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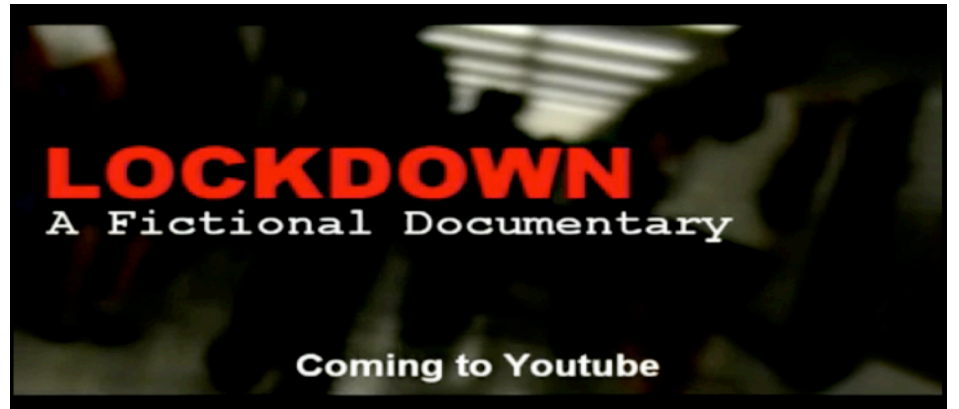
Alum filmmaker has no small ideas

by **Suhail Ansari**
Viewpoints Editor

A minority of West graduates choose to pursue a doctor of pharmacy degree; an even smaller minority does so while becoming award-winning filmmakers. West alumnus Stephen Small ('09) was inspired by West to pursue his film talent while working towards his pharmacy degree at Butler University. With resources and

wrongly gave the paper a failing grade [because of the topic]. In reality, [Klingenger] liked the paper, but for this video, I tried to imagine what would have happened if my teacher had not been so intelligent or understanding."

The "mockumentary" titled *SILENCED* will be screened at the New York Film Academy tomorrow, and Small and Paisny have flown out New York City for the award ceremony. The film festival celebrates the 40th anniversary of the Supreme Court case *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, the decision that upheld free speech in schools when students protested the Vietnam War, according



inspiration at West, he and West alumnus Tom Paisny ('09) were able to win second place in a video contest hosted by the National Coalition Against Censorship.

The video was based on a paper Small submitted to AP Great American Writers teacher David Klingenger during his junior year about teenage relationships and sex. In the movie, Small said, "The teacher automatically

to www.ncaac.org.

Small began making films when honors biology teacher Ruth Gleicher assigned a video project concerning stem cells and ethical issues during Small's freshman year. Small's video project group spent hours on the project filming

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WestWord

Diversity Cohort benefits West community

w Kathryn Booker
Staff Writer

Those who walk to the student cafeteria on the mornings of faculty meetings might have noticed a group of 20-30 teachers sitting in the student commons and wondered, "Hey, why don't they have to go to the meetings?" Welcome to the Diversity Cohort.

Every month on the day of the faculty board meeting, a group of approximately 25 faculty and staff meet in the student commons to discuss issues of diversity and race, according to the Diversity Cohort coordinator and English director Sanlida Cheng. The teachers involved come from a variety of departments, and along with Cheng, school psychologist Henry Brown and science teacher Jayson Foster facilitate the meetings. This is the second year the Diversity Cohort has been available to faculty and staff at Niles West.



Brown

"Adults in the building need some time and space to talk about their perceptions of our students," Cheng commented. "They want to talk about their own experiences when it comes to race. It is very close-knit and very comfortable, [as well as] very safe for the faculty and staff."

Brown explained the variety of discussions that take place in the Diversity Cohort.

"Specifically what [we do is look at] our own biases [and] our own prejudices. It can be in the form of anything, whether it is race, whether it is religion, whether it is sexual orientation—but we do primarily focus on race. The goal would be to make everyone in our cohort more racially conscious [and] aware of prejudice," Brown said.

Oftentimes, Cheng explained, the cohort needs more time to discuss experiences with diversity and race at school. The group frequently meets more than once a month to continue heated discussions. The group also has sponsored two institute day sessions during its existence.

Cheng and Brown agree that the primary ambition of the Cohort is to become better leaders for their students.

"[The goal of the Diversity Cohort] is being able to relate to our students, thereby helping them," Cheng said. "So, that is always the ultimate goal – getting faculty and staff to reflect on and investigate ways of better interacting with students. When teachers teach students, yes, they teach the content of the material, but they also teach their own particular culture. In a school like ours, where there are so many cultures, we need to get together as educators and talk about what that means."



Cheng

Brown cites the discrepancy in the type of students in AP/Honors classes versus detention and disciplinary action as a major problem at Niles West, one that he hopes the Diversity Cohort will help eliminate.

"We did an equity audit over the summer which [showed that] although African-American students make up 4.9 percent of our student population, they make up over 50 percent of the detentions and suspensions," he explained. "Start looking at who is in your honors classes [and] who is in the [Behavior Adjustment Center] almost all the time."

Brown emphasizes that the Diversity Cohort seeks to help teachers overcome any biases that may play a role in their placement of students in different school classes or disciplinary actions.

"Whether it is a disciplinary issue or placement in an AP/Honors class, [teachers] are the ones who have that 'power.' Sometimes, biases and prejudices can come into play and if you are not aware that this is happening, you can change someone's life. I don't think it is being done maliciously, but that can be a problem," Brown said.

He also noted the potential of the Diversity Cohort for promoting healthy interactions between students and teachers.

"This benefits our entire school community," Brown commented. "Not only does it benefit the students, it benefits teachers because they will be able to have more positive and healthy interactions with students."

Foster acknowledges the necessity of a discussion group like the Diversity Cohort.

"It benefits the community because teachers, faculty and administration need to understand the complexity of diversity in the student body and the issues they have with diversity, so that they can meet kids' needs in a school background," Foster said.

Earlier this year, Diversity Cohort members were invited to watch the movie *The Color of Fear* (1994) created by filmmaker and diversity coordinator Lee Mun Wah. The documentary features eight people of different races discussing their differences in heated and emotional debates. Wah held seminars for District 219 staff twice this year, one last Friday night and all day Saturday.

"[He is a] phenomenal person, [as well as] a benefit to our cohort and to those who can experience what he has to offer," Foster said.

In addition to attending Wah's District 219 seminars, the coordinators also visited the University of California Berkeley to attend workshops that Wah offers.

"The experience reawakened a lot of emotions that I suppressed over time dealing with issues of diversity, brought them back out, and made me sensitive once again," Foster commented. "As a person of color, [I know that] a lot of times we have to put on a mask about the issues that we confront with every day dealing with race."

Cheng, Foster and Brown agree that the future of the cohort looks bright.

"I see the cohort continuing because it serves its purpose," Cheng said. "It is almost like group therapy. I think that people will always need that."

Brown and Foster expressed the expectation that the cohort will continue, but will become larger.

"I see more and more people [joining] because I don't think this is something that is going to be fixed by us having one group for two years," Brown said. "What I would like to see eventually is that all the teachers in the school go through the system [and] this experience."

Foster concurs, also considering the prospect of student involvement with the cohort in the future.

"I see for the future of the cohort becoming much larger and a lot more discussions being held and issues being brought up on diverse topics," Foster said. "[I also see] possibly student involvement with the cohort to make that communication between the kids, administration and faculty stronger."

Invitations for membership are distributed at the beginning and end of each school year. Cheng encourages any interested staff to join, but also understands that there are other ways to discuss significant issues.

"As long as faculty and staff need a regular time and space to talk about issues of race and diversity, the Diversity Cohort will always be there," Cheng explained, "I also feel [that the district is headed] in a direction where that is not going to be the only thing available for people. There are going to be other opportunities for people to discuss race."



Foster



Constant college correspondence continues to clutter

w Adriana Zalloni
World Editor

After Feb. 1, virtually every college and university stopped accepting applications for admission for the fall term. Why is it, then, that every day when I check my e-mail, I find myself deleting close to 20 e-mails regarding last chance opportunities to submit my application?

Just a few days ago, I received an e-mail from something called East-West University informing me that the dean of admissions was hoping to see my application on his desk by midnight that night (thanks for the early heads up), that it was my last chance ever and that they would waive the \$80 application fee!

I deleted the e-mail, mostly because I finished my applications early this year and already have my future plans in mind. However, when I logged back in to my e-mail account recently, I saw another e-mail from East-West University, happy to tell me that their admissions personnel had made an exception, and if I were to choose to submit the application, I would have until early next week.

I hate to say it, East-West University, but if I have yet to submit my application; it will not show up on your desk by midnight, in two weeks, or ever, for that matter.

Those of us who have known for some time that we are

Seniors who recently came to the realization that they might want to continue their education should be soliciting schools such as East-West

college-bound, for the most part, have already made our college decisions. The schools that are desperately searching for bodies to fill their classes should not be wasting their time reaching out to us. It should be the other way around. Seniors who recently came to the realization that they might want to continue their education should be soliciting schools such as East-West. As a matter of fact, as a public service, I will forward all those e-mails to them.

Even more annoying are the solicitations that come via the regular mail. I cringe at the thought of the vast amount of paper products wasted on students like me who receive the fliers, look ever so quickly at them and toss them in the recycling bin. I also feel for the poor people responsible for the bulk e-or-snail mail at these schools, whose hard work ultimately ends up in recycling bins or delete folders.

East-West University is not the only school that has been persistent in its pursuit of me. Iona University (You do?) invited me to chat with them online about my questions regarding campus life, academic majors and financial aid. Drexel University promised to send me tips to complete my application in a simple and speedy fashion. I get three e-mails a day from Barry University reminding me of all the benefits of the school

At this rate, however, I am starting to believe it will not be until late August when these schools are sure that I, in fact, am not going to attend because I already have begun taking classes at another institution

and how well I would adapt to its campus life. Schools such as the University of Phoenix and Kingsley University have sent me scarves, flags and other gear to sway me toward considering them in my already completed college search.

I look forward to the day I can delete my last desperate e-mail attempt from a college too eager for my attention. At this rate, however, I am starting to believe it will not be until late August when these schools are sure that I, in fact, am not going to attend because I already have begun taking classes at another institution.

Small, from page 8

and editing. He credits the project with sparking his interest in film.

"After seeing how much fun my friends and I had while making our movie, I thought filmmaking may be a really fun thing to do as a hobby or something."

Small made several other videos for his classes and was subsequently hired by Principal Kaine Osburn to film school-related videos.

"I am sure [Osburn] saw the commercials I made for the extracurricular activities at West and thought I could help out a lot during the summer," Small said.

He filmed during 2009, especially during summer break, for different projects such as one for the Sizzling Summer Science Program.

Small chose West to be the location of his most recent film, *Lockdown*, which is about a school shooting (a blog of the film's progress is available at www.lockdownfilm.wordpress.com).

"The school is such a cool place to film because of its interesting architecture and its significance. You know, director

John Hughes filmed almost all of his movies, such as *The Breakfast Club*, in North Shore high schools," Small said.

Parts of Hughes' *Sixteen Candles* were filmed at North, and parts of his *Weird Science* were filmed at the defunct East campus; however, West was never featured.

Small's film at West features a dozen West students and alumni.

"*Lockdown* addresses the need for improved and more realistic security procedures in today's high schools," Small said, adding that his vision was not for the West community and broader audience to see it as a simple school shooting film, but rather, "*Lockdown* is meant to present a serious problem in a mature and thought-provoking style."

Small said that in the future, he hopes to film more at West and maybe even continue John Hughes' use of District 219 schools to film a big budget production at West.

Small has ambitious plans for the future. He wants to continue his production of films, at least one every summer. His ideal seems to be research pharmacist by day and filmmaker by night.

"In my mind, I would be living like Batman-if he was a pharmacist, a filmmaker and played the sax," Small said.