

Habari Gani? (What's Happening?)



Professor Debi
Jenkins

In Swahili, the phrase “*Habari gani?*” means “What’s happening?” It was a question asked by village elders to younger members of the community as a way to gauge how they were doing. The *habari gani menta* (literally, “the person who asks, ‘What’s happening?’” but often translated as “mentor”) was charged with providing mentees with support to keep them from feeling disconnected.

In her presentation during the winter quarter installment of Clark College’s renowned Faculty Speaker Series, Professor Debi Jenkins describes how many employees from historically disadvantaged communities feel disconnected from their workplaces, leading to challenges in employee retention—and how we each can become a *habari gani menta* to our coworkers to help overcome those feelings of disconnection, thereby fostering a workplace environment that truly honors and supports diversity.

Using current research and her own scholarship, Professor Jenkins creates a framework for supporting workplace diversity based on the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa: Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), Imani (Faith).

"My research focuses on higher education, but really these are practices that could be incorporated into any workplace interested in fostering diversity," says Jenkins. "I want people to ask themselves, 'What is their role as an individual to support a diverse workforce?'"

The event, which is free and open to the public, will be held from 4:00 – 5:00 p.m. in the Ellis Dunn Community Room (Gaiser Hall room 213) on Clark's main campus. Driving directions and parking maps are available at www.clark.edu/maps.

Individuals who need accommodation due to a disability in order to fully participate in this event should contact Clark College's Disability Support Services (DSS) Office at (360) 992-2314 or (360) 991-0901 (VP) two weeks prior to the event. The DSS office is located in room 137 in Clark's Gaiser Hall.

About Professor Debi Jenkins

Since 2011, Professor Debra (Debi) Jenkins has served as division chair of Behavioral Sciences in addition to her role as head of the Early Childhood Education Department at Clark College. Her range of teaching experience includes topics in psychology and sociology, power-privilege-inequity, and early childhood development. She has designed courses for both face-to-face and online classrooms, including Race and Ethnicity; Parent Education; Family Dynamics and Culture; and Bicultural Development and Education. In addition, she is founder of Share the Flame, an organization that offers strategies for personal growth and change through one-on-one coaching, workshops and presentations. In 2009, she received the YWCA

Woman of Achievement Award for Clark County.

Jenkins began her higher education at Clark College, earning an Associate in Applied Science degree in Early Childhood Education. She holds both bachelor's and master's degrees in Human Development from Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena, Calif., and a Master of Science degree in Psychology from the University of Phoenix in Arizona. She expects to graduate from that same institution next year with a doctorate in Higher Education Administration.

Jenkins's research focus for the last seven years has been on the influence of power-privilege-inequity on bicultural development of underrepresented communities in the United States and tri-cultural literacy development among Maroons children in Jamaica. Her doctoral dissertation is about the role of allies and communities of practice in supporting a diverse workforce. Jenkins believes that teaching and learning are reciprocal activities. As such, she continually refines her message and approach while focusing on desired student learning outcomes, not the least of which is to "foster a connection between course content and real world experiences." Jenkins quotes bell hooks, American author and social activist, when she talks about establishing a supportive learning environment that "respects and cares for the soul of students ... to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin."

About the Clark College Faculty Speaker Series

Established by Clark College with support from the Clark College Foundation, the Clark College Faculty Speaker Series honors individual faculty members and celebrates academic excellence. The series showcases recent experiences that have enriched both the life and teaching of a Clark faculty member. Faculty members share their developmental experiences with the college community—and with members of the community at large—while addressing some of today's most intriguing issues.

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