Day of Dialogue Fall 2010
Summary/Press Release

Dr. Guerda Nicolas poignantly remembers the day she overheard a class of African American students being told that their effort and performance did not matter in determining their future — they had nothing more to look forward to than careers at McDonald’s. This incident reiterated for Dr. Nicolas the need to take a close look at the messages that students — especially ethnic minority students — receive regarding their education and value as individuals.

With this as the impetus, Dr. Nicolas and the CRECER research team partnered with Miami Coalition of Christians and Jews (MCCJ) to address the intersection of culture and education at the 3rd annual Day of Dialogue. The Day of Dialogue is a forum that provides neighborhood leaders and CRECER partners a space to identify the needs of the community, and develop strategies to address them. This year’s theme — Building Bridges Across Cultures: Promoting Education — is particularly salient for our local community, as 91 percent of Miami-Dade County’s students are students of color (Fall 2009) and 24 percent of students are designated as English Language Learners (2008-2009).

Held last Saturday, October 30th, at the CAS Gallery at the Wesley Foundation, the event drew about 30 participants including UM students and faculty, local school staff, parents, and representatives of various nonprofit and community-based organizations across Miami. Participants insightfully discussed personal and professional experiences that reflected on issues of discrimination and lack of acceptance. The day began with African music and storytelling, as well as a Unity Circle exercise to set the tone for a day of open dialogue and sincere communication. A circular seating format and the participant-based agenda/structure encouraged active and passionate engagement by attendees.

One of the highlights of the day was the sense of encouragement and fulfillment that came from dialoguing with those who share a common sense of dedication and passion to addressing issues of discrimination and diversity of all kinds. Work in this field can often be daunting and draining, with lack of social and professional support. Regarding the struggle of roles in this type of work, participants shared concerns and frustrations, as well as gave each other advice and suggestions. Some suggestions included being knowledgeable about different cultures, working from a position of love, thinking critically and speaking up, providing a sense of constancy, and being genuine in one’s interactions.

As many participants pointed out, individuals and organizations doing similar work should continue to look for the ways to work together. It was concluded that combining resources only works to increase the impact of a particular intervention or program. This year’s Day of Dialogue overall continued the tradition of encouraging the expansion of perspectives and fostering the communication between local organizations.
About the Organizers:

The **Challenging Racism and Empowering Communities through Ethnocultural Research (CRECER) Team** is a community-oriented research group based at the University of Miami’s School of Education. Led by Dr. Guerda Nicolas, CRECER is comprised of graduate students dedicated to address social justice issues through academic research and intervention programs. CRECER (A Spanish word meaning growth) is committed to addressing issues affecting ethnic minority and immigrant populations. Working from a community perspective, the team seeks to encourage community empowerment through the development and sustainability of programs for youth, families and organizations.

**MCCJ (the Miami Coalition of Christians and Jews)** is a nonprofit organization founded in 1935 in response to rising anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic climate in America. Presently, MCCJ is broadly dedicated to eliminating intolerance. MCCJ profoundly believes that every person has the right to live in dignity and enjoy respect, regardless of race, gender, faith, ethnicity, national origin, age, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability or socioeconomic status. MCCJ aspires to make Miami a model of intercultural understanding.