Although there’s work to be done in our community, positive examples of racial interaction and cultural inclusivity can be found throughout Columbia.
GROUPS WORK TO BUILD INCLUSION

This year, the theme for the Columbia Missourian’s annual Progress Edition is an important topic for our community — the issue of race.

But instead of focusing on problems and obstacles, the stories in this section have uncovered solutions and successes.

Race became the prevailing focus of conversation in Columbia during the fall of 2015. It led to a number of incidents on the MU campus that had repercussions nationwide.

As a topic, race is uneasy and emotional for a community to discuss. There are key differences among Americans of different backgrounds that can hinder effective communication.

Understanding these differences can go a long way toward improving relationships in Columbia.

In this section, you’ll find places in Columbia where diverse groups coexist peacefully and positively — classrooms, businesses, churches. You’ll also find the demographic patterns underlying diversity in the community.

There are stories about a public school classroom that integrates students of many cultures and backgrounds, about a college volleyball team that represents eight countries and about a church where worshippers represent different nationalities but come together to pray.

The Missourian wanted to discover the strategies that help these diverse groups work together. From them, we hope you’ll find the ways people have learned to live and work in harmony.
WITHOUT TREES...
Hammocks would just be blankets on the ground.

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Ismaeel Bilal leads the intermediate hip-hop class in February at Jabberwocky Studios. The class was preparing a group number for an upcoming performance.
The art of uniting cultures

Jabberwocky Studios strives to foster inclusivity by making creative expression accessible to Columbians of all backgrounds.

Story by JOSEY HERRERA  
Photos by ERIN QUINN

Daisy Douce and Shruti Rajan grew up at least 10,000 miles from each other — Douce in Guatemala and Rajan in India. Yet today, they get together on Sundays in Columbia to chat over tea at Jabberwocky Studio, where their children take drawing classes.

The nonprofit studio welcomes children and adults from Columbia’s diverse community to take a wide array of classes in art, dance, music and theater. Many families who participate are American, but many others have roots in Asia, Africa, South America and Europe.

Some children have parents of the same gender, while others have an interracial background, and more than one family has a mix of biological and adoptive children.

“I have met many families that I couldn’t know otherwise from Kenya and other countries,” Douce said. “It was just beautiful to see my daughter play with different kids. (The studio) brings people together in fun, healthy ways.”

The staff is equally diverse. Caitlynn Noltie, a dancer with the Missouri Contemporary Ballet, is passionate about ballet, lyrical and Ukrainian dance. Ismaeel Bilal specializes in popping and isolations in his hip hop instruction.

Joe Schlottach has been b-boying, or break dancing, for about 14 years and paints murals around Columbia. Nakita Cade started dancing in her living room when her family made Soul Train lines and now teaches sorority and fraternity-style stepping.

Joanne Oten plays acoustic guitar and piano, and is an assistant worship leader at Latter House Kingdom Ministry. Others guest instructors teach Odissi classical Indian dance, belly dancing, painting, drawing and ceramics.

DANCE MOVES

Elizabeth Boit said she had no idea her 10-year-old son Ian could dance until she enrolled him in a Jabberwocky class earlier this spring.

Twice a week, Ian pops and locks his way through intermediate hip-hop and break dancing.

“I just didn’t know what to expect, and I thought of how people dance in Kenya,” said Boit, who is originally from the Great Rift Valley area of Kenya. “But we just jumped in and Ian liked it.”
Hope Schust works on an illustration on the whiteboard before drawing class in February at Jabberwocky Studios. Joe Schlottach, the instructor, asked Hope to draw a title image for the class.

LEFT: Daisy Douce, left, and her daughter, Elena Douce, 11, laugh together during a class at Jabberwocky Studios.

Ismaeel Bilal works through a number with his intermediate hip-hop class in February at Jabberwocky Studios. During the class, Bilal practiced a number with the students and taught them steps to a newer piece.
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WE ARE MADE BY HISTORY

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

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While her son learns new moves, Boit often spends the time catching up with Emma Kiundi and Florence Kariuki, whose children also are in Jabberwocky classes. All are from Kenya, though members of different tribes. The three mothers laugh and talk in Swahili, seamlessly switching to English when other parents walk up and join in. On warm nights, they can spend up to three hours in the parking lot gabbing as their kids keep dancing inside. “The experience has been wonderful and interaction is a part of it,” Boit said. “We feel like we’re part of this community. When we go to a Kenyan (celebration), it’s just a Kenyan thing. Here, it’s everybody.”

STUDIO LAUNCH

That is exactly what Linda Schust hoped would happen when she founded Jabberwocky Studios a year ago. The studio is tucked into a commercial garage at 1308 Grand Ave., behind a carpet store off Business Loop 70 and near Hickman High School. A 12-foot spray painting of the dragon-like “Jabberwock” from Lewis Carroll’s nonsensical poem is displayed at the entrance. Schust doesn’t have a dance or drawing background, but after being involved in performing arts organizations, she noticed a pattern among the students: Most were white. “The more we spent time around these organizations, the more it became obvious to me there was quite a homogeneous population represented,” Schust said. “I don’t necessarily think it’s purposeful, but theater is an expensive hobby to pursue, so people of modest means get left out.”

Taking on the goal of providing space for a broad audience, Schust rented the old garage, remodeled it and began
offering classes in January 2015.

Everything “fell into place,” she said, but she isn’t naive about the reasons.

“I realized again that because of my race and my socio-economic class and because of my educational level, I happen to know a lot of people who are in a position to help us out,” Schust said.

She mentioned a real estate agent who didn’t charge a finder’s fee, the lawyer who helped with paperwork pro bono and a landlord who cut them a good deal on rent.

“If I’d been somebody else, I wouldn’t know those people and it wouldn’t have gotten off the ground.”

Recently, the studio switched from a low-cost tuition model to donation-based payments. Families are not required to pay the suggested tuition; they can make whatever donation they can afford, even if it means they don’t pay at all.

“I genuinely believe if people can’t afford the tuition, they pay what they can,” Schust said. “People have this idea that if they can’t pay for something they don’t want to do it. They feel uncomfortable.”
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LIKE FAMILY

Schust never hounds students or their families for money, she said. Instead, if she waits, the money always comes to the studio. So far, she has been able to keep the studio going, but it’s a joint effort. One family brings another one in, and from there, instructors play a big role connecting with students.

Jabberwocky Studios is the first place Ismaeel Bilal, 24, has formally taught dance. His beginner and intermediate hip-hop classes are the most popular at the studio, and he makes a point to bring friends inside.

“It’s not exclusive. There are things for adults. There are things for kids. It’s for everybody,” Bilal said. “I bring my friends in there because I’m really proud of it. There is every single type of person there, and that tells you something.”

The inclusive space has been refreshing, Bilal said, because of the tendency for dance to become “whitewashed,” or controlled by the white population, erasing connections to other cultural identities.

“I feel like when I first joined, there weren’t that many students, and I’ve seen a lot of people come back and are really happy,” he said.

“It touches me. Eventually I do get paid, but it’s more than that. It’s about giving back to the community and giving back to the kids.”

During a recent Friday intermediate break dancing class, all four students took time to practice on the dance floor. As each worked on a new move or routine, someone else came up to learn.

Break dancing instructor Joe Schlot-tach worked one-on-one with each child, while they helped coach each other.

“It creates an artificial family,” Alex Schust, 14, said. “Everyone’s seen you fall and trip, and you’ve done it together.”
COLUMBIA DIVERSITY: BY THE NUMBERS

INCOME BY RACE
Income disparity is apparent on multiple levels. Columbia families also see a difference when it comes to pay grade.

WHERE COLUMBIANS CAME FROM
Ethnic diversity is more apparent when you can see where the citizens come from. It’s impossible to tell someone’s ancestry or ethnicity based on skin color alone. Columbia is an eclectic community, composed of individuals from many different places.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
Columbia has a much higher rate of college degree attainment in adults 25 years or older than Missouri as a whole. However, the level of attainment varies depending on race. Note: numbers indicate highest degree attained.

RACE BREAKDOWN
Columbia’s racial makeup has remained constant for several years. This is how it looks today.

Sources: UNITED STATES CENSUS BUREAU, AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY
We’ve Moved!
But we are still keeping you in stitches!

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Their motto: Unity in diversity

At Columbia College, eight countries and cultures make up one volleyball team.

Story by JOSEY HERRERA  Photos by ZACH BAKER
Columbia College head coach Melinda Wrye-Washington sifts through a container holding more than a dozen small flags from different nations.

As she goes through the flags, Wrye-Washington remembers many of the students they represent, often more than one, and the gifts they’ve brought back after a visit to their home countries — carvings from Kenya, a jersey from Serbia, one from the 2014 Olympics in Russia, coffee from Brazil and chocolate from Mexico.

Wrye-Washington has always recruited student athletes from around the world, but this year the representation on the team has been especially diverse.

“(The team is) from all over the world. They came here, and they’re all from different programs, different ways of doing things,” she said.

**COMING TOGETHER FROM AROUND THE GLOBE**

The 14-person roster this year has international student athletes from eight countries — China, Serbia, Greece, Russia, Ukraine, Colombia, Mexico and the United States.

“There are different styles of volleyball, and just the perspective of seeing the court is different,” said outside hitter and junior Sofija Ivanovic, a native of Belgrade, Serbia.

“It’s amazing having different cultures.”

Ivanovic, 25, has been playing volleyball since she was 8. Her father played professional basketball and her mother is a university professor, but schools don’t have extracurricular sport teams in Serbia, she said. So she came to the United States to pursue both.

According to Columbia College’s International Center, 124 international students attend Columbia College’s traditional day campus. That is about 12 percent of the school’s overall campus population.

The college began an English for Academic Purposes program in the 1990s to focus on intensive English and transition students to regular academic courses. That played a role in recruiting the first international student athletes to Columbia College, Wrye-Washington said.

“They wouldn’t have been able to come in under our regular program with their speaking skills at that time,” she said.

“It helped us to be able to bring in players to compete at a very high level.”

The English for Academic Purposes program opened the door for some student athletes, but today no one on the team needed to learn the language or take extra classes for practice.

Freshman setter Sasha Robinson, 19, wasn’t expecting to be on a roster with teammates from so many nations.

Robinson grew up in Ozark, Missouri, and was raised in a predominately white community.

“I’d never really been exposed to a lot of diversity until I came here where it’s just four Americans and the rest of the team is foreign,” Robinson said.

“But it’s been really awesome learning their different languages and learning how they kind of do things.”

During her first semester at Columbia College, she roomed with middle hitter Maria Franco, a junior college transfer from Cali, Colombia. With Franco’s help, Robinson learned basic Spanish.

But junior middle hitter Eirini Chatziefstratiadou, 20, who comes from Thessaloniki, Greece, said the team learns more about volleyball with their cultural differences.

“I like to meet people from other countries and play with them because they learn differently than we do, and they have different techniques,” Chatziefstratiadou said. “The way they play is different.”

Chatziefstratiadou is known as a virtual language whiz and often helps her teammates learn new languages.

“WE ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER JUST LIKE A FAMILY”

Sasha Robinson

“May we all listen, learn and lead Mizzou into the future... together.”

INTERIM CHANCELLOR HANK FOLEY

Learn more: news.missouri.edu/tag/state-of-mizzou
The Columbia College Cougars women’s volleyball team practices bumping with a partner at the Southwell Gym. Among the 14 players on the team, eight different countries are represented. Head coach Melinda Wrye-Washington studies her team in the Southwell Gym. Wrye-Washington coaches 14 players from eight different countries on the volleyball team. For a certain rambunctious style, especially when it comes to celebrating. She goes all out. After winning a set she usually slaps the ground and starts a victory dance, shaking both arms as if she were beating eggs with cooking whisks. Some of the other players, like Wenwen Han and Penny Liu, both from China, consider themselves quiet, yet positive celebrators who help boost team spirits.

“Sometimes its difficult because of language... sometimes we don’t understand each other and there is a misunderstanding between us,” Chatziefstratiadou said. “It gets easier after a while. You keep practicing with them.”

“I think we have really good chemistry for being from all over the world,” Meyer said. “We all just understand each other really well.”

**OVERCOMING A TOUGH START**

But chemistry didn’t account for their unexpected losses and a steady flow of injuries at the beginning of the season. Once one player recovered, another one or two would be injured, Wrye-Washington said.

“Unity in Diversity” became that motto. It was hung up in Wrye-Washington’s office and spread on social media as the team picked up wins and successfully made it through conference play.

The hashtag #UnityInDiversity has even stuck during post-season as the players volunteer with the MU Women’s and Children’s Hospital and regularly scrimmage the local men’s Special Olympics basketball team.

“I think we've tried to put [the motto] to use a lot and make sure everybody, including me, understands it,” Wrye-Washington said.

Even after that “rocky start” each player’s individual style and strengths took the group all the way to the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics national championships. In December, Columbia women’s volleyball won their first championship title in 14 years.

“Unity in Diversity” has stuck during post-season as the players volunteer with the MU Women’s and Children’s Hospital and regularly scrimmage the local men’s Special Olympics basketball team. "It gets easier after a while. You keep practicing with them."