Douglass Leadership House; a pioneering mission

The Douglass Leadership House (DLH) is a brand-new academic living center on the Fraternity Quad. The initiative to establish the house was led by four alumni, Lecora Massamba ’11, Tsion Girum ’12, Sharese King ’12, and Melika Butcher ’12, with help from Professor Valeria Sinclair-Chapman and Sasha Eloi of the Office of Minority Student Affairs. DLH opened its doors last August in a dedication service presided over by Pastor Brian White and Father Brian Cool from the Interfaith Chapel.

Douglass Leadership House helps members learn or improve leadership skills through the examination of leadership models from the black experience. DLH also seeks to celebrate and raise awareness of black culture, politics, and history in the United States and across the African diaspora. The Douglass Leadership House presents a physical expression of Douglass’s principles, while serving to connect students, alumni, and the Rochester community. In its mission and focus, DLH is a University of Rochester pioneer.

DLH members demonstrate leadership through four project areas: the Frederick Douglass Project presents studies of various well-known and lesser-known black leaders as models for problem solving and service; the Zora Neale Hurston Project promotes the arts; the Martin Luther King Jr. Project addresses strategies for conflict resolution; and the Ella Baker Project focuses on engagement with the local Rochester community.

Last semester, house members hosted themed general-interest meetings, a voter registration drive, Greek or Treat with Sigma Delta Tau, an academic support talk with Delta Kappa Epsilon, and a full day of events for community families in conjunction with the “Be a Healthy Hero” program. Additionally, DLH worked with the Susan B. Anthony Institute for Gender and Women’s Studies and the Rochester Center for Community Leadership to host a leadership luncheon discussion with former members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Most recently, DLH hosted a talk with Melissa Harris-Perry, noted scholar and host of her own MSNBC current affairs program, as part of the University of Rochester’s celebration of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. During Black History Month, DLH is hosting its first poetry slam.

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DLH is hosting its very first academic course with several house members voluntarily taking a course with political science professor James Johnson on top of their regular course load. In the course, students will consider how individuals and ideas, big and small, impact communities and the world.

Douglass Leadership House has been nominated for three Student Life Awards: Award for Excellence in Creative Co-sponsorship, Outstanding Student Organization Award, and the Communal Principles Award.