

## **Diversity Week highlights student variety on campus**

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**Originally published April 13, 2015**

Maine isn't exactly the most ethnically diverse state in the nation. If you grew up here, you probably heard this once or twice ... daily.

But a new series of events is attempting to change the conversation about how we look at each other. Although not the most racially diverse university, Diversity Week attempts to break the stereotypes about what it means to be unique.

"Typically when people think of diversity, they're stuck on racial or ethnic diversity, and there's so many types," Jaclyn Serchuk, a graduate assistant with the Office of Multicultural Student Life, said.

"Anything will make me different from you," she said.

Serchuk, who studies higher education, says the theme week, beginning Monday, will feature events centered on veterans, non-traditional students and students with disabilities. All events will highlight the unique ways in which all people are different, "especially in Maine, where diversity is mainly seen with socioeconomic and class differences, as opposed to racial differences," Serchuk said.

Diversity week falls perfectly in conjunction with Pride Week, which is dedicated to and celebrates LGBT students on campus, and Taste of Asia, a large potluck-inspired dinner hosted by the Asian Student Association. Serchuk says all events represent the breadth of diversity on the UMaine campus.

"Even though, you know, 'You're white and I'm white,' or, 'We seem to be the same age,' you know, the way that you dress is different than me, you're interests are different than mine. There's diversity in everything that we do," she said.

One way in which UMaine's diversity will be showcased is with the opening of the gallery, "Faces of Diversity," at the Central Gallery in Bangor, featuring photographs from UMaine student Steve Roberts. You may know him as the man behind the camera on Portraits of UMaine, the Facebook page with more than 2,000 likes.

Roberts started the page in July of 2014, but it was his black and white photos of UMaine's protests about the Ferguson shooting that sparked Jaclyn's interest. Through these photos, Roberts was able to show how diversified UMaine truly is, despite our misconceptions.

"I just thought black and white was the best way to show how different we are. It's just gray. Everything's gray, there's no one end. You're not this, you're not that, you're just a shade in the spectrum," Roberts said.

"Even though we're a white majority, there is ethnic diversity on campus and that's really how [the gallery] started," he said.

Roberts says he doesn't see color or recognize diversity as much as he simply sees people. But, the way he acknowledges his work allows him to think about the more subtle differences between individuals than at first meets the eye.

"Everyone's different," Roberts said. "It doesn't matter if you're both from Millinocket, you're probably a little bit different. You might have had the same upbringing, but at the base level you're different people, you have different things to say and different opinions, different perspectives."

And ultimately, Roberts' sentiment echoes Serchuk's hope: For people to realize that it's okay to be different.

"I feel as though a lot of people don't understand where they fit in with the overarching term of diversity or multicultural. I'm hoping that this brings awareness to the campus," Serchuk said. "I hope this is something that sticks and really grows and that blossoms and becomes something signature that people look forward to every year," she said.

The "Faces of Diversity" gallery opened Sunday at the Central Gallery in Bangor, and will run the length of Diversity Week. Monday events feature a breakfast reception at 9 a.m. in the Dean's Suite of the Union, and a Diversity 101 Workshop at 1 p.m. in the Multicultural Lounge. Tuesday will be focused on non-traditional students, with a discussion at 3 p.m. in the FFA Room in the Union. On Wednesday, a workshop will be held to celebrate those with disabilities, "Disability versus Abilities," in the FFA Room at 3 p.m. Also on Wednesday will be a screening of "A Beautiful Mind" in the Collins Center at 9 p.m. Thursday will highlight veterans on campus with a talk in the FFA Room in the Union at 3 p.m., and poet Kyla Lacey will perform in the North Pod of the Union at 7:30 p.m. Friday will feature a "FesTEAval" tea party, also in the North Pod, at 1 p.m. The week will end with the Taste of Asia celebration Sat. April 18, at 4 p.m. in Estabrooke Hall.