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For Immediate Release

Contact: Beverly James
Assistant Director, Media Relations
Phone: 678-891-2686
Fax: 678-891-2966
email: Beverly.James@gpc.edu

Acclaimed Poet Rita Dove to Keynote MLK Celebration at GPC

Rita Dove, a Pulitzer-Prize winner and former United States Poet Laureate, will be the keynote speaker for Georgia Perimeter College's 14th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Celebration to be held on Friday, Jan. 15, 2010, beginning at 7 p.m. at Beulah Missionary Baptist Church, 2340 Clifton Springs Road, Decatur.

Dove also will participate in a morning interview conducted by Valerie Jackson, host of National Public Radio's "Between the Lines," and widow of former Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson. The 10 a.m. program will be held at GPC's Clarkston Campus Cole Auditorium, and it will be simulcast to other GPC campuses.

This year's celebration includes art and poetry contests for public school students, and a public service video contest for GPC students in support of the newly-added Week of Service starting Jan. 18.

Dove served as Poet Laureate of the United States and Consultant to the Library of Congress from 1993 to 1995, and as Poet Laureate of the Commonwealth of Virginia from 2004 to 2006. She has received numerous accolades for her poetry, including the coveted Commonwealth Award of Distinguished Service in 2006, the Library of Virginia's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008, the Fulbright Lifetime Achievement Medal and the Premio Capri in 2009. Currently, Dove is Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. (A more complete biography and listing of her publications can be found at www.gpc.edu/mlk.)

"Our goal at GPC is to strengthen student success by developing leaders who are creative, critical thinkers. And affordable, accessible education is the gateway to creating the kind of leaders who

can proactively address the community's needs and challenges," said GPC President Dr. Anthony S. Tricoli. "Rita Dove and the King celebration embody this goal."

As part of the evening program, GPC has asked elementary, middle and high school teachers in the area to discuss Dove's poem, "The First Book," with their students. Artistic representation of this poem will be juried and displayed during the college's MLK Birthday Celebration evening program. In addition, GPC students have the opportunity to participate in a poetry and art contest based on Dove's "Banneker" poem by writing an original poem or submitting a painting or drawing with a paragraph explaining how the poem inspired the entry. Winners will be honored with cash prizes and recognized during the celebration,

Georgia Perimeter faculty are working with the GPC Center for Civic Engagement and Service Learning to expand classroom awareness of Dove's writing and to encourage student participation in all the MLK events.

The evening event will include a tribute to the late Duke Ellington by the DeKalb Symphony Orchestra, as well as music by HARMONY: Atlanta's International Youth Chorus. The program will be emceed by Karen Graham, Fox5-TV Atlanta weekend sports anchor and GPC alumna.

The college will continue its commitment to community engagement with the GPC/MLK Jr. Week of Service beginning Jan. 18. Students, faculty, staff and members of the community will unite in service projects across the region, as advertised by a GPC student-generated public service announcement professionally produced by MLK sponsor the CW 69 TV.

Georgia Perimeter's King event is the largest held in Georgia, with more than 3,000 guests attending each year. Past speakers have included director Spike Lee, renowned pediatric brain neurosurgeon Dr. Ben Carson, critically-acclaimed performer Ben Vereen and the first African-American female astronaut, Dr. Mae Jemison.

Presenting Sponsor for the event is Harland Clarke, which provides check and check-related products, direct marketing and contact center services to financial and commercial institutions as well as directly to individual consumers.

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Georgia Perimeter College, the third largest institution of the University System of Georgia, serves more than 24,500 students through four campuses and several sites in metro Atlanta. For additional information, visit www.gpc.edu/mlk.