

A Bit of Me

This series of profiles on SUNY Broome community members is a part of the Student Village diversity calendar initiative. We will be highlighting members in our community who identify with or can speak on the diversity theme or topic for each month.

The theme for April is Culture and the topic is Does culture determine our behaviors and attitudes?

To be featured in this series please reach out to Kalis Nunes .

Kalis J. Nunes Jr.

Residence/Community Director at the Student Village



Background: Kalis Nunes is the new Residence/Community Director here at the Student Village.

WHAT IS YOUR EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND?

I received my Bachelors of Arts in Speech Communication and Business Administration with a Concentration in General Honors at the State University of New York at Potsdam.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS PROFESSION?

I chose this profession because I didn't want to leave college! But, I choose the profession of student affairs and higher education because of the experiences I have had during my time in undergrad. Having all of the leadership roles I held, and being able to run huge events on my own helped adopt my love for higher education. I also had a lot of professionals who were in higher education positions who have also encouraged me to pursue this, letting me know how well I would do, and how I would love it.

WHAT IS YOUR PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND?

As far as my professional background, being a Residence Director would be my first "professional job position". However based on my leadership positions and experiences during my undergraduate years, I have adopted a love for Student affairs and plan on pursuing other opportunities that include that.

WHY DO YOU THINK CULTURE IS SO IMPORTANT?

I believe culture is important, once again because it helps us identify ourselves. Think back to when you were a child, and you would meet all of your different peers who may not look like you, speak like you, or even have the same mannerisms as you. At that point you would ask your parents where they came from, or why others seem to be different from the way they are. It is very important for children and even adults to know how to identify themselves. For example, I am Trinidadian American, and I love my culture, I love where my family comes from, and I plan on letting my own children know where their family comes from and the culture they will be growing up in. So, I think that having culture, cultural difference, and similarities are very important to the development of people.

WHAT IS ONE BIG WAY IN WHICH CULTURE HAS INFLUENCED YOU?

One big way my culture influenced me was by helping me find my identity. There is this theory called “intersectionality” and it is where the different parts of our identity come to a “crossroads” and meet, and at the intersection is where we stand. We are made up of parts of our identities and are not just one thing. For me, my intersectionality would include that I identify as a man, I am black, I am of the middle class, I am Trinidadian American, and so on and so forth. All of these different identifiers make me who I am. Not to say that these are the only things that make me who I am, but they help when it comes to my identity. Growing up in Brooklyn NY, there were so many different cultures that I was exposed to, and I had to sit back and think which one I was a part of, which one did I identify with. Figuring this out has helped me connect with others who may have similar identifiers and are a part of the same cultures I am. So learning about my culture has really helped me find myself, and appreciate where I come from, and how I see things through my own lenses.

WHAT IS ONE THING YOU WISH WOMEN COULD HAVE SOMEDAY?

True equality. While we have come a long way in the fight for equality, there is still a long way to go. Women are still fighting for equal pay, equal consideration, and an equal voice at the table. Much remains to be done before we can look at one another and consider the value in others as individuals and humans rather than seeing things like the color of their skin, their cultural identity, their gender, their gender identity, their disability, the list goes on.

DO YOU THINK IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO ALWAYS INTEGRATE THE CULTURE THAT IS AROUND YOU?

I wouldn't say that it is a good or bad thing to integrate the culture around you. I feel that there could be pros and cons to it. Once you get to learn about a new culture that you may not be familiar with, and be able to appreciate it. All while appreciating your own culture. I wouldn't go as far as to say that you should try to fit in where you can, and adopt a new culture just because it is around you. However, you should just show appreciation and acknowledge the culture, you shouldn't appropriate, just appreciate.



WHAT IS YOUR CULTURAL BACKGROUND AND IN YOUR OPINION WHAT IS THE MOST DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC OF IT?

I would say that my culture background would be me being Trinidadian American. Which is very different from just being Trinidadian. Unlike my parents I was born and raised in The United States, and have only ever visited Trinidad and Tobago. However, I identify as Trinidadian American rather than American because of the way I was raised, the food I ate and cooked, the values my parents instilled in my siblings and I, the music I listened to, and the way I spoke. From a very young age, I know I was “different” from my peers. I spoke with a “Trinidadian Accent” because that is what I heard at home, my parents taught me how to speak and talk in their Trinidad dialect. So, naturally I picked up on that and spoke with it as well. It was never apparent to me that I spoke differently from others until I started attending school, where everyone spoke differently. This is when I began adopting the “American culture”. SO I would have to say our most defining characteristic of being Trinidadian American would have to be the dialect and accent. It is very easy and clear to differentiate a Trinidadian from other West Indians.

IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT YOURSELF WHAT WOULD IT BE?

If I could change one thing about my life it would be my perfectionism. I always try to make sure that everything is perfect with no errors, and I tend to hold others to that same standard as well. I try to remind myself that “practice doesn't make perfect, it makes progress”. If things were perfect, there would be no need for things like development, or change. I have been really good at not being a perfectionist, and realized that making mistakes makes room for improvement.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT?

Some things I am passionate about are student development, programming, and opportunities. I love working with students, and helping them develop the professional and working skills they will need in the very near future, in hopes that they would share that same knowledge with others they may come in contact with. I am also a stickler for organization, and scheduling, so naturally I would love planning and organizing events. Lastly, I am passionate about opportunities because it is an amazing feeling when you are able to receive an amazing opportunity, but it is phenomenal when you are able to give someone an amazing opportunity.



HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED CULTURE SHOCK AND IF YES CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE?

Yes, definitely. I would have to say the time I experienced very apparent culture shock is when my siblings and I went to Trinidad and Tobago to visit our extended family. We went for a summer vacation and stayed there for about two months. When we got there, things were very different from what we anticipated and expected. Everything seemed straight out of a magazine. There were clear blue waters, white sandy beaches, a scorching hot sun, and so much wildlife. It was so amazing to see where our parents grew up and

where our culture comes from. However, the one thing that differentiates a Trinidadian American and a Trinidadian is ... you guessed it, the “American” part. When we went to Trinidad and went around the towns with our family members, people immediately knew we were not from there, they saw it in our clothes, they saw it in our skin, and the most apparent one was that they heard it in our accents. They would label us as “Yankees” because they knew we were American. This was a huge culture shock for me because I felt so out of place. I wasn’t American because I had Trinidadian parents and grew up with Trinidadian culture, but I am also no Trinidadian because I was raised in American, and my accent was “watered down”.

ARE YOU EXCITED TO BE HERE AT THE SUNY BROOME STUDENT VILLAGE?

Yes, I am ecstatic to be here at SUNY Broome Student Village. It is amazing to be able to work at an institution that is different from the one I have been at for four consecutive years. It is like a breath of fresh air. It opened new opportunities for implementing new ideas, as well as seeing how other organizations and institutions operate.!

WHAT IS SOMETHING THAT YOU THINK MAKES YOU UNIQUE?

Something that makes me unique? Hmm, I would have to say my positive disposition. Regardless how glum, or hopeless a situation might seem, I always manage to reassure others that we are going to get through it, and that things could’ve been worse.