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President Davila:

Hello, I'm Robert Davila, president of Gallaudet University. Welcome again to *Bob's Vlog*. As you know, here on the Gallaudet campus, diversity is a very important focus of my administration. The topic of diversity will come up from time to time in my vlogs. You know that the work never really ends. It is ongoing. Also, that work is not just the responsibility of one person or just a few people. On the contrary, the entire community must be committed to diversity. And, here at Gallaudet, we are trying very hard to develop and implement a climate of respect, not only for people, but for their ideas and opinions. Gallaudet is a place where people of various backgrounds can work together, interact together, help each other, and learn from each other. That's the kind of University environment we want to establish for the benefit of our students and everyone who works here at Gallaudet. So, I'm really excited about the progress we are making, in different ways, related to improving our ability to serve and meet the needs of everyone who comes here to learn or comes here to work.

Today, I have with me a few individuals who work here on campus every day and focus on supporting our students of color and minority people. First, I have Thuan Nguyen and, then, I have Elvia Guillermo and Dr. Laurene Simms. These are three individuals who are involved with promoting diversity. I want to start by asking Thuan some questions. For the last five years Thuan has been the coordinator of the mentoring program within CAPSS, which stands for the Center for Academic Programs and Student Services, CAPSS. She graduated from Gallaudet University with a B.A. degree in deaf studies and received a master's degree from NYU in rehabilitation counseling. She and her family emigrated to the U.S. from Vietnam when she was 10-years-old. She has been working here at Gallaudet for several years. I want to ask you, Thuan, why it is important to have a mentoring program? What are the functions of your work? Please explain a little bit about mentoring and how it helps students.

Ms. Thuan Nguyen:

The mentoring program is extremely important because it helps the University. It helps the University retain students. It also helps students chart out their paths in life through encouragement, to work hard and succeed. An important benefit is to help students determine their careers. It helps them determine their careers because it allows them to gain encouragement and fosters life experiences. They can become good leaders, members of society, and good leaders in our deaf world.

President Davila:

Oh, that's good to know. Thank you. I have another question for you. What are some things and activities that mentors and students do together - things which could be helpful to both of them?

Ms. Thuan Nguyen:

Mentors and mentees can do a variety of different things, such as going to museums, events, or programs sponsored by mentoring programs, and MSP or FYS workshops. It's important to go to these events, learn from them, do homework, earn credits, and enjoy yourself. For example, a mentor and mentee can go off campus for lunch and talk about what the student is processing or thinking about, such as selecting a major – that's important - a good topic of discussion would be selection of a major and career.

President Davila:

That's good. Do you have some examples of successful mentoring activities that impact students in a positive way?

Ms. Thuan Nguyen:

I not only run the mentoring program, I am a mentor, and I can give two examples. One of my own mentees started out as a freshman, and was very confused and unsure of what to do. She had problems with roommates, academic life, and we talked a lot about deciding on a major. I suggested researching the catalog, and she decided on social work as a major. We sat down together, and now she is very

active and even thinking about going on to graduate school. She is thinking about it as something she can do, and she even invited me to her graduation this May. It's incredible. And, the second example is another of my mentees who was hit hard by the loss of both parents. She lost her focus on her studies and her GPA plummeted to the point where she was almost kicked out of classes. We were able to work it out with a lot of discussion and suggestions, and her family, teachers, staff, and faculty provided strong support. With the suggestions of Counseling and Financial Aid, everything worked out! She got counseling, and now is focused on her academics and doing well in school. She's going strong. It's very noteworthy.

President Davila:

These are wonderful stories. Thank you for explaining that. I can see clearly that mentoring and helping students gives them the feeling of direction and allows them to consider carefully their choices and make better decisions. Thank you for the things you do.

Ms. Thuan Nguyen:

Thank you.

President Davila:

Now, I have another person here who is doing very important work for us. Elvia Guillermo is coordinator of Multicultural Student Programs, MSP. She has served in that position for the past five years. She has an interesting background. She came to Gallaudet from Mexico. She

received a bachelor's degree from a university in Mexico but she studied for a graduate degree here at Gallaudet. She began her work and studies here in 1999. She is now doing work that is very important because her office's purpose is just like Thuan's, and its purpose is to help students to focus, settle into their studies, and to do the best work they can do, so I want to ask her a few questions. Elvia, you manage the office of MSP programs. What really does your office do to support the students and help them?

Ms. Elvia Guillermo:

We help students of color and minorities have the opportunity to feel comfortable here on the Gallaudet University campus, and have the opportunity to share their different cultures with other students and expose them to different cultures. Multicultural Student Programs provides the kinds of programs where we can expose students to issues to increase their awareness, and help them to become more competent in their own experiences with cultures, and to help other people to share their experiences and culture.

President Davila:

That's good. Can you maybe explain a little bit more about the benefits that come to all of our students and to the faculty and staff who work with them?

Ms. Elvia Guillermo:

First of all, the students benefit from the opportunities to build strong social relationships with different kinds of people. That really helps them to feel comfortable in teamwork with other people because they are able to make those connections. It helps them increase their awareness so after college, when they go out into the world, they can work with many different kinds of people outside of the campus.

Today, diversity among people has greatly expanded. So, we want to have students increase their knowledge of diversity issues and different kinds of people so that they are able to easily fit in and work with others in a cooperative way. And, the benefit for the staff and faculty is that we help to increase their sensitivity to students by understanding the students' different cultures and backgrounds so that they can work together and be fair to all diverse students. Also, they can integrate the information on multicultural issues into their courses for a multicultural education. So, it's a good education for students, staff and faculty.

President Davila:

This is a very complex but very important service that you are providing, but I imagine that you have different needs among different students, so that means you have a number of different programs.

Can you explain some of your different programs?

Ms. Elvia Guillermo:

My department provides different kinds of programs. For example, we have different cultural performances, we have presentations and workshops, and guest lecturers from different states all across the U.S. to speak on various issues. We have panel discussions, dorm workshops, and “Erase the Hate” activities to help students adopt zero tolerance and be more understanding of bias, prejudice, and discrimination so they can assess themselves and increase awareness in order to eliminate bias, prejudice, or discrimination. We have some of those activities and training. We have a leadership conference for students of color to enhance their leadership skills. Oh, we have a variety of programs!

President Davila:

That’s very interesting. Also, I imagine that you keep adding new activities and new programs as you go along. Do you have any plans for any different or new programs in the future?

Ms. Elvia Guillermo:

We recently had a *Students of Color Conference*, and next fall we plan to have a conference for students who are women of color. This April, we will have two big events. One is an “Erase the Hate” performance done by students, my student assistants, and other Gallaudet University students. They will give a performance and talk about their experiences with prejudice, discrimination and hate, and to share how they feel. Then, after the performance, students will

have a candlelight vigil where students promise and agree to make a difference. There will be a signature banner to ensure that they will follow through with that topic. Then, we'll have a big event, "Unityfest," on April 25. We'll start the event at 11:00 and go until 5:00. We'll have three different cultural dances – Spanish dancing, African dancing, and Native American dancing. We will have guest speakers, and we will have Thai, Spanish, and African food for sale. We'll have multicultural activities provided by student organizations, like the APA, BDSU, LSU, and ISC. We will have different activities that day, on Friday, April 25, so I hope all of you can go.

President Davila:

Wow, I'm impressed with all of the different things you have to offer our students. That's wonderful, and thank you very much for sharing that information.

Ms. Elvia Guillermo:

Thank you.

President Davila:

Now, I would like to ask some questions of Dr. Laurene Simms. She is the director of the master's degree program in deaf education at the Graduate School here at Gallaudet. She came to Gallaudet with many years of experience at different universities. She is a program developer who does many outstanding things, and she brought a lot

of innovation and wonderful experience here to graduate students in training to become teachers of the deaf. Laurene, I am happy to have you here. I have a question for you. You are working on an event that is coming up soon and let's talk about that. We want to make sure our audience knows what your plans are, the purpose of that event, and what you hope to accomplish with it. Please tell us about it.

Dr. Laurene Simms:

It's a big and thrilling event right after "Unityfest" on April 25. That same Friday evening, we will start a conference called the *Eastern Regional Conference*. Let me explain a little bit about what that conference is all about. The *Eastern Regional Conference* is under the National Black Deaf Advocates, NBDA. They traditionally have a national conference every two years. However, many of those black people, for economic reasons, can't afford to go to a big national conference, so regional conferences were established – Eastern, Southern, Western, and Central regions. The Eastern region will have the conference here in Washington, D.C. This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for these people from the Eastern region to come together – including families, students, professionals, and teachers – all together from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Washington, Maryland, and Virginia. They are all gathering together beginning on Friday night, and then all day Saturday, and a Sunday morning session. We have a special program for families, and a special program for children from ages zero through high school, and a program for college students specifically. All have the same goal of

empowerment, growing together, sharing, and supporting each other. We need that opportunity, and it won't happen again because it will move on to another state, and then another every two years. So, this really is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for those people.

President Davila:

I'm sure that is a really wonderful idea. Can you tell us how you will involve students in your plans and activities?

Dr. Laurene Simms:

As an advisor of the Black Deaf Student Union, I have seen their struggles and challenges, as mentioned by Thuan and Elvia. We really want them to grow and be empowered through seeing many various people there in the Eastern conference, and building networks. We are pulling them out of their shells and bringing them to see it. They are involved in the conference and support the conference through volunteering, serving, and presenting. They are very active, and also they work with the DCBDA. The District of Columbia Black Deaf Advocates here offers to connect the students with the community and families, and with KDES and MSSD, so there is no more isolation but expansion. The "It takes a village to raise a child" concept applies to this. Also, the co-chairs of the *Eastern Regional Conference* are Dorian Fletcher, and Ruth Reed, who is one of the staff at Kendall School. She is wonderful and very actively involved in this conference. Also involved is Fred Beam, who is also

president of the BDA, so there are a lot of members involved and supportive of BDSU.

President Davila:

Wow, that's a big event! For the benefit of our audience also, exactly when is that event and how can people get information about it if they would like to go?

Dr. Laurene Simms:

The exact event begins on Friday evening, April 25. We are having the opening ceremony, and we hope you can come and give a presentation, a welcoming. Gallaudet is a major sponsor of this event and it begins on Friday with the opening ceremony. Then, on Saturday, we have workshops and a structured program in the morning. In the afternoon we'll have family fun with some kind of activity and awards and, then, at night a banquet. It starts April 25 and runs through the 27<sup>th</sup>. How do we let people know about it? That is an excellent question because that has been one of our biggest obstacles. We have tried to access public information systems dominated by people who are not people of color, and we ask permission of them to publicize for us. We don't have much but because of this vlog, the information has gone out all over the world, so come to the conference that weekend!

President Davila:

Wow, that's very interesting, and also I know that you are working with the Black Deaf Student Union, BDSU. Tell us about that. What is it and what do you do in that group?

Dr. Laurene Simms:

I have been the advisor since 2001, and I have had different experiences in different years. Sometimes with excellent students, it expands with great leaders; sometimes it declines, and then picks up again. It depends on the number of students who stay in our program. That's why Thuan's program plays such a critical role in retention! The students stay here, then the BDSU becomes active and works toward goals of empowerment and leadership skills. I've seen more and more black students arrive here with a lack of leadership skills. My role is to help, with support from various offices, to help the students grow, and stay and graduate from here. So, I have been doing that since 2001 and I really enjoy it. The biggest event so far was *Black History Month*. Other than that, I keep on them about finishing their studies so that I can see them march on graduation day up there on the stage.

President Davila:

I'm very impressed with everything you do. I think you do very important work. I want you to know that the event is already on my schedule. I've got it noted.

Dr. Laurene Simms:

That's wonderful.

President Davila:

So, I will see you there. Nevertheless, I want to thank Thuan, Elvia, and you for providing us with this wonderful sharing of information with our audience. Thank you.

You know that diversity and support of students of color brings the community here together with healthy and productive interaction, cooperation, and support – mutual support. It's very important, and that's the kind of environment and climate we want to establish on the Gallaudet campus but, like it has been said several times during this presentation, that's the responsibility of everyone who loves and has a connection with Gallaudet University. We want this community to be supportive of everyone. We also know, for example, that students of color have lower retention rates and lower graduation rates than students in general, and we want to do everything we can within the framework of our resources, program activities, staffing skills and knowledge to give them every opportunity to stay to graduation and to get the most benefit from their experience here at Gallaudet. So, I want to share with you some of the things that we are doing. We are doing a lot, many other things, and we will be reporting to you periodically to keep you informed about the work of Gallaudet University. Again, I want to thank our fine guests for their wonderful presentation. Thank you very much. So long!

