Dear Colleagues,

“Well, it’s Mardi Gras time, and everybody’s having fun.” So goes the opening refrain of a Carnival tune by Al Johnson. In the days preceding Fat Tuesday, this song is ubiquitously heard on the airwaves. Growing up, and still today, when I hear the first chords of that frenzied trombone beat in sync with the lyrics, my feet get happy, making me want to dance in the streets. And believe me, there is plenty of dancing during the Mardi Gras season. Walk the streets of the Vieux Carré or the French Quarter, and you’ll hear music wafting from the open windows and doorways of houses and nightclubs. In the evenings, revelers march in syncopation with the high-stepping marching bands along the parade routes as a fleet of ornate floats pass by. We call them Carnival Krewes; the most well-known are Endymion, Bacchus, Rex, and Comus. The crowds yell excitedly, “Hey, Mister, throw me something.” Locals and visitors alike all scramble with childish glee to reap a trove of trinkets and beads. On Mardi Gras Day the streets are alive with festivities. Masked merrymakers in glittering costumes parade the streets. Families line up, several feet deep, along the parade routes. Neighborhood parties abound with spontaneous dancing to the jazzy and bluesy tunes of Louis Armstrong, Pete Fountain, Al Hirt, the Neville Brothers, Fats Domino, the Wild Tchoupitoulas, and Deacon John!!! The spicy smell of Creole and Cajun cooking fills the air, adding to the intoxication of the music that envelops body and soul. The entire city bathed in the radiance of happy and carefree fun! Laissez les bons temps rouler! Let the Good
Times Roll!! I can still hear the raw, earthy sounds of legendary, blues pianist, Professor Longhair, singing, “When you get to New Orleans, go to the Mardi Gras. There you will see the Zulu King down on St. Claude and Dumaine.”

As children, my siblings and I, in decorative costumes sewn by our mother, had a cinematic view of Mardi Gras revelry from our paternal grandmother’s porch. There, sitting on the stoop, we would watch the Mardi Gras Indians parading in their elaborately beaded costumes, and nearby on the corner of Orleans Street and Claiborne Avenue, we witnessed their tribal dancing and taunting chants, “Hey Pocky A-Way.” Each band of Indians dueling in dance and song to be the most admired. The Big Chiefs primping like a peacock. Later in the day we waited for the Zulu King and his flotilla of floats, hoping to catch one of the envied painted gold coconuts thrown into the crowds. The King’s float would stop just a few doors from our grandmother’s home in front of the famed black Creole restaurant, Dooky Chase, to toast the Mardi Gras. The Zulu parade was the black counterpoint to the King of Carnival, Rex, who paraded downtown on Canal Street. And although, Mardi Gras today is much more integrated than it was then, traditions endure. Mardi Gras festivities end at midnight when the forty Lenten days of prayer and sacrifice begin, a response to the hedonistic excesses of the Carnival season. On Ash Wednesday, in this Catholic city, penitents, with the mark of ash on their forehead, are reminded of life’s mortality.

The last time I enjoyed a Mardi Gras was in 1989; the memories linger. Perhaps next year, when I am officially retired, and like Professor Longhair, “with my ticket in my hand, I’ll go to the Mardi Gras and even see the Zulu Queen.”

Locally, for several years the Human Rights Commission sponsors community gatherings of area residents from all walks of life and ethnicities to discuss openly feelings about race. A few months ago I was approached about having one of these “study circles” at IU South Bend. Routinely, St. Mary’s has had one of these discussion groups as a one credit course. I found the idea worthwhile but wanted to participate in one before introducing it to our campus. For the last three weeks, Melanie and I have spent Wednesday evening at St. Mary’s with a group of St. Mary’s and Ivy Tech students in a study circle [coverage in South Bend Tribune]. It is the first time that this has been done with students from both schools. There are two groups, equally divided with students from St. Mary’s and Ivy Tech. The experience has been enlightening for everyone as we learn from each other and in the process learn more about ourselves. Perceptions of and experience with race and racism vary among this group of young and mature adults, white and black, privileged and working class, erudite and less so, male and female. In the hands of our skilled professor, we share our fears about race and racism; we speak honestly without fear of retribution or judgment; we reflect on our own unacknowledged fears and prejudices; we listen to each other’s stories, seeking understanding, finding common ground, yet recognizing and accepting each other’s differences. Initially, the gulf between the two university groups appeared vast; the stories and experiences impossible to bridge. To break the obvious awkwardness of discussing race so publicly and intimately, in our second meeting, we each shared something of our cultural backgrounds. I naturally spoke about Mardi Gras and the institutional segregation of my youth. The more time we spend together, the more we find that we are more alike than different, in our dreams, in our hopes, in our future. The rapprochement is visibly noticed with each session. I believe the value of these study groups is to become less judgmental and reach a more comprehensible understanding of how the other lives, and ultimately, to resolve to become agents in society’s betterment. The duration of these sessions is six weeks. After that time, I am certain that each of us will experience some metamorphosis. Perhaps in the future, IU South Bend will host one of these study circles. Because we are a public university whose embrace of diversity is embedded in its mission, I envision study circles to be a natural fit.

Best wishes in these waning winter months.

Sincerely,

Alfred J. Guillaume, Jr.,
Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Photos courtesy Alec Hosterman; photos here and on page 1 were taken in New Orleans by Alec while at a conference held there – links to the pictures were provided in the January 2012 EVCAA News.
Kudos

Congratulations to adjunct faculty member Tara Lavallee and the Department of Political Science for the WNDU-TV coverage of the visit by 70 middle school students to campus to “get a taste of college life” [link].

Kudos to Alec Hosterman, Communications, who has been invited to go to Washington, DC to listen to President Obama’s State of the Union Address and employ social media to comment about it. WSBT will be covering his experience [as reported in South Bend Tribune] [press release].

Emeritus Professor Harold Zisla (ARTS) was featured in a South Bend Tribune article regarding his current (“fourth farewell”) exhibit [link].

Kudos to Elizabeth Bennion (POLS) who was featured in the Spotlight in the Inside IU online publication on February 6 as moderator of “Politically Speaking” [link].

Congratulations to Kelcey Parker (ENG) who has been named one of three finalists for 2012 Best Book in Indiana for her short story collection For Sale by Owner. [South Bend Tribune].

As announced by EVCAA Guillaume at the January Academic Senate meeting, congratulations to Rebecca Brittenham (ENG) who was selected to receive an all-IU teaching award. She will be recognized with the Frederic Bachman Lieber Memorial Award for teaching excellence at the annual Celebration of Distinguished Teaching dinner on Friday, April 5 in Bloomington in honor of Founders Day.

Campus Activities and News

MLK Celebration Concert

On January 21st, IU South Bend hosted the annual Martin Luther King Celebration Concert in the Main Auditorium. The South Bend Symphony, directed by Maestro Tsung Yeh, took part in the concert along with 15-year-old guest violinist Ade Williams, the South Bend Symphonic Choir (directed by Dean of the Arts Marvin Curtis), the IU South Bend Chorale, and the IU South Bend Chamber Choir. In addition, students in New Media, under the direction of Eric Souther (ARTS) produced a video to accompany a portion of the event (see photo at left with the South Bend Symphony; photo courtesy inside IU).

Dean’s Seminar

At noon on February 22, Professor of Biological Sciences Peter Bushnell will present a Dean’s Seminar in NS245, The Peterson Classroom. The title of the presentation is “Old and Cold: The Biology of Polar Fishes (and the people who study them).” As always, attendees are welcome to bring their lunch and beverages will be available.

Faculty Research Grants Deadline

The deadline for the second round of Faculty Research Grant and Curriculum Development Grant proposals is March 15th. More information available at [link].

New Education Dean Named

Joining IU South Bend on July 1st as Dean of the School of Education will be Marvin Lynn who is currently Associate Dean for Teaching Education at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire [press release]. He has extensive experience in education administration and as EVCAA Guillaume observes, “he is a nationally recognized scholar and an active grant writer.” We look forward to welcoming Marvin this summer.