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University Marketing and Communications

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(Note: This was sent to Bill Lair only for use in the Charleston Times-Courier.)

CHS SENIORS WIN EIU ESSAY CONTEST ON DIVERSITY

CHARLESTON – Three Charleston High School seniors shared winning insights on the merits of diversity in a high-school essay contest sponsored by the African-American Heritage Celebration at Eastern Illinois University.

Essays by Meredith Wieck, Justinn McDaniel and Emily Miller were selected as winners, earning savings bonds of \$100, \$50 and \$25, respectively. The students are taught by Nell Wiseman.

Wieck is expected to read her first-place essay at the African-American Heritage Banquet on Feb. 5 in the Martin Luther King Jr. University Union's Grand Ballroom at EIU. The banquet, set to begin with a social hour at 5 p.m., followed by dinner at 6 p.m., is also to include a performance by Muntu Dance Theatre of Chicago. Tickets – \$15 for adults, and \$7 for students and children 6 and older – must be purchased by Feb. 1 in the Minority Affairs Office, 102 Clinical Services Building, or by calling 581-6690.

EIU's African-American Heritage Celebration, which includes events celebrating diversity throughout February, is being held in conjunction with Black History Month.

Following are the top three essays:

The Diversity Imperative

By Meredith Wieck

America is a cultural melting pot thanks to the diversity of its people. Over the years, America has both adapted to the addition of new cultures and evolved by their addition. These adaptations provide the basis of America's unique strength.

Diversity has exposed me to different ideas and cultures in the United States. Through friendships with people of other backgrounds, I have become more understanding, appreciative, and accepting of others different than myself. With my friend from Pakistan, I have explored the unique Middle Eastern culture by watching "Bollywood" movies and enjoying Indian cuisine. Studying Spanish

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over the last four years and visiting Mexico have opened my horizons by learning of ancient civilizations, such as the Aztec, Mayan, and Incan, Hispanic literature, and music. I believe that further exposure and exploration of diversity are essential not only for my future, but the country's.

Without diversity, America would be a stale unchanging country. Over the years, America has had to adapt to the addition of new cultures. These adaptations make America unique from all other world countries. The energy brought into this country by others has helped shape America, making it more competitive, outspoken, and aware than ever before. When I think of diversity, I hope for evolution to a more accepting, healthy, peaceful, and free America. Without the continued embrace of our diverse origins, America will not survive as a vital, growing culture. Thus, while diversity has made America what it is today, embracing diversity in education will create what America is tomorrow.

#### Diversity in the Arts

By Justinn McDaniel

Though the subject of diversity sparks many topics to mind, the most significant aspect to me is the importance of diversity in the arts. As an avid theatre fan, it is almost impossible for me to imagine an artistic world without the contributions of all races and cultures.

My love of theatre would not be nearly as great had it not been for the allowance of diversity in the theatre. Four years ago, I was introduced to Jonathan Larson's musical "RENT." A rock opera featuring topics such as HIV/AIDS, homosexuality, and the struggles of New York City bohemians, this musical broke new ground in the theatre world. In addition, it broke the barrier in regards to race and sexual orientation, presenting a cast made up of African Americans and Asians in addition to Caucasians, and transvestites and lesbians alongside heterosexuals. "RENT," which features perhaps one of the most diverse casts in theatre history, revitalized the theatre realm, inspiring a new brand of musicals and inviting new, younger generations of people to come and enjoy theatre.

The performing and visual arts affect every single person each day in one way or another. People from all cultures and walks of life have contributed to and shaped the worlds of art, music, and theatre, adding new flavor and creating several unique styles of each of the arts. Without the opportunities diversity in the arts have given us, the world would be a very monotonous place.

#### A Culture of Cultures

By Emily Miller

The world is diverse simply by its nature: There are many groups of people in many places that have developed their own styles of living that may differ from another group's in any number of ways. For example, the Chinese have a very different lifestyle than the Americans simply because they live on opposite sides of the globe. Neither one nor the other has the "correct" way to live; they are merely

different.

America is a culture made up of literally hundreds of different ways of life from all over the world that have each contributed their part to the greater whole. Each subculture is derived from the homeland's way of living. The African-Americans, for example, may continue to follow traditions brought with them from Africa; ultimately, the greater population adopts some of these as universal traditions for the whole of America. As far away as their origins may be, however, many families have been established here for hundreds of years. They have taken parts of the continuously changing American way of life and accepted them as well. This is true for every group who makes up even a small part of America. In the end, each subculture remains unique while helping to create a unified whole.

Diversity provides the legs on which America stands. When it is embraced harmoniously, it can create something beautiful. The differences between people are what make them interesting; the world would surely be a dull place without the wonderfully varied cultures that shape it.