



DIVERSITY@WORK

A PUBLICATION OF THE OFFICE OF DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT & EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY,
A PROGRAM OFFICE WITHIN VA'S OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES & ADMINISTRATION

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RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION AND ACCOMMODATION

According to the 2001 American Religious Identification Survey, more than 85 percent of Americans practice a religion in one form or another. Many of the world's major religions can be found in the United States, which is often described as the most religiously diverse country in the world. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, some of the major religious communities in America include Christian, Jewish, Muslim/Islamic, Buddhist, Unitarian, and Hindu. There are numerous other religions and denominations like Native American spirituality and Wicca, which are not often traditionally viewed or considered as religions.

Even with this small sampling of all the various religious identifications in the United States, it is easy to see how religion can be viewed as an influential part of American culture and also how it plays a significant role in the lives of many American workers.

Religion usually involves devotional and ritual observances, and often contains a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs. For the American worker, the call of work duties and the obligation of religious practices may have competing schedules and agendas.

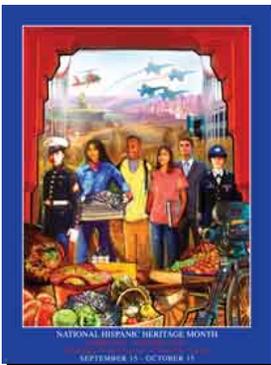
[Continued on page 3]

IN THIS ISSUE:

FIELD NOTES News You Can Use	2
WEB SITE SPOTLIGHT Diversity Spectrum	2
RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION (Continued from Page 1)	3
DM&EEO ONLINE Our Mission	4
DIVERSITY CALENDAR Upcoming Events	4

CELEBRATE!

Hispanic Heritage Month, National Disability Employment Awareness Month and Disability Mentoring Day



VA proudly joins the Nation in celebrating a number of observances this time of year.

National Hispanic Heritage Month will be observed from September 15 through October 15.

This year's theme is "Hispanic Americans: Making a Positive Impact on American Society."

Overall, VA employment of Hispanics grew to 6.9 percent in fiscal year (FY) 2006.

Hispanics in the leadership pipeline grew to 5.23 percent in FY 2006 and 29 percent of VA's Hispanic employees were also veterans. To learn more about VA's Hispanic Program, contact José Marrero, EEO Manager, at <Jose.Marrero@va.gov>.

Additionally, **National Disability Employment Awareness Month** will be celebrated throughout October. This year's theme is "Workers with Disabilities: Talent for a Winning Team!"

Coinciding with this observance is **Disability Mentoring Day**, which will be observed on October 17 this year.

As of September 2006, VA employees with a targeted disability (deafness, blindness, missing extremities, partial paralysis, complete paralysis, convulsive disorders, mental retardation, mental illness, and distortion of limbs or spine) totaled 3,583, or 1.49 percent of VA's workforce. VA employed 17,985 disabled veterans who represent 7.5 percent of VA's workforce.

For information on VA's People with Disabilities Program, contact David Walton, National Program Manager for People with Disabilities, at <David.Walton@va.gov>.



BOOKMARKS

- ▶ **American Association of People with Disabilities**
www.aapd-dc.org
- ▶ **Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions**
www.cpwr.org
- ▶ **Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Government**
www.dhig.org
- ▶ **Family and Work Institute**
www.familiesandwork.org
- ▶ **Labor Council for Latin American Advancement**
www.lclaa.org
- ▶ **National Alliance for Hispanic Health**
www.hispanichealth.org
- ▶ **National Council for Support of Disability Issues**
www.ncsd.org
- ▶ **National Council of Hispanic Employment Program Managers**
www.hepm.org
- ▶ **National Hispanic Business Association**
www.nhba.org

Contact information for other diversity-related organizations can be found on the DM&EEO Web site at: www.va.gov/dmeeo/org

FIELD NOTES

News You Can Use

National Image, Inc., Conference

The upcoming National Image, Inc., Region III Annual Leadership Training Conference for Federal Employees is scheduled for November 14–16, 2007, at the Holiday Inn Rosslyn at Key Bridge in Arlington, Virginia. The theme for this conference is “Career Training for Tomorrow’s Leaders.” The objective of the conference is to enhance the professionalism of Federal employees through cutting-edge workshops and panels on such relevant topics as conflict resolution, motivating employees and managers, effective communications, team building, values and ethical principles, and coaching and mentoring. The conference will include career enhancing workshops and panel presentations on timely topics in the areas of education, employment, and civil rights of relevance to Federal civil service employees. Ralph Torres, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Resolution Management, will be presenting a workshop entitled, “Organizational climate assessment for increased efficiency and effectiveness in serving our clients.”

For more information, including the agenda and contact information, visit the National Image, Inc., Web site at <www.nationalimageinc.org>.

CPP Web Site Update

The Community Prosperity Partnership (CPP) is a mutually supportive coalition to provide the framework to coordinate and facilitate services that are responsive to the needs of VA, affinity organizations, and veterans service organizations supporting American veterans, their families, and their communities. The CPP Web site was recently redesigned and updated to include a new bulletin board with links to information and various programs pertinent to veterans, their families, and their communities. Posts include information on veteran benefits, job opportunities, and much

more. CPP is supporting Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) recruitment by linking the bulletin board to VBA job postings. In addition, visitors may also now leave feedback about the CPP Web site so that it can be improved.

Visit the CPP Web site at <www.va.gov/cpp>.

2007 American Veterans Summit II

The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and VA, through the Community Prosperity Partnership (CPP), are collaborating on the 2007 American Veterans Summit II scheduled for November 8–11, 2007. The Summit will be held at the Coronado Springs Resort in Orlando, Florida. The Summit will consist of workshops and clinics addressing cutting-edge topics key to both veterans and the community—including health, employment, home foreclosure, post traumatic stress disorder, business enterprise, emergency preparedness and disaster loan programs, and alliance for economic inclusion. In addition, job and health fairs will be sponsored by Federal, state, and local governments, along with the private sector and institutions of higher education.

For more information on the 2007 American Veterans Summit II, visit LULAC’s Web site at <www.lulac.org>.

Welcome, New Intern!

DM&EEO welcomes new intern Aurelia Lopez with the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP). Ms. Lopez recently graduated from California State University East Bay with a B.S. in Business Administration with a concentration in Human Resources. She is assisting with EEO audits, the National VA Employment Plan for People with Disabilities, and the directive on processing reasonable accommodation requests. ■

WEB SITE SPOTLIGHT

Diversity Spectrum

<www.diversityspectrum.com>

Content: Diversity Spectrum Corporation, a minority- and woman-owned business, is the number one resource for global diversity news, information, and intelligence. Headquartered in Washington, DC, Diversity Spectrum was established in 2007. Gathering data across global corporate, government, and non-government organization sources, Diversity Spectrum publishes, webcasts, and podcasts original and aggregated free daily news and information services to the public.

Must-See Feature: The Global Responsibility section offers case studies on racial stereotyping, effects of racial bias, preferential treatment, and more!

Accessibility: No information offered.

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RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION AND ACCOMMODATION

(Continued from Page 1)

One example of this is how Sunday is considered a holy day in many religions. A worker who practices a faith and adheres to this belief may have to abstain from working on that day. Other examples include Jewish workers looking to observe their own religion's holy days and Muslims who might have to devote traditional working hours to prayer time.

Religion might not only dictate when and how an individual should devote time to worship but also how he or she must dress and what kinds of things to eat or to abstain from eating. Each and every religion has its own set of codes and standards and, recognizing this, the Federal government erected a set of laws and regulations which work to protect both U.S. workers who practice a religion and the employers who hire them.

In fiscal year 2006, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) received 2,541 charges of religious discrimination. EEOC resolved 2,387 religious discrimination charges and recovered \$5.7 million in monetary benefits for charging parties and other aggrieved individuals (not including monetary benefits obtained through litigation).

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employers from discriminating against individuals because of their religion in hiring, firing, and other terms and conditions of employment. Title VII covers employers with 15 or more employees, including state and local governments. It also applies to employment agencies and to labor organizations, as well as to the Federal government.

In addition to race, color, national origin, and sex, Title VII prohibits not only intentional discrimination, but also practices that have the effect of discriminating against individuals because of their religion.

Under Title VII:

- Employers may not treat employees or applicants more or less favorably because of their religious beliefs or practices—except to the extent a religious accommodation is warranted. For example, an employer may not refuse to hire individuals of a certain religion, may not impose stricter promotion requirements for persons of a certain religion, and may not impose more or different work requirements on an employee because of that employee's religious beliefs or practices.
- Employees cannot be forced to participate—or not participate—in a religious activity as a

condition of employment.

- Employers must reasonably accommodate employees' sincerely held religious practices unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employer. A reasonable religious accommodation is any adjustment to the work environment that will allow the employee to practice his or her religion. Some reasonable religious accommodations that employers may be required to provide workers include leave for religious observances, time and/or place to pray, and ability to wear religious garb. An employer might accommodate an employee's religious beliefs or practices by allowing flexible scheduling, voluntary substitutions or swaps, job reassignments and lateral transfers, modification of grooming requirements, and other workplace practices, policies or procedures.
- An employer is not required to accommodate an employee's religious beliefs and practices if doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employers' legitimate business interests. An employer can show undue hardship if accommodating an employee's religious practices requires more than ordinary administrative costs, diminishes efficiency in other jobs, infringes on other employees' job rights or benefits, impairs workplace safety, causes co-workers to carry the accommodated employee's share of potentially hazardous or burdensome work, or if the proposed accommodation conflicts with another law or regulation.
- Employers must permit employees to engage in religious expression, unless the religious expression would impose an undue hardship on the employer. Generally, an employer may not place more restrictions on religious expression than on other forms of expression that have a comparable effect on workplace efficiency.
- Employers must take steps to prevent religious harassment of their employees. An employer can reduce the chance that employees will engage unlawful religious harassment by implementing an anti-harassment policy and having an effective procedure for reporting, investigating, and correcting harassing conduct.

It is also unlawful to retaliate against an individual for opposing employment practices that discriminate based on religion or for filing a discrimination charge, testifying, or participating in any way in an investigation, proceeding, or litigation under Title VII.

For more information on religious discrimination and accommodation, visit the EEOC Web site at www.eeoc.gov. ■

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Visit our **Web site**, <www.va.gov/dmeeo> for additional staff e-mail addresses.

OTHER USEFUL LINKS

Under Secretary for Health
Diversity Advisory Board
<www.va.gov/diversity>

VA's Office of Human
Resources & Administration
<www.va.gov/ofcadmin/portal>

VA's Office of Resolution
Management
<www.va.gov/orm>

VA's Office of Human
Resources Management
<www.va.gov/ohrm>

GOT NEWS?

We want to hear from you! If you'd like to share your story ideas, comments, or suggestions, please e-mail us at <dmeeo@va.gov> with the words DIVERSITY@WORK in the subject line.

DM&EEO ON THE INTERNET <www.va.gov/dmeeo>



The DM&EEO mission is to increase awareness and acceptance of diversity and to promote a flexible and inclusive work environment throughout the Department of Veterans Affairs. Our vision is of a work environment that fosters respect, fairness, and opportunity for all employees. Here's a sampling of online tools available that can help leverage diversity and build inclusion:

- ▶ Hispanic Heritage Month, National Disability Employment Awareness Month, Disability Mentoring Day, and other special observance resources.
- ▶ Events, conferences, conventions, and programs.
- ▶ Links to professional and community organizations.

DM&EEO IN YOUR E-MAIL INBOX

Once a week, DM&EEO sends out *NewsLink*, an e-mail message with annotated links to current news items and other information related to leveraging diversity and building inclusion. For a FREE subscription to this weekly electronic news service, e-mail us at <dmeeo@va.gov> with the words SUBSCRIBE NEWS in the subject line. You can find a current copy of *NewsLink* on the DM&EEO Web site at this address: <www.va.gov/dmeeo/ca/newslink.htm>.

DM&EEO ON YOUR TV SCREEN (OR PC MONITOR)

Diversity News is a monthly video program produced by the VACO Broadcasting Center for DM&EEO. Each program runs for a month, immediately following *VA News*. A copy of each program will be placed on the DM&EEO Web site (when the files become available) at this address: <www.va.gov/dmeeo/ca/diversitynews.htm>.

FROM THE 2007 DIVERSITY CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER

The National Organization for Mexican
American Rights Annual Training
Conference and Business Meeting
September 6–8; San Antonio, TX
<www.nomarinc.org>

Historically Black Colleges and
Universities Week
September 9–15

The Conference Board Annual Diversity
Seminar
September 10–11; Chicago, IL
<www.conference-board.org>

Patriot Day
September 11

National Hispanic Heritage Month
September 15–October 15

Out and Equal Workplace Summit
September 27–29; Washington, DC
<www.outandequal.org>

OCTOBER

National Disability Employment
Awareness Month

Polish-American Heritage Month

Italian-American Heritage Month

German-American Heritage Month

National Diversity Day
October 5
<www.nationaldiversityday.com>

Columbus Day
October 8 (observed)

Disability Mentoring Day
October 17

Hispanic Association of Colleges and
Universities Annual Conference
October 20–22; Chicago, IL
<www.hacu.net>