Do you know YOUR history? By Dr. Keenan Norris

Literature is an endless wealth of knowledge, of history, and humanity. To be literate involves much more than the simple ability to read. To truly be literate in a field of knowledge is to be completely conversant in it. Most black people I meet, students included, assume that they know a great deal about African-American history, African-American literature, the Civil Rights Movement and other black-specific stuff that is rooted in times past. About the diaspora they will admit ignorance, but the assumption generally is that as far as the home base goes, they were born knowing all they needed to know. Within a minute or two of discussion, I generally find that this is not the case. While most of us can probably name an important Civil Rights hero or two, a black artist of note, and a few little-known inventors or activists or Nobel Prize winners, that is far different from actually being conversant in any of these fields of knowledge. Pressed, few of us could explain in detail the noteworthy aspects of black life in early colonial Virginia or the impact of the labor and socialist movements of the early twentieth century on the Civil Rights Movement.

Continued on pg. 4

AFFIRM Coordinator’s Corner

Since its inception, the AFFIRM Program has been dedicated to offering the best academic and support services it can. However, this fall, we would like to challenge you, our students, to rise to the occasion and help us support the community we all live in. Our theme for this semester is Finding Our Roots: Tracing the Ancestry of People of African Descent and our ultimate goal is to develop a sense of social awareness within our students while we continue to promote their scholastic success.

Community involvement can be achieved in many different ways from donating your time at your child’s school to raising money for your local church. We would like to encourage you to visit three local community organizations (JEWL Oral History and Learning Institute at EVC, African American Heritage House in San Jose’s History Park, and the African American Journey Exhibit at First AME Zion Church in San Jose) to learn more about the positive impact African Americans have made here in Silicon Valley. Also during this holiday season, please consider volunteering at any of your local food banks or homeless shelters. Cont. on pg. 5

“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.” ~ Nelson Mandela
I spit in the plastic beaker I received from 23 & me—a company specializing in tracing people’s genetic history. The genetic testing was a Christmas gift from my fiancé, and it cost about $200. He got one as well as a Christmas gift to himself. When we ordered the testing kit online, we had to wait a few weeks for it to arrive from Sunnyvale where 23 & me is located. We are in nearby Oakland, so the wait wasn’t long; we were excited to receive the testing kit!

In all my 30-plus years, I had little interest in discovering my specific genetic roots—I was completely comfortable with accepting and adopting a more general cultural history shared by the Africans in this part of the diaspora. The need for specific information or knowledge about what tribe, or what specific ethnic mixtures comprised my bloodlines and genetics just did not seem necessary. In some ways, I felt liberated from the confines of a strict, insular ethnic identity. I embraced the ambiguity, and the unknown mystery of my lineage.

Or maybe I just didn’t feel like colliding against the many barriers preventing Africans-Americans from truly tracing and discovering our fractured, contested and traumatic family histories. Rediscovering and piecing together African-American family lineages can be extremely time consuming, expensive and surprising. For example, my sister has spent numerous hours in her spare time while balancing a full time job and attending college classes, researching a variety of databases related to genealogy. Through her hard work, she actually discovered the white American family who held my great-great grandmother on my maternal side in bondage. She has been in correspondence with that family, and they are working together to uncover more information about Florida, our enslaved maternal ancestor; although our family considers this a breakthrough, Florida represents just one fourth of our genealogy dating back to slavery and it took my sister two years to find her in the fragmented annals of slave history.

After spitting in the beaker and mixing it with another solution included in the testing-kit, we repackaged our genetic information and sent it back to 23 & me; we then eagerly waited for our results to be posted to our online profiles created by the genetic company. Our genetic information was to be included in a vast online database with thousands of others who had also traced their genetic history. Weeks passed and our results were finally posted to our profiles! The results provided us with detailed genetic and medical information regarding our predispositions to...
Attention Continuing Students!

There is a new student success mandate which will be implemented between FALL 2014 and FALL 2016. Since these new mandates come directly from the State Chancellor’s Office, they may be subject to change, in which case updates will be provided later.

However, you still need to know this important information regarding changes to the student registration process, enrollment priorities and ways to continue your success and progress at Evergreen Valley College.

I. MANDATED PRIORITY REGISTRATION
As of January 1, 2014, Priority Registration is legally mandated for ALL of the following groups:
- Military/Veterans/Foster Youth and Former Foster Youth/CalWORKs/EOPS/DSPS

Under current policy if you are member of one of these groups, you are automatically assigned a priority registration date regardless of your academic standing. Effective FALL 2014, your priority registration privilege may be lost if you do not comply with student success/enrollment process or if you exceed unit capacity (exceptions may be considered for some student groups).

II. STUDENT SUCCESS/ENROLLMENT PROCESS
As of FALL 2014 all California Community College students must comply with the following change in order to retain an early registration date:
- Assessment – includes taking the following placement tests-Math, English, Reading or ESL
- Orientation – completed the college orientation
- Advisement/Education Plan – approved by a counselor
- Maintain Satisfactory Academic Standing (by not being on the second semester of probation or not being on dismissal)

III. UNIT CAPACITY
As of FALL 2014, students who exceeds 100 units of degree applicable course work (up to 30 units of basic skills/ESL work will be excluded) will lose registration priority status.

IV. LOSS OF REGISTRATION PRIORITY
Students who exceed the 100 unit cap and/or who are placed on academic/progress probation for two consecutive semesters (Progress or Academic Probation 2) will obtain a registration date after current and new student registration dates.
- Academic Probation 1 - After attempting 12 units of letter-grade courses, a student with a cumulative GPA below 2.0 is placed on Academic Probation 1.
- Academic Probation 2 - If the student’s cumulative GPA stays below 2.0 after a second semester; student is placed on Academic Probation 2 (Continuing Academic Probation).
- Progress Probation 1 - After enrolling in 12 units, a student who earns marks of “W,” “NP,” & “I” for 50% or more of all enrolled units is placed on Progress Probation 1.
- Progress Probation 2 - If this cumulative, non-completion percentage of enrolled units remains at 50% or more after a second semester, student is placed on Progress Probation 2 (Continuing Progress Probation).

V. APPEALS PROCESS
An appeals process is available for all students who lose enrollment priority due to extenuating circumstances that can be verified (accidents, illness, or other circumstances beyond the student’s control), or who are in a verifiable high unit major. Details on appeals process and procedures will be available SPRING 2014.

VI. STATE FINANCIAL AID
As of FALL 2015 Students’ eligibility for the Board of Governor’s Fee Waiver (BOGWF) will be impacted if you do not meet academic and progress standards for two consecutive terms.

Please note: This is information provided by our Vice President Irma Archuleta. I will continue to provide you updates as they are provided to me.

Attention Transfer Students!

If you missed the deadline to apply for any of the California State Universities (CSUs), please check their website at www.csumentor.edu to find out which CSUs may have extended their deadlines. However, if you have applied already, please wait until the CSUs’ request your transcripts before sending them. Furthermore, if you plan on graduating this spring, you need to make an appointment to see your counselor as soon as possible to write up and submit your graduation petition before March 3, 2014. Do not wait until the last minute!
We probably know who Toni Morrison is and that she is both the most recent person of African descent and the last American of any ethnic descent to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, but few of us would be able to explain the literary and mythological archetypes upon which Morrison’s most famous characters, Pecola Breedlove and Sula Peace, Macon Dead and Beloved, are based. To go even further, very few of us (myself included) could explain in any detail and with much accuracy the history of African-descended people in the Western hemisphere.

This is the difference between knowing a thing or two and being literate in a field, and the difference between literacy and mastery. With the wonders of Wikipedia and a curious mind, anybody with internet access can and should know a thing or two about whatever they want to learn about. But we come to school or undertake training programs or apprenticeships to become literate and eventually to master our chosen field.

I teach African American Literature, among other things, and am well-versed in this field, as well as in African-American history. However, I don’t think it’s necessary that every black person have the same knowledge. Though you might expect it, my goal here is not to preach at you about the necessity of knowing your history. There are many things in this world that one can know and the history and literary product of black Americans are only a couple of the jewels in that endless crown. If your passion lies elsewhere, and odds are that it does, you will surely benefit from an education in black history and the arts, however what will be far more important for you is to gain literacy and mastery over that which you are most passionate about, whatever it may be.

I point out our ignorance of ourselves (or at least of our history and art) because it brings me to an important question: If we know so little about history, culture, religion, folklore, art and innovation that we have grown up either immersed in, or at least connected to and conscious of, what in the world do we know about things that we are less intimately connected with? What do we really know about the American job or housing market, or about child psychology, or cognition, or Hegelian dialectic, or Wallerstein’s world systems theory, or trends in technology, or the political platforms of our local, state and national leaders? Do we know how to properly condition our bodies, or how to healthfully and mindfully de-stress after experiencing a trying situation? Do we know our legal rights when pulled over or questioned by a policeman, or when renting from a landlord, or when negotiating a contract with an employer? Do we have useful management and business skills and are we well-connected locally, nationally and even internationally within our chosen profession?

These are reasonable questions and important areas in which one can and probably should become literate. Of course there are only so many hours in a day and it is difficult to acquire a wide range of knowledge with the family and financial concerns that follow us from day to day. This is where an education system that cultivates programs like Affirm, which promotes collectivity, collaboration and group uplift, is so important. When we learn together, when we teach as we go, and when we kindly and compassionately fill in the gaps where others sometimes falter, we begin to create the beautiful extended family (the community) that we all desire.

“The demands of the slave on the present have everything to do with making good the promise of abolition and this entails much more than the end of property in slaves. It requires the reconstruction of society, which is the only way to honor our debt to the dead. This is the intimacy of our age with theirs-- an unfinished struggle. To what end does one conjure the ghost of slavery, if not to incite the hopes of transforming the present? Given this, I refuse to believe that the slave’s most capacious claims or wildest imaginings are for back wages or debt relief. There are too many lives at peril....”

~Saidiya Hartman, 2007
to various illnesses and diseases (I am a sickle cell carrier—which is good to know for obvious reasons); the results also gave us an ethnic and geographical breakdown of our DNA. I discovered that I am 73% sub-Saharan African, 24% northern European, .2% Native American and the remaining miniscule percentage is unknown. I found it surprising that I was nearly a quarter white—does the presence of non-African blood make me less of an African-American? Absolutely not! The term African-American is an unstable racial classification. The term is a broad ethnic and cultural category that encompasses a wide spectrum of genetic, ethnic and cultural identities.

Some people feel that we are nothing but a compilation of our ancestors’ genetic and cultural information. The value of genome mapping and family tree building offer us insights into our recent and distant pasts. Is it necessary to know our genetic history and family tree in order to feel more connected to our ancestral past? Maybe, maybe not. Although, I don’t feel the compelling need to know the details and specifics of my distant ancestral past, I do feel the need to acknowledge and honor those who came before me—especially the more recent ancestors. Expensive technological procedures are not needed to access and tap into our respective histories. Somehow I know my foremothers and foremothers are already here with me—inside my DNA and inside my blood and inside my heart and dreams. Ashé.

(Coordinator’s Corner continued from pg. 1)

Here is a list of a few organizations working to provide for the needed:

- **Cathedral of Faith’s Reaching Out Center** will be distributing Christmas food boxes on December 23rd to low-income and homeless families. For more information, visit www.cathedraloffaith.org/.
- **Loaves & Fishes Eastside Neighborhood Center** will be hosting a free Christmas dinner to the homeless on December 25th from 4:30pm-5:30pm. For more information, visit http://loavesfishes.org/cms/loaves-fishes-holiday-schedule-2013.
- **City Team Ministries** will also be hosting a free Christmas dinner on December 25th from 11:00am-5:00pm. For more information, visit http://www.cityteam.org/san-jose/ for more information on how to help.

As the semester progresses, I think it is important for all of us to challenge ourselves to give back in any way we can. Volunteerism is not restricted to our campus community alone nor should it be limited to one particular event or season. It is our responsibility as members of the San Jose community to try to support each other through these difficult times.

*Have a safe and happy holiday season!*  
~The AFFIRM Famliy