

2017 Diversity Scholarship Essay Contest Winner

Essay subject: How has diversity affected your life?

Winner: Gitali Chandra Piekaska Guanel

Celebrating Diversity

Anything that marks one as different stamps one as diverse. As children we learn that culture, race, gender, age and religion are just some of the ways that people are defined as being part of the “other”. Intelligence, natural pheromones, body mass, sexuality, speaking patterns, even the way one swings one’s arms can lead to the perception that you are too diverse, too dangerous, for safe association. Physical diversity has affected my life - both positively and negatively. Bullied and discriminated against for my dark skin color; my gorgeous (but unruly) Afro-Caribbean hair; refusal to conform to societal expectations; and rejection of the “silent woman” role, experience tried to teach me that diversity is a problem, a challenge to be overcome. Even today, as a sixteen year-old college-going female with roots in America, India, France, Martinique, and Poland, many people seem to consider me “too diverse” for comfort.

My experiences made me fiercely determined to accept people in all their heterogeneity, and to understand the differences that make us unique and great. I sought to make my diversity work for me. In consequence, I traveled to many countries, and experienced a profusion of diversity. Exposure to amazing people, places and perspectives expanded my mind and my comprehension of differences; enabling me to explore the similarities between myself and others. I found that compassion and kindness multiplied through seeing, experiencing, and sharing the lives, games, toils, sufferings and joys of diverse people. Diversity has shaped my life, opened my mind, and expanded my consciousness. I celebrate and rejoice in my diversity and in that of others.