

Drawn to Diversity program expanding through Art Force Five

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Alfred University's Drawn to Diversity program brings together the artistic and creative talents of students and their desire to improve themselves and society. Aimed at combating America's creativity gap, Drawn to Diversity teaches better solutions to conflict rather than fighting or fleeing through creative problem solving,

Established in 2006, Drawn to Diversity believes creativity is the ultimate superpower and it helps people make smart choices. Through art and creativity, the program encourages equality, teaches history, inspires artists, cultivates dialogue and fights ignorance, according to the program's mission statement.

Dan Napolitano, Drawn to Diversity's director, says the program began as a research class of the history of diversity, primarily using comic books and creating the group member's own superheroes as an educational and discussion tool.

Napolitano, also Alfred University's director of Student Activities, says the program has become more than a comic book club.

"We've really moved so far away from that," says Napolitano. "We've really embraced the power of creativity," Napolitano explains that the Art Force Five, Drawn to Diversity's outreach team, represents different forms of creative art such as illustration painting, sculpting, photography, and fashion. Art Force Five students teach audiences ways to reduce bullying, build self-esteem, and develop non-violent resolution and communication skills. During the 2011-2012 academic years, they presented workshops to over 600 students ranging from second graders to college residential assistant staff members.

Drawn to Diversity embraces the use of community art to help raise awareness of an issue, help cope with tragedy or embrace diversity. The group seeks to design a project while carefully considering all a community's viewpoints, uses research to learn the history of a topic and determine the budget and funding sources of a project, plan and organize of a project, evaluate the success of a community project, learn about the level impact the project left and use lessons learned in planning and organize projects in the future.

Last spring, inspired by French artist JR, Drawn to Diversity designed a mural in downtown Alfred featuring photographs of University and community members. They also commemorated the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks by encouraging Alfred University staff and students to hang links of chains representing a person who died.

Other projects included a creating a walking path to spread information about poverty, partnering with the Wellsville chapter of American Red Cross to design window displays and murals, and organizing a special art display with Cuba, NY students.

According to Napolitano, students can become involved in Drawn to Diversity by taking the two-credit Drawn to Diversity class, joining the Drawn to Diversity travel club or by living in a Drawn to Diversity living community, which includes weekly discussion groups.

Napolitano hopes to increase the Art Force Five presence beyond Alfred University.

“I would like us to have Art Force Five chapters outside of Alfred,” he says. Drawn to Diversity’s expansion vision, “Art Force 500,” contains plans to create 100 chapters across the United States, said Napolitano. He also foresees an increased presence of the Art Force Five in media through platforms such as television, comic books, and the Internet.

“It’s not just for art majors,” maintains Napolitano. “It’s about using Drawn to Diversity as a creative outlet in whatever a student’s major is.”