

INTRODUCING...GAIL E. THOMAS, PH.D. DEAN OF FACULTY AND PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY

Gail Thomas has been dean of faculty and professor of sociology at Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo since August 1998. She has been working hard on recruiting faculty and developing curriculum even though the campus will not open until fall 2001.

“SUA is all about celebrating diversity and creating harmony in our multicultural world,” she says. “My family [husband, Emmett Amos, and son, Bradford Amos] moved with me to Aliso Viejo from Texas so that we could all be part of this wonderful opportunity to create a truly student-centered and humanistic university. Everything we do, every step we take, is with the question in mind of how it will benefit our future students. The faculty and I can’t wait until they get here!”

Gail, a Fulbright scholar, came to SUA, AV from Texas A&M University, where she held a similar position as professor of sociology and founded and directed the Race and Ethnic Studies Institute. Thomas has also been a visiting professor at Harvard University and was principle research scientist at the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Md. She is widely published in a variety of journals and has edited three books in the areas of education and race and ethnic relations.

She envisions SUA, AV as a vibrant community of students from many countries and cultures. “We value and embrace all facets of diversity,” she emphasizes. “As faculty, we are committed to teaching and learning about different cultures and perspectives that our students will bring from around the globe and from our local community.”

Gail is leading a team of 22 faculty members who will be working together over the next year to implement a new liberal arts curriculum designed to give students the important skills to succeed in an ever-changing world. “Our academic approach is a non-sectarian curriculum that is broad and will reflect the diversity in our student body,” she explains. “We will focus primarily on East–West perspectives...so it’s a comparative interdisciplinary curriculum.

“We’ve attracted a wonderful group of faculty from a number of outstanding academic institutions. They’re coming from Cornell, Johns Hopkins, Yale, UC Berkeley, Harvard and Columbia University, to name a few...and six of our faculty are Fulbright scholars.”

Gail also mentions that as a liberal arts university, the faculty will be committed to educating not just the mind but the heart as well. “Educating the head without the heart is like no education at all,” she says. “We seek to strike a balance in nurturing our students’ intellect, their creativity and their heart.”