Simi Linton Shares Perspectives on Disabled People

For more than 35 years, Simi Linton, Ph.D., has been a national advocate for people with disabilities, changing perceptions and policies through her books, films, research, and consulting.

“Although there has been enormous progress, disabled people as a group are continually struggling for basic rights,” said Linton in a November 8 talk at the University of Miami BankUnited Center hosted by the School of Education and Human Development. “Many of us have put our lives on the line to create positive changes in society, and we need to continue that spirit in the future.”

More than 200 University of Miami faculty, students, staffers, and guests heard Linton speak on “Disability in 21st Century America: Political, Social and Cultural Imperatives.” Linton also shared a (story continues on next page)
Simi Linton (from page 1)

brief segment of “Invitation to Dance,” a forthcoming film documentary of her life, and signed copies of her 2006 memoir, “My Body Politic.”

Professor Ora Prilleltensky, of the Department of Educational and Psychological Studies (EPS), introduced Linton, noting that her first book, “Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity” (1998) was highly influential in shaping her own thinking about disabled people.

Known worldwide for her academic work, as well as her activism, Linton holds a doctorate in counseling psychology from New York University. She was a faculty member at the Division of Education at Hunter College prior to establishing her consultancy in disability and the arts.

In her UM presentation, Linton raised the basic question of defining a disability. “If a person with a broken leg has to use a wheelchair for a few months is that person disabled?” she asked. “What if someone has a muscular disorder or a hearing problem, but doesn’t tell anyone? And when we talk about gender, we can run into even more definitional problems.”

Referring to the 2012 Olympic Games in London, Linton noted that there was a heated discussion about whether South Africa’s Oscar Pistorius should be eligible to run with his carbon-fiber prosthetic legs, and whether Castor Semenya was really a woman because of her high levels of testosterone.

“It was wonderful to see these two athletes participating in the games, but the intense media interest raises the issue of gatekeepers,” Linton said. “When it comes to disability, who decides? After all, there are very few people in positions of authority who have significant physical disabilities.”

As a longtime activist for people with mobility, sensory, psychological, emotional, or gender disabilities, Linton believes in drawing a clear distinction between able and disabled people, while breaking down traditional stereotypes.

“We are not living in a world where individual differences no longer matter,” she said. “So we need to have an open dialogue about these issues in regard to individuals, families, and communities.”

In that regard, Linton pointed to the field of disability studies, which involves disabled people looking at various aspects of society, such as barriers, attitudes, political policies, transportation, education, and employment opportunities. “Disability studies also encompass the arts,” she added. “When you go to the movies or the theater, for instance, look at how disabled people are depicted.”

For the past few years, Linton has been focusing on the arts, and how painting, sculpture, theater, film, and dance can change attitudes about the disabled. Working with a diverse range of cultural organizations, she seeks to improve the way disability is represented and depicted in all art forms.

“My latest work is called ‘Invitation to Dance’ because dance is the ultimate expression of the right to freedom,” she said. “Dance is the last frontier for disabled people and we must give ourselves permission to dance.”
Leading the Way

Our School of Education and Human Development is playing an increasingly important role in advancing the concepts of individual, family, and community well-being in our diverse society.

This issue of our newsletter highlights some of the many ways our faculty, students, alumni, and partners are making significant contributions to fields like early childhood education, exercise and physiology, and community psychology. Through academic research, service partnerships, guest lectures, and advocacy efforts, we are seeking to separate fact from fiction and raise awareness of the vital need for education at every level of our society.

That theme also runs through our outreach efforts with organizations like the Children’s Trust and the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, as well as our recent programs featuring authors and activists Jonathan Kozol and Simi Linton.

In keeping with our leadership role, I am pleased to announce that the School of Education and Human Development will host the national conference of the Council on Contemporary Families on April 5-6, 2013. A nonprofit that focuses on the media’s use and misuse of social research, the CCF’s conference will focus on “Immigrant Families as They Really Are.”

Two months later, our school will host the biannual conference of the Society for Community Research and Action on June 26-29. Formally known as the Division of Community Psychology of the American Psychological Association (APA), the society will bring more than 700 professionals to our campus where several renowned speakers will present programs related to our conference topic, “Communal Thriving: In Pursuit of Meaning, Justice, and Well-Being.”

Let me invite you to stay in close touch with our school as we move into a New Year filled with new possibilities for everyone. Warmest wishes for 2013.

Dean Isaac Prilleltensky
Dean, School of Education and Human Development
Erwin and Barbara Mautner Chair in Community Well-Being
prActicing inclusion in the Workplace

By Isaac Prilleltensky
Dean, School of Education and Human Development

Editor’s Note: Isaac Prilleltensky was among six University of Miami leaders asked to reflect on strategies to improve the university workplace. This article first appeared in eVeritas.

I have lived in five countries in South America, North America, the Middle East, and Oceania. I grew up speaking Spanish, finished high school in Hebrew, and ended up speaking English for a living. Every time I moved, I benefited greatly from a new culture and geography. It was not always easy to blend in with the new crowd, but most locals could tell that this guy with a strange accent had something to offer. This act of recognition, that despite our differences I had something to contribute, was always empowering and affirming. Each one of us has unique talents and strengths waiting to be acknowledged and affirmed.

At the University of Miami, we enjoy a great deal of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. I commend our department of Human Resources for making inclusion a priority for our working environment. Inclusion strikes at the heart of two fundamental human needs: recognition and dignity. We all want to be recognized for our strengths, individuality, and uniqueness. It is by recognizing and acknowledging our special talents that we accord people the dignity they deserve. And make no mistake: Inclusion is not just about gender or ethnic background, but about the vast array of diversity that exists in the human race, including life experiences, personalities, education, and levels of power in society.

Inclusion in the workplace is an extension of inclusion in our families. We all struggle to accept the idiosyncrasies of our spouses and the quirkiness of our children, and to the extent that we succeed — and most of us do — it is because we come to see beauty in difference. At home, school, and work, we yearn to be accepted for who we are; to the extent that we are, we do our best work, and we reciprocate in kind. Research demonstrates that inclusive policies foster more engagement and productivity in the workplace. We ignore inclusion at our own peril.

Like most human organizations, universities are very hierarchical places. Hierarchies tempt those of us with some degree of power to be arrogant and dismiss those below us in the food chain. Each act of neglect, however benign or unconscious, diminishes our humanity. We human beings embody great capacity for recognition, but also great proclivity for neglect. It is a mistake to assume that inclusion will be promoted in our units just by singing its praises. We have to celebrate our desire for inclusion and resist our practices of exclusion. Both exist within us. To make sure we institutionalize policies, practices, and programs of inclusion, we have to be deliberate.

In the School of Education and Human Development, we created a Diversity Committee and a number of other initiatives to ensure that all our staff, students, and faculty have a say in the direction of our school. Inclusion is not a slogan; it is a fundamental human need, a value, a strategy to improve our University, and a vehicle for wellness and fairness.

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Isaac Prilleltensky

students, alumni remember phyllis cleveland

When Phyllis C. Cleveland, B.S.Ed. 1962, passed away September 14, the veteran Blue Lakes Elementary school teacher was mourned by several generations of her students and University of Miami alumni. “Ms. Cleveland was a wonderful teacher to both me and my mother,” said Christina Perez, Gainesville, in an online tribute in The Miami Herald. Elaine Marlin, a Miami resident, wrote, “Phyllis was a wonderful lady, and a caring, honest, professional teacher. She was one of the kindest and friendliest people I have met, and was a terrific listener.” After graduating from the University of Miami with her degree in elementary education, Cleveland taught at Blue Lakes Elementary School until her retirement. She was active in the University of Miami Alumni Association and Iron Arrow Honorary Society, and was an avid football fan of the university as well as the Miami Dolphins. Throughout her life she remained a strong and dedicated advocate for children’s education. She also traveled worldwide throughout her life to many unusual and exotic places.
Chamber Panelists Emphasize Importance of Early Reading

Childhood reading is critical to the nation’s future, according to four panelists at a September 24 meeting of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce’s Education Committee. “We have always believed that education is the cornerstone for sustainable economic development,” said moderator Rafael Saldaña, education committee chairman, and CEO, Banesco USA. “The ability to read properly and comprehend what you’re reading is as necessary as having good health. Otherwise you cannot understand what’s happening around you.”

Today, 44 percent of third graders can’t read at minimally proficient levels and half of tenth graders can’t read at that grade level, according to David Lawrence Jr., Education and Community Leadership Scholar, University of Miami, and a longtime advocate of early childhood education. “This is not a recipe for a bright future,” Lawrence said. “We don’t have a chance to sustain our global leadership unless our children are better educated.”

Research studies show conclusively that children who learn to read early in life and develop a love for learning do much better in university than others, said Isaac Prilleltensky, dean, University of Miami School of Education and Human Development. “Early childhood education has a huge impact on academic success, family life, and our criminal justice system. But many parents don’t recognize the importance of reading or are stressed out by their daily activities. So we need to help them as well.”

In that regard, Prilleltensky recommended that South Florida businesses try to provide a supportive climate for parents or develop long-term relationships with nearby daycare centers. “You could organize brown-bag lunch-and-learn sessions or host a parenting night once a week where employees can share their stories with each other,” he said. “This would be great for the parents, their children, and the business as well.”

‘Crossing Borders’ – A Talk at TedxParis

Editor’s Note: Anjuli Pandit, B.S. Ed. 2008, spoke at TEDxParis in October. The following is an edited summary of her talk to French students.

My two grandmothers were visionaries. It is thanks to them that I stand here today, wearing a sari, and speaking in French. Because, they encouraged us to take the best from the west, yet at the same time to preserve our culture and national pride of India.

When I was 9 years old, my parents made the decision that they would choose an international career track. This decision is the reason why I grew up in Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Singapore, Kuwait, and Kazakhstan. I have had the chance to travel to more than 70 countries and I have received a truly international education. I never understood borders, and I had to adapt to all cultures and ways of life. For example, I remember when I was as excited in Saudi Arabia to become old enough to wear the abaya, as I was to go out dancing in my new backless dress in Miami!

Although it’s impressive, it is not an original story to Indians. There are 27 million Indians who are living abroad today. They see a world full of opportunities. But the point that we all seem to be missing is that it’s just one world, with one combined future, and therefore the opportunities within it are for us all.

I have an image of 2030. Our world will be even more multicultural, multilingual, integrated and interdependent, with an economy that favors people who think at a global level, people with an open spirit.

Maybe you are worried to move abroad. Maybe you are scared of globalization. But I know you are also worried about France’s future. I’ll tell you one thing, I feel I am doing something for India, just by standing here in France to tell you my story and India’s story of migration. In the same way, I think you would do more for France if you start an international career or find another way to embrace globalization here.

Today, being here, I hope that I have built more understanding between Indians and the French, and given you the desire to cross borders. So, by 2030, what stands between you or your children standing at TEDx New Delhi giving a speech in Hindi, in your native dress? I think that really there are no borders at all. And I will be in the audience cheering you on.
Author Kozol Calls for Equality in Public Education

Speaking out on behalf of neglected and impoverished students, investigative journalist and award-winning author Jonathan Kozol called for equality in the nation’s public education system. “That’s the only way to ever close the gap between the richest and poorest kids,” Kozol told an audience at the University of Miami BankUnited Center in an October 2 talk co-sponsored by UM’s School of Education and Human Development and the Office of the President. After the talk, held in partnership with Books & Books, Coral Gables, Kozol signed copies of “Fire in the Ashes,” his latest book about the children of an impoverished South Bronx neighborhood.

“For nearly 50 years, Jonathan Kozol has been raising the national dialogue about children and education to the highest level,” said Dean Isaac Prilleltensky. “He is a passionate advocate for every child’s right to the best possible education regardless of race, income, or neighborhood.” In his talk, Kozol emphasized the importance of smaller class sizes and individual attention as two keys for helping young students succeed. “If these things are good for the sons and daughters of prosperous physicians and lawyers, they are good for the poorest children as well,” he said.

Kozol provided an update on youngsters whose struggles were chronicled in “Rachel and Her Children” and “Amazing Grace.” One died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, another from a heroin overdose, and a third was killed while “surfing” atop a New York City subway car.

But there were also success stories, like the girl called Pineapple, who had seven different teachers in the fourth grade, ate in a cafeteria located in the school’s basement, and couldn’t read or write a sentence longer than five words. Today she is a college senior, and plans to become a teacher. “Pineapple was one of the lucky ones, winning the attention of adults who could go to bat for her,” said Kozol. “She prevailed because of charity, but charity is not a substitute for justice.”

In a conversation with University of Miami President Donna Shalala after his talk, Kozol said he would advise the White House that educational testing has no diagnostic value. “We should take those billions of dollars a year spent on testing and pour that money into the rich developmental years of preschool education,” he said.

A winner of the National Book Award, the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award, and many other honors, Kozol is also the author of “Death at an Early Age,” “Savage Inequalities,” and other books. He is a Harvard graduate and Rhodes Scholar who taught in the Boston public system before becoming deeply involved in the civil rights movement. In his talk, Kozol praised teaching, calling it a “beautiful profession” and “one of the best things we can do with our lives.”

UM student Stephanie Dietz, an elementary education major, said Kozol’s talk was inspiring. “We need to rally together and work in the schools that need the most help,” Dietz said, “and focus our funding and attention on kids like the ones Mr. Kozol has written about.”
advocacy

School Is New Home of Council on Contemporary Families; Will Host Conference on Immigrant Families

On April 5-6, 2013, the School of Education and Human Development will host the national conference of the Council on Contemporary Families, “Immigrant Families as They Really Are,” in the Newman Alumni Center. This conference brings together national immigrant family researchers and local immigration practitioners to discuss some of the intricacies of immigrant families and the challenges they face as they work their way into American society. The conference provides an excellent opportunity for faculty and students to meet and network with local leaders working to promote the well-being of immigrant families living in South Florida.

While Aldarondo oversees the functions of the council, co-chairs Stephanie Coontz and Joshua Coleman work directly with the media. “We write op-ed pieces and generally seek to add complexity to the cultural conversation about family issues,” Aldarondo said. “In this regard, the council’s activities are directly aligned with our school’s efforts to provide policymakers with accurate, evidence-based information on which to base their decisions.”

Aldarondo’s own research focuses on the positive development of ethnic minority and immigrant youth, domestic violence, and social justice-oriented clinical practices. He is actively involved in a number of grassroots advocacy organizations, foundations, and federal government agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the National Institute of Justice.

“Academics have an important role to play in the ongoing quest for wellness and social justice,” Aldarondo said. “We know a lot of valuable information from research. My job is in part to help those colleagues with something to say, to step up, and speak out on the issues that affect family life.”

The School of Education and Human Development’s Dunspaugh-Dalton Community and Educational Well-Being (CEW) Research Center is now the home for the Council on Contemporary Families. Etiony Aldarondo, associate dean for research and CEW director, is also the executive director of CCF.

The CCF (www.contemporaryfamilies.org/about-ccf/about-ccf.html) is an organization comprised of family scholars (demographers, economists, family therapists, historians, political scientists, psychologists, social workers, sociologists, and other family social scientists) and practitioners dedicated to enriching the cultural conversation about the state of families in the United States – how and why contemporary families are changing, what needs and challenges they face, and how these needs can best be met.

“The council was founded 12 years ago by family scholars who understood that sound social science research can function as an antidote to the oversimplified and distorted perspectives about family life often promulgated through popular culture and media outlets,” said Aldarondo.

CCF provides media outlets and policy makers with balanced and up-to-date research regarding all aspects of family life (e.g., sexuality, work issues, couple relationships, conflict resolution, marriage, divorce, race relations, health, et cetera), holds annual conferences open to the public, and issues briefing papers and fact sheets. “Our members bring family research to the attention of reporters and policy makers and build trusting relationships with major media outlets,” said Aldarondo. “As a result, the council is one of the most respected and frequently cited sources of family research by news media and has a worldwide impact.”
Higher Education Program Takes Holistic Approach

More than ever, colleges and universities are seeking leaders who know how to recruit and retain students and facilitate their personal development while navigating financial pressures, increased competition, and administrative bureaucracy. A tried and true training ground has become the University of Miami School of Education and Human Development, where Professors Paul M. Orehovec, now retired, and Scott Ingold popularized the groundbreaking concept of enrollment management and in 1998 launched the nation’s first master’s degree program.

The school remains a leader in this academic field with doctoral and master’s programs tailored to the needs of professionals in a demanding environment.

“Enrollment management continues to be a very hot topic in higher education because it views students and the institution with a wide lens,” said Professor Carol-Anne Phekoo, Ph.D., director of the Higher Education Program in the Department of Educational and Psychological Studies.

“It emphasizes research that indicates student success is the result of a complex series of exchanges with the campus environment. The academic aspect is crucial, but so are administrative and social components.”

Phekoo noted that understanding these components drives practical applications: “Our students learn how to build enrollment models to meet budgets and develop short- and long-term plans. Every institution wants to attract the right blend of students and as a result of our rigorous, research-based curricula, every one of our students gets placed after completing our program.”

The University of Miami program covers every part of enrollment from initial inquiry to graduation. Graduate students can also focus on a student life and development track, which examines the college experience from the non-administrative side. “We cover the transitions of students, their academic and social engagement, and their personal development,” Phekoo said. “We also look at how research and theory can have an impact on college programs, policies, and procedures.”

Graduate students can combine both aspects of the program, obtaining a post-master’s certification in student life or enrollment management. “We have a very diverse enrollment in our master’s program, with students from all parts of the country as well as internationally from countries like Peru, China, and Colombia” said Phekoo.

Since 2008, the school also has offered a doctoral program in higher education leadership. Students focus on areas of special interest and choose applied dissertation projects that address critical issues confronting the current higher education workplace.

Last year, the school added an executive doctoral program for working professionals who come in once a month for an intensive weekend of classes on the Coral Gables campus. “Our executive format has attracted senior academic leaders locally, nationally, as well as from several South American countries seeking a senior degree in higher education leadership to advance on their career paths,” Phekoo said. “It’s an excellent opportunity for professionals to gain key skills and certification without leaving important positions in higher education.”

For more information on these programs, contact Dr. Phekoo at cphekoo@miami.edu.
New Nutrition Track Approved for School’s Exercise Physiology Program

Next fall, the School of Education and Human Development will launch a new nutrition track in the Exercise Physiology master’s degree program. The “Nutrition for Health and Human Performance” track was recently approved by the University of Miami Faculty Senate and UM President Donna Shalala.

“We are already seeing a great deal of interest around the country, as well as from our own students,” said Lisa Dorfman, a registered dietician and director, Masters in Nutrition for Health and Human Performance Program in the Department of Kinesiology and Sport Sciences. “Many students are involved in exercise, nursing, athletic training, and other health-related areas. Now, they can take advantage of this program to gain the nutritional expertise that complements their knowledge base.”

Arlette Perry, professor and chair, Department of Kinesiology and Sport Sciences, said the new program will provide the nutrition information that students have been demanding in their physiology programs for the last 10 years. “It will also be an integrative program so that students will learn just how much nutrition impacts so many other areas of study in health, medicine, performance, and fitness,” she added.

One set of courses will focus on the role of nutrition in athletic performance, including team and individual sports. A second area of emphasis is nutrition in promoting health and preventing disease. “With half the U.S. population approaching obesity, we want our students to have a solid toolkit for helping their patients and clients achieve optimal health without medications, whenever possible,” said Dorfman, who is a board certified specialist in sports dietetics and a licensed mental health counselor. “We take an integrative approach to promoting better health.”

Dorfman said the program will provide graduate students with education needed to become nutritionists licensed by the Florida Department of Professional Regulation. “We are also in a unique position to offer our students the experience of working with a highly diverse population,” she said. “It will be excellent training for going out in the field.”

Special Event: On October 30, the School of Education and Human Development presented a free screening of the film “Temple Grandin” at the Cosford Cinema at the University of Miami. The movie paints a picture of a young woman’s perseverance and determination while struggling with the isolating challenges of autism. Shown here, from left, are Samantha Richard; Zureyka Carci; Dr. Miriam Lipsky; Kyle Siebrecht, associate director, Center for Humanities; and Devin Weinstein.

Elected!

Professor Mileidis Gort, Department of Teaching and Learning, has been elected 2013 program chair and 2013-2014 SIG chair by the Bilingual Education Research Special Interest Group of the American Education Research Association. She was also featured in the Education Week article, “Advice from Miami-Dade Educators: Embrace Diversity,” published on June 7, 2012. The article is available at: www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/06/07/34districts.h31.html?r=86790686
Faces of Education:
Nancy Olson – Enjoying the Sporting Life

As an educator, athletic director, fitness enthusiast and community leader, Nancy Olson has always enjoyed the sporting life. Now semi-retired, Olson, MED ’70, is an adjunct professor at the H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship at Nova Southeastern University, teaching a new generation about sports and recreation management.

“I have always been into sports and fitness,” said Olson, a native of Ohio who earned her bachelor’s degree in health and physical education from Bowling Green State University. “As a master’s student in the School of Education, I learned a lot about anatomy, physiology, and the mechanical analysis of movement. All those lessons have stuck with me through the years.”

In 1977, Olson became assistant athletic director (AD) at Ely High School in Pompano Beach. A year later she was promoted to AD, becoming the second woman in the state to serve as high school athletic director. “I loved my job and it was a great experience for me,” she said. “Today, we take women in sports for granted, but in the late 1970s, that was definitely not the norm.”

Next, Olson became associate director of athletics at Florida International University (FIU), and was promoted to AD in 1979. “At that time, FIU didn’t have a men’s basketball team and neither did UM,” she recalled. “But our baseball and our golf teams were great. I think we became the catalyst for UM to restart its basketball program.” In 1985, Olson left FIU to become assistant operations manager of Windjammer Barefoot Cruises – a role she held until 1996.

After a year in California, Olson returned to South Florida and became manager of community affairs for the Florida Marlins and executive director of the Florida Marlins Community Foundation. “I was with the Marlins for 14 years, and during that time we raised $7 million for community causes,” she said. In her roles with the Marlins, she also became a mentor to several University of Miami students in the school’s sports administration program. “I tried to show them that if you go into sports, it’s not just fun and games and winning a World Series or two,” she said. “It’s also a lot of hard work.”

Now, Olson volunteers her time for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Broward County and the Women of Tomorrow Mentoring and Scholarship Program. She is also a member of the task force for the Community Foundation of Broward’s Re-engage for Good project, a member of the Marine Industries Association of South Florida Education Committee, and a member of the Florida State League (Minor League Baseball) Scholarship Committee. She was honored as one of the “100 Outstanding Women of Broward” in 2009.

Olson is certified to teach water fitness by the United States Water Fitness Association, and is an active participant in walking, bike riding, water fitness, body sculpting and bowling. She also greatly enjoys teaching at NSU and supervising student interns. “In my experience, internships are very valuable to anyone considering a career in sports administration,” she said. “It’s a great way to prepare for that first job after college.”
Publications


Presentations


