Diversity Week highlights many walks of life across UMaine community

This past week, the University of Maine Office of Multicultural Student Life organized a week full of events to celebrate this year’s Diversity Week.

According to Director of Multicultural Student Life, Silvestre Guzman, Diversity Week has occurred on the UMaine campus for at least eight years, and has become a popular string of events within the past few years. This year, the week was comprised of many smaller events that occurred everyday such as meditation, karaoke and a couple of educational seminars on different diversity topics, such as religion. The events were put together with the assistance of the Caribbean Club, The Student Heritage Alliance Council and the Muslim Students Association as well as other heritage groups on campus.

“It [Diversity Week] is a great opportunity to bring awareness to the campus community, because I think many students haven’t had that opportunity to interact with students from different backgrounds,” Guzman said. “By implementing these small events, those students who haven’t been exposed to other backgrounds now have the opportunity to talk and interact with students for a whole week.”

The week kicked off with the event, “Diversity Is …” Monday morning. The purpose of the event was to bring together students from the UMaine community to discuss what diversity means to them. The event was a way to set the tone for the rest of the week, as well as give students something to think about as the week went on.

“Each person who wanted to participate had to write about their thoughts or perceptions down on a card to define diversity in a few sentences,” Guzman said.

In the middle of the week, students had the chance to participate in filling out the Diversity Wheel. The Diversity Wheel was a way for students to showcase all the different cultural backgrounds that UMaine students represent. The Diversity Wheel was split into 12 different categories, such as “role at UMaine,” “race and ethnicity” and “sexual orientation.” Students had the opportunity to fill in each category with what they identify as. The wheel showed that there are a multitude of different traits that make everyone diverse.

The karaoke session featured on Wednesday afternoon was well-attended. Students had the opportunity to sing some of their favorite songs in front of their peers in the Multicultural lounge.

“It was fun. I sang a song called, ‘Bidi Bidi Bom Bom,’ by Selena. It’s been 21 years since she died,” Jodaliza Feliz, a second-year civil engineering student, said.
Diversity week ended on Friday afternoon with a session called “Poptalk! Poptalk!,” a session where students could come and show off their own side of diversity with the focus of the discussion being centered around different styles of dance.

Diversity week was deemed successful by the Office of Multicultural Student Life. Guzman reported that the opening event, “What is Diversity...” attracted a lot of students, and also added that some of the events saw as many as 50 students come out and participate.

“I think Diversity Week gives us a chance to express our culture and heritage and share it on campus,” Feliz said.

“It gives us a chance to discuss topics that other students might want to get involved with,” Izundu Ngwu, a third-year computer engineering student, said.

“It gives me a sense of belonging,” graduate student, Favour Akhidener said.

According to Guzman, having a sense of belonging is important in student success on a college campus. Guzman hopes to provide many services through the Office of Multicultural Student Life to incoming students. He hopes to continue these programs, so that incoming students can get the services that they need to give them that sense of belonging.

The Office of Multicultural Student Life, and other heritage organizations, will be continuing to host smaller events on campus this semester. Some upcoming events include Taste of Asia, where Asian cuisine will be served by local participating restaurants on April 9. The Caribbean Club will be hosting the Caribbean Carnival at the end of the semester on April 22. For more information on these events, feel free to stop by the Office of Multicultural Student Life on the third floor of the Memorial Union, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
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