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## "A COALITION OF WOMEN OF COLOR: MINORITY WOMEN'S CAUCUS AT McNEESE STATE UNIVERSITY"

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## **"A COALITION OF WOMEN OF COLOR: MINORITY WOMEN'S CAUCUS AT McNEESE STATE UNIVERSITY"**

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**This presentation outlines the origins of the Minority Women's Caucus at McNeese State University, a predominantly White university. The presenters discuss the goals, objectives of the caucus, challenges, and plans for maintaining the group.**

This presentation will outline the origins of the Minority Women's Caucus at McNeese State University, a predominantly White university. The presenters will discuss the goals, objectives of the caucus, challenges, and plans for maintaining the group. The participants will be provided with a model for starting group on their campuses. The Minority Women's Caucus emerged from McNeese's participation in the National Teleconference on Women in Higher Education held March 27-29, 2000. The opening session was broadcast from the University of Minnesota on Monday, March 27, and the various caucuses were held across the McNeese campus later that afternoon. One of the presenters was asked to facilitate the African-American Women Caucus and she readily agreed. As she began to contact students, faculty and staff about attending the caucus; she found that many students were reticent about participating in the caucus. When questioned about their apprehension, the students reported believing that their attendance at the caucus would be perceived as "militant" by their White professors and peers. The students did not want to offend these individuals or be viewed as being too vocal about the issue of race on campus. A majority of the staff members contacted echoed these same sentiments. They stated that their attendance at this caucus would "create or generate hostility in the offices where they worked". Other staff members called the primary presenter and reported that their supervisors would not give them permission to attend, even though they found other workers to cover for them. As a result of these comments, the primary presenters contacted all of the student organizations, especially the athletic, academic and Greek organizations, and extended personal invitations to the caucus. She also made personal phone calls to the minority faculty and staff members, urging them to come to this forum and show support for the students brave enough to attend.

The African-American Women Caucus proved to be the best attended caucus held at McNeese. Although the facilitators covered the topics identified, participants were able to voice their concerns about attending the caucus and their need to continue the dialogue began there. With the support of the Chair of the Women's Studies Department; and the Chair of the Department of Teacher Education; the African-American Women Caucus became the Minority Women's Caucus Group. This group has become a coalition of female students, faculty, and staff that includes Anglo, Asian, and African-American participants. This group meets monthly to share current university-related information, present topics of interest, and plan activities that will increase the visibility of women on campus and raise awareness of the issues faced by minorities and women at MSU.

This group endeavors to provide support, encouragement, and information to existing students, faculty, and staff in an effort to assist them in maintaining their academic and/or professional careers at McNeese. This group of women also strives to remove the barriers that can sometimes exist between students, faculty, and staff; focusing on the shared issues and concerns rather than preconceived concepts about roles and role models. The caucus has also recently opened the group to members of the community interested in addressing the issues and concerns of minorities and women at McNeese.

### **Presenters:**

**Dr. Gwendolyn Duhon** is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Teacher Education at McNeese State University here in Lake Charles. She has been in education for the past fifteen years, serving as a classroom teacher, certified school counselor, home based-therapist, clinical supervisor for a school-based mental health program and a college professor for the past five years. She is a National Board Certified Counselor and serves as Consultant/Counselor for ChRos Family Counseling Services. She has published six books, in addition to numerous book chapters and articles in education and counseling. She has received many awards and certificates for her work in education, counseling and poetry writing. Most recently, she received the Palermo Endowed Professorship in Education from McNeese State University. She serves on the Board of Directors for Bayou Council Girl Scouts, Inc. and the Louisiana Assoc. of Teacher Educators. She has done workshops and given presentations on various topics in education and counseling at the national, regional, and local levels. She is the proud mother of one daughter, Grace.

**Dr. Linda L. LeBert** is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Teacher Education at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana. She has been in education for the past twenty-eight years, serving as a classroom teacher, librarian, elementary school principal, and a college professor/director of the Curriculum Materials Center in the Burton College of Education for the past three years. She has served as Chair of the Technology Enhancement Committee and the Professional Development Committee at McNeese State University. She has published articles and book chapters in a variety of educational publications. She has written numerous grants to fund technology projects in both the elementary and university setting. She has received awards for her work in the educational field as well in her service to her local community. She serves as

an officer in Delta Kappa Gamma, Alpha Delta Kappa, and as President of the Women's Commission of Southwest Louisiana. She has done workshops and presented lectures on a variety of educational topics at local and regional conferences. She is the mother of two sons, Robbie and Seth.

**Dr. Mary Burke Augustus** is employed by the Calcasieu Parish School Board as a Curriculum Coordinator for K-S elementary schools. She is a graduate of McNeese University and Union Institute. Dr. Augustus holds certifications in the areas of Home Economics, Science, Elementary Education, Supervision and Instruction and Principalship. She has presented at regional and national conferences in the area of science and technology and has presented workshop in these areas of science and technology and has presented workshops in these areas for various school systems. She has authored and co-authored articles in teacher education and peace education. She is also a Southern Association of Accreditation of Schools facilitator for the Southern region as well as a specialist for Instructional Strategies for math, reading, and science. She is also a Mentor for Louisiana new teachers and a Louisiana Assessor for Quality Educators as well as a High-stakes testing trainer.