

“How have you incorporated equity, diversity, and/or inclusion into your current or a previous position?”

For nearly 50 years, my father was Department Chair of Ethnic Studies at Bowling Green State University (1970-1997) and Head of African American Studies Eastern Michigan University (1997-2003). My mother was a high school English teacher for 40 years before spending the last years of her career as a professor in Africana Studies at the University of Toledo before developing Alzheimer's. They taught me to never be an instrument of my own oppression, which is a value system I live by and is the type of leader I strive everyday to be for others; a leader that intrinsically recognizes the genuine worth of every person, the humble dignity of the human experience, and a leader who understands that no one ought to be oppressed, ever.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, belonging, and so on – aren't merely affirmative action words; rather, those terms are value statements about how one sees themselves, the incredibly diverse world around them, and how in their professional roles, we have an obligation to execute those values-- not just in programming, but in institutional policies, community engagement, and upward mobility for faculty, staff, and students of all backgrounds and abilities.

In other words, my statement is the corpus of my life experience. Just like we can tell an institution's priorities in large part by looking at the budget, we should be able to see a person's commitments by the lives they lead.

My career began at Clark University, a liberal arts college in Worcester, Massachusetts. In that role, one of 4 Black faculty at the time, I was integral in creating the school's diversity plan, MLK and Black History Month celebrations, and related social justice academic programs and public events. At Clark, after drafting and proposing a Diversity Action Plan, I was able to gain the support among the Board of Trustees, the Office of the President, the Provost and the Dean of the College to develop a university-wide Diversity Task Force that, for the first time (after decades of trying) led to the creation of the university's first-ever Chief Diversity Officer position and office. At Mississippi State, I was a key participant in the City of Starkville's effort to add LGBTQ non-discrimination protections for municipal workers. I was also elected a member of the Board of Directors at the ACLU of Mississippi. At VCU, I established the College of Humanities and Sciences standing committee on diversity and renamed it to ensure equity and inclusion was in the title because, well, messaging matters. At Howard, I've worked hard to increase the representation of women and LGBTQ issues. Everywhere I have worked, I have engaged in critical work on diversity. I live it everyday.

There is no one roadmap toward creating a culture of belonging; but it begins by listening; deep, empathetic listening with an eye toward learning the stories and pathways of others, what motivates them, and indeed, also what are their triggers. Storytelling is a powerful tool toward expanding diversity. I've learned this personally as an HIV+ adult whereby telling my own story has uplifted others and has introduced me to new lessons and new challenges of my own.

In my current position, we have hired more full time women faculty under my leadership than ever before and have intentionally closed the gap on gender-based salary inequity. A new Center for Democracy (in development) and a newly established Center on Women, Gender, and Global Leadership was established at HU. I've helped to establish a new minor in women, gender and sexuality studies at both VCU and HU, and after added courses on disability while chairing a

collegewide committee on diversity and inclusion, which became the first ever committee to have equitable faculty, staff, and student representation; advised departments on search hiring procedures to increase diverse applicant pools, and led university wide programming on diversity and higher education focusing on key affinity groups such as women, differently abled persons, immigrant status, and racial identity.

I believe the classroom is a community of co-learners. As the next Dean, I will ensure that diversity and belonging efforts engage all stakeholders so that we may learn from one another; by golly, that's the beauty of the privilege we each have to work in higher education. If only we seize the opportunity each and every day, we will be positioned to truly solve the seemingly intractable problems of othering that continue to plague us.

The University of Louisville's diverse student body, curricular offerings and faculty/staff ranks must be inclusive and foster belonging. A review of current practices in DEI is likely merited and I'd facilitate a College-wide review that examines department hiring practices, syllabi and course diversity of topics and citations, and incentives for increased interdisciplinary research collaborations with DEI, among other initiatives. Most importantly, nothing should begin without extensive consultation with all relevant stakeholders, and then a process is developed with shared governance whereby all stakeholders understand their important role in fostering this agenda – everyone on the roll at UL, has a role to play in DEI.