Dear Higher Education

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LETTERS FROM THE SOCIAL JUSTICE MOUNTAIN

DR. MENAH PRATT, DR. MERCEDES RAMÍREZ FERNÁNDEZ, AND DR. MICHELE DERAMO, EDITORS

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Introduction

DR. MENAH PRATT, DR. MERCEDES RAMÍREZ FERNÁNDEZ, AND DR. MICHELE DERAMO, EDITORS

Dear Higher Education: Letters from the Social Justice Mountain is an edited volume by three women, including an Italian American senior diversity administrator and two women of color (Latina and African-American) chief diversity officers, each with almost 30 years of experience. Dr. Menah Pratt, a Sierra Leonean-American, is the Vice President for Strategic Affairs and Diversity and Professor Education at Virginia Tech. Dr. Mercedes Ramírez Fernández is from Puerto Rico and serves as the Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Michele Deramo is the Associate Vice Provost for Diversity Education and Engagement at Virginia Tech and leads diversity education and inclusive pedagogy initiatives. Menah and Mercedes worked together at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Virginia Tech; and Menah, Mercedes, and Michele worked together at Virginia Tech. During the 2023-2024 academic year, Menah was selected to participate in the American Council on Education (ACE) leadership program. Menah selected the University of Minnesota as her placement institution and began collaborating with Mercedes and Michele on this project. This series is envisioned as an ongoing project, and this is the inaugural volume.

In recognition of the rapidly shifting sociopolitical, legal, and cultural environment impacting social justice and issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in higher education in the United States, and the growing antagonism toward diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues in the national conscious, particularly within the educational sector, the editors felt a call to capture the voices of those engaged in social justice work. One very profound result of the elimination of DEI offices, pursuant to state legislation, has been the elimination of websites and the content associated with reports, recommendations, and the history of DEI efforts at institutions. In addition, they realized that much of the transformational work that had happened at Virginia Tech, an institution founded as an all-White, all-male military college in a state that was the heart of the Confederacy, into a more inclusive community, had not been formally documented. This work included curricular changes; community and cultural centers; required diversity education; faculty and department head cohort programs; engagement with descendants of those enslaved on the land; building name changes; new historical markers; the founding of the Black College Institute; the hosting of the Faculty Women of Color in the Academy National Conference; new faculty diversity initiatives; the development of land and labor acknowledgments; the engagements with tribal nations; and the meaningful partnerships with HBCUs and MSIs. This work provides an example of a case study in the challenges and opportunities surrounding leading structural and systemic institutional change. In light of the current context of erasure, silencing, and invisibility, this project is a significant attempt to create visibility, awareness, and presence.

Another important context for this series is the current Middle East crisis. Almost 100 protests across the nation and over 2,000 arrests have provoked questions about freedom of speech, academic freedom, the freedom to peacefully protest, and the role of civil disobedience in response to oppression and injustice are at the surface of college protests against the war (Yerushalmy, Livingtone, Salam). These protests were not limited to the United States, and included Australia, Canada, France, Lebanon, Mexico, and the United Kingdom, among others (Burga).

The global context led to the expansion of the vision for this project to incorporate both a United States and

a global perspective. Each editor has significant global experience and perspectives. During the course of the fellowship year, Menah visited universities in Ethiopia, Benin, Senegal, India, and South Africa. Mercedes' brings an important global perspective informed by her work in Ireland. It is important to acknowledge the interconnected global ecosystem and the ways in which education systems and structures are often intertwined, and ongoing global collaborations between institutions.

Working in the field of diversity, equity, and inclusion has always been challenging and difficult. In the past three years, however, the landscape has radically shifted, creating perilous and volatile conditions, particularly in the education ecosystem. After the murder of George Floyd in 2020, there was a nationwide reckoning when colleges, universities, K-12 schools, organizations, and corporations committed to addressing the ongoing legacy of racism in America. A mere four years later, akin to the end of Radical Reconstruction, a growing counter anti-DEI movement is seeking to dismantle these nascent efforts; to silence activists and educators; and to eliminate discussions about issues of diversity, equity, inclusion in the education system.

One key strategy has included reframing and redefining Critical Race Theory (CRT), a legal theory about justice. Several state legislatures have incorrectly asserted that CRT is an umbrella concept that promotes "divisive concepts," ideologies, values, beliefs, and attitudes that are anti-American, anti-White, anti-Christian, and anti-conservative. This has led to legislation in several states limiting and circumscribing what can be taught in classrooms around issues of race, gender, and sexuality, and banning books that address America's complex history.

One of the most notable examples relates to *The 1619 Project*, which was originally a series of essays, poems, art, and images in the New York Times Magazine to commemorate 400 years since the arrival of the first enslaved people. Eventually, it became a book, a TV series, and a school curriculum. As of February 2021, *The 1619 Project* had been adopted by more than 4000 educators from all 50 states (Bridges).

However, as part of the backlash to DEI, as of July 2024, 18 states have enacted some form of legislation banning tenets they have associated with critical race teaching, and "divisive concepts." In 17 other states, the legislation was proposed, but not successful, and in 9 states, legislation is pending. There are only 7 states where there has been no ban attempted (World Population Review). The pervasiveness of the legislative efforts is evidenced by the fact that between Jan. 1, 2021 and Dec. 31, 2022, local, state, and federal government officials have introduced 563 anti-CRT measures and almost half—241—were enacted or adopted (Waxman).

The legislation typically bans "the discussion, training, and/or orientation that the U.S. is inherently racist as well as any discussions about conscious and unconscious bias, privilege, discrimination, and oppression" (Ray and Gibbons). It is not only at the state level, but also at the local school board level, and in some areas, the discussions have not been limited to race, and have extended to LGBTQ identity, gender, and sexuality (Ibid). The impact of the changing climate is profoundly personal, as according to *The Washington Post*, over 160 educators have lost their positions in the shifting political landscape (Natanson and Balingit).

In several states, the legislation allows students to report teachers who make them "feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress," based on race (Natanson). A South Carolina teacher who was recently reported to the school board by her students for teaching about race in an Advanced Placement English course, wrote in her journal: "teachers are afraid, teachers are silent, teachers cave" (Ibid).

These anti-DEI efforts continued in 2023 with Florida enacting legislation that prohibits the state's public colleges and universities from funding DEI programs, as well as offering courses on issues of diversity, race, and equity. Texas also enacted legislation banning DEI offices and prohibiting mandatory diversity training (Bhaskara). Texas' legislation resulted in the elimination of 300 jobs (Bolstad).

In 2024, in response to legislation, Utah eliminated its diversity offices and cultural and community centers (Bolstad). Legislation in Oklahoma resulted in the closure of a women's leadership program, and the changing of names of offices (Martinez-Keel). Legislation in Alabama has impacted DEI offices and in South Dakota, the Board of Regents recently enacted a policy that bars employees at its six public universities from putting their preferred gender pronouns or tribal affiliations in email signatures. Additionally, the University of North Carolina at Chapel

Hill Board of Trustees shifted $2.3 million of DEI spending toward public safety and policing on campus and the UNC System Board of Governors abolished all DEI policies in place since 2019 at all 17 of its campuses (Bolstad).

The anti-DEI effort has already impacted faculty hiring, reflected by the experiences of two African-American women journalists whose work includes issues of race and racism. Professors Kathleen McElroy and Nikole Hannah-Jones both had tenured offers revoked by prestigious universities (Gamboa). The importance of this series is reflected by the reality that a tenured faculty member was encouraged NOT to contribute to this volume, given the political climate in the state.

In addition to these efforts, there are also federal judicial decisions that are impacting DEI. In June, 2023, the Supreme Court eliminated the explicit use of race as a factor in admissions decisions. Some states are expanding the interpretation of the decision to include race-based scholarships and diversity hiring efforts.

As a related aside, it is worth noting that the volatile DEI environment is not confined to higher education. It is also present in the for-profit corporate world. A July 21, 2023 Wall Street Journal article noted the precarious position of Chief Diversity Officers in corporations: "Two years ago chief diversity officers were some of the hottest hires into executive ranks. Now, they increasingly feel left out in the cold. Thousands of diversity-focused workers have been laid off since last year, and some companies are scaling back racial justice commitments." In Fortune 100 companies, the number of CDO searches is down 75% in the past year, and demand is the lowest it has been in 30 years (Chen and Weber).

The concept of DEI is not confined to the United States education system. There are DEI efforts across institutions outside of the United States. Administrators and scholars across the globe are thinking about issues of identity, difference, and transformation, addressing historical inequalities (Hendley).

There are several goals associated with this project. The project envisions creating a fluid digital conversation space of letters to higher education about social justice. The Pressbooks platform facilitates open access and an ongoing project, creating a resource that documents multiple perspectives related to creating and leading diversity, equity, and inclusion work in higher education; shares personal real-life examples and experiences associated with DEI in higher education; documents historical and systemic challenges that require social justice activism; elevates various strategies and best practices employed by diversity practitioners in fostering inclusive campus climates; contributes to the current discourse about diversity, social justice, equity, and education; and provides a resource for the larger higher education community of faculty, staff, students, governance boards, and administrators who want to understand DEI in higher education.

Representing a diversity of racial, gender, sexuality, and disability identities, the contributors share letters to higher education on an extensive breadth of topics. The topics include, in part, the following areas: land and labor acknowledgments; student and faculty activism; governance and curriculum revisions; inclusive excellence and inclusive pedagogy; the perspectives of the descendants of the enslaved; disability activism; LGBTQ activism; White allyship; community and cultural centers; living-learning communities; institutional history narratives; chief diversity officers; decolonizing education; and the impact of anti-DEI legislation.

Subsequent series will elevate experiences of particular communities and will include open calls. As the founder of the Faculty Women of Color in the Academy National Conference, editor Menah Pratt knows that women of color need to share their experiences. Likewise, there are men of color who may need a forum for their experiences. Recognizing that identities are intersectional, we also aim to include reflections from those who identify as queer, and trans, and represent the LGBTQ community. Those with visible and invisible disabilities constitute another important population.

This series is motivated by a desire to fight back against the attempts to silence, minimize, marginalize, and render invisible the work of social justice in higher education. It seeks to raise up the voices of those who have been laboring and working to make campus environments more diverse, equitable, and just.

We have organized the collection of letters into four areas:

Our first section, "**Why We Come to the Mountain**," addresses the national and global landscapes for the work of social justice in higher education. These landscapes include the specific challenges to institutional diversity and

inclusion work occurring across the United States, including threats to academic freedom and speech, and the integrity of the higher education mission, as well as global issues concerned with higher education's handling of sexual violence and its narrow pathways for students minoritized by gender, caste, class, and religion or political affiliation. Each letter calls for higher education to address these challenges head-on to fulfill their highest aspirations.

Our second section, "**Why We Need You to Listen**," amplifies individual voices sharing their experiences of exclusion and marginalization in higher education because of their intersectional identities. These letters speak directly of the pain and frustration felt by those whose concerns have been dismissed, their expertise undermined, and their appeals to be heard admonished as too angry or uncivil. Each letter reminds us that we need higher education—and all of us who occupy its space—to listen and respond to achieve the fullness of inclusion.

Our third section, "**Why We Must Tell the Whole Story,**" are letters from those whose lives intersect with hidden dimensions of higher education's complicated history. This shared history includes higher education's complicity with the expropriation of tribal lands upon passage of the Morrill Act that granted land to public colleges, the forced labor of enslaved people who built our colleges and universities, and the exploitation of poor, disabled, and minoritized people whose bodies were used without their consent or compensation for the purposes of research.

Our fourth section, "**Why We Believe Transformation is Possible**," shares work that is being done to change the trajectory of higher education so that its future is one of equity and justice for all. This work includes initiatives that create access for faculty and students who previously had been excluded, foster competencies for inclusive teaching and leadership, and leverage the privilege of Whiteness for allyship.

We recognize that the dynamic nature of this project may facilitate additional areas of reflection and inquiry as we continue to receive letters from colleagues across the globe. And so, we invite you to join us on the social justice mountain, to speak your peace and to listen to the words spoken because we believe transformation is possible.

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Future Content and Letters

Dear Higher Education: Letters from the Social Justice Mountain is a growing collection and will include additional contributions and volumes. To keep up-to-date on this publication and larger project, sign up for email notifications from the editors: https://forms.gle/U2wXGMJWypfYZ9Ld9

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https://open.lib.umn.edu/dearhighereducation/?p=157

WHY WE COME TO THE MOUNTAIN

The Current Landscape for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Higher Education

PAULETTE GRANBERRY RUSSELL

Dear Higher Education,

I have the great privilege of being the President and CEO of NADOHE—the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education. We describe ourselves as the preeminent voice for chief diversity officers, leading the national and global conversation on diversity, equity, and inclusion in postsecondary education. We have more than 2,200 members of senior diversity officers, diversity professionals, scholars, researchers, students, for whom we work to provide resources to be successful in their roles and to navigate the shifts in the legal landscape.

Last year, I spoke to an organization, Getting to We, whose goal is "envisioning a society where us and them become we." What a beautiful goal and image for our future. Unfortunately, we are experiencing a time of deep division. It is very much "*us*," those who understand the value, impact, and necessity of pursuing inclusive excellence in our society, versus "them," organizations that have provided a model that has been adopted by elected leaders who have embarked upon a calculated and organized attempt to discredit and diminish equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts in higher education and beyond.

These efforts have taken hold of legislatures in more than 20 states and I do not anticipate that the attempts to dismantle progress will subside. Some of these states describe controversial topics as "divisive concepts." I do not regard the work of creating a more diverse, equitable, inclusive higher education as divisive or controversial. What is divisive is the purposeful misrepresentation of these efforts, that target particular identities based on race, gender, and sexuality and that demonize the lived of experiences of individuals based on their social identities.

On June 29, 2023, the Supreme Court overturned decades of precedent that has affirmed the legality and value of race-conscious admissions practices.

I am deeply concerned by what is in front of us today and into the future.

As we look out into the landscape, what we are seeing, hearing, and experiencing in our political and societal climate is a direct assault on what many of us consider to be our life's work. It has certainly been my life's work, and I know that to be true of our members who are now having their careers and jobs eliminated, offices reorganized, work rendered invisible, and incremental progress stalled. Legislatures and Supreme Court justices are rebuilding barriers for students seeking equitable access to the opportunities that a college degree offers, such as higher earnings and lower rates of unemployment. These legislative outcomes and the decision of the Supreme Court will make it more difficult for all students to benefit from the educational excellence that results from diverse learning environments.

A recent Lumina Foundation-Gallup poll illustrates why it is essential to move to "we" and become better humans, especially as we consider when policymakers block evidence-based strategies that advance diversity, equity, and inclusion. In Florida, where lawmakers stripped funding from diversity programs at public colleges, barely one-third of Black Floridians, and just about 39% of Hispanic Floridians, between the ages of 25 and 64 have completed formal education after high school. That's compared to roughly half of white Floridians.

We see strikingly similar racial gaps in Texas, which faces an outright ban on diversity, equity, and inclusion offices at state colleges and universities. Both states lag the nation in overall attainment of post-high-school education. These patterns should sound alarm bells as more states take up this type of legislation.

Mistrust and fear create conflict. Many of our elected leaders are actively working to cause confusion, spread misinformation about what this work is, and to seed division. And, in some cases, it's working. The pressure simply becomes too much. The University of Arkansas at Fayetteville dissolved its diversity, equity, and inclusion office despite any ban being enacted in the state. In Florida, 28 college system presidents issued a joint statement in support of the governor's anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion policies.

But, despite these attempts to demean and diminish, "*we*" persist. There is still a "*them*," but there is also a large, organized, passionate "*we*," joining together and issuing strong statements against political interference in higher education, and in support of academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

The Ohio State University Board of Trustees, in their opposition to Senate Bill 83, stated that the bill undermines the role of faculty in "shared governance," "weakens academic rigor," and imposes "extensive and expensive new reporting mandates." For now, the legislation has not passed.

We at NADOHE released our inaugural State of the CDO Survey report during the summer 2023. We had 261 Chief Diversity Officers share what it's like to lead equity and belonging efforts on campuses in 2023. You may have heard some news outlets and legislators say CDOs are not well-educated. Well, we found nearly 65% held a Ph.D. or professional doctorate. You may have heard that CDOs are overpaid and their offices over-funded. Nearly a third of respondents let us know they have annual operating budgets of $39,000 or less, and 44% have between zero and two full-time-equivalent employees who report to them. And among those who responded to our survey, 52% were Black or African American; nearly 12% were Hispanic/Latina/o/e/x; 7% Asian/Asian American; 1.5% Native American/Alaska Native; almost 9% White, and 63% identified as women.

This is how we fight back. While CDOs individually do not have the time or resources to respond to every inquiry about data or to constantly draft statements fighting misinformation about who they are and what they do, organizations like NADOHE can work to gather the data and share the truth about the value, impact, and necessity of equity, diversity, and inclusion in higher education and beyond.

The research makes it clear — education after high school leads to better health, more civic engagement, and jobs suited to individual talents and interests. A Harvard Business Review report from February 2023 found clear evidence that diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts on campuses help universities recruit, retain, and teach a more racially diverse pool of talented students and faculty.

We must implore "*them*" to understand that attacking this work is an attack on all of us. And so, I want to share a few imperatives identified by NADOHE with you that I hope each of you can share within your own circles of influence, as we seek to broaden our collective "*we*."

Our students and other young adults care about activism, equity, and inclusion. And many accrediting bodies still care about equity, diversity, and inclusion. Campuses throughout higher education provide academic and social support for our students to engage effectively across cultures within and outside of higher education. Diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts throughout higher education address the following imperatives that were recently shared in a Communication Guide developed by NADOHE to better inform campus leaders, legislatures, and the broader public.

First, our society is increasingly diverse—that is happening regardless of what anyone wants to think or attempt to disavow. We know that diverse teams perform better and innovate better. We know that employers demand globally proficient candidates who can demonstrate cultural knowledge, humility, and a broad worldview to maintain a competitive advantage. The dismantling of equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts will impact all students and trainees who will be less prepared without the necessary skills to succeed in a diverse economy.

Second, we need more students in STEM and technology, particularly in Artificial Intelligence. Equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts are critical to building our capacity in these areas that are essential for all industries, including

national security. Without broad recruitment and retention efforts, the U.S. is leaving enormous amounts of talent behind.

Finally, many research funding agencies require diversity impact statements or plans as part of grant submissions and contracting work. Research is a critical function for all institutions of higher education and for advancement in all fields. To secure funding, researchers are often expected to explain how they aim to build inclusive teams and identify or develop diverse talent.

I admit, what lies ahead of us is daunting. I have had many sleepless nights and moments overcome with anger. Yet, I refuse to quit. I refuse to quit on our young adults, who deserve equitable access to opportunities and experiences. I refuse to quit on our diversity, equity, and inclusion practitioners, who have dedicated their lives to helping minoritized individuals overcome obstacles and lead our society toward inclusive excellence.

We are in the middle of an incredibly difficult fight, but we must draw upon our collective power and reach out to our allies for support. *Higher Education*, I am reaching out for your support.

I am honored and privileged to lead NADOHE. While CDOs across this country should and have been playing a galvanizing, leading role in this fight, we cannot do it alone. We need your help building a future in which everyone knows their authentic self is affirmed and supported. Where we consistently assess institutional policies, programs, and practices, and hold ourselves accountable in cultivating cultures that are equitable and inclusive of the diverse individuals represented throughout our communities.

So, thank you.

Paulette Granberry Russell, JD
President and CEO of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education

About the author

Paulette Russell

Paulette Granberry Russell, J.D., president of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education since March 2020, is a leading national voice and sought-after presenter on issues related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in higher education and beyond. Granberry Russell retired in August 2020 from Michigan State University as senior advisor to the president for diversity, emerita, after more than 20 years advising on diversity and inclusion efforts at the institution.

An Alternative Curriculum

MENAH PRATT

Dear Higher Education,

I'm angry. Let me be specific. I am angry with you. You sometimes feel like a bad dream, a nightmare. And sometimes, you feel like my best friend. I have a love-hate relationship with you. I have all these ideas and ideals about what and who you should be, many of which are antithetical in much of the current reality. But I need you. This is a relationship I can't get away from. I can't disown you. I can't walk away. I, however, must tell you how I feel and why.

The value of higher education was almost genetically instilled in me. My father was born in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and after his initial education in Freetown and in Durham, England, came to the United States in 1961. Starting at Hampton University, a small historically Black college, he graduated with his bachelor's degree in physics in 1963. He then obtained his master's degree (1965) and PhD in physics from Carnegie Mellon University in 1968. Three years after beginning a tenure-track faculty journey at Illinois State University, he came face-to-face with the concrete wall of America's racism. His contract was not renewed; he never taught again; he never researched again; and he never published again, though he had twelve international publications. The same institution of higher education that transformed Dr. Theodore Pratt's life from a child abandoned by his father, raised in poverty, to having a chance to cultivate his brilliance, was the same institution that sabotage his life's goals and ambitions at the age of 37.

My mother, Dr. Mildred Pratt, was one of eight children, raised largely by a single mother with only a 6th grade education in rural Texas during the Great Depression. Against the odds of racism, sexism, legalized segregation, and poverty, she managed to get her bachelor's degree at a small historically Black college, Jarvis Christian College in the 1950s, and two master's degrees: one in religion at Butler University and one in Social Work at the University of Indiana. In 1969, she got her doctorate in social work at the University of Pittsburgh. She began her tenure-track journey at Illinois State University, and again, against the same odds as my father, she became tenured and promoted to full professor in the 1970s when less than one percent of full professors were Black women. Education was the institution that helped my mother rise out of generations of enslavement and sharecropping to transform not only her life, but also future generations.

My parents' life outcomes and opportunities were significantly changed because of education. Likewise, my outcomes and opportunities were significantly changed because of education. The University of Iowa was my first stop, with a bachelor's degree, majoring in English, minoring in philosophy and African American Studies in the late 1980s. Two years later, I got a master's degree in Literary Studies. Transitioning to the field of social justice, I began studying law and sociology, achieving a master's degree and a law degree from Vanderbilt by the mid-1990s. In 1997, I graduated with a doctorate in sociology from Vanderbilt. During my time at Vanderbilt, I also started teaching at Fisk University and at the men's and women's minimum- and maximum-security prison through American Baptist College. The prison experience afforded me the opportunity to work with brilliant minds behind bars. It was an experience that has remained with me my entire life.

After a federal clerkship and a short stint a private law firm, I returned to my alma mater as the University

Compliance Officer, Assistant Secretary of the University, and University Attorney. Nine years later, I moved to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to lead the Office for Equal Opportunity and Access, becoming the Associate Chancellor for Strategic Affairs and Associate Provost for Diversity. I also became a tenured professor. Eight years ago, I joined Virginia Tech as a tenured full professor and Vice President of Strategic Affairs and Diversity.

I see myself as a scholar-activist and academic-advocate. I am a scholar of education and a practitioner of educational equity. My dissertation was on single-sex schools and explored issues of race, class, gender, and nationalism. It was an integration of sociology and law, using critical race theory, critical race feminism, and Black feminist thought to explore contentious issues impacting Black communities, and Black women and girls in particular. Subsequent scholarship included a co-edited volume on women of color and their higher education leadership journeys into presidencies. The humiliating experience of the former President of Harvard, Claudine Gay, epitomizes in some way, the challenges of racism and sexism for women of color in higher education. I also co-edited a volume on race, class, and culture in Cuba based on the experiences of Chief Diversity Officers during a ten-day visit in 2016.

I currently work as a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) and have worked in this role for almost 20 years. I have seen the evolution of this role and its critical positionality in managing issues of social justice and equity on college campuses. Many CDOs are from historically marginalized, minimized, and minoritized identities. They have faced and experienced racism, sexism, and homophobia. They know what it means to be ignored, marginalized, and overlooked for promotions. They know what it means to be paid less than others. They know what it means to experience microaggressions and macroaggressions. They know what is like to be the only – the only person of color, the only individual with a disability, the only queer person in a room, and sometimes representing more than one of these identities. They know what it feels like to not be included or wanted in a room. They know what it feels like to be excluded and to not belong.

Ironically, it is precisely because of these experiences that they are asked to lead organizational change. Yet, it is an almost impossible job to expect the CDO to work towards eliminating institutional systemic discrimination and oppression within the concrete structures of higher education. The CDO position is a nearly impossible job, particularly in terms of the skillset required to be successful in a complex climate. A 2019 Russell Reynolds report on CDOs in higher education listed a set of skills needed for a CDO: "In addition to foundational competencies such as setting strategy, executing for results, leading teams and building relationships, best-in class CDOs are defined by a track record and expertise in the following areas: strategic leadership and change management; persuasion and influence; data savvy-storytelling; external engagement; personal motivation and resilience; domain expertise and understanding of higher ed culture."

When I read this list, I thought to myself, "this list is incomplete." This is what is missing: has learned how to not "go off" in meetings, while yet and still suffering indignities of marginalization, invisibility, and hyper-invisibility; is able to shoulder unrealistic expectations from White leadership and also from minority communities; is able to facilitate difficult conversations; is able to juggle unceasing and unrelenting requests for individual meetings; must be able to beg the data team repeatedly for disaggregated data to engage in truth-telling about the actual numbers and percentages in the data; must be able to process requests to "just help me process my pain and guilt with you" from majority community members; must be available to support students on the verge of dropping out from carrying the weight of the institution on their backs with the absence of sufficient financial resources; must help manage the exhaustion of faculty of color trying to support students and themselves; must support women who are serving on every single diversity and search committee, while male colleagues often have access to the budget, personnel committees, and other ad-hoc committees with "decision-making authority" as my mom referenced in her letter to the president fighting for her promotion to tenure; must also conduct climate surveys that never result in action plans; and must be able to conduct Title IX and equal employment opportunity investigations that rarely result in disciplinary actions. These expectations must be met or exceeded, often under circumstances that involve under-resourced offices; under-staffed offices; and inconsistently expressed

commitments to the work and values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Yet, if there is going to be systemic and institutional change from an equity lens, the CDO role and their offices are critical to that transformation. That is perhaps why these offices are called offices of transformation in South Africa.

South Africa was one of five countries I visited during the 2023-2024 academic year as part of an American Council on Education (ACE) fellowship. The fellowship is an opportunity to step away from the routine of your home institution, and step into the routines of a host institution. It is a time to be both an insider and outsider, benefitting from the outsider status that sometimes provides a unique diverse perspective, while at the same time being situated within that new culture, and learning its climate, protocols, politics, policies, and ways of being.

The fellowship is a professional development opportunity to think about leadership, education, and one's own personal and professional journey. As an ACE fellow, I wanted to use my fellowship, in part, to step out of the American education bubble, and to see education and the experiences of women and girls from a different lens. ACE encourages campus visits—visits to other campuses where you can continue to explore the culture and structure of higher education and leadership. I wanted to step out of the pristine, idyllic, small-town community in rural southwest Virginia in the mountains of Blacksburg, Virginia, where Virginia Tech's main campus is located and explore the education environment from a global lens.

During the fellowship year, I visited universities in Ethiopia, Benin, Senegal, India, and South Africa. Each country taught me many lessons and I think, Higher Education, you should know some of the lessons I learned. In Senegal, I participated in a faculty study abroad program with Rose Pan African Education. Rose Pan African Education offers staff tailored creative, academic, and service-learning opportunities to university students, artists, scholars, and academics. These specialized programs supplement traditional, dominant, and hegemonic Eurocentric pedagogies by providing deeper engagement with African histories, cultures, and perspectives. The visionary Dr. Nicole Richards founded Rose Pan to focus on decolonizing education, after she noted that only 6.2% of study abroad programs are in Africa and out of that number, only 3.9% are in Sub Saharan and just 2.3% are in the Middle East and North Africa.

The ten-day experience in Senegal included profound interviews with two female students at Cheik Diop University who were studying English and American Studies. I asked both students to share their advice for women and girls. One student shared:

> Women should not underestimate themselves. I think a woman who is able to share, communicate, and advise children, mainly girls, is a social danger. And I think that we women should not silence ourselves. We should voice our mind and reveal our thoughts. I think we should not underestimate ourselves; we should be proud of ourselves; we should not be caring for a man; we should believe our dreams, and things will come true.

The other student shared similar advice: "As a female student, it is too difficult, because men become rude, and you have to be a strong woman to face them. You have to be proud of yourself and fight." Her advice for women and girls: "focus on yourself; stay strong and know that in this life, nothing is easy, but you can make it." This student is amazing: she owns her own business; she just got her driver's license; and she speaks seven languages.

She shared one of her frustrations with her experience in American Studies. She said most of the curriculum is about European Americans in America, and includes very little about Native Americans, Black Americans, and Asians. In addition, most of the required reading is the "traditional" hegemonic cannon, like *The Old Man and the Sea*. She has learned about Black feminism because of her work with the director of the women's center, and not through her curricular experiences.

The context for the interview reflected a tense national political climate. It occurred during the December holiday break. Political protests in the spring of 2023 led to the destruction of some properties on campus, resulting in classes being suspended, and the university being shut down. Although the university remained closed in the fall, students were required to return in December to take their spring exams. The president of the country appointed a new president of the university and the political appointment was raising concerns about the

intersection of politics and education. I immediately thought about the similarities to the United States, and the appointment and influence of governors and legislators on university presidential appointments.

The faculty study-abroad program in Senegal was an opportunity to interrogate the question "What does it mean to decolonize education?" I started to find the answer to that question on the Island of Shells during a tour of the fishing and farming village. The village was majority Christian, in contrast to the largely Muslim country. Throughout the village, there were several statutes with Christian iconography. In an all-black Senegalese African community, despite understanding the colonial history, I had hoped, perhaps, that the representation of Jesus would be different. When I asked the guide about the images, he told me that the representation doesn't matter, only the message. I, of course, told him that the image matters, too. He repeated his assertation that the message matters. I just bit my tongue, because image does matter. Representation matters. The message and curriculum matters, too.

Universities in South Africa are grappling with the same reality related to the message and to images – curriculum and representation. When I visited the University of Pretoria, the University of Johannesburg, and the University of Cape Town in South Africa, I learned about the very real challenge of access and transformation. There are only 26 public universities in South Africa. The demand for access and representation is exponential. The University of Johannesburg gets 600,000 applications for 10,000 seats. The University of Cape Town receives 100,000 applications for 4500 seats.

Not only are these universities thinking about access, they are also struggling with the message. The University of Cape Town (UCT) does an inclusivity survey every three years and it is clear that Black students do not fit in, and that the university feels much like an "old boys' club." UCT is exploring the importance of systemic change and its historical legacy, adopting an anti-racism policy to address institutional racism in 2021. It is asking questions about what decolonizing the curriculum looks like. I remember one conversation during our visit about decolonizing math and learning that faculty members are thinking about what examples are used in story problems. They are asking themselves about what examples are used from around the world in their curriculums. They are asking the question, "What do universities owe democracy?" Their Office of Transformation is thinking about ideological issues, as well as the role of the university in redistribution of economic wealth and power.

Similarly, the University of Johannesburg's Office of Transformation efforts are also focused on Black economic empowerment, structural inequalities, and access for more representation of the country. They, too, are thinking about what it means to decolonize education, understanding that some of the examples, even as seemingly basic and simple as a garage are not concepts that some of the Black students can even identify with. In addition, they are trying to address financial literacy, sustainable development, as well as issues related to AI, rankings, infrastructure, energy management, and electricity challenges that only allow for six to eight hours a day of access. The "global south" not only struggles with decolonizing education, it also struggles with very real infrastructure challenges.

India was a fascinating experience, as I had the opportunity to visit and speak at three all-women's colleges that are part of the University of New Delhi. The commitment to women's empowerment and feminism on the campuses, even in the midst of a political climate that is very patriarchal, was inspiring. The role and implications of caste continue to have a profound impact, as India, too, has a concept of affirmative action embedded in its constitution to address the historical experiences of "backward classes."

This year, I have been wrestling with question of "who gets to decide what is taught by whom to whom?" It is the question of the cannon, the question of hegemony, the question of power, the question of what is important, and the question of who gets to ask what questions about society, structures, and systems: Who and how should a president of a university be selected? What is the role that politics can and should play in education? What should be the role of governing boards? How should they be selected? Who and how should curriculum be determined?

I continue to wrestle with the purpose of higher education. I have realized that education is ultimately about the power to control thoughts, ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of a society. Because knowledge can open our minds, expose us to different ideas and thoughts and people, and ultimately transform societies, it has often been used

as a tool to maintain ignorance and enable those with power to maintain it. Book bans, prohibitions on critical race theory, prohibitions about teaching "divisive concepts," by state legislators and local school boards are attempts to impact education and access to knowledge, and to ultimately maintain the status quo for those who currently hold political and economic power. As a descendant of a great-grandmother who was enslaved, I am very mindful of the legalized prohibitions that prohibited those who were enslaved from reading and writing. Maintaining ignorant masses allows injustice and inequity to continue.

In 2020, during COVID and its accompanying the quarantine, as well as the social justice movement inspired by the murder of George Floyd, I began thinking more deeply about education and its purpose. Since then, I have been exploring a concept I am calling "The Alternative Curriculum: A Revised Syllabus." Though COVID and the murder of George Floyd seemed to "come out of the blue," abruptly, startlingly, and suddenly, I believe that these energies were simmering just below the surface. It was a slow boil, as water does before it pops off the lid of a teapot. Something was happening in the universe. An odd energy associated with seemingly disconnected events: the massive accumulation of wealth for some; the stock market rising and its inevitable fall and continued fluctuation; the decimation of the environment, through an ongoing carelessness about the earth; rising migrations of people as refugees; accelerating hunger and poverty; tribal conflict across the globe; and a general disregard for the fragile universe.

Some wise sages tried to put us in check. Greta Thunberg was sounding an alarm. We thought it was just a little girl worried about the climate. She was, but it represented so much more. She felt it. The world was out of order. Native Americans were sounding the alarm. Their protests were getting louder. They understand the land and the environment. They cherish it and love it. Logging and pipelines were threatening not just their livelihood and lives, but the world's life. The forest fires happened in Australia and Canada. Drought happened in the west. Hurricanes happened in the Caribbean. Earthquakes happened in unexpected lands. Even the mountains were groaning. The vortex energy around Bell Rock, Sedona was sounding off like the pealing of bells.

Shifts were happening. We did not wake up. And the artists spoke, for they always speak, attuned to the shifts from the pulse of their souls — the dancers, the painters, the poets, and the musicians. They speak in a language that most of us cannot hear, for we do not create the time and space needed to reflect on the message sent in a language we do not value. We continue to defund and discontinue art and music programs in schools, and so we stopped training our ears and spirits to listen. The cacophony of the world was so loud that we could not–did not–want to hear the silent whisper of the wind of change.

Yet, one day, this season will be part of a "once upon a time." Generations into the future will hear a "creation story" – a story about the time we all had to go inside to hear.   Each culture, in their own traditions, will tell a similar tale of the day the world had to stop, when people had to go indoors, when planes ceased to fly, trains ceased to run on tracks, and buses and cars no longer polluted the highways and byways. They will tell the story of how children could not go to school, and of how some kind teachers and principals would drive into the neighborhoods of children to let them know they were not forgotten. They will tell the story of how parents who could not teach their own children and who often happily sent their often rude and misbehaving children to teachers suddenly gained new appreciation and compassion for the chaos their children were causing in school when they could not control them in their own homes or teach them. They will tell the story of how the poorest of the poor still had to go to work in the face of harm and how others could stay home and out of harm's way. It will be a story about those who were home with no money, no longer able to cook, to clean, or to barber and beauty others.

In this story, generations from now will talk about how schools sent students home to learn through a computer and to zoom, and that generation far into the future will wonder what zoom was, though zoom will be all this generation knows. And, that generation in the future will wonder why students were still expected to learn chemistry, physics, biology, humanity, arts, engineering, science, architecture, on their own, without labs, without brushes, without friends, and without conversations. They will wonder why we still spoke about quality and credits, when the teachers themselves did not know how to teach online. They will wonder, in the future, why from the

little kids in kindergarten to the big kids in college, they weren't taught an alternative curriculum during their hiatus from the buildings. They will wonder – those of the future who are sharing the creation story –why we of the now didn't teach an alternative curriculum in this season.

It could be an alternative curriculum about life and what really matters. For many of us have had to face our lives in new and different ways. We have had to look at children we raised well or we didn't who were quarantining with us. We have had to look at mates that we once loved and laughed with and are no longer laughing or loving with. We had to look through windows at loved ones in nursing homes and assisted living facilities wondering how or when we could touch their hands and hug them. We have had to accept that loved ones were dying without funerals, surreptitiously buried or cremated without fanfare or ceremony, lives becoming dust without acknowledgment. We have had to birth our children alone, without our mothers or partners at our side, without a welcoming and embracing team of family members at the bedside. We have gotten married without an audience of a few or hundreds, celebrating our joy and the promise for a happily ever after. We have had to comfort children who missed proms, senior year trips, and graduations. We had to learn how to wear masks, even if we preferred not. We had to learn how to live and die differently, or did we?

When the world opened up and we pretended that COVID was over, some in the United States decided that social justice was not needed, that DEI offices needed to be outlawed, that issues of equity, fairness, and justice were no longer necessary or important. Some, in America, decided that DEI meant only that Black Lives Matter, and that because institutions were having to wrestle with historical and systemic legacies of injustice, the powerful, and often White men, decided to exert their power and stifle noble progress, just as they did with Radical Reconstruction after the Civil war. And then, the Middle East exploded in 2023, and we were a world without words, without strategies, without the saavy and wisdom to address disputes and conflicts, not only in the Middle East, but around the world.

Because we cannot be a world without words and strategies and the saavy and the wisdom to manage disputes, now more than ever, we are in need of an alternative curriculum. It could be, perhaps, a curriculum about energy and how it manifests differently in the world. Not a physics class, per se, but a spirit class: a class about the spiritual energy in the world and its power; a class about the energy of emotions and how they work; a class about the energy of love, sacrifice, and kindness contrasted against the energy of greed, hate, selfishness, and tribal loyalties. We could talk about the energy of the forest and the air and of fire and flowers. We could talk about life-giving energy of birth and renewal. We could talk about how to just breath. We could talk about seasons and times of change; of leaves changing in the fall, dying in the winter, and then being born again in the spring and dancing in the summer. We could teach about how caterpillars have to become silent to shift and transform to butterflies.

We could talk about how to get along with people who are very different than us, even in our own family. We could learn to talk about our emotions and feelings. We could perhaps teach our children that political parties, donkeys and elephants—don't really matter, because there are core values that we should always vote for and they never change: love, kindness, generosity of spirit, gentleness, loyalty, community, food for all, and housing for all. We could teach about how to hear in the whisper of the wind the tears of pain and sorrow and the subtlety of oppression. We could teach about the power of the touch of love, the embrace of a hug and the gentleness of a smile. Perhaps we could teach about how to listen, and breath in and out the humility and humbleness of humanity.

This alternative curriculum should be informed by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals— "the blueprint for a more resilient and prosperous world and the roadmap out of current global crises"; a roadmap to "end poverty, protect the planet and leave no one behind." This alternative curriculum should address the subjugation and disempowerment of women and the feminine/female energy, for this energy is the energy of creation and birth; it is the energy of the earth and the ocean; and it is the energy of life.

To teach this new alternative curriculum, we would have to pause, again: pause from these lives of rushing, running, texting, emailing, technologing, Facebooking, Linking, Instagramming, and Snapping. Pause from these

lives of exhaustion, trying to survive, trying to find the next meal for some, the next dollar, the next, the next, the next.

Dear *Higher Education,* I hope you can become a place that helps us pause; helps us to find time for curiosity; helps us to find time to nourish spirit, in addition to mind and body; helps us find time to develop, learn, and teach an alternative curriculum. After all, the Latin word *educare* means "to lead out." I hope that you can lead us to an alternative curriculum that plants the seeds for this world to be a place for the plant, animal, and human community to survive and thrive. After all, we are all interconnected and interdependent, requiring us to try to understand and practice the values and virtues of diversity, inclusion, equity, and belonging.

My dear *Higher Education*, I hope you are listening.

With love and hope,

Menah Pratt

Vice President for Strategic Affairs and Diversity, Virginia Tech

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About the author

Menah Pratt

Nationally recognized as a leader, scholar, and author of four books on issues of race, class, gender, diversity, education, women's leadership, and critical race feminism, Dr. Menah Pratt is the Vice President for Strategic Affairs and Diversity and Professor of Education at Virginia Tech. She has received several national awards, including Women We Admire in Virginia, 2023; the 2023 Individual Winds of Change award by the Forum on Workplace Inclusion; the 2021 Inclusive Excellence Individual Leadership Award by the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education; and the 2018 American Education Studies Association Critics' Choice Award for outstanding scholarship. She joined Virginia Tech in 2016 and she has almost 25 years of leadership experience in higher education, including serving as chief strategy officer, chief diversity officer, university compliance officer, assistant secretary of the university, university board member, and attorney. She is the founder of the Faculty Women of Color in the Academy National Conference (11th year) and the Black College Institute (6th year) at Virginia Tech. She has previously worked at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), Vanderbilt University, and Fisk University.

Noticing: Caste, Class, and Gender in India

VASUNDHARA BHOJVAID

Dear Higher Education,

In 1971, celebrated sociologist, J. P. S. Uberoi, wrote in the essay 'The Student Question' that in India,

> "..our students are generally struggling for participation in society. It is the student rush rather than student revolt that is our real problem. What our people are currently seeking are three things. Firstly, they want the right to enter university as a universal human right. Second, they want assured progress up the ladder once they are on it. Many of them consider it inherently unjust that anyone should be sent down from university for any reason, academic or disciplinary. Third, they want assured employment of some non-manual kind at the end of their term at university." (34)

In my experience in classroom pedagogy and over discussions with colleagues across departments and universities, these lines ring true 50 years later. In the midst of this status of intellectual life of the majority of students in the country, what is the place and importance of higher education especially in the social sciences and humanities at the current moment? Specifically, I want to focus on what it is that higher education can do to the processes whereby 'our students are generally struggling for participation in society'. What kinds of participation are made possible here or who participates, and what can we do in our classrooms to enable modes of participation that reflect on differences and inequalities? My ability to respond to this comes from my own trajectory in and through the higher education landscape in India.

I am a middle class, upper caste cis-gender woman. My higher education academic training has been entirely in India, and I continue to teach in an Indian University. Though my parents do have higher education degrees, I am the first academic in my family. Due to the nature of my father's transferable job, I have had the privilege to go to eight schools, one of which was in Toronto, Canada and the remaining across states in Northern India. In grade four in school in Canada I experience racism firsthand, when I was bullied for being Indian, unclean, and having 'cooties.' While to this day I remain grateful to the teacher who noticed this and led the entire class back from recess to discuss why what was being said to me was wrong, I cannot deny this personal transgression has led me to notice consistently how racism flourishes in India, amongst communities in India and otherwise. It is this ability to notice that is the most important gift that higher education in India can give to our students as they are 'struggling for participation' in society.

Notably this ability to notice comes after a recognition that we live in a diversified world. After having gone to schools in small towns across India, the best education of this diversity was my time as an undergraduate, masters and PhD student in a public university in India. My time in Delhi University (in the capital city Delhi of India) was an eye-opening experience that put me in classrooms with students from different castes, classes, regions and genders. It was the first place I saw LGTBQ sexualities openly expressed (other than Toronto), was asked what my caste was, and finally understood the power and meaning of the word 'feminist'. In senior school in Dehradun (a town in the North-Western state of Uttarakhand), which is not cosmopolitan by any stretch of imagination, I was ridiculed by being called a 'feminist' for expressing some of my views on gender. Speaking up was looked down upon, I learnt rather early. It wasn't until I came to Delhi University that I understood the meaning of this word

and that too from fellow students who had gone to the best schools in the most metropolitan cities across India. Their privilege, social and cultural capital gave them confidence with words and language that was new to me. This was an indelible learning for me, which comes from the power and authority, not to mention liberation that I and fellow students felt at the undergraduate college for women, Miranda House. The fact that women occupied and made this space, allowed us to question and notice how our participation in society was never equal, a learning which came from a window into an alternate world made possible by a campus only for women.

I carry these learnings with me as I now teach at a private university in Delhi-NCR[1] India has seen a boom in private universities in the recent past. 'The current share of private universities in the Indian university sector is around 40%, with more than two million students' (Mathews). This was certainly not the case when I was an undergraduate student in 2004. Not only does this mean that prospective students have more options, but most private universities are very costly in comparison to public universities in India, and most students cannot afford private sector higher education. This means that while private universities do have scholarship programs for those students who simply cannot afford the price to study there, my classroom is definitely not as diverse as classroom in a public university in India. This is not only due to the caste quota as means of positive discrimination that is present in public universities, but the range of incomes in the middle-class is expansive, and most families cannot easily afford private universities.

But there is another layer here that often goes ignored. Only the most privileged students in India are able to go abroad for their undergraduate education. The majority of students aspire to enter classrooms across the country, which is highly competitive given India has the world's biggest youth population (Poonam). And while it cannot be denied that there are a few select private universities in India that only the most elite and well-off students can afford (their fees are often closer to American Universities that those in India), most private universities (especially those that have risen out of philanthropic interests) do not seem out of reach for many families in the board upper-middle class categories. I see this in the student composition in my classroom, year after year. Though definitely not as diverse as a public university, students come from a variety of backgrounds as the corpus of students who cannot even imagine an education outside the country is rather large. This is especially true for PhD students, who traditionally even in the public university system in India do not have adequate state support in terms of funds to subsist in a comfortable manner given the inflationary situation in most cities. Private universities in this dynamic, with their reasonably better fellowships and modern infrastructure offer better chances to PhD aspirants, who could not even apply outside the country owing to the hefty application fees. In my department we have PhD scholars that are first generation educated and are committed to using their degrees and exposure to go back to the regions they are from to pursue academic professions and in turn aid students. This is an opportunity many of them have shared with me, they could not pursue in public universities due to the delay in scholarships and often the amount not being enough to subsist and continue research effectively. One of them was enrolled in a PhD program in Europe and the COVID-19 pandemic in addition to the racism he faced in the department there made him drop out of the program and join the private university I am affiliated to. He has shared with me a few times, "I feel like I am being taken seriously and listened to here." Clearly, his and his cohort's ability to participate in society is being strengthened.

At the undergraduate level, a different story emerges. These students too are aspirational, but most could not afford higher education outside India. There is no question that the undergraduate classroom is not as diverse in a private university as compared to a public university, but even here changes in modes of pedagogic arrangements can be beneficial. The need to bring issues of diversity up for discussion to these classrooms are more important than ever before, not only due to the privatization of education but the kinds of information that is available to young adults from a variety of sources, that are often entirely based on propaganda.

A case in point is how I start all my courses that are introductory by detailing power relationships and always using the student-teacher relationship as an example. This allows me to do two things, establish the professional

1. NCR is an acronym for National Capital Region, which is a planning region centered on the city of Delhi. Delhi – NCR encompasses Delhi and several districts surrounding it from the states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

relationship that exists in student-instructor engagement, but also the skewed power structure to engage in a discussion on sexual advances and sexual harassment. Power imbalances must be discussed, as that is what harnesses the abilities of students in my classroom to not only find a space to engage but talk about issues that are otherwise never broached in their lives, or always at a distance. I do think that instructors teaching the social sciences and humanities are placed with a definitive advantage to engage in such conversations and given the rise of the #MeToo movement, the place of social media in our lives and changing understanding of sexualities in India, the undergraduate classroom is the place for these discussions. Asking students about stereotypes that operate on campus especially to judge others is always a great way to make them reflective of and engage in conversations on racism in India. Routinely the color of skin and the shape of facial features emerge as deeply encoded in how students' notions of 'self' emerges from how they make sense of 'others' from different parts of India (Sax 292, Engleke 85). This allows for conversations on racism in India, that have often left classrooms silent, simply because the possibility of imagining ourselves as racist has not occurred to most middle-class Indians.

Similarly, I brought an ethnography from Lahore, Pakistan to discuss caste differences to my class. This was done to elicit two sorts of responses. First, if Pakistan has a majority of Muslims (whereas India has a Hindu majority), how can caste exist in Pakistan, given caste is seminally related to Hinduism? Second, in piquing students interests in this way and reminding them of their privilege – only those from dominant castes have never needed to discuss their caste – can conversations on how most students in my class have domestic help who are given different food and water, often in separate utensils from them and their families, allows me to bring caste practices into their homes. Stories emerge from the immediacies of their lived realities, and telling and listening to them together are critical to transformative diversity education. The ability to question unquestioned issues (such as gender or caste) and notice them, stems from bringing these issues to the spaces that are most intimate for students, their classrooms and their homes. I see the need to have such conversations as more important than ever before, and especially with those students that can afford private education in India, as a means for them to think through and question their struggle (or lack of it) to participate in society.

Private universities in the Indian context are also markedly different from public universities, as they are not spaces of student protest in the same way. But using the classroom to engage in conversations that are often difficult and becomes modes of allyship of upper caste and class students in India, is a means to inculcate self-reflexivity in those individuals that are likely to control and hold the larger ability to wield their weight and speak more loudly as they aspire to become income generating individuals. The social sciences and humanities are best placed in this dynamic at the higher education level, to equip our students, to listen, speak up, question, support, and rage on as to who 'participates in society' and at whose expense.

Yours Sincerely,
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Vasundhara Bhojvaid is Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology at Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi-NCR. As a social anthropologist her research explores the intersections of science, air pollution, climate change and ecological relationships in India. Her articles have appeared in *The Journal of Material Culture, and Cultural Anthropology*.

Now Is Not the Time to Wait

TIM SANDS

Dear Higher Education,

In my nearly fifty years of engagement with higher education, I can recall no five-year period more fraught with challenges than the last five. We have navigated a historic pandemic, the social upheaval that followed the murder of George Floyd, the court-mandated end to affirmative action in college admissions, and the ongoing backlash against "DEI." Reflecting on my service as a university president at two public land-grant institutions over the past decade, I feel a tenuous sense of pride for opening the gates to underrepresented and underserved students, and some trepidation for what my successor, presumably one of you, will face when my time is up. I am pleased to share some of the wisdom I have gained to accompany the battle scars of these tumultuous years.

My introduction to economic and cultural diversity began in Hayward, California, where I was raised as the oldest of three children of a high school math teacher and a devoted "homemaker." My parents supported my unusual interests including ornithology, entomology and meteorology, and my business enterprises, which ranged from mowing tiny lawns at a mobile home park (a great racket!) to running a silk-screen printing business.

Hayward in the 1960s and '70s was a cannery town. I worked as a member of the Teamsters union in the summer, sorting, cooking, canning, bottling, and packaging all sorts of tomato products. About half of the families in Hayward spoke Spanish or Portuguese at home, many of whom were the descendants of people who came to work in the cannery or harvest fruit from the orchards. I encountered wonderful people and cultures, but also developed a clear sense that I did not want cannery work to be part of my future.

I was fortunate to attend the local public university, UC Berkeley, on a Regents scholarship that covered my tuition at $212/quarter. I worked as a houseboy at 1 Canyon Road for Mrs. Dorothea Torrey Kelly, the matriarch of a family that had lived in that home since the day of the great earthquake of 1906. My room was free in exchange for about 10 hours/week doing odd jobs and maintaining the prolific ivy that covered the craftsman-style home located above Memorial Stadium. I also served as a hasher at the Alpha Phi sorority down the hill where I received two meals a day in exchange for serving dinner and cleaning up afterwards with the hasher crew. This allowed me to afford my college education without taking out a loan or depleting savings, something that would be almost impossible today for a student with modest resources.

After a 25-year career in industry at Bell Communications Research and as a professor at my alma mater and at Purdue University, I had an opportunity to move into the role of provost at Purdue. I had not served as a dean or a department head; my only previous academic administrative appointments were as chair of the executive committee of an interdisciplinary graduate program at Berkeley, and then as a research center director at Purdue. Becoming provost at Purdue in 2010 awakened latent themes from my own experiences around college access and the critical role of universities in facilitating social and economic mobility. As provost, I was privileged to have responsibility for supporting the full range of academic disciplines along with enrollment management, our community and cultural centers, and our struggling but persistent efforts in diversity and inclusion.

My time as provost at Purdue was relatively short, totaling about three and one-half years in two stints sandwiching six months as acting president that bridged the presidencies of France Córdova and Mitch Daniels. In

that brief period, I learned enough to realize what I didn't know about the experiences of underrepresented and underserved students, faculty, and staff. I was well tutored, especially by Dr. Christine Taylor, the chief diversity officer at the time, along with long-time members of the Black Caucus. We made some progress in inclusion and diversity, but not enough, and always against passive resistance by some. As I left that role in 2014 to take the position of president at Virginia Tech, Dr. Taylor challenged me to make inclusion and diversity a hallmark of my new presidency. Knowing that I was moving to an institution in a former state of the Confederacy added to a compelling sense of mission I felt at that time.

In preparation for the transition, I had the opportunity to do a deep dive into institutional data and explore the history of Virginia Tech and the Commonwealth. As I interviewed the university's faculty, staff, students, alumni, and partners. I uncovered three important strategic imperatives for my new role:

First, although Virginia Tech's enrollment was stable, interest in the institution from prospective students was stagnant. It had only been a comprehensive university since 1970. Its history from 1872 through the 1950s as a White, male military institute had instilled a strong culture but demographic trends were not in Virginia Tech's favor and the institution was well behind its public land-grant research university peers. We had to open the door to attract students who might not have considered Virginia Tech as an option in the past.

Second, employers loved Virginia Tech students for their work ethic, practical smarts, and commitment to service, but they were concerned with the lack of cultural competencies that were difficult to develop among a predominantly White and relatively wealthy student body.

Third, I was struck by the history of Virginia as the landing spot of the first enslaved Africans in what is now the United States. Over 400 years of history encompassing slavery, Jim Crow, and Massive Resistance had created a tremendous gap in generational wealth among Black and White residents of the Commonwealth. Compounding this gap was a long history of impoverished Scots Irish in Appalachia that contrasted with the wealth in the so-called Golden Crescent spanning northern Virginia, Richmond, and Hampton Roads. I concluded that a focus on inclusion and diversity was central to the university's prospects for future growth and relevance.

That challenge was top of mind on my first day when I arrived in my office to find a freshly issued report on inclusion and diversity at Virginia Tech. That report recounted decades of effort yielding cycles of modest progress followed by periods of retrenchment. The report concluded that repeating that cycle would not yield different results. The task force recommended a completely new approach with a counterintuitive first step – eliminate the office of diversity and inclusion. The university had come to consider that office to be the proverbial "office down the hall," which was responsible for all things diversity and inclusion. Members of the community could wash their hands of the obligation to focus on diversity and inclusion – the "Office" would take care of it. That resonated with my experience at Purdue. I suspect the same could be said about many historically White universities.

What would replace the Office? It was to be a transfer of the commitment to everyone, starting at the top and at the bottom and meeting in the middle. This became known as InclusiveVT. As the ownership for InclusiveVT took hold, we opened a new office of inclusion and diversity (OID) with the primary role of facilitating, not replacing, our community commitment. I hired Dr. Menah Pratt to lead the new OID. Menah came from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where she had responsibility for diversity, inclusion, and strategic affairs. Wearing the same two hats at Virginia Tech, Dr. Pratt was well positioned to ensure that inclusion and diversity was directly integrated into strategic planning. Looking back, this was critical to the success we have achieved so far. Sustainable progress in diversity and inclusion requires complete integration into everything the university strives to accomplish.

Over the past decade our successes include an increase in the number of undergraduate students identifying as Black from 834 to 1,876 (125% increase) and an increase in first-generation students from 4,346 to 5,780 (33% increase). These increases have been purposeful, as we lowered superfluous barriers rather than lowering standards. Undergraduate applications have grown from 21,000 for Fall 2014 to 50,000 for Fall 2024. The applicants are more diverse in almost every dimension. The result is a dramatically different campus environment. Our students, regardless of background, have opportunities to gain cultural competencies that would have been

difficult a decade ago. Our steady commitment to diversity and inclusion resulted in Virginia Tech being named a Diversity Champion by INSIGHT Into Diversity Magazine for eight years running.

While we have much to celebrate, we also recognize that change is difficult to sustain. As we approached the pandemic, we had steadily reduced the disparities in 4-year graduation rates for underrepresented or underserved students (including underrepresented minority, Pell-eligible, first-generation, and veteran students) relative to the student population as a whole to 1.8 percentage points for the 2017 entering cohort. That gap increased to 4.2 percentage points for the 2019 entering cohort. The pandemic exposed a lack of resilience under the stress of the pandemic, primarily for those without generational wealth. We also learned that our students of color and low-income students who were working part-time jobs were less likely to have secured a first destination upon graduation than the wealthier students with built in networks and the flexibility to pursue paid internships. While I believe our students and our institution will recover in time, the pandemic was a humbling experience for all.

When I think back on the last decade, today's politically charged backlash against "DEI" can be viewed superficially as a reaction to the activism around Black Lives Matter, but of course it is deeper than that. We are living in a time-capsule moment when the pendulum is swinging with greater amplitude than anyone can recall. Our actions in this tempestuous time will be scrutinized by historians many decades from now. Did we stay the course, or did we abandon principles to respond to political and societal transients, having to reverse tactics again and again?

A salient example is the tension between free speech on campus and our duty to keep our students and employees safe in the aftermath of the October 7, 2023, terrorist attacks by Hamas in Israel. Are we actively managing the tension, or are we taking the seemingly easier route of swinging with the political winds? At Virginia Tech, we have tried to stay true to our long-standing "Principles of Community,"[1] which reflect the complexities of balancing free speech and academic freedom with maintaining physical safety and an inclusive community. As an educational institution, we owe it to our students to provide tools for civil discourse across differences, and to our faculty to protect their ability to seek the truth through scholarly work.

What can we as academic leaders do to meet the challenges of the future? The upheaval of the past four years has exposed the real divide in our society between those with a promising future and those who have all but lost hope. Institutions of higher education have an obligation to address this divide. If we fail, our institutions will wither along with society. I do not yet have complete clarity on the path forward, but two challenges are compelling and addressable.

First, we must recognize that the lack of generational wealth has made college unaffordable and inadvisable for many. As Paul Tough has illuminated,[2] the advantages of a college degree in building wealth (the "college wealth gap") are negligible or negative for many of those who lack the resources to avoid taking on oppressive debt, and at the same time must work 20, 30 or 40 hours per week to stay in college. These students lack the networks and workplace skills that are readily achieved through the paid internships and familial connections that are strong predictors of a successful launch upon graduation. We need to take the same energy we have applied to DEI and refocus it into addressing the wealth and opportunity gap.

Second, much of the public has lost faith in higher education in part because scholars of inequity have not been able to separate the dispassionate search for truth from the need to personally address inequity through activism. That a scholar, through their research and lived experience, would find it difficult not to act is understandable and very human response. Unfortunately, the general public has almost completely lost faith in the scholarship of the activist. There is a fine line to be walked, and I have seen some of my colleagues do this well, but scholarship and activism are nevertheless in tension.

In closing, to my colleagues in higher education leadership and to the faculty, now is not the time to watch passively in the hope that the pendulum will swing back to the days when colleges and universities were among

1. https://www.inclusive.vt.edu/about/vtpoc.html
2. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/05/magazine/college-worth-price.html

the most highly respected institutions in the United States. As my late father-in-law often said, "reputations last longer than deserved, whether good or bad." That pendulum has no restoring force. It is not swinging back without definitive and sustained action by all of us. That is our generational challenge.

With hope,

Tim Sands

President, Virginia Tech

About the author

Tim Sands

Timothy D. Sands is the 16th president of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and a professor in the College of Engineering. Since joining Virginia Tech in 2014, he has worked collaboratively with the provost and university leadership to set the university on track to become a leading modern, global, land-grant institution. Under President Sands' leadership, undergraduate enrollment has been increased by 5,000 to achieve the benefits of scale while preserving the strong sense of community rooted in our motto, Ut Prosim (That I May Serve). President Sands initiated InclusiveVT in 2015, leading an effort that has increased the enrollment of underrepresented minority (URM) students by 88 percent while closing the 4- year graduation rate gap from 10 percentage points to 1 percentage point. URM and underserved students (Pell-eligible, first-generation, and veterans) now make up nearly 40 percent of the entering class, including transfers. President Sands' recent awards and honors include The Edward Bouchet Legacy Award, the National GEM Consortium's Academic Leadership Award, the Virginia Latino Higher Education Network's Leadership Impact Award, and the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council's Regional Leadership Award. He has published more than 250 refereed papers and conference proceedings and has been granted 21 patents in electronic and optoelectronic materials and devices. His recent research efforts have focused on the design and development of novel nanocomposite materials for environmentally friendly and cost-effective solid-state lighting, direct conversion of heat to electrical power, and thermoelectric refrigeration. He holds faculty appointments in the Bradley Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering and the Department of Materials Science and Engineering in the College of Engineering, with research interests in microelectronics, optoelectronics, and nanotechnology. He is a fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, the Materials Research Society, and the National Academy of Inventors. As part of his civic engagement and community leadership, President Sands chairs the board of directors for the Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF) and the Virginia Space Grant directors for the Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF) and the Virginia Space Grant Consortium. He serves on the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the Northern Virginia Technology Council (NVTC) and is a member of the Boards of the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), the University Research Alliance (URA), and is an ex-officio member of the Board of the Northern Virginia Chamber of Commerce. He is also a member of the Board of Visitors of the National Intelligence University. Before coming to Virginia Tech, President Sands was executive vice president for academic affairs and provost of Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, serving as acting president in 2012. Throughout his career, he has participated in and led research teams and academic programs that have been characterized by open collaboration across a wide array of disciplines. Before becoming provost, President Sands served as the Mary Jo and Robert L. Kirk Director of the Birck Nanotechnology Center in Purdue's Discovery Park. He was a professor of materials science and engineering at the University of California, Berkeley, and directed research groups at Bell Communications Research (Bellcore) in Red Bank, New Jersey. President Sands earned a bachelor's degree with highest honors in engineering physics and a master's degree and a doctorate in materials science from

the University of California, Berkeley. He joined the Purdue faculty in 2002 as the Basil S. Turner Professor of Engineering in the schools of Materials Engineering and Electrical and Computer Engineering.

Speak Your Truth or "They'll Kill You and Say You Enjoyed It."

ANDREA N. BALDWIN

Dear Higher Education,

My government name – as Black people say – is Andrea Natasha Baldwin. To my preteen son, I am mom – though recently, he has started referring to me as mother (in that tone that mothers of preteen sons can probably relate to). To my husband of 20 years, I am sweetheart. My maternal family has called me G all my life; my friends call me A or Ann; and my students call me Dr. B or simply Baldwin. I respond to all these titles because I am more than my work, and yet my work impacts all other aspects of my life and the lives of people I love.

I am an immigrant, a first-generation university graduate, and an associate professor of Gender and Ethnic Studies in the School for Cultural and Social Transformation at the University of Utah. My job helps pay for my son's private school tuition since we live in a state where he cannot go to school in the district he is zoned for because there is an ongoing [Federal Justice Department investigation for racism](#) stemming from the [death by suicide of a 10 year old Black girl](#). Income from my job also supports my parents back home in Barbados, who, after working hard all their lives, cannot afford to live on their fixed retirement incomes in a region that is rapidly becoming unaffordable to its citizens as the Caribbean caters to the needs and tastes of Western tourists.

Before I became an academic, I was an attorney and then a trade policy specialist. I knew when I worked in those jobs that I didn't want to keep doing them, simply because I wasn't passionate about them. But academia, I loved it immediately. I love teaching, I love that I get to research the lives and experiences of Black people globally, and I love mentoring Black (queer) women. After over ten years in academia, I still love my job, but I am sick and tired of being sick and tired of how the lives, experiences, and scholarship of Black and brown people, particularly women and queer folks, are constantly being devalued by the university and used as fodder for politicians' careers.

I am writing this letter because I feel like nowhere is safe for marginalized and minoritized people in academia. I have moved my family four times between 2015 and 2022 to take up positions in institutions when the position I held became untenable. And here now again in 2024, I find myself in a similar situation as the conditions for marginalized and minoritized faculty at public institutions have started to rapidly deteriorate in the state of Utah. I am tired of moving, I am tired of running, I am just tired!

In a deeply divided United States, where politics has historically played out on the backs of racialized people, from slavery to Jim Crow to the Civil Rights Movement to Black Lives Matter, the lives of the marginalized and minoritized have yet again become a highly charged political football. In this time of anti-critical race theory, everything about our lives appears to be up for grabs.

I took a position at the University of Utah in 2022 after a tumultuous time in the Department of Sociology at Virginia Tech. That year, all three Black women in the department left, feeling undervalued and unappreciated. People ask me all the time, why Utah? It is a deep red state with conservative politics. My response is always, I didn't choose the University of Utah; I chose the School for Cultural and Social Transformation – or Transform for short. As one of only three such schools in the entire country, Transform was born of student protest. It houses

the Divisions of Gender Studies, Ethnic Studies, and the Disability and Pacific Island Studies programs and when I interviewed with Transform, I knew I had found my people: Black, brown, and indigenous feminist activists and community advocates, and outspoken queer and disability scholars. During my first year under the deanship of the incomparable Kathryn Bond-Stockton, who was responsible for taking the students' vision and building our school, I felt I had made the best career decision. And even though Utahn culture is a bit peculiar sometimes, there is something about waking up to those mountains that just felt right. But like most things, this turned out to be too good to be true.

In the academic year 2023/24, Dean Stockton announced that after almost seven years of leading Transform, she thought we were now in a place where we were strong enough to grow without her. In July 2023, a new dean was hired who was not the top candidate for any of the faculty in our school. By February 2024, faculty and staff had filed a concerning number of Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) discrimination reports. It should have been clear then that change was coming. The Dean decreed that we could not hang our trans flags in the Transform suite at a time when anti-trans legislation was making its way through the legislative session and the Young Americans for Freedom student group were openly targeting trans lives with their anti-trans propaganda and programming on campus. She was condescending to staff, made several of them cry, forced one to resign, and caused one to seek medical attention. She told staff that they could not attend a student protest about the genocide in Gaza, and hesitated to publicly support MECHA when their sponsorship was withdrawn by the university for engaging in student protest at a time when it was almost certain that anti-DEI legislation targeting Black and brown people and communities on our campus would become law. By February 2024, my colleagues and I had had enough and wrote a letter to the SVP that we could not work with this new dean. We were successful in our petition and currently have an acting dean. As my colleagues and I were experiencing this deeply intense traumatic experience, we were also watching the state legislature as their deeply transphobic and racist bills were closer to becoming law.

On January 30th 2024, Governor Spencer Cox signed into law the H.B. 261 Equal Opportunity Initiatives bill, and two months later on March 12th the H.B. 438 Higher Education Revisions bill. H.B. 261, in summary, prohibits so-called discriminatory practices on public campuses, that is,

"engaging in or maintaining a policy, procedure, practice, program, office, initiative, or required training that, based on an individual's personal identity characteristics" including but not limited to "engaging in or maintaining a policy, procedure, practice, program, office, initiative, or required training that: (A) asserts that one personal identity characteristic is inherently superior or inferior to another personal identity characteristic; (B) asserts that an individual, by virtue of the individual's personal identity characteristics, is inherently privileged, oppressed, racist, sexist, oppressive, or a victim, whether consciously or unconsciously; … (H) asserts that socio-political structures are inherently a series of power relationships and struggles among racial groups; … (K) considers an individual's personal identity characteristics in determining receipt of state financial aid or other state financial assistance, including a scholarship award or tuition waiver; or (L) is referred to or named diversity, equity, and inclusion."

The University's initial response to the bill was to send out communication about what language employees should use. We were advised to refrain from using words like intersectionality, and that instead of using inclusion, we should use belonging. Faculty and staff with diversity, equity, or inclusion in their titles had their titles changed. The powers that be made assurances that faculty would be protected if their research and teaching required them to use prohibited words, and yet in late June, I was advised to remove the word activist from my Lab's website as a precautionary measure. It goes without saying that we were not only confused but mad as hell, and after a suicide attempt by a Trans student, the then-director of the LGBT Resource Center broke his silence. Needless to say, he is no longer employed at the University. To add insult to injury, after signing all of these bills including the bill that bans gender-affirming care for transgender youth during the last legislative session, Governor Cox opened Pride Month on June 1st, 2024, with more erasure as he proclaimed it Bridge Building Month.

On July 1st, the Division of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion was eliminated, and without consultation with faculty,

the University closed its student centers, including the LGBT Resource Center, the Black Cultural Center, and the Women's Resource Center, even though Governor Cox stated that this was not necessary to be in compliance with the law. Most of us found out about the closures after the fact, and in a series of townhalls with faculty, we were informed of the creation of a new Community and Cultural Engagement Center, which will take on the functions of the three centers, disregarding the long historical legacy and importance of these centers.

With regard to H.B. 438, in addition to implementing a post tenure review by a committee that includes members external to the department of the faculty under review, states that "Beginning July 1, 2024, a tenured faculty member may be dismissed from employment at a degree-granting institution" for a number of reasons, including but not limited to "if the program in which the tenured faculty member works is discontinued by the degree-granting institution or modified to such a degree that the tenured faculty member's position is no longer needed." This particular section of the bill is extremely concerning when one considers the quickness with which the University got rid of the student centers and the wider national attack on disciplines that make up Transform, particularly Gender Studies. Our experiences, our scholarship, our lives are at risk of erasure and we are actively working to document and archive the histories of Black, brown and queer people, organizations and programs, at the University of Utah before they are all gone.

At this point in this letter, I am expected to offer a solution, hope for a way forward, but as the pieces keep moving at dizzying speed, I feel like there is no ground beneath my feet. I am honestly not sure what the way forward looks like. Several of my colleagues in Transform have left for new jobs in more hospitable states. I don't want to move my family again. My husband just received his Ph.D. in management and landed a teaching position at the University of Utah's business school. The move from Virginia to Utah was difficult for my son. After therapy and finding a new friend group only last year, I can't fathom the emotional and psychological impact of moving him again. And yet, it would be irresponsible of me not to get back on the job market, knowing that with my job in jeopardy, other people's livelihoods would be negatively impacted.

As a Black feminist I am committed to speaking truth to power and will continue to publicly advocate for justice because as Zora Neale Hurston wrote, "If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it" (1937). This is all I have to offer: that we personally stay vigilant because currently, I hold out no hope that academia will do right by us. I anticipate that as the anti-DEI, anti-trans, anti-Black, anti-CRT, anti-feminist political climate continues to spread across the country it will get worse for marginalized and minoritized academics before it gets better. But as one of my mentors told me, the pendulum swings in both directions, and one day we will see change.

With lots of care,

Andrea N. Baldwin

Associate Professor, School for Cultural and Social Transformation at the University of Utah

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About the author

Andrea N. Baldwin

Andrea N. Baldwin is an Associate professor of Gender and Ethnic Studies and a 2023-2024 Presidential Fellow at the University of Utah. Dr. Baldwin who is an attorney-at-law holds a master's degree in international trade policy and a Ph.D. in gender and development studies and is the founder of the Black Feminist Eco Lab at the University of Utah.

The View from the Aftermath of the Attack on DEI

ANNIE L. MCGOWAN

Dear Higher Education,

I am a first generation, African American female. I grew up in a small town in Mississippi that remained segregated after the Civil Rights Act of 1964. My parents were entrepreneurs who provided me with the opportunity to learn business as I spent my childhood working in our family business. I have spent the past 30 years as an accounting professor and administrator at a large public land grant, Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the south. My recent past role as the Vice President and Associate Provost for Diversity at that Institution, was eliminated by state legislative action. During my tenure in this cabinet level position, others often expressed their opinions about the difficulty of this role. Others who fill similar university level roles would agree that the difficulty does not lie in the work itself, but in the myriad of obstacles, political and otherwise, that stand in the way of the work that needs to be done. In hopes of saving this work in other regions, I share my experiences as a chief diversity officer with the goal of highlighting two crucial points:

First, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues are not well understood by those who have never experienced them. The issues that require resolution in higher education extend well beyond those related to race. DEI offices serve organizations through exploration and resolution of issues that arise when people with varying identities, backgrounds and ideologies attempt to work together. These issues are often correlated. Consequently, obstacles to resolving them will likely hamper progress in other areas. DEI offices improve outcomes at the individual and organizational levels by providing professionals who are dedicated to helping faculty, staff, and students navigate existing norms and barriers while identifying and eliminating institutional barriers to success.

Second, our nation's historical and systemic focus on race has created disparities that still need to be addressed. Failure to address these issues in the American higher education system threatens America's capabilities to adapt to the changing demands of the workforce. Eliminating diversity offices will not move us closer to resolution.

When I moved to Texas to pursue a Ph.D. in accounting, I did so with the intention of returning to my home state to teach at a Historically Black College (HBCU). Having experienced HBCU education both as a student and a professor, I had a unique perspective on how to engage with the HBCU student body. In the HBCU environment, my talents were nurtured. I had no shortage of mentors to guide me on my career path. The environment, the food, the music on the yard was comfortable and familiar and as an aside, ell there is nothing else quite like a HBCU homecoming. Most importantly, the HBCU environment allowed me the ease of matriculating free from the distractions that come with feeling othered and marginalized.

My experience at a Predominantly White University (PWI) would significantly broaden my perspective. Of course, the contrast in the level of resources available at a PWI compared to a HBCU is striking. However, the awakening occurred when I was asked to assist as advisor of the student chapter of the National Association of Black Accountants. While students of color at large PWIs are surrounded by better facilities and were exposed to more and different opportunities, like their counterparts at HBCU, they needed unique guidance and encouragement to fully leverage the opportunities, resources, and services. Further, given the lack of representation at PWIs, it struck me that the role that I could play for these students rivaled my potential contribution at an HBCU. I could offer the

underrepresented minority student a little piece of the comfort that I had enjoyed while nestled safely within the halls of my HBCU.

With this logic in mind, I joined the business school faculty at a large public land grant institution in Texas. For the first half of my career, I focused on research, teaching, and student mentoring. My mentees were not limited to students of color, but I was intentional in my outreach to underrepresented populations. It was important that these students be exposed to someone with more than a surface understanding of their identity because sometimes you don't know what you don't know until someone informs you that you need to know. When I walk the hallways between classes, I notice homogeneity among the groups of students that gather there. When I peek into the classrooms, I notice students of color gravitating towards the back of the large lecture halls. I notice that in my classes, when students are allowed to self-select into groups, they naturally gravitate towards the familiar and that it is often left to me as the professor to assign the few students of color to groups.

Student attrition in higher education is a widely studied topic (Quaye et al.; McCain and Perry). Studies have confirmed the existence of a significant positive relationship between faculty diversity and measures of student success including retention and graduation rates for URM students (Museus). A recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* makes a point that I believe is relevant here. Despite the depth of reliance on academic research in making decisions about hiring practices, salary adjustments, and tenure decisions, there is little evidence that those in positions to make decisions that affect the path of higher education apply the research in operational decision making. I would go a step further. Although data analytic tools are widely used in industry to understand the nuances of organizational effectiveness and human behavior, its use to understand the differing needs across identities in higher education is often met with a level of resistance that is difficult to comprehend. People from diverse backgrounds and experiences may respond differently to stimuli and may need different tools to succeed.

The Office for Diversity at my university provided oversight for a faculty hiring program designed to attract faculty who demonstrated a commitment to promoting a climate for diversity, equity and inclusion as demonstrated through their scholarship. After all, academic research has demonstrated a clear association between student success and faculty representation, particularly for students from underserved communities. As a part of the application process, candidates were asked to provide a statement explaining how their commitment to diversity was demonstrated through their teaching, research, and university service. All hiring decisions were made at the department or college level. The program objectives were simply to generate a diverse pool for the small number of positions filled through the program and to build a community around the scholars who were employed through the program. The intention was that this community of scholars would help the university build a support structure equipped to meet the increasingly diverse needs of our student body. The University's Office of the general council reviewed the program guidelines and found them to be non-discriminatory. In addition, we worked closely with the Office of Human Resources, Faculty Affairs, and college level leadership to ensure that policies and procedures were being closely adhered to. The merit-based process resulted in the hiring of an esteemed community of scholars created from the process included junior faculty from all racial, ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds. The University's Board of Regents was impressed enough by the outcomes to invest an additional $5.25 million in support of the program. In addition, the Office for Diversity had recently helped to secure the university's federal designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution. The HSI designation would make the university eligible to compete for federal grants designed to achieve the goals of our office centering on the Hispanic student population. One of the key priories for HSIs was also faculty diversity. For a brief moment, it appeared that we were moving in the right direction. At least until the wave of attacks on DEI commenced.

In May 2023, the Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 17 banning Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offices in Texas public institutions of higher education. The definition of diversity included in the bill bears no similarity to the definition crafted by scholars in the field. Diversity as defined in Senate Bill 17 is simply discrimination- "programs that give preference on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin". The bill allows for certain carve outs. For example, when applying for a grant, faculty are not prohibited from highlighting the University's work in supporting first generation or low-income students or students from underserved populations. This carve out is a

little confusing when you consider the correlation between race and membership in an underserved population. Exceptions were also made for academic course instruction, scholarly research, student recruitment and student organization activities.

Other than DEI activities required by law in support of the differently abled and veterans, the only activity that remains is faculty hiring. The Texas Law explicitly defines a diversity, equity, and inclusion office as "an office or division that engages in hiring or employment practices at the institution that give preferential treatment on the basis of race, sex, color, or ethnicity, other than through the use of non-discriminatory hiring processes in accordance with any applicable state and federal antidiscrimination laws." Senate Bill 17 would also include a ban on the use of diversity statements.

Texas is one of the most diverse states in the nation with a population that is 40.2% Hispanic/Latino American, 39.8% non-Hispanic White, 13.4% African American, 5.7% Asian, and 1.1% American Indian (Census.gov, 2022). Texas Public Universities, particularly those that are land grant institutions operate under mission to serve all the constituents of the state, of which more than half are from underserved populations. There is a deep disconnect between the higher education goals proclaimed in the mission statements presented on websites and the actions of the higher education administrators charged with defending and promoting the work that institutions engage in to ensure the proper education of its constituents. While the research that forms the very foundation of many public institutions, points us in the direction of what students need to be successful, legislators in states across the south are spending hours to obstruct and eliminate the structures that help to provide these resources while higher education administrators remain mostly silent on this issue. I wish now that I could have back all the hours that I have spent in strategic planning meetings developing mission and vision statements. Eloquent words on a website will not get us where we need to be to meet the demands of the workforce.

DEI efforts were formalized at many universities because of institutional failures in meeting the federal government labor and enrollment requirements. I call upon higher education to take the time to understand the work of the DEI professional and scholar and to leverage them to the advantage of our institutions. Higher education leaders have accepted important responsibility for advancing higher education opportunities for all students. After all, the work that needs to be done to understand and eliminate the barriers to social mobility for all students will not simply disappear when the offices leading the charge are eliminated. It just becomes more difficult to maneuver.

Closing signature,

Annie McGowan

Bill and Gina Flores Professor of Business, Texas A&M University

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About the author

Annie L. McGowan

Dr. Annie L. McGowan has been named interim Vice President and Associate Provost for Diversity at Texas A&M University effective Dec. 1, 2020. She brings to the Office for Diversity noteworthy leadership experience. Most recently, Dr. McGowan served as Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs at Mays Business School, where she holds the Bill and Gina Flores Professorship in Business. She also serves on the university's Diversity Operations Committee.

We Can Take Steps to Overcome our Blinders to the Multiple Harms of Sexual Violence and Enable Higher Education to Fulfill its Mission

M. GABRIELA TORRES

Dear Higher Education,

Our bias to frame sexual violence[1] and gender-based harassment as a purely interpersonal acts has left us unable to see and address the harms of this social practice on the core mission of our institutions: the production and transmission of knowledge. In the academy today, gender-based harassment is endemic. In its 2018 Consensus Study Report, the National Academies for Science, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) highlights that more than half of women staff and faculty in the academy (in all disciplines) have experienced sexual harassment. Sexual violence in Higher Education damages the production of knowledge and creates a hostile environment that pushes women and gender-diverse students and researchers out of academia, particularly in the historically male-dominated fields of STEM research (Molstad, Weinhardt, Jones, 218-30). Worldwide institutions have implemented policies and mechanisms to address sexual violence in recent years, and many countries created legislation to protect survivors from retaliation (NASEM 2023). Yet, sexual violence in higher education remains prevalent across the globe.

As an administrator, faculty member, graduate student, colleague, and advocate working in higher education in three countries (Canada, Ecuador, and the United States), I have either experienced or managed the impact of sexual violence in the academy for more than 25 years. As a graduate student, my experiences ranged from unwelcome remarks to unwelcome touching. As a faculty member, it was stalking that began as soon as I took on a tenure track job. And as a colleague, I have heard it all: experiences that were physically intrusive, deeply humiliating, and too often so heavy to bear that leaving the academy became an existential need. I have seen colleagues who never returned to write their thesis after fieldwork, violated miles away from their support networks and alone where they were sent to study other cultures—and unprepared for the risks and unsupported by their academic programs in the aftermath. For others, the harassment came from graduate advisers, which they endured for decades until it became too much to bear.

It strikes me, dear higher education, that you already know this. We have all seen the signs. Do you remember, perhaps, that overly-personal commentary at public Q&As at your annual academic conference of choice that made you wonder? Or possibly you remember your discomfort with the overly clingy behavior that your inebriated former adviser had with a colleague at that academic cocktail party? What about the time you weren't quite sure what to say when one colleague ogled and commented on another's body parts? And even if you didn't experience any of those, maybe you do remember the academic #MeToo moment early in the 2020s when too many of your

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1. Sexual violence is an umbrella term that includes sexual harassment and sexual assault, among other forms of unwanted non-contact sexual attention. It is my preferred term here because it is not attached to any specific crime or violation of a national legal system in the ways terms that terms like harassment, rape or gender-based violence tend to be.

WE CAN TAKE STEPS TO OVERCOME OUR BLINDERS TO THE MULTIPLE HARMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND
ENABLE HIGHER EDUCATION TO FULFILL ITS MISSION

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colleagues shared brief glimpses of their experiences with sexual violence on social media. Even if you only read articles about #MeToo on social media and did not read your own colleagues' stories, I know we have all read the stories of perpetrators who abused in place for decades, as their institution's very public secret. If not those stories, we surely have read or heard whispers about those who hopped from institution to institution inflicting abuse to new groups of unsuspecting students.

My dear higher education, sexual violence is indeed our very public secret, and we are doing too little to support those who have and continue to experience it and are moving too slowly to curtail the elements of our institutional cultures that enable it to flourish worldwide. There is much more we can do.

Since 2010, I have been advocating and enacting policy change in my own discipline. I have engaged in committee work, taskforces, policy development, and a three-and-a-half-year stint as the inaugural organizational Ombuds for Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault for the American Anthropological Association. In 2018, I worked with my colleague Dianna Shandy to finalize a collaborative and multi-authored process for devising the American Anthropological Association's "Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Policy," which framed instances of sexual violence as scientific misconduct following NASEM's 2018 Consensus Report (209-234). Wanting to work beyond my own discipline, I joined the advisory committee of the NASEM's Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education in 2023 and I am currently working to organize a global network for preventing sexual violence in higher education. My long durée approach to addressing sexual violence as a systemic problem has been to get involved to ensure that good trauma- and support-informed policy and practice is developed and enacted.

As a sector, we can work together to build upon a number of initiatives already underway:

1. Within institutions, develop institutional courage by acting "with accountability, transparency, actively seeking justice, and making changes where needed despite unpleasantness, risk, and short-term costs." Institutional courage requires engaging in practices and policies that are focused on supporting persons who have experienced sexual violence over compliance-focused approaches. In the US context, a key example is rethinking the blind embrace of mandatory reporting policies which too often confuse reporting with supporting potential targets of sexual violence (Holland, Hutchison, Ahrens, Torres).

2. Encourage institutions to participate in communities of practice that are researching and developing new policies and interventions. In the United States, for example, approximately 60 institutions are working together in NASEM's Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education[2] to develop, implement, and assess evidence-based early intervention practices, institutional accountability measures, and pass-the-harasser prevention policies. Similar organizations are at work at the national level in the UK, Chile, Australia, and also in regional organizations covering multiple nations[3].

3. Fund research on sexual violence in higher education. In Canada, for instance, a joint initiative between Women and Gender Equality Canada and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council is dedicating 3.5 million to the study of gender-based violence, higher education contexts included.

4. Support foundations and state research funding agencies that explicitly have zero tolerance for harassment or assault within the agency or at the awardee organizations. The development of policies and offices in the United States' National Science Foundation or the National Institutes of Health are good examples.

And, finally, because the problem of sexual violence is not only systemic but also global,

2. Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education. https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/action-collaborative-on-preventing-sexual-harassment-in-higher-education/about#participants
3. See for example, the UK's 1752 Group, Chile's Proyecto Anillo Disonancias, Australia's Respect.Now.Always., and Africa End Sexual Harassment Initiative

5. Support the development of global networks of practice that can share policy and practice resources, consulting expertise, and begin to engage in much-needed global and cross-cultural research on sexual harassment in the academy.

Beyond the concrete steps outlined above, we can do better going forward by acknowledging the systemic nature of higher education's sexual violence problem and enacting policies and practices that change the very elements of our institutional cultures that sustain sexual violence and their perpetrators. We owe it to ourselves, our students, and to the creation of knowledge with integrity.

In Hope,

M. Gabriela Torres, PhD.

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About the author

M. Gabriela Torres

Dr. M. Gabriela Torres is a transformative leader committed to fostering a more diverse and socially just academy. She is Vice Provost at Rhode Island College. Dr. Torres is an experienced and trained conflict management professional and was the inaugural Ombudsperson for sexual harassment and assault for the American Anthropological Association from 2018-2021. Dr. Torres has been named an adviser to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education as recognition of her expertise and policy work on sexual harassment in the academy. As a scholar, has published over 30 peer–reviewed articles, research reports, and book chapters, in addition to the volumes *Marital Rape: Consent, Marriage, and Social Change in Global Context* and *Sexual Violence in Intimacy: Implications for Research and Policy in Global Health*.

Women in Higher Education in India and The Fight for Democratization

YOGITA SURESH

Dear *Higher Education*,

The Indian higher education system is reeling under a crisis. One that has never looked as grim as it does today.

In 2014, the major right-wing political party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), came to power in India. The BJP has significant ideological and institutional links to the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), a hyper-nationalist, Hindu paramilitary organization. The impetus of the organization is to spread the "Hindu Discipline" and ultimately create a Hindu Nation in India. The organization is historically associated with anti-muslim, anti-women, and casteist movements. The organization has a self-professed vision of creating second-class citizens for various social groups, especially women in its determination to create a predominantly Hindu State. In 2019, the BJP was re-elected with a super majority, with overwhelming financial and ideological support from the corporate sector. Electoral power in India, as in the rest of the world today, is determined by financial support from the corporate sector. According to the Association of Democratic Reform reports, in the year 2017, the BJP received 705 crores (out of 900) in corporate donations, and 90% of the corporate donations, 850 crores, in 2022-23. The figures are important to understand the embeddedness of corporate power in right-wing ideology. This has been particularly detrimental to higher educational spaces.

Since 2014, several higher educational spaces have been under attack by the BJP-RSS regime for promoting "anti-national" ideologies. Any efforts to create a democratic and free academic space have been scrutinized and termed as contradictory to State ideology. Apart from student and faculty activists being stifled, arrested under the draconian UAPA law[1], and or suspended for resisting the systemic closure of public universities, fee hikes, student suicides, neo-liberal policies, and so on (Thapliya 89) even our classrooms are no longer safe spaces. India's academic freedom index has been on a sharp decline since 2014. Institutional autonomy, academic and cultural freedom of expression, and institutional integrity were some identified spaces where academic freedom was curtailed the most (AFI Update 7). Moreover, the lack of a legal framework to protect the academic freedom of students and faculty was emphasized. (ibid). Not only did India see one of its lowest educational budgets in the year 2022-23, with an allocation of a mere 2.9% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but the existing funds for educational schemes for Minorites remain unspent (Mohammed). Fund cuts, cancellation of scholarships and fellowships, closure of public universities, contract-based faculty positions, and arbitrary suspension of students and faculty have all contributed to an insecure, fragmented, and crisis-ridden university space. The Covid-19 pandemic worsened the situation. The enrollment ratio of women drastically declined due to a variety of factors like early marriage, forced employment, inaccessibility to digital devices, and privileging

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1. The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, amended in 2019, is a draconian law that allows the arrest of any citizen under the suspicion of terrorist activities, without any judicial process. In the BJP regime, from 2015-2020, 8371 individuals have been arrested without trial.

the education of the male child due to poverty (Chaudhary). The country also witnessed a grave increase in the dropout rate of students with a secondary school dropout rate as high as 17%.

The enactment of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is significant to this crisis. The latest policy document encourages "self-financed" courses which entail higher fees, and digital education, without considering the digital divide in the country, and the concept of "multiple exits" which allow students to "voluntarily" drop out at any year of the course, thus negating social, economic, and political factors that force students to drop out of college. These measures are not only extremely exclusionary to marginalized castes, the lower classes, and women (AIFRTE 14) but also dilute scientific learning and thinking by restricting public pedagogic spaces that can nurture discourse, experimentation, and free thinking. I argue that it is imperative to place the question of women in higher education in India, with this context in the background.

I was barely 18 when I moved from Bangalore to the capital city, for my undergraduate bachelor's degree in English Honors at Hindu College, Delhi University. Up until then, I lived in the same city, went to the same school, and was cemented inside an Urban "apolitical" bubble that was devoid of any understanding of the socio-political environment outside of myself. Understandably, it came as a shock to me when I saw a banner outside of Delhi University that read "*Hum Bharat Ki Mata Nahi Banenge*"[2] (We will not become the Mother of India). The banner was being erected by members of a women's movement who were preparing for a night-long march across campus to reclaim the night and protest the imposed curfew on women students at Delhi University. The group sang and danced to the lyrics, "*The desire for nights where the moon and the star are not glimpsed through barbed wires, where the sky is not forbidden through rods, through gates and locks*." I was mesmerized by this imagination. It showed the possibilities for a freer, and democratic campus.

By using the slogan of *Bharat Mata*, they not only wanted to reiterate their dissent against the masculinist "protection" of women as Bharat Mata, rooted in conservative right-wing politics but also create a community for women to theorize, resist, and hold discussions in the university about feminist movements and the possibilities of negotiation for a more democratic campus. It created a narrative that approached the question of women's safety, freedom, and rights in the university outside of conservative, protectionist, and surveillance mechanisms. As anticipated, these women were harassed, trolled, and even threatened with violence for their "anti-national" protests and were threatened time and again by right-wing student groups. However, this is the case for every progressive student movement today in India.

I decided to join them, and undoubtedly, despite all their shortcomings, a new world opened to me. This was as much a part of my education as the classroom was. All spaces of the institution contribute towards its pedagogy. As somebody invested in the future of a more accessible, free, and progressive higher education system, I want to argue for the relevance of democratic spaces for women in higher education, and the importance of collectivization to identify, theorize, and resist injustice and discrimination. I want to make two simple points in this chapter: The importance of emphasizing democratic higher educational institutes by reflecting on the experiences of women students that challenge the current political landscape in India and secondly, the contextualization of higher education in India beyond the concept of representation and the "leaky pipeline."

Higher Education and Women in India: Beyond Representation and the Leaky Pipeline:

The All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) Report 2020-21 found that women's enrollment in higher education is almost at parity with men, comprising 49% of the total enrollment. While the pandemic affected the enrollment ratio of women students in the country, Indian universities have never experienced the contemporary volume of female student admissions. While positive in theory, there are of course a myriad of complexities that follow this data like the disappearance of women in employment after college, the conception of educational

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2. The figure of the Bharat Mata (Mother India) originated in Bengali Literature in the late 19th Century. The imagery has since become a personification of nationalism in India. The image of Mother India is depicted by a goddess in a red or saffron saree holding the national flag. The goddess preserves the culture and purity of the country, like the body of a woman as a site of honour and purity – something that is always at threat of being conquered. Symbolizing countries as "female" refers to their ability to be conquered, and is inherently sexist in its portrayal.

degrees as modern dowries, and the cultural barriers that restrict women from migrating away from home to study in the university of their choice, to name a few. The issue of representation of women in educational degrees and the problem of the "leaky pipeline" which refers to the absence of women in higher leadership positions has been well documented and analyzed in Indian and global feminist academia (Blickenstaff 369; Coley, Gressel and Dhillon; Yousaf and Schmiede 3). Researchers have pointed out how women are left out or underrepresented in decision-making, STEM fields, faculty positions, research grants, vice-chancellor, and dean positions, and so on. They have argued for gender sensitization, affirmative action policies, career guidance and counseling for girls, etc. However, what remains understudied is how these women negotiate for democratic spaces once they reach the university and how networks of power in neo-liberal higher education operate to "keep them in check."

With the neoliberal turn in the Indian economy, the promise of a publicly funded education to achieve equality and improve quality of life weakened. The epistemology of the university witnessed a paradigm shift, where creating perfect neo-liberal subjects (Foucault x) to compete in the world economy was prioritized. However, the reliance on education to imagine a better future remained, and with it, the battle for the re-negotiation of education as a greater public good. Surajit Mazumder (22-23) argues that the excessive expansion of higher education has created a diverse social composition, closing the gap between castes, classes, and genders. However, the public expenditure on education is negligible and further reducing. He situates neoliberalism as the backdrop for the increasing unrest amongst students who are faced with the complexities of the neoliberal higher educational space. On the one hand, they are reminded time and again that their education is a luxury and not a right, with extreme financial burdens on their families. This creates a more submissive, insecure, and conformist student base. However, with the increasing diversity on the other hand, they have no choice but to resist the neoliberal policies like fee hikes, canceling of stipends/fellowships, self-financed courses, scrapping of affirmative action policies, and so on, of the higher education system as it is no longer "out there but within institutional spaces" (Ibid, p. 26). This is especially true for women in higher educational spaces today.

The educated woman is a threat. This statement has been historically consistent, with some changes in context. In the contemporary imagination, the assertive educated women who negotiate for democratic spaces are received with the most severe political backlash. The recent Citizen Amendment Act (CAA) protests in 2020 in New Delhi are the perfect example that not only demonstrates how marginalized women negotiate democratic spaces in the university and outside but also how they threaten the status quo of neoliberal higher education.

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was proposed in December 2019 which outlined the granting of citizenship in India based on religion, for persecuted minorities in neighboring countries. The Act deliberately omitted "Muslims" from the list of people eligible for citizenship in the country while mentioning Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, and Jain. Additionally, it also aimed to identify "illegal migrants," while enabling only non-Muslims to regain lost citizenship. The legislation was received by widespread protests across the country, with universities at the forefront of the resistance. What is remarkable about the CAA protests is that it was predominantly Muslim women who came to the streets and fought for their rights. The CAA demonstrations were the longest women-led civic movement in Indian History (Mustafa 2020), resulting in a 101-day sit-in by Muslim Women in Delhi's Shaheen Bagh. Along with their resistance against CAA, the women also remarked how universities were not safe spaces for their Muslim daughters (Kadiwal 10).

Jamia Milia Islamia University (JMIU) became the center for the CAA protests. After several protest demonstrations by the students of JMIU in the streets of Delhi, the Delhi Police broke into the campus on December 15th, 2019, and physically assaulted students and attacked them with batons and tear gas. The powerful image of Muslim women outside of JMIU resisting police brutality during the protest demonstrations was a viral sensation in the Indian media. It questioned the narrative of minority women as submissive and conformist

At the same time, it also presented the significance of public pedagogy and a democratic institution as a right. Their slogans, songs, and resistance against the right-wing neoliberal government, are unforgettable in the discourse of Higher Education in India. The political backlash against the threat of the educated woman followed

soon after. In December 2021, a Government Pre-University College in Udupi, Karnataka[3] imposed an arbitrary hijab ban on Muslim students on the college campus. In the name of uniformity, the college stated that women would no longer be allowed to wear a hijab inside of campus. The arbitrary rule spread to other districts and universities in Karnataka, where far-right groups not only forced women to take off their hijab when they were on campus but also wore saffron scarves in some instances (the symbol of Hindutva) to declare who was in power. The High Court of Karnataka upheld the hijab ban in March 2022 and claimed that the hijab is not an essential religious practice in Islam.

A report published by the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) on the Hijab Ban estimated that 1010 Muslim women students dropped out of universities after the arbitrary hijab ban in Karnataka (2023). It is no coincidence that the hijab row took place within a year of the anti-CAA protest demonstrations by Muslim women on university campuses and the streets. The political backlash responds to the threat of the educated woman.

I refer to this elaborate example to make two points: the women's question in higher education stems beyond their enrollment and their absence in some positions and or academic fields. It is an important academic exercise to study the life worlds of women in higher education and how they resist power and authority to carve a democratic space to not only theorize, imagine, and exercise academic freedom, but also merely exist in a safe space and receive a quality education. The recent mass-scale protests at IIT-BHU[4] and Indraprastha University, Delhi[5] against sexual assault and demand for redressal mechanisms is an example of how women strive to merely exist in a safe higher educational space. Secondly, it is relevant to understand the structures of power that women threaten when they occupy spaces in higher education and assert their right to equality and basic human rights. Especially in the contemporary political fabric, questions around women's rights and far-right governance become crucial. It is important to ask, who occupies these structures of power and what are the social, political, and economic fabric of the institutions that support these structures? I believe that these are incredibly relevant endeavors for the academic community.

Sincerely,
Yogita Suresh
Ph.D. Candidate

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3. Karnataka is a State in the Southern part of India with the ruling BJP government at the time of the hijab ban.
4. Mass scale protests led by women students erupted at the Indian Institute of Technology Banaras Hindu University after a female student was molested and held at gunpoint in November 2023.
5. Women students of Indraprastha University in Delhi took the streets in March 2023, after several women students were molested by men who broke into the university during a college fest by climbing the university walls

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About the author

Yogita Suresh

Yogita Suresh is a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at a university in India. Her research interests include Science and Technology Studies (STS), Feminist Theory and Praxis, Engineering Studies, and Higher Education Studies.

WHY WE NEED YOU TO LISTEN

Fighting for Visibility for Disability

ASHLEY SHEW

Dear Higher Education,

I'm probably going to do this incorrectly. Sometimes we can't do it the correct way, or it's extra taxing to do so. And what's correct anyway? Formats and structures should suit the material, the people, the goals that exist in the space between us and the world, not the other way around. People will critique us disabled people for not taking the right path, complaining in the right way, going to the proper committee, but there is never a right way when you are disabled. You are structured to wear us out in search of what we need, to burn us down if we seek justice or even equal treatment, to bleed us dry if we seek to be heard.

I'm writing to you as my disabled self, the face I show mostly to my disabled comrades here. We are here, you know? Maybe you don't. It seems like maybe you don't know, or don't want to know, or maybe think we don't truly belong here. And I get to read another "access statement" or "accommodations inquiries statement" that in no way gives me the information I need to know whether I will need accommodations there or not. Will there be stairs? Will autocaptions be turned on? Will restrooms be accessible? How far is this event from parking? Will I have to focus for hours in a row, or will there be a break? Sometimes we just need a description of how things will be to let us know if an event is accessible to us – and we don't all need the same stuff.

As an aside, I love working alongside autistic colleagues. They are blunt about setting things up in ways that make sense, honest in their assessments of our current situation. You should probably listen to them a lot more than you do. While I'm neurodivergent, I'm not autistic, so please understand that my resting bitch face is not an accident of my neurology, but an actual mean mug for you. For you, dear higher ed. I bring my resting bitch face for you. Resting, because I *need* more rest. Bitching, because you don't even realize how you squeeze us out, push us under, and make being with you a pain. Facing, because where else can I be that will let me do so many things with, despite, and because of my disabilities? I love it and hate it here.

Yes, I'm getting to the part where I introduce myself to you. I've been here – we've been here – always. Disability is a normal and natural part of human life, a social category and a functional assessment, a judgment and a curse, and a source of creativity, community, adaptivity, and joy. We are multitudinous and pulchritudinous. But we are also asked to hide to be with you, or to bend ourselves into impossible shapes, to remain here, unless we want retaliation, dear higher ed.

You don't like the word retaliation. You have lawyers for that. But retaliation for being disabled, for asking for accommodation, is so common here. We talk about it among ourselves; the rare among us actually file a complaint. We know that complaints can also bring retaliation. Better for many to remain silent or continue contorting – to continue passing as nondisabled.

I can't exactly hide what I'm working with. I'm a hard-of-hearing chemo brained amputee with Crohn's disease and tinnitus. The amputee part gives me away easily as disabled, but amputees, especially those of us with prosthetics, don't often receive the harshest treatment here. People tend to believe us when we state our needs when we are literally missing a chunk of our bodies. It's trickier for my friends with non-apparent and more variable disabilities – or for me to even broach the topic of my other disabilities. I started writing about

being an amputee long before I felt like I could talk about my cognitive impairments due to the year of intense chemotherapy I endured. You remember my medical leave, right?

We sometimes need to ask – have to ask – for accommodations, but this opens us up to scrutiny.

And it's a lot of paperwork to exist here as "officially" disabled, and it doesn't end. New boss. New chair. New symptom. New administrator. Updated paperwork. Sometimes the interactive process is far too much interaction when what we need is simple, and we could just be believed.

Administrators, chairs, the registrar, etc. may push back. Have we gone through the appropriate channels? Do we really need a classroom with good acoustics/near a bathroom/on the first floor/near the one accessible entrance/convenient to parking/without fluorescent lights? Have we been properly documented by an MD who is willing to spend extra time filling out our forms? Have we met with the ADA coordinator and our boss as part of the ADA-required interactive process? Of course, we'll need to be periodically reassessed. Or we'll have to remind people that we have accommodations – *over and over* – just to get what we need to be here. It's given grudgingly. We are told #ThisIsHome by a PR campaign, but how can this be home if we are never truly at home here? If things are hostile to us by design? If people regard our inclusion as a concession? If our inclusion is supposed to indicate how nice everyone else is, rather than actually make it possible for us to be here on equal terms?

Sorry, I started talking about accommodations, but there are so many structural barriers here. It's hard not to jump (and also hard to jump – the literal physical action is something I can't actually do; hopping on one leg is what I've got). **Things become necessary as accommodations only when the state of things is inaccessible.** No accommodations are needed where things are built to include more people and flexible from the start and planned with access in mind. But higher education is built for exclusion.

These places, your campuses and perfect walled gardens and arbitrary expectations and deeply held norms, dear higher ed, are built for nondisabled people. And then disabled people are treated as a burden, regarded as expensive to include, and labeled as risky to exist here. We don't "fit the image of the university" – a thing that was literally said to a multiply-marginalized disabled person I know when her desk was moved to a less visible spot. Usually, they don't say it that loudly, and they never say it quite like that to me because I'm white and hetero and sort of otherwise look like other people here. I'm only here by accident and luck and a good supervisor or two, but, still, I've never been ushered to a less visible place due to how I look. I have, however, not been able to serve in some roles – being a faculty usher at graduation, filing up and down stairs at graduation seems impossible. Disabled students sometimes mention not going to graduation exactly because they are made to stand out in the processionals and offered confusing routing. Some of them also worry about how overstimulating big events like these are, or how long events are problematic for them. Especially since the Provost outlawed departmental graduations, which were less big, less long, and more possible for some of us. I want all the joy and celebration for all of us – but that's a tall order when so many what-should-be-joyous-things require extra labor and energy to participate in and attend.

And yet we are supposed to be grateful for being here at all. We name it to ourselves – academic ableism. People are so uncreative and inflexible in their planning – for classes, for campus life, and for events. My community works overtime in offering advice, sending links to guidance, sharing our experiences, bleeding out before the people in power in hopes that they will be moved to new action. We absolutely exhausted ourselves in advocacy around covid policies with nothing to show for it except our own burn out, a couple of google docs, and absolute disgust for witnessing the two-faced faces around us. Your face, dear higher ed.

Ableism is the logic that often undergirds things like anti-immigration policy and sexism and white supremacy – by talking about which human beings are "more fit" or productive or intelligent. TL Lewis offers this definition of ableism (2022):

> A system of assigning value to people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in eugenics, anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. This systemic oppression that leads to people and society determining people's value based on their culture, age, language, appearance, religion, birth or living place,

> "health/wellness", and/or their ability to satisfactorily re/produce, "excel" and "behave." You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.

A system of assigning value becomes almost irresistible to put into action, and such systems are part and parcel of higher education. I love the work of my former student Joshua Earle who did some archival work where land-grant institutions promoted eugenic ideology among high school teacher trainees in the 1940s and 1950s; Earle connects this to the modern work of universities and transhumanist ideology. The connections to white supremacy are not lost in this narrative nor time period either.

I get to work with amazing students here though, dear higher ed: my former PhD student Damien Williams works on the way in which AI re-instantiates existing biases and makes them worse – worse because we think AI is impartial and fair; my former student Alice Fox works on harms and harassment enabled through technologies and online spaces; my current PhD student Hanna Herdegen studies the historical development of diagnostic technologies in the context of dysautonomia, medical sexism, and changing diagnoses. I serve on some of the most interesting committees. It's amazing to be in this position – studying bias as a disabled person and learning from elite scholars and colleagues. This is part of the love/hate I feel here.

While I have not experienced the worst of ableism at its intersection with other identity factors (and still get to be here at all), I have been moved downstairs and into an area away from my entire department – which of course is in a three-story building without an elevator. I was so weak from chemotherapy when that happened that a kind graduate student packed up my office for the movers. My department was good to think ahead – my amputation was coming. I don't even know if anyone told the ADA Office or filled out any forms. Some people in the disability community sometimes express how lucky people with cancer are – not because cancer is great, but because doctors and colleagues and family members take cancer diagnoses seriously.

I benefit from being disabled due to cancer. I helped a friend through a major surgery, and I could see her hurt as I told her how my colleagues set up a meal train and delivered meals for my family several times a week for months while I was too sick to function. Everyone knew she was getting a major surgery and would be on medical leave for weeks, but no one was so moved.

I stray off topic, but I want to tell you that it's okay, dear higher ed, to stray sometimes. It's the way the chemo brain goes. My colleagues with ADHD understand this too. Sometimes you just have to take a side quest, or interrupt one thought with another. The thing is: we are good here. Work life is much more possible here where we can pursue trajectories of research and teaching and outreach that fire us up, where we can change topics and pursue new lines of thought, and where these are often value-adds to our disciplines. Work life is also much more possible where schedules can be (should be) flexible – so that scheduling a doctor's appointment or physical therapy doesn't require a conversation with someone else who controls your schedule. And of course, at your large state universities, the insurance plans are often enviable. I know disabled people who have strategically gotten jobs at universities in order to survive for longer in the workforce (and just survive longer, as we are in a system that links insurance to employment), dear higher ed.

Dear Higher Ed, I would rather not be addressing you at all. I know you cannot hear me, cannot hear us. **Colleges and universities would never make themselves more inclusive on their own. They bill themselves as elite, and the ranks of the elite are supposed to exclude us.**

Even when you let us in, you seek to burn us out. As a tactic. To show how we don't have it in us to overcome, a terrible narrative that requires nothing on your part except to fail to clear the way, to fail to move, to fail me and us. If it's up to us – our persistence, our bravery, our whatever word you describe us by when you sing our praises while holding us back – this work could be flexible and fun and make meaning beyond this place.

But it's time to email the omsbuddy again to give him the heads up that the nondisabled faculty member who is trying to grub some grants about autism and dance thinks I have a personal grudge against her and is acting like she's being persecuted because my autistic colleague suggested, and I backed her up, that we wouldn't advertise her research study ad in our community group listserv. She yelled at a disabled graduate student about

it, too. I hate it here when nondisabled people make themselves the victim when you don't praise them for briefly considering disabled people (and often without asking us what we'd want).

We have to vet everything we send out because research preys on us. It distorts us so often. And we're expected to be grateful and often unpaid when they "include" us in their study. **But inclusion as an object is not inclusion.** And they get all the categories wrong. They don't know how to recruit. They want autistic people, but only those who can speak, and only those who are a certain level, and who have documentation to share, and none with other disabilities. They don't realize they are asking for something so few are: most of us disabled people are multiply disabled.

I'm a hard of hearing chemo brained rotationplasty amputee with Crohn's disease and tinnitus. I am asked on the form where a university has asked me to fill out my demographic information and what my primary disability is. To pick one to be labeled, but so much depends on context, and, if I'm currently at risk of shitting myself from Crohn's or if my hearing aids can hear only the hiss of air and none of the voices around me, then one or the other might be primary in that moment. Some of these things are highly variable day to day. And none of them are half as frustrating as our campus and classrooms and the provost's mandate for the return to in person.

I'm on immunosuppressants, I've had two lung surgeries. I'm told in early 2022 that the provost isn't granting online or hybrid modalities. Even for classes that have always been online or can be easily zoomed. Oh, and we can no longer ask students to mask. Oh, and even though there's a special team working on air quality in classrooms, we can't have that data. And hey the Covid tracker is going down, and the CDC will stop reporting too.

I know you don't care about me. About disabled people. Even when you play pretend for outreach or some self-congratulations. You make it so unsafe to be here, to be disabled here.

The building I work in has no elevator. I was moved downstairs when I became disabled.

My friend was told he didn't have to attend faculty meetings if he couldn't hear well. Even though he wants to hear people. God forbid they book a different room.

My other friend is forced by her dept to redocument her disabilities every semester, and the admin who books her classrooms forgets every semester, so then she has to scramble every semester to have a classroom. She's been teaching in a computer lab without anyone using the computers this semester, and it was hella weird to guest lecture there.

My other friend is in a lengthy back and forth about disabled parking. She needs a place near her building, not in the parking garage half a mile away. Even if the spot half a mile away is labeled disabled. Parking there doesn't help.

My other friend, and I say friend, but I don't know what to call my fellow disabled faculty and staff, gets advice about how to avoid coming out as disabled because she knows they will doubt her abilities and retaliate against her if she's out. How can she find a workaround? Can she pretend like this is a temporary situation? I tell her to mislead as much as she wants; no one else will protect her but her. They don't want us, we aren't worth small differences in environment, workflow, or, you know, a freaking ramp.

The disability accommodations paperwork is insulting, but I'm lucky to have the healthcare to access the doctor who is trusted more than I am to describe my body and what I need, though he doesn't know my day-to-day life. But I also tell him which disabilities he'll disclose, and which I'd like him to leave out. We can't tell work that I have chemo brain yet. The university can tolerate an amputee, but I'm not sure how they'll look on someone on their teaching and research faculty with a cognitive impairment yet. I will have to win a grant and write a book and be appointed editor of my professional society's journal first. See? I'm doing it all with my cognitive impairment, so it's okay. I have to already be doing it and have accomplishments to get an accommodation. This situation is nearly impossible.

Except why should I have to do so much more just to be accommodated? Not included or celebrated or integrated. Or appreciated.

Here's the thing: **They – you, Dear Higher Ed – pay for stuff that nondisabled people use all the time. Classrooms and stairs and buildings. Why do we get seen as expensive or like an extra when we ask to**

have the same access? when the problem is how things are made and scheduled and defaulted to always choose nondisabled being in the world?

I've had students weep in my office, thanking me for how I've built my courses. I've built them with the expectation that I'll have disabled students and plan ahead for that. It's nothing: they deserve this education as much as anyone else and pay more dearly for it too. I care that they learn things about our subject – not about deadlines or format. **I know there are many ways to demonstrate knowledge, communicate, and participate.** Multiple paths, and flexibility. Disability justice says: we move together. Disability rights says: hold up, do you have documentation? I want the former.

My university has a faculty development session on universal design without ever really centering disability. Taught by a nondisabled person to nondisabled people. **But how are they going to get the soul of it aligned? How can they move with us if we aren't there?**

I go to a session on neurodiversity in the workplace, and I wouldn't give it a C. Neurodiversity is so much richer than what they talk about, which only seems to be about autism and maybe ADHD, but autistic people mean neurodiversity to include everyone, and include neurodivergence that maybe HR isn't ready for: from mental health disabilities like schizophrenia to chemo brain like mine to traumatic brain injuries. Autistic people may have theorized neurodiversity, but they built the concept bigger than autism.

And, higher ed, you are stealing neurodiversity – the term, and changing the vibe. The awful autism center conference had ABA therapists – ABA, which autistic advocates decry as abusive. It's time to send another heads up to the omsbuddy before emailing my diversity officer to ask if she could please explain to them why they shouldn't be using the term out of one side of their mouth while dishonoring autistic voices. I don't want to talk to the director: she will also view this as a personal attack. And then want to meet with me to discuss. And I'm tired. It's not about her in the least, or what donors she wants to court, and that's the point. Can the diversity officers please handle this? No.

They can't. I'm not sure anyone ever talks to the conference organizers. We crips discuss protesting the conference at our community meeting, but we're all too busy with the end of the semester and this isn't worth the energy right now.

We burnt ourselves crispy offering disability informed Covid policy recommendations, which were ignored. The president mentioned us in a state of the university speech where he said he met with us and announced the very opposite of what we recommended to him.

We understood after that incident that **people want to say they met with us, that you'd say you spoke with us, at the same time that you, Dear Higher Ed, push us out the door.** Here to be objects of design and invention and fundraising, but somehow also never considered experts, agents, and worth the price of inclusion, worth a little adjustment. The price is so low for you, and so high for us, higher ed.

Please just let us be here – or not here if what we need is a work from home accommodation.

Thanks,

Ashley Shew

Associate Professor of Science, Technology, and Society, Virginia Tech

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About the author

Ashley Shew

Ashley Shew is an associate professor of Science, Technology, and Society at Virginia Tech. Her current research sits at the intersection of technology studies, biotech ethics, and disability studies. She is recipient of an NSF CAREER Award for work on disability narrative about technology (#1750260, Disability, Experience, and Technological Imagination, 2018-2023), and a principal investigator of an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-funded Higher Learning project that supports the creation of a regional Disability Community Technology (DisCoTec) Center providing guidance for developing disabled-led technology and disability-forward technological futures through humanities-based scholarship and disability justice education, arts, and outreach (Just Dis Tech Project, 2023-2025). Shew's recent book *Against Technoableism: Rethinking Who Needs Improvement* (2023) and forthcoming

open textbook, co-edited with Hanna Herdegen, *Technology and Disability*, both focus on the stories disabled people tell about technologies that people do not always expect.

Ashley's past work has been in philosophy of technology with particular interest in technological knowledge, animal studies, and emerging technologies. She is a current co-editor-in-chief (with Kirk Besmer) of *Techné*, the journal of the Society for Philosophy and Technology. She is sole author of T*echnological Knowledge and Animal Constructions* (2017) and co-editor of three philosophy of technology volumes: *Spaces for the Future* (with Joe Pitt, 2017), *Feedback Loops* (with Andrew Garnar, 2020), and *Reimagining Philosophy and Technology, Reinventing Ihde* (with Glen Miller, 2020).

Shew believes in cross-disciplinary, cross-disability, and public-facing scholarship: she has written for *IEEE Technology & Society, Nursing Clio*, *Nature*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *Inside Higher Ed*. She is a grateful participant with her local disability advocacy and activist community in the Disability Alliance and Caucus at Virginia Tech and the New River Valley Disability Resource Center.

At Virginia Tech, Shew participates as a faculty member in the STS PhD program, Medicine & Society minor, and Disability Studies minor; she's also the current director of the Bioethics graduate certificate, and a longtime executive committee member with the Integrative Graduate Education Program on Regenerative Medicine.

Lessons From a Lifetime in Higher Education

MARK DAWKINS

Dear Higher Ed,

Including my 4.5 years as a doctoral student, this is my 34th year as a member of the academy. Both of my parents are college graduates and emphasized the importance of obtaining a quality education. My father was a medical doctor, and my mother a registered nurse. My parents stressed to my seven brothers and me that "education is the one thing no one can take away from you." As I have aged, had my own family, and served as a professor and administrator, the message of this adage and its meaning remain continually reinforced.

Even though my brothers and I attended private school, my parents chose to live in a Black community that had no nearby private schools. My parents consciously chose to live in a Black community even though they could afford to live elsewhere because we were middle class. Because of where I was raised, many of my friends were poor. My parents' insistence that my brothers and I earned a quality education gave us an advantage in the world. But my brothers and I also realize and understand that the world is not fair (and perhaps never will be), which is why I am willing to share some personal experiences in the hope that collectively we can improve the world for everyone.

In this letter, I want to discuss my experiences and insights as a both a Black student studying accounting at several predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and as a Black accounting faculty member serving at two PWIs for 28 years. The decision to organize my reflections and analysis were prompted by a special "Diversity, Equity and Social Justice in Accounting Education" issue of *Issues in Accounting Education* calling for an examination of the experiences of minoritized faculty within higher education institutions. My article "Life Experiences of a Black Accounting Student and Faculty Member," was included in the February 2023 issue of the journal.

Reflecting and documenting my lived experiences in higher education has led to the following observations about the categories of career obstacles I've encountered—and other Black faculty have likely encountered as well. These obstacles are lack of access to networks; hostility or indifference to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts; and unfair standards, treatment, or expectations. Let me share some of my experiences, beginning with my undergraduate years, and the implications of these career obstacles—not only on me, but on talented Black students and scholars who aspire to work in higher education as professors and administrators.

When I was an undergraduate at Georgia Tech, I was enrolled in a speech class that required each student to give a series of speeches and be anonymously graded by our peers. I was the only Black student in the class, and a majority student gave me the lowest score on all my speeches for the quarter. The low scores caused me to receive a B rather than an A grade. Because I did not believe all my speeches warranted the score given, I expressed my concern to the professor about biased grading from this student. The professor agreed that it likely was biased grading (the handwriting was identical on each score sheet), yet he said he was not going to change my grade because covert and overt bias or discrimination was a reality of the world I would be entering upon graduation. His decision reaffirmed the message that life is not fair or equal for many Blacks, and we cannot let biased or discriminatory incidents or behaviors hold us back.

In my MBA cohort at UF, I once again was the only Black student. I realized after the first statistics examination

that I was an "outsider" when I heard some students in the class discussing how the sample examination they obtained closely mirrored the actual exam. I was shocked that the professor did not distribute a sample examination to everyone. Fortunately, I eventually befriended two majority MBA students who shared "insider" materials with me. But this experience paled in comparison to what occurred during the second year of my MBA program when a Fortune 500 manufacturing company scheduled MBA interviews on campus. My interview was immediately after a Black female student from the new cohort, and I saw her crying as she exited her interview early. I asked her why she was crying, and she explained that the recruiter had asked her very inappropriate questions: What was a Black female doing at UF? Why was she in the MBA program? Why was she not at home having babies? And so forth. The pattern and intent of the questions were apparent.

I consoled my classmate and encouraged her to report this incident immediately to the MBA Director, which she did. Later that day, the five Black MBA students met with the MBA Director (a faculty member) who made excuses for the company and said perhaps it was a stress interview and indicated he/she planned to take no action. We were furious that the MBA Program Director decided not to do anything that day and planned to say nothing to the company recruiters after they finished interviewing on campus. When I was invited to a follow-up interview a few days later, I declined. I asked the representative if they were aware of what occurred on campus during the interviews. They weren't. The MBA Program Director had taken no action, and so I explained what occurred. The representative was horrified and immediately contacted UF to discuss the incident. Others heard about what happened, including some majority students, generating substantial tension among students in the MBA program about this incident, and the non-responsiveness of the MBA Director.

Of the five Black MBA students, I was the only one invited for a follow-up interview. After the incident exploded within the MBA Program and among the students, the company then invited the remaining four Black students for a follow-up interview. I advised them to reject the interview offers because I believed the company was now using them to attempt to protect its reputation as a good employer in the MBA Program. Three of the Black students nonetheless accepted the follow-up interview; as expected, none received an internship offer.

I worked in industry for two years before returning to the academy to complete my Ph.D. at FSU. As a graduate teaching assistant, a majority undergraduate publicly stated in class that the students should vote concerning a decision I made with respect to the class. I was over 30 years old when this incident occurred, and despite my youthful appearance, it was unclear to me if this was an age-related or race-related incident. I advised the class that anyone with questions or concerns was welcome to share them with the department chair or dean. The student did not follow this advice and later that week apologized for her classroom behavior and inappropriate request. Based on my discussions with other Black faculty, these challenges to authority are common microaggressions intended to undermine our authority as faculty in the classroom.

Throughout my career, I experienced the "Diversity Tax" –those additional responsibilities placed on nonwhite faculty because of our ethno-racial backgrounds (Padilla 24-7, Joseph and Hirshfield 121-41). At my first institution as a professor, I served on approximately 20 search committees at both the college and university level, and at least 60 faculty panels that presented to prospective incoming students and attended and spoke at many other recruiting events targeted to Black and/or majority students. The time committed to these service activities was sometimes acknowledged but usually received little credit during annual merit reviews. I was also sought out by Black and other diverse students for professional and personal counsel. I was committed to assisting these students as much as possible because the social and cultural environment at PWIs is often lacking in support for minoritized students. Yet I was told by a senior accounting faculty member that I needed to spend more time assisting majority students in the college, even though there were at least 15 majority faculty who could do so. This same feedback appeared in my annual evaluation, most likely attributed to this faculty member.

I am very passionate about and committed to DEI, and I volunteered extensively to attempt to diversify my institution's student population. Unfortunately, despite significant efforts from many Black faculty, the percentage of Black undergraduate students at the school remained around 7-8% for the entire 21 years I was there, despite

the state being over 30 percent Black. I ultimately concluded that the institution was not genuinely committed to diversifying its student population beyond offering token DEI programs, events, and initiatives.

I also helped to recruit another Black faculty to join the College of Business in 1995 in another department. Unfortunately, this department chose not to recruit the candidate, and so the College of Business not only lost out on hiring another Black faculty, but ultimately lost one of the three Black faculty it had since the candidate and his partner, also an academic, later married and accepted faculty positions at another elite business school. I am still surprised when I recall the department deciding not to recruit the potential Black faculty who was graduating from an elite business school, all but ensuring we would lose the existing Black faculty once they married.

In another situation, I was contacted by a faculty colleague outside the business school who expressed an interest in pursuing a joint hire of a Black faculty with a business PhD from an elite business school who had at least two elite publications in her first two years after completion of her PhD. I approached the College of Business department chair to inform him about this potential hiring opportunity and was told by the chair that I could not tell the department whom to hire, which I was not attempting to do. After the opportunity to make this hire passed, and the Black faculty accepted a position in a large city over an hour away, I had a discussion with a faculty member in the relevant department who was shocked that the department passed on the opportunity, and even more shocked that the department chair (to their knowledge) never discussed the hiring opportunity with the departmental faculty. The outcome may have been different had the department chair discussed the hiring opportunity with the faculty in the department rather than deciding unilaterally not to recruit this person. I also recall two situations where College of Business departments (Accounting and Finance) actively recruited Black faculty but were unsuccessful in making a hire, and so some departments in the College of Business were willing to recruit Black faculty and make job offers to Black candidates.

In 2004, Dean George Benson favorably regarded my DEI work and appointed me as the College's first Director of Diversity Relations and Recruitment. The appointment came with a course release. At the time, I was teaching four classes during the academic year (two each fall and spring), whereas new assistant professors had a three-class teaching load. My department chair asked me if I really wanted the course release even though I was already teaching more classes than others in the department. Accepting the course release merely put me on equal footing with newly hired assistant professors. When I was appointed as the Associate Dean for Academic Programs overseeing the undergraduate and master's programs in 2008, my course load was finally reduced to two classes. I wonder if the department chair would ask a majority faculty if they really wanted a course release to which they were entitled.

In my last year as the Associate Dean for Academic Programs, I realized my annual salary was $40,000-$50,000 below the annual salary of the Associate Deans at two other R1 schools in the state. I brought this salary discrepancy to the attention of the Dean and was ultimately removed from the Associate Dean position. Interestingly, the person who replaced me, a majority faculty member, received the $40,000-$50,000 salary adjustment I had requested. He was a full professor, and I was an associate professor, but I do not believe faculty rank is relevant with respect to compensation for an administrative position (i.e., universities hire based on a faculty member's ability to successfully do the work required).

I was hired as Dean of the College of Business at a different institution in 2015 to turn around enrollment since graduate and undergraduate enrollment declined 35% and 18%, respectively, from 2008-2014. Since a graduate credit hour generates four times the revenue of an undergraduate credit hour, I focused on growing graduate enrollment and stabilizing the decline in undergraduate enrollment. With strategic planning and execution, graduate enrollment increased 70% during my 5-year tenure as Dean, and undergraduate enrollment declined 2%. Based on these results, I was one of two deans asked to present at the 2020 AACSB Dean's Conference in February to discuss how the College of Business grew its enrollments when many business schools had experienced graduate enrollment decreases of 10-20% during a similar timeframe.

During my five year tenure as Dean, I worked with the College of Business faculty and staff to start the following new initiatives and programs: 1) raised funds and opened a Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation in

February 2019, 2) approved and started a Master of Science in Management Program in Fall 2016, 3) approved and started a Masters in Logistics and Supply Chain Management Program in Fall 2019, 4) approved a Masters in Data Analytics Program that started in August 2021, 5) approved a BBA Program in Business Intelligence that started in August 2021, 6) approved separating the Global MBA Program from the MBA Program, and 7) approved converting the Economics degree into an Applied Economics degree that qualifies as a STEM degree. The institution hired a new President in June 2018 and a new Provost in July 2019, both White. Whereas the previous President (also White) had two Hispanics and three Blacks on the President's Leadership Team, the new President's first year replaced these people with majority men. The Hispanic leaders left the institution, and one of the Black leaders was demoted to a director-level position.

In April 2019, members of the institution's Commission on Diversity & Inclusion (of which I was chair) noted the decreasing diversity on the new President's Leadership Team and asked me as chair to present the data to the President and ask him about a timeline for hiring a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO). Since the new President met with Deans less frequently than the former President, I asked the Interim Provost and CFO to present the CDO issue to the new President since they regularly met with the new President. After waiting two weeks and receiving no response from the Interim Provost and CFO, I met with the Interim Provost, and she instructed me to present the CDO issue to the new President when he met with the Deans the following week. I compiled a list of questions for the new President from all the Deans, and I emailed this list of questions to the new President and his assistant two days before the meeting. The CDO issue was question one on the list.

After verbally attacking me in the Deans' meeting for raising the issue of School B hiring a CDO, the new President said that the institution did not need a CDO and he had no plans to hire one, nor did he have any idea when a CDO would be warranted. The Interim Provost who instructed me to present the CDO issue to the new President at the Deans' meeting was sitting between the new President and me, and even though I acted on her advice, she did not speak up during or after the verbal attack. She emailed me later and said the verbal attack was "very uncomfortable," and two other deans and a senior administrator who witnessed the verbal attack later described it as "ugly." I filed a complaint with School B's Equal Opportunity and Inclusion Office (EOI) and expected the Director to hire an external investigator since my complaint involved the new President and posed a conflict of interest for her, yet she did not recuse herself, and her investigation cleared the new President. The irony here is the Interim Provost was going to remove me as Dean over an allegation I yelled at a department chair, yet EOI cleared the new President for verbally attacking me in the Deans' meeting when the verbal attack was described by the Interim Provost as "very uncomfortable" and by two other deans and a senior administrator as "ugly."

One-year after the new President verbally attacked me in the Deans' meeting, George Floyd was murdered. The new President quickly appointed a VP for Diversity & Inclusion. In August 2020, the institution's Provost because of medical issues unexpectedly resigned after serving one year, and the new President in September 2020 appointed as Interim Provost the Black faculty administrator he had previously demoted and removed from the President's Leadership Team. The new President eventually appointed her as Provost in April 2021. This sequence of events taught me that the "right" decision may not happen when we want it to happen or when it should happen. However, as Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded us, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Blacks and allies must be vigilant in seeking representation in administration at colleges and universities.

During my five-year tenure as Dean, I had three majority department chairs who did not work in the office every day, and I could not get the administration to support me with respect to holding them accountable by requiring them to be in the office. They received a four-course release as department chairs presumably to be on campus daily to provide the student access and support the institution claims it provides. These department chairs eventually turned against me and in October 2018 alleged to the majority Interim Provost that I yelled at one of them during an Executive Committee meeting. Without ascertaining whether the allegation was true, and if true, whether there was any justification for the alleged yelling, the majority Interim Provost said she was going to remove me as Dean.

Neither the three majority department chairs, nor majority Interim Provost, expected the Dean's Office to have

a full audio recording of the 90-minute meeting. At my insistence, the institution hired an external investigator who listened to the complete audio recording and determined that I did not yell at the majority department chair during the meeting. The   Interim Provost listened to the complete audio recording and agreed with the external investigator. Nevertheless, the Interim Provost said *I must have done something during the meeting that led the three majority department chairs to* <u>*perceive*</u> *I had yelled at one of them, and she gave me a written reprimand even though I was cleared of the alleged yelling.* Moreover, the audio recording of the meeting revealed no evidence of anything I had "done" to cause anyone to perceive I had yelled.

And so even though the institution has a policy regarding false allegations, the Interim Provost refused to issue any reprimands to the three department chairs who made the false allegations against me because she said the false allegations were based on the majority department chairs' perceptions. To be clear, I received a written reprimand from the majority Interim Provost based on perceived false allegations from three majority department chairs, and the majority Interim Provost subsequently used the fact that the false allegations were based on perceptions to justify not reprimanding the three majority department chairs who made the false allegations against me. The irony of this double standard astounds me to this day.

As noted earlier, the new President and new Provost constructively discharged me as Dean, and they did so by changing the terms of my contract if I was reappointed for another term as Dean from my retaining 75% of my Dean salary when I returned to the faculty to my retaining only 50% of my Dean salary when I returned to the faculty. This 25% reduction was almost six figures, and so I returned to the faculty at the end of June 2020 when my five-year Dean contract ended and retained 75% of my Dean salary. Even though the Provost wrote in an email that the 50% return to faculty rate would apply to the next business school Dean, the new President and Provost hired a majority male to replace me as Dean, and his contract included an 81% return to faculty rate at the end of his term. Thus, the change in my contract from 75% to 50% was made only to constructively discharge me as the business school Dean so they could hire a majority male (consistent with most of the other executive level changes since the new President and Provost joined the institution in June 2018 and July 2019, respectively).

To defend its decision to remove me, the institution claimed there was a "non-collegial" environment in the College of Business. Evidence did not support this claim. Of the 89% of eligible faculty participated in the vote, 64% voted to reappoint me as Dean for another 5-year term. When the Interim Provost reported the results of the faculty vote to me in March 2019, she said it was a "great" result since these votes generally are 50/50 votes. Her Executive Assistant emailed me congratulations on the positive vote. A former College of Business Dean also congratulated me on the 64% faculty retention vote and agreed with the Interim Provost that it was a great result. Two months later the Interim Provost stated the institution was not renewing my Dean contract based on the claim that the environment in the College of Business was allegedly "non-collegial." Four months later, the new Provost offered me the one-year contract extension with a 25% cut in my return-to-faculty rate from 75% to 50%.

I was entitled to a one-semester sabbatical at the end of my five-year term as Dean. However, the one-semester sabbatical offered to me differed from the three-semester sabbatical received by another former majority Dean whose term was four-years. The institution extended different length sabbaticals to the two (2) academic deans replaced by provosts during the tenure of the new President hired in June 2018.10 Considering sabbaticals received by all senior administrators since I joined the institution in 2015, the former majority Provost received a three-semester sabbatical when he stepped down as Provost after one year in 2020, the former majority Associate Provost received a three-semester sabbatical when he was replaced after three years in 2021, and another majority academic Dean received a three-semester sabbatical when she stepped down as Dean in 2016. When I reported this discrepancy to the provost, the initial response was that the sabbatical differential was justified and warranted. Fortunately, they reversed their decision, and in September 2021 my one-semester sabbatical was extended to three-semesters. However, I had to sign a settlement agreement forgoing my right to sue the institution regarding the sabbatical differentials to be treated the same as the majority former senior administrators who served less time in their administrative positions relative to me.

The final experience I will share is perhaps the most insidious and harmful since it relies on common stereotypes

about Blacks. As discussed earlier, I was accused of yelling at a majority department chair in an Executive Committee meeting, and both the external investigator and majority Interim Provost concluded I did not yell after listening to an audio recording of the full 90-minute meeting. About six months after the external investigator submitted his report, I was discussing a research project with a colleague at another school when he informed me a colleague of his at another school who knew faculty members at my institution said I was being described by at least one majority faculty as an "angry Black male." This is a pervasive stereotype that is often applied to Black men and women where the speaker knows that many recipients will believe it is true. Consequently, Black men and women choose not to speak up or ask difficult or challenging questions in meetings to avoid being labeled with this stereotype. Alternatively, Black men and women in positions of authority refrain from making difficult or challenging decisions to avoid being labeled with this stereotype. I am sure this false claim would surface were I to seek another Dean position and likely would cause some schools to avoid me as a potential candidate even though the claim is false.

Fortunately, I have achieved great work-life balance in my post-Dean life, and I am not interested in pursuing other business dean, Provost, or President positions. Other Black administrators who face similar false claims may not be as fortunate as me and may want to pursue administrative opportunities at other schools and will have to overcome such claims.

I share my life experiences as a Black student studying accounting at several predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and as a Black accounting faculty member serving at two predominantly white institutions (PWIs) for 28 years. I've included some personal thoughts, memories, experiences, life lessons learned, and several unpleasant and painful experiences. I felt compelled to write down these experiences after seeing videos and reading articles of several Blacks suffocated or fatally shot by police officers and civilians with the hope that my comments would better sensitize primarily majority accounting faculty to some of the actual or perceived realities of the world and, more specifically the academy, from the perspective of one Black accounting faculty member. I invite my colleagues in higher education to think about potential inequitable situations in the academic environment and commit to making efforts to reduce or eliminate the inequity. I also hope my comments provide some lessons and insights about the need for and benefits that may be derived from DEI training, initiatives, and programs that serve to guide our actions and behaviors as we educate the next generation of accounting students for lifelong careers after college as practitioners and society members. Even though the experiences discussed in this article are unique to me, I know they are not unique in general based on discussions with other Black accounting faculty.

I hope the experiences I have shared paint a clear picture of some of my life experiences as a Black student and faculty member. I am not complaining about my life or the life of my parents or family members because we realize we are extremely blessed and fortunate to have lived and experienced the lives we have enjoyed in the United States. I have discussed these experiences in this commentary only to highlight some difficulties we have encountered along life's journey as Black persons in the US despite being educated and "qualified." Sadly, my experiences have been confirmed by multiple prominent and successful Black faculty at colleges and universities across the country. Further, I am aware that others have stories that are even more egregious than those noted in this article. My purpose in writing this letter is not to cast a negative light on my institutions, but to invite higher education to realize its highest aspirations.

Sincerely,

Mark Dawkins

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Resisting Civility in Higher Education

BING BINGHAM

Dear Higher Education,

I'm Bing. I'm a queer, gender non-conforming, white, first-generation college student from the Midwest. I was born in 1990, a year with the highest AIDS mortality rate to date, just thirty-five minutes from Ryan White's final resting place. While Ryan White was a household name, we dared not speak of the other lives lost to that very same disease. In fact, my early life was almost entirely devoid of any mentions of queer and trans people, living or deceased. Socially it was not considered "polite conversation." Educationally queer people were treated as irrelevant. And religiously they were to be pitied as best, damned at worst. To this day, I have only ever taken one course on anything even remotely LGBTQ+ focused.

I have spent the last decade of my life trying to find what was so easily kept from me. I feel a deep need to understand who and what has come before me. Through this process I've gained a profound appreciation for the nuances and complexities of our world and the perseverance of a community I am honored to call my own. Humanity, which once felt so small and rigid, has now revealed itself to be wonderfully expansive and beautifully diverse. It is with this spirit that I approach my work as the director for Virginia Tech's Pride Center.

The Pride Center is one of five Cultural and Community Centers (CCCs) that call Virginia Tech home. The APIDA + Center, Ati: Wa:oki Indigenous Community Center, Black Cultural Center, El Centro, and the Pride Center make up our little marginalized family unit. We are few in number which means on any given day we are shaking hands with donors and turning around to serve food at student-facing events. Deciding what to wear is a nightmare.

Believe it or not, the vast majority of my job is actually working with cisgender, straight people. That's who most of our administrators are and that's how most faculty members identify. We meet and talk about accommodations and changes that can be made so that queer and trans students, faculty, and staff can focus on their assigned tasks. It seems very simple but because queer and transness has been made so foreign to everyone, it's always an effort to meet folks where they are. Some want to understand the nuances of the queer and trans communities while others just want to know what they are supposed to do about it.

What follows is part of an address I gave at a Student Affairs breakfast and award ceremony in 2022. I was asked to speak on "civility," a principle championed by our administration as "aspirational." While I was thrilled to be invited to speak at such a large university gathering, it was absolutely devastating to be given this topic. Not only did I not consider myself a "champion of civility", but I was outright opposed to it being called anything other than a low bar. At the time I had been in my role for only two years and was certain I could stay for more if I played my card rights. This meant that I needed to choose my words wisely. After numerous conversations with all involved parties, I accepted the invitation. The purpose of this address was twofold: I wanted to challenge civility as an aspirational attribute without insulting or assuming intent and I needed to offer something to take its place that felt like a genuine step in the right direction.

Here's what I said:

> Civility. I don't like it. I don't want to talk about civility.
> I've often equated civility to something as backhanded as tolerance. The "I don't care what you do as long as you don't

do it in front of me, approach to difference." I can't think of a time when I've ever wanted to be tolerated. At its best, I've seen civility used as a facade meant to hide dissenting opinions which ultimately ends the conversation. At its worst it has been used as a silencing tactic, policing the tone of the marginalized, and reinforcing the existing power imbalance. It's a low bar and the opportunity for low bar efforts has long since passed.

So, I don't want to talk about civility and I know I don't want to practice it either. This feels like a good time to tell you that others knew what I was going to say today. If you are sitting in your seat just now thinking that you are witnessing the last public appearance of Dr. Bing, take a breath, everything is going to be okay.

Given my experiences with "civility," I really struggled with how to respond to such a flattering invitation. At this point in my life and career, it's important to me that I show up as genuinely authentic as I can. I owe it to myself, I owe that to the mentors who have invested their time in me, and I owe it to my students. And I couldn't think of anything further from the goals of my work than civility and peacekeeping. Our work in the CCCs focuses on making space for bodies that this institution was not built to serve. It is creating something where there was nothing, it is beautifully and justly disruptive. And I'd say that is the goal for everything we do. If you don't walk away thinking or feeling differently about something, we haven't done our jobs.

Like any good student when faced with a problem they don't know how to solve, I returned to the basics. Even a "the Webster's Dictionary defines...." approach would be better than what I had to say about civility.

As described on Virginia Tech's website: "At the heart of this pursuit is a basic commitment to consideration, respect, and courtesy. Civility expects that we strive to listen as well as to speak to each other; we try to understand each other in our commonalities and differences; we show respect to all members of the university community; we favor courtesy over rudeness and encourage considerate treatment over dismissive behavior; and we combine free speech with reasoned expression so that liberty and peace are both served."

This, I thought, is something I can work with. This definition speaks of an enduring commitment, intentional listening, and the power of one's voice. It calls for basic human decency in the pursuit of a shared understanding. It suggests that we can collectively free ourselves from the oppressive restrictions and that we can and must do this work together.

I like this. This is worth aspiring to but I'm not sure it really describes civility today.

I talk a lot about language and the importance and power of words in my daily work. Language is an incredible tool. It can inspire, bring light into darkness, and bring even the most stubborn of us to tears. But it can also be wielded to justify inhumane treatment, continued persecution, and is readily available at a moment's notice to ever so slightly take you down a peg.

This is why our words are so incredibly important. They are loaded with meaning and potential. Potential we all know can be wonderful and dangerous. Because of this, in any given context or time period words change significantly. Words we used to throw about playfully we now understand to cause pain. Phrases like "that's so gay" or "you speak so articulately" reveal more about the speaker today than it does the target.

The great scholar Julia Serano talks about this phenomenon from a queer lens, calling it the activist-merry-go-round. Round and round it spins, occasionally landing on a way of speaking that most can agree is more acceptable than the last. For example, what was "sexual invert" became "homosexual" then "gay" then "LGBT"," LGBTQ," "LGBTQAI2," "LGBTQ+," and now "queer." I'm sure everyone here can think of a word or phrase they've stopped using for one reason or another.

The original intent of the word stays intact, what changes however is its impact. I've started talking about this in terms of the heart and the hand, what was meant and what it looks like in action. Actually, my favorite way to phrase this is "from womb to world." We have some control over the creation process, we can set it up for success, but what happens after it leaves us is beyond our control.

Serano says that as long as power imbalances exist between communities, the merry-go-round will continue to spin. And while you could dig your heels in and refuse to jump aboard, it will keep on spinning and your voice will go unaccounted for.

On the flip side of language, however, is perhaps one of my favorite quotes. Carl Yung once said "loneliness doesn't come from having no people about, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to oneself or from holding certain views which others find inadmissible." (356) Horribly simplified, he's saying that attempting and failing to be heard or understood is one of the loneliest things we'll ever do. In the queer community, we are constantly coming up with new ways that describe our experiences with gender, sexual, and romantic attraction. It is our attempt to describe and share in a way that previous versions didn't quite capture. It doesn't mean that the old words are vile or inherently bad, they're just not the best ones for the job.

This is where I think we find "civility." Maybe, just maybe there's something else out there that can help us better communicate our intentions. Something that better fits the ideas of enduring commitment, intentional listening, and empowering voices in the aims of collective liberation.

At the beginning of every VirTual Safe Zone training we offer through the Pride Center, there is a list of community

> guidelines that every participant must agree to. They are our aspirations. They help us engage with each other, hear each other, and respect each other as we clumsily work through the nuances and beauty of humanity.
>
> Full transparency, our VirTual Safe Zone program is not ideal for everyone. We have intentionally made our trainings longer and more burdensome. We're trying to move away from surface level, transactional learning and into something more productive, something that stays with you. What used to be conveyed in a one-to-four-hour window, we now explore together over a five-week period. It is purposefully slow and demanding.
>
> What a lot of people don't stop to realize is that sexism, cissexism, heterosexism, racism, and ableism have negatively affected us all just not to the same degree. Everyone here has walked into a room only to find that parts of them are welcome there, just not the whole. We are utterly alone in that until someone puts it to words.
>
> In VirTual Safe Zone, we work through that pain, anger, and vulnerability together. We have hard conversations rich with meaningful silences. We process the anxiety and freedom that comes when we decenter our own experiences and understanding of the world. And somewhere in the process we stop talking about "them" and start talking about "us." We start taking ownership of our thoughts and actions both past and present and see them as deeply intertwined with others. It is a messy process that requires an unprecedented amount of empathy and humility. It is honestly one of the most rewarding parts of my job.
>
> Maybe those would be my words: humility and empathy.
>
> But I don't know what words hit the right chords for you. That's the beauty of living with and alongside others. We get to talk through it together. Our shared languages are ripe with opportunity.

Two years after giving this speech, and numerous attacks on trans lives later, I find myself wrestling again with the difference between civility-like practices and genuine empathy and humility. Gender is a feeling, an understanding that we express in words and actions. It is almost always an imperfect translation. Many are born with their words already in existence, others have to find ours. Policies like those approved by Governor Glenn Youngkin in the state of Virginia make that work nearly impossible for young adults. These policies claim to "ensure privacy, dignity, and respect for all students and parents" and at the same time they depict transness as an inherent danger to others. This legislation ensures the safety of some by restricting that of others. This is the guise of civility. This is what has been embedded in our society since its creation.

As freedom of speech now becomes one of our biggest topics for discussion in higher education, I urge you to resist civility-like practices. Don't just do the bare minimum. Respect others' pronouns and think about your relationship with your own. Is it important that you are addressed using specific pronouns? How about adjectives or compliments? Use a person's chosen name and reflect on your own or the ones you've given others. Do you like your name? Is there one you'd like more? Would you keep a sweater as long if it no longer fits? Who says you have to keep what is given? Learn the difference between saying "everyone should be who they want to be" and "everyone should have the freedom to be who they are" because there is a difference. Don't ensure your comfort by taking from someone else's, we all deserve to be here. We all deserve genuine respect.

If you'd like to take it a step further, and I hope you do, don't just memorize a person's chosen name and/or pronouns, work to see them as they know themselves to be. Unlearn your habitual gendering practices and start seeing people for who they tell you they are. Make room in your mind for queer and trans existence. Being seen as who you know yourself to be is one of those most beautiful gifts we can give to one another. Every day you are presented with the opportunity to welcome the beautiful complexity of humanity into your life.

I hope you accept that invitation.

Bing Bingham

Director of the Virginia Tech Pride Center

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About the author

Bing Bingham

Dr. Ashleigh "Bing" Bingham (she/they) joined Virginia Tech and Cultural and Community Centers team in October 2019 as the Director of the Pride Center (formerly LGBTQ+ Resource Center.) Dr. Bing's work focuses on supporting the mental, emotional, social, and physical well being of queer and trans Hokies through creating space, providing resources, advocating for student needs, and facilitating learning opportunities for students, faculty, and staff. This work includes but is not limited to: serving on the steering committee for the Lavender House Living-Learning Community, advising student organizations, creating a 15-week VirTual Safe Zone training program, expanding the use of pronouns and chosen names in the university system as well as ID cards, and working to expand the availability of All Gender Restrooms across the Blacksburg campus. Dr. Bing holds a bachelor's degree in psychology, Master's degree in Social Psychology, and a Doctorate degree in Higher Education from Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana.

The Politics of Praxis: Or, What if I Never Make it to the Mountaintop?

ANGELA CARTER

Dear Higher Education,

Here is the honest truth: I don't want to tell you my stories anymore. I've been telling you my story for over two decades now. And for what? Where has it gotten us? You've requested my story over and over again. You've told me that if I tell my story I'll be granted access (both literally and figuratively). You've not only requested it, you've required that I tell it in a particular way – for admission, acceptance, accommodation, recognition, even for a livable wage. And I have always done exactly as you've asked because, like so many of us in DEI, I too was brought into consciousness through story.

Well before being introduced to women of color feminisms, queer and crip histories, and Indigenous ways of knowing, I was taught the power of story by the care network of working-poor single mothers who raised me. They didn't know the literature or theory, but they knew, and they taught me to know. Stories are survival. Stories are relational. Stories are sacred…

So, my hesitation doesn't arise from self-righteousness or indignation; it isn't even out of anger. It's with deep sadness that I now question the utility (and the ethics) of sharing my analysis of higher education through story. Will you hear me this time? Will you see me? If so, will it matter? After twenty years I just don't know that I am open to being vulnerable any longer. But I do know I am not alone in this disillusionment and painful uncertainty, and I do not take that solace for granted.

I was participating in an internship program with the Ronald E. McNair Program the summer I became disabled. That was the summer my story changed; the summer my story stopped being my own. I was a first-generation, low-income college student – a nerdy White queer kid – who desperately needed an out, out of poverty, out of the Bible Belt, out of generations of trauma. Academia, they told me, was my ticket and I wholeheartedly believed them. That summer, I enthusiastically believed them because their story came with a stipend, and I had a kid brother back home to support.

Really though, I had internalized the myth of meritocracy[1] long before then. I think I was in fifth grade when I first told my mom I wanted to go to college. In many ways, every choice I've made since then can be traced back to what she said next. English is my mom's second language; her father made it to the eighth grade; her mother not even that far. I didn't fully understand what that meant at the time, but I did understand her tears of anger and despair. And I did understand the tone in her voice when she told me that she was stuck – stuck *there* – in a place without name that exceeds geography, gender, affect and occupation. She told me she was stuck but I could get out. I had to get out. Only she had no idea how to help me…

I'm skipping the next parts of the story, because you've heard it many times before, because you've requested it from all of us. The adversities and determination. The overcoming of odds. The passion we have because of it. That summer the McNair Program was teaching me the narrative structure but the women who raised me had already

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1. Here I am referring to Stephan McNamee's *The Meritocracy Myth* which was released in its 5th edition in 2023.

taught me the game. There is a difference between relational and transactional, and we do not judge people for the things they gotta do to survive. So, I was learning the going exchange rate for stories like mine and trying not to judge myself for cashing in the most valuable thing I was told I had.

Except then the stories changed: *Jaws of Life. Life flight. ICU. Coma. Life support. Broken bones. Surgeries. Brain injury. Unexplainable. Miracle. Rehab. Deficit. Disabled.* These new stories are fragmented and incoherent. They're stories I cannot tell even if I wanted to tell them because these are stories that refuse narration[2]. They haunt me, lingering and ephemeral[3]. They're not the stories that matter though, not really, not now. The stories that matter are the ones that came next and those are the ones I am so profoundly tired of telling…

- I could tell you about the many doctors who've said people like me cannot get degrees like mine. If I did, would you applaud me as inspirational or reconsider who gets to define what's real? Would you think differently about what disability means? About what you've internalized?

- I could tell you about being denied accommodations because "it's never been done that way," or it would make abled people "uncomfortable." If I did, would you talk to me about rigor, standards, and outcomes – despite the fact that accessibility doesn't interrupt any of this? Or would you acknowledge that you don't actually know what accessibility looks like and the institution doesn't support you in learning? Would you learn from disabled people?

- What if I told you about having to get more documentation from more specialists saying the same things that were already said in prior documentation from previous specialists – only to have my accommodation request denied again by overworked abled people who don't know enough about teaching and learning in higher education? Would you tell me that's just how the system and law works (as if I needed the reminder)? Would you tell me to sue (as if I could)? Or, would you reflect on the time, energy, knowledges, and resources it takes to navigate these administrative injustices?

- What if I told you I understand your exasperation with the increase in accommodations and that I agree – completely – that this system isn't working. What if I told you I know you're overworked and underappreciated and that I am here to advocate with you for my instructional support? Would you understand my exasperation when I tell you that what we hear is "disabled people are a burden"? Would you understand that we are not the problem here and advocate with me for more support? Would you think about the multiply marginalized disabled people who do not have the time, energy, knowledges, or resources it takes to navigate these administrative injustices? The ones that will just disappear rather than ask for what they need.

- If I told you about the student evaluations that said I should find a different job because disabled people can't be real professors, would you shrug and tell me those evaluations don't matter all that much? That there is always the outlier, and we can't let it drown out the others? You may be right. But would you also help me try to change who's considered a real professor? Would you help me fight for structural change if I told you about all the disabled students who came to me for mentorship? Or the other graduate students who needed to talk about being too afraid to seek accommodations? Or the tenured faculty who came to me trying to figure out new ways to teach?

- Would you listen if I told you about taking ten years to finish my Ph.D. when others in my cohort finished in five? Or would you think like the university leaders' administrators who regularly reminded me of the impacts and inconvenience of my crip timeline[4]? Would you see the hypocrisy in all mission statements,

2. Critical trauma theorists have long grappled with the notion that experiences of trauma seem to exist outside the bounds of discernable narrative structures.

3. Here I am referencing Gordon's work *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociology Imagination*.

4. Although not without contention, many people within disability communities have reclaimed "crip" as a word of empowerment. "Crip time" refers to the ways in which disabled people experience time and space differently, see Sameuals'

programs, and offices that are eager to welcome disabled people, until we need something done in a different way? Would you see the violence of this assimilationist approach and admit how it aligns with larger anti-DEI efforts?

- Would you listen if I told you that the inherent ableism of the job market and adjunctification of higher education means that I couldn't apply for those positions you sent me? Would you nod when I explain that I can't work on multiple campuses or up-root my care network or my team of 13 doctors for something temporary? What if I tell you that "publish or perish" means something different to folks like me? Would that inconvenience you to help me change the system? A system that isn't working for anyone, actually.

- How exactly am I supposed to tell you about well-regarded colleagues who espouse intersectional scholarship and politics but act as though disability distracts from work on racism, or settler colonialism, or xenophobia? As if BIPOC people aren't continuously experiencing disablement? Historically. Constantly. Globally[5]. In Gaza right now[6]. I'm not going to tell you about the 2020 uprisings or what it's been like here since George Floyd was murdered just a few blocks from my house. That story matters but it's not mine to tell. They used disability to try and justify his murder though. Did you notice? Ableds never do. I commit to never talking about disability without talking about race and vice versa. Will you?

- How exactly am I supposed to tell you that there is no return to normal for me or millions like me who are immunocompromised or newly disabled?[7] Normal wasn't working before and it's not working now. People like me are still dying. We are "post pandemic" just like we are "post-colonial" and "post-racial" and "post-feminist." Higher education has made it clear: the comfort of normality is worth more than my life. How exactly am I supposed to help you understand that this is a DEI issue? IYKYK[8]. I just don't think there is a story I can tell.

- I can tell a lot of stories about well-meaning people who think accessibility is the same as inclusion and belonging. Or that digital inaccessibility is our only access issue. Or that accessibility is a checklist (rather than a way of being in relationship).[9] Or that access that is all disabled people need[10]. I could tell you about conflated words and hollowed out language used for policies, initiatives, metrics and progress which only erase me more. Every disabled academic I know has stories to tell about the violence of compliance-based offices that uphold the ADA and nothing more. Would you do anything differently? Would you establish, no, better yet, would you fund a disability culture center? A mentorship program? What about courses or facility lines in disability studies so we see ourselves reflected in the curriculum?

- What if I told you about my disabled colleagues, mentors, students and friends who have been pushed out? The queer/trans, BIPOC, immigrant, international, and first-generation disabled people who helped me survive even though they didn't. What would you do if I told you that I too am slowly being pushed out? Afraid every day that I won't make it out alive. This isn't hyperbole. What if I told you that I know that I've held on this long because of the privileges my Whiteness affords. Would you slow things down? Would you do anything differently? Would you have to be so worried about the enrollment cliff if you prioritized educational equity for people like me?

- Everything I am saying, our students have also been telling you.[11] We are not okay. Yet, you interpret

5. See Erevelles' *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Body Politic*.
6. See Puar's *The Right to Maim: Debility | Capacity | Disability*
7. For example, the Center for American Progress reports that there were 2.7 million more disabled adults in the U.S. in 2022 than there were in 2020.
8. Often used in text messages or on social media, IYKYK stands for "if you know, you know."
9. I'm drawing here from Aimi Hamrae's work in critical access studies.
10. See Kraus's 2021 article, "Disability Students Need Equity, Not Just Access."

their struggles or disengagement as evidence of their personal ineptitude. What if their silence was speaking to the overwhelmingness of it all? What if we took (at least partial) responsibility providing the transactional narrative template they mobilize when oversharing their struggles in hopes of receiving access, or acceptance, or understanding? Educators are not therapists; that's true. You have a right to feel frustrated but there are things we can do. What if I found the words to describe the loneliness, the tears of anger and despair? Or, if I told you what it feels like to be stuck here – in a place with no name that exceeds degrees, institutions, positions and broken promises? Would you tell me to go to the counseling center or take a wellness workshop? Would you wonder why I didn't trust you?

- I could tell you stories to illustrate all the ways that ableism is inherently a part of our current political rhetoric, even if it appears to be unspoken. The erasure of Black history is the erasure of disability history. Anti-trans politics is anti-disability politics. Attempts to silence academic discussion on war, genocide, and hate are attempts to silence discussions on the forces of debility. If I tell you these stories, will you ask me about my disability story? Maybe because my disabilities are visible or apparent to you, or maybe because they are not visible or apparent? Or will you pause and remember that this story isn't my story; it's a much larger story about how academic ableism intersects with other forms of academic injustices and that story belongs to all of us.[12]

On and on and on. It's unrelenting. I don't know what else there is to say or how I can say any of it differently, so that you – dear higher ed – will listen. But I know I'm not alone in this disillusionment and I do not take that solace for granted. My queer crip feminist mentors who raised me up and into this work have been warning me.[13] They've told me to be discerning about sharing my story all along. They've taught me about "moving at the speed of trust," and moving with caution around those who request my story, especially those who demand it.[14] Our stories are our methods and our theories; our praxis is our power. They know and they've been teaching me to know. We must keep our stories sacred, and relational, because stories are how we hope. There is no judgment in survival but there are sacrifices that I am no longer willing to make. I'm ready for different stories now. I'm ready to imagine otherwise. Will you weave your story with mine? Can we listen, together?[15]

Onward,

Angela M. Carter (she/her)

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Founding Member | Critical Disability Studies Collective

University of Minnesota | Mní Sóta Makhóče

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11. While exasperated in recent years, the current mental health crisis on campus is not new. In a 2023 article for *NEAToday*, Mary Ellen Flannery reports a "nearly 50 percent increase" since 2013 in college students who "meet the criteria for at least one mental health problem."

12. See, Dolmage's *Academic Ableism*

13. I both reference and borrow Kafer's book title with my use of the words "feminist queer crip." We do not have agreed upon practices for citing someone's praxis, yet I live and work in deep gratitude to so many, including: Jigna Desai, Margaret Price, Liat Ben Moshe, Nirmala Erevelles, Alison Kafer, Eli Clare, Sami Schalk, and Jina B. Kim.

14. I first heard the phrase "moving at the speed of trust" from Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha who (I believe) got it from brown's work *Emergent Strategies*.

15. I am invoking the quote by Murri activist Lilla Watson who said, "If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

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About the author

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Angela M. Carter became a first-generation college graduate in 2009 when she earned her BA in English from Truman State University. Dr. Carter completed her Ph.D. in Feminist Studies in 2019 and is currently serving as Associate Director for Racial and Social Justice Education at the University of Minnesota.

WHY WE MUST TELL THE WHOLE STORY

Fighting Back from Systemic Erasure: Using Truth to Challenge Perceptions

VICTORIA FERGUSON

Dear Higher Education,

I am the Program Director for Solitude, the oldest structure on the campus of Virginia Tech, which was once part of a plantation owned by the Preston Family. The plantation house sits on campus along with a cabin where enslaved people once lived. Pretending the past did not happen or glorifying the house as a vestige of southern White supremacy does not fix the present-day concerns associated with the history of the site. The opportunity to see this space as a place to help students, faculty, and community grasp a better understanding of the world we live in and how we got here, adds value to the structures. Conversations about the past can help change perceptions of the truth.

I am a public historian with thirty years' experience interpreting the history and culture of my people. Public historians have a responsibility to share historical facts in a way that will encourage visitors to our museums to seek out additional information that goes beyond the conversation. We call that planting a seed or sometimes a disturbing thought which requires more investigation on the part of the person who received this new knowledge. We must hone our verbal skills to reach a diverse audience and deliver the knowledge in a manner that can be accepted. I have used this process to help protect, preserve, and promote Indigenous knowledge as a citizen of the Monacan Indian Nation of Virginia. Virginia Tech's home campus sits upon a portion of our original territory. My ancestors fought assimilation and erasure for centuries and we fought for the right to equal educational opportunities. As I turn my attention to a project on social justice on campuses these words of Chingachgook from the ending scene of *Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper runs through my head:

"The frontier moves with the sun and pushes the Red Man of these wilderness forests in front of it until one day there will be nowhere left. Then our race will be no more or be not us."

My early years were steeped in assimilation and segregation. Virginia Indigenous communities had been legally reclassified by the Virginia Racial Integrity Act of 1924 as colored or Negro leaving no opportunity to self-identify. Our segregated existence became a shared experience with African Americans. At the same time, we lived with the expectation that Indigenous people would adopt the ways of the dominant culture and replace our learning models with those of the western education models. My family employed a land-based education system at home where we were given the knowledge we needed to survive in a hands-on fashion and shown an interconnectedness to nature. This teaching process did not require advanced degrees. My mother did not get past the fourth grade and my father did not finish the eighth. Due to poverty, there were very few books in our home. I experienced firsthand the shift from a segregated two room schoolhouse for grades first through eighth to a primarily White high school. This was not something that happened centuries ago. This is modern history.

As minoritized students going through integration, we were thought to be less intelligent by many of our White teachers. These teachers were armed with only their perceptions of us. They had little knowledge of our community. The experience of coming from a hard-working lower class colored coal camp community made me

resolve to prove myself as equal to my White counterparts and determined to preserve the cultural knowledge I was given under the tutelage of my parents. Having lived and learned in diverse community settings I saw firsthand the importance of using different educational processes like land-based learning used within many Indigenous communities. I saw firsthand the importance of keeping our stories and controlling our own narrative. It is my belief that these different learning practices could be helpful to us today.

For thirty years I have researched and documented the history of the Monacan tribe, of which I am a descendant and citizen. I realize the need to have ownership of our stories and tell our own truths. We, as people from a marginalized culture, desired to give voice to those who had been silenced for centuries. In doing the work for my people I came to understand that we were not alone in our quest to be seen, appreciated, and applauded for our contributions to this nation. The control of the western-based educational system by the dominant culture has allowed certain opinions to be formed and for unconscious biases to flourish. Over centuries people have formed opinions that were not be grounded in facts.

My work is to change perceptions by using facts, speaking the truth, and sharing truths long hidden. We can use the past to illuminate the future. Can we expect to have whole opinions if they are based on half-truths? What happens when we are no longer allowed to speak the truths hidden in our history? Learning from the past allows us to identify the obstacles that are a part of the contested spaces we share at institutions of higher learning. That recognition of the past demands we take responsibility and work toward reparative actions. The process starts with moving perspectives by using knowledge, truths, and facts.

Working in public history has allowed me many opportunities to enlighten visitors to the Monacan Indian Exhibit where I served as the manager. I remember one conversation with a guest who told me she thought the Indians were treated badly but the Black people had nothing to complain about. This was just after the National Museum of African American History and Culture opened. The guest was upset by the amount of press received by the newest Smithsonian Museum. She did not understand–or refused to understand–why this museum was so important. I simply informed her that African American history is in fact all our history. It belongs to us as a nation and not just to the people of African descent. These same perceptions are sitting there as the undertone of what colleges and universities are dealing with in their attempt to acknowledge past injustices of stolen people on stolen land.

History has taught us that members of marginalized communities were once seen as inferior and unworthy to walk the halls of predominately White institutions whose beginnings were seeded in the bed of White supremacy and segregation. Virginia Tech started their journey in 1872 during the aftermath of the Civil War as a school for White males, by White males, and has spent the last 80 years attempting to overcome that past in order to level the playing field for all who applied and were accepted. This work is accomplished by bridging gaps in race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion and disability. The interconnectedness available on a college campus can serve as a small microcosm of a truly diverse world. The opportunities we provide our students include knowledge of and chances to navigate the varieties of humankind. It is a major step toward sending graduates out into the world prepared to live out our motto of *Ut Prosim*, That I May Serve, (all of humanity). Positive strides toward this goal have occurred over the last few decades. The process of using the past to illuminate the future is perhaps more important now than it has ever been as it serves as a guiding light to help navigate the future by using facts.

There are multiple ways we can honor the lives and challenges of our ancestors. It starts with learning the truth of our conjoined histories. We must be careful when interpreting the past with today's societal norms. How we interpret history tends to evolve with our personal knowledge. Including a wider lens approach with a complete explanation is useful in enlightening those who have remained strongly loyal to their own beliefs based on having knowledge of only part of our history. We must speak the truth of the past, the whole truth, so we can learn from those facts and become aware. Once we commit ourselves to gaining a full understanding of the truth, we can look at measures required to put in place a system of equality and justice to propel us into a future that will no doubt contain many challenges.

Steps like this have been taken in helping Virginia Tech emerge as a leader in providing community and diversity

on the campus. I am not saying we have arrived; I am saying we have taken the first steps on the journey. This work started in part with digging deep, analyzing reflections of the past, and placing people who have knowledge of doing the work into positions where they can maximize their efforts to make positive changes. Not everyone has the passion or ability to do the work.

Like other marginalized populations Native Americans are striving to make their mark on the campus of Virginia Tech by overcoming the erasure of the past that happened through paper genocide and assimilation of their cultural identity. Indigenous groups are fighting against the idea that, to quote Chingachgook, "our race will be no more, or be not us." The Monacan/Tutelo nations were quickly written out of history as they were erased during early colonization. As a land-grant university it is important to remember the first land-grants in the colony of Virginia gave away land of its original inhabitants like the Monacan and other Indigenous populations of the mid-Atlantic to Europeans. That erasure played a role in allowing the process of land seizure to be conducted as the frontier "moved with the sun."

The erasure of Native Americans made way for new immigrants to become part of the landscape. These new immigrants developed large farms that required enslaved people to be ushered into the interior. These laborers, mainly of African descent, were forced to improve thousands of acres of land while raising crops, animals, and children to help increase the wealth of their owners. Yet, while they labored to cultivate and build upon the very land where Virginia Mechanical and Agricultural College, now Virginia Tech, sits, neither they nor their children could legally attend for decades.

By the time the Morrill Act of 1862 was authorized and signed into effect by Abraham Lincoln, the land had been granted to European colonizers over a century before. Quoting Chingachgook once again: "the Red Man was still being pushed from their wilderness." The Morrill Act allowed over eleven million acres of western land from 250 tribal entities to be designated for sale to generate revenue to help establish centers of higher education and to promote a practical education for the common people of America. This process funneled the largest percentage of dollars to primarily White institutions such as Virginia Tech, and less to historically Black institutions such as Virginia State that also hosted Native American students. After funds from the sale of western Indian land was used to help establish the Virginia Mechanical and Agricultural college, it took over seven decades before the descendants of the enslaved were eligible to attend the college now known as Virginia Tech. White women and people of Asian and Pacific Island descent were able to attend VPI long before Native Americans and African Americans gained the opportunity to enroll.

Education affects income. Today 25% of Native Americans and 19% of African Americans live in poverty.[1] This is an opportunity to use historical facts to shine a light on the present and the future. From this sometimes-troubled history a pathway forward was revealed to those willing to do the work to right the injustices. Tribal nations see the need for equity to be applied to the cost of tuition and an important step for our marginalized communities.

The importance of learning about the past is to demonstrate how changes can occur and look at the processes higher education has used–and can still use–to create spaces for diverse populations of students, faculty, and staff on their campuses. The erasure of truth affects perceptions. We have learned that higher education's perceptions or ideas of what they think marginalized communities need may be entirely different from what the communities themselves see as a need. Pretending the past did not happen or refusing to teach the truths of our contested past does not add to the conversation or fix the problems. Engaging in community learning exercises are beneficial. Institutions can learn there is great loneliness involved with being one of the few from an ostracized community in these predominately White spaces. I am sure loneliness can also be a concern at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, (HBCU).

The first Native American, African American, and other marginalized students faced isolation and lack of community. As a person who went through integration, I can speak of the loneliness of being the only person from my community placed in a space not originally meant for me. Acceptance into these places of higher education does not mean acceptance by the communities of students who attend or by the faculty. Laws may have changed

1. United States Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2023/demo/p60-280.html

but attitudes have not. Underrepresented students are still fighting the battle I fought decades ago: the need to prove they belong, and they deserve to be there while still resisting cultural assimilation. The struggle is made harder when there are few people from your community, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, or disability. In this day and time colleges are discovering the necessity to provide a space where each individual student has a pathway to success is paramount and are reaching out to other universities to learn from their successes.

Reflections of positive experiences when used to open a path for those who come behind us is an important process. Someone had to be first. Someone had to persevere. While it is entirely possible that first Native students attending Virginia Tech may have gone un-noticed to one another, there is much pride among those who were the first to do so. Records indicate Helen Maynor Scheirbeck of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina (Ed.D., '80) was perhaps the first Native American woman to receive her doctorate from Virginia Tech. She was certainly not the last. Since 1980 many Indigenous students who have graced the halls of this university. While Native Americans comprise less than three percent of the population, and their presence on campus is less than the national average, their accomplishments are still noticeable. Virginia Tech established a student organization, Native @ VT, and a program of American Indian and Native Studies was added to the curriculum. Local Indigenous community support helped propel these advancements, which is why community engagement is so important.

Many public places have decided to learn about the original stewards of the land where they sit. Part of the process includes acknowledging the Indigenous people whose land is now owned by someone else. Acknowledging the original custodians must include restorative steps so that the acknowledgment is more than performative. The process of acknowledging the land of the Eastern Siouan speaking Yesa, known as the Monacan and Tutelo people became a major step forward on the campus of Virginia Tech. The process was not an easy one. People from diverse tribal units participated in writing the acknowledgement. A lesson on community-based input was learned and applied. While not every individual got exactly what they wanted the process of working through the ideas and input allowed the community and the institution to come together to begin a process for reparative action.

The community work on the statement also brought to the forefront the need for a declaration acknowledging the plantation history associated with the land, the early landowners, and the institution of slavery associated with the original institution of higher learning and the history of being a primarily White school for decades. Land owned by the Preston family includes the land of Virginia Tech's main campus in Blacksburg Virginia. The descendants of enslaved people of African descent who lived and worked on the land have been instrumental in keeping their family history in the forefront of the discussion. Stories detailing their association with the land are documented and will continue to be told for what we hope will be perpetuity. This is being done by the descendants telling the story about their ancestors in their own manner. This conversation is triggering, both to the descendants and to the African American students who struggle with the notion of a former plantation house occupying space on their college campus. Sometimes it is good to be triggered, especially if growth can occur.

Thus, Virginia Tech developed a [Labor Recognition](#) that follows the Land Acknowledgement. The Labor Recognition speaks directly to the wealth generated by the enslaved and the decades that passed before the first Black people were admitted to the university and finally offered scholarship opportunities. Virginia Tech also authorized the Office for Inclusion and Diversity to act as stewards of the former plantation house, Solitude, the oldest structure on campus, and the adjacent Fraction cabin where the families of the enslaved lived. Solitude/Fraction is now used as a space for restorative justice, bringing people together in conversation about contested space and shared history, and how to move from segregation and exclusion to equity and inclusion.

Higher Education, you have a history and important truths to tell. These institutions all sit on land that was once under the custodianship of an Indigenous group and many of our tribal nations are still here. Let's acknowledge that history as important by identifying past truths and working toward reconciliation. Collaborating with communities to meet community needs while simultaneously building communities on campus are both important models. We need these campus communities to build stronger campus populations. Before Abraham Maslov published his theory of the hierarchy of needs in 1943, Indigenous groups had their own understanding

of the circle of human needs starting with the individual who contributes to the community that supports the cultural practices that circles back around to build a stronger individual. And so the circle continues. We can apply that concept to the many underrepresented populations on campus by helping them to build communities that develop pathways to heal and move their communities forward. This is a crucial step in growing diversity on campus beyond demographics. This should not just be centered around getting students and faculty from different populations on campus; it is preparing a place and space for them. True diversity in education should be the goal and include learning from other communities. The Virginia Tech motto of *Ut Prosim*, That I May Serve, must include having the ability to serve all populations regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and disability. Learning about and from these communities provides a necessary foundation for being of service to a wider audience, not just the community from which we originate.

By doing the work to develop the Land Acknowledgement and Labor Recognition we helped not only the students but also faculty and staff learn truths necessary for transformation. For many on campus this was the first step to learning about history and the impact that history had on some of the populations who have chosen Virginia Tech as their home for a few years. Perhaps if we as a nation had started learning about our diverse populations sooner, it would not have taken centuries to pass laws like the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 2019 Crown Act or take decades to dismantle the 1924 Racial Integrity and VA Sterilization laws. We are still facing the fact that just because laws changed did not mean attitudes changed. We must continue to use truths and knowledge to change attitudes.

Higher Education, you have an obligation to make sure knowledge is applied. Just like any course of study, the ability to apply the knowledge learned is where the true power resides. I plan to use my work in public history to share truth and knowledge about our contested past. I hope to continue to enlighten visitors to the Solitude/Fraction site, and to participants of my presentations to the true history of how colonization negatively impacted my tribal nation and other underrepresented communities associated with the land upon which Virginia Tech sits. I will support the growth and development of diverse communities and encourage learning from their histories so that their history becomes our history. I want to encourage people with the passion to do the work of inclusion, diversity, integrity, and social justice to continue to strive for success and never give up. Teaching diverse historical truths allows us to honor the past and influence a changed perspective. We can use these truths to be transformative as we help people see from other points of view. Speaking the truth can be challenging, but it is necessary as we plot a course of action for future generations. Applying knowledge unleashes the power to prepare for a successful future, a future where we can all survive and thrive, collectively.

Wishing you all the best,

Victoria Ferguson

Director of the Solitude-Fraction site at Virginia Tech

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Victoria Ferguson

Victoria Persinger Ferguson is an enrolled citizen of the Monacan Indian Nation of Virginia. Victoria is a graduate of Marshall University and has a background in researching science methodologies to support historical information. She has spent 30 years seeking primary source documentation and archaeological information to help explain

and support theories on the daily living habits of the Eastern Siouan populations of Virginia's interior up through the early European colonization period. She has written and presented work at Virginia Tech, Washington and Lee, Sweet Briar College, James Madison University, Mary Washington University, and archaeological conferences. Her last presentation, Food Practices of the Eastern Siouan, is being considered for publication in the Archaeological Society of Virginia's Quarterly Bulletin. You may glimpse her in two PBS documentaries: Virginia Indians: Reclaiming our Heritage and Pocahontas Revealed. She is the author of the children's book, *Dark Moon to Rising Sun* and co-authored *Sassy Sassafras, A Two Spirit Story*. She continues to research and write historical works, including the recently completed nonfiction book, Fan Me with a Brick. Victoria was recently appointed Virginia Tech's Presidential Ambassador to Native Nations.

The Legacy of Enslavement on a University Campus

KERRI MOSELEY-HOBBS

Dear Higher Ed,

Let me tell you about my great grandmother. She was the granddaughter of the last enslaved member of her line.

Great-Grandma was scary. She was old and scary…but she taught me how to knit. I used to slide up the carpet steps and then land outside of Great-Grandma's door, both curious to talk to her, but afraid to go in. I just needed to take a deep breath and start "Hey Great-Grandma?;" because that was her name. Great-Grandma. I scratched at the temple of my sandy brown hair and got lost in thought. Why exactly am I working up the courage to bother a woman that I am afraid of? It's not like she's calling out to me. She's Great-Grandma. She's here at Grandma's house every day, sitting in her room knitting. The tap of the knitting needles brings me back to my task. I remember why I'm here now; it's the knitting, I want to do the knitting. I take a deep breath and peak around the door. Great-Grandma is sitting on the edge of her bed with the yarn in her lap. The needles are blue. No purple. No, definitely blue. No…purple. Suddenly I realize that I've moved into the doorway of the bedroom to see the needles better to decern the color. I look up from Great-Grandma's hands. She's still knitting, but she's staring…right…at me. I pause. She doesn't smile. I don't remember her smiling. Looking back now, I have plenty of pictures of her smiling, but I don't remember seeing her smile.

Great-Grandma tilts her head in question, but she's still knitting without looking at her hands. My eyes narrow. I'm impressed. I look down at the needles again, but she finally stops knitting. I look up and see her reaching over to the side table and opening the drawer. She pulls out two pieces of candy. I can't remember if it's peppermints or those deep red and green Christmas candies. It's probably the latter because I don't remember getting excited by them. Great-Grandma turns back around and reaches out her open hand to me, the candy sitting in her palm. I don't move. "Come on" she says softly as if coaxing a scared kitten. I slide across the carpet on my knees. Leaving the safety of the wall of the doorway and ending at her feet. I take the candy and Great-Grandma picks up her needles again. She starts to knit while I eat the candy that I'm sure I don't like. But Great-Grandma gave it to me and who am I to say, "no thank you". I have a feeling that the least I can do is accept candy from Great-Grandma because she's scary. She's old. And she's scary. I eat the candy because I want to watch her knit.

Great-Grandma knits for a while and I watch. Loop, loop, pull. No. Loop, wrap it around, put the finger on that part, and… I lose it. She's too fast. Okay. I start over. Loop, wrap it around, put the finger on that part, and pull? What is she pulling?

"Kerri!?' Grandma calls from downstairs. I look at the door waiting to hear Grandma come up the stairs because she says we should "leave Mom alone." That's what Grandma calls Great-Grandma. I move the piece of candy in my mouth from one cheek to the other and suck. I look back at Great-Grandma double checking to ensure that the person that I think is sitting there is the right person. Grandma has her name all wrong. She's Great-Grandma. I may be four or five years old, but I know for sure that this lady's name is Great-Grandma. She's not anybody's "mom". Silly Grandma.

"Kerri!?" Grandma calls again.

"Yes?" I answer still looking at Great-Grandma.

"Get out of that room!" Grandma demands.

"Go 'on Susie" Great-Grandma interrupts.

"Mom, I...." Grandma goes to answer.

"Susie!" Great-Grandma interrupts her.

Grandma stops calling for me. Great Grandma looks back at me, and I look at her. She is scary. She's old and scary. But I like her. I smile. Teeth staining from the nasty candy I'm holding in my mouth. Great-Grandma continues knitting, and I watch her. For a while, she watches me, and my eyes follow her hands trying to catch the method. She stops again and reaches for a plastic bag on the floor. My eyes follow her motion, and she tries to sit back up, but she hesitates a little as if it's hard. I jumped up and grab the bag and her hands to help her back up. She's cold, but her grip is strong. She looks up at me, but she still doesn't smile. She does raise her eyebrows in question. She's just as surprised as I am that I jumped up and came to her. She settles in her seat again and takes a breath. She reaches into the plastic bag and pulls out a pair of knitting needles. They are green. She hands them to me, and I take them as if she is handing me Excalibur. She opens the plastic bag and holds it out for me to look inside. "Pick one" she says. I look inside and pick out a green ball of yarn. "Go 'head and sit down. I'm a teach you how to knit".

For years when I was asked about my work with my Fraction family history, I started with the moment my grandmother Susie broke the cardinal rule of the Silent Generation and began to answer all my questions about our history. She started giving me the details of all that she knew about Great Grandma and herself. That time was so important because it is when Great Grandma became Isabelle and Grandma became Susie. I now realize that I've spent years discounting all those days and hours sitting at the feet of Great-Grandma as she taught me how to knit and then we eventually sat there knitting together. I don't have many memories of Great-Grandma and me talking while we knit. But I do realize one thing. When I was 10 years old, Great-Grandma died, and so did my ability to knit. I honestly don't have any idea of how to do it anymore. Knitting was how I was with Great-Grandma, and when she was no longer with me, the knitting left too. Sometimes at antique stores, I come across a pair of old knitting needles, and I run my fingers up their length remembering Great Grandma. She was scary. She was old and scary. But I loved her.

From 2012 through 2015, I had dived deep into the Fraction family history with my grandmother Susie, and the family history became my new knitting needles. I got to know Susie and Isabelle and I inherited the history that haunted them. I traumatized myself as I asked Susie to re-live growing up in America in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. I watched her eyes glaze over and the iron clad barrier fall into place when she told me about the mobs of White men that would come to the door, demand to see a Black man who was inside, and that Black man quietly leaving to protect the family never to be seen again. She talked about all the people left behind as the door shut and how powerless and hopeless you feel. She talked about the awkward silence in the room as everyone grappled with being expected to live on but stayed silent. That is where the silence came from. To be silent was to be safe. To tell was death. When asking my grandmother to tell me the story, I was asking her to conjure up an immaculate amount of courage, and to go against her lifetime of instinct and tell me anyway.

And she did. She told me about herself, and she told me about Great Grandma, and as I got to know her, she became Isabelle. I learned that Isabelle didn't show much physical affection-that the candy and the knitting needles was the great action of love that I had always thought it was. I learned that Isabelle also had the iron clad barrier because as a child in 1910, she was groomed by an orphanage to live only to serve White people in their homes; and she knew it and it was insulting to her being. When she failed to do so, she was left on a street corner of Baltimore and told to fend for herself. My grandmother shared with me a letter that Isabelle wrote her before she died. In the letter Isabelle says "This is a beautiful day. That I am not running away" because even Isabelle had to learn how to stop staying silent.

Susie took her own knitting needles and started to weave together the family story showing me the intricate art, the knots, damage, and the family secret to knitting iron for that barrier. Around 2014, Isabelle changed again and

became the granddaughter of Thomas Fraction. Thomas was the last enslaved person of Isabelle's familial line. We would learn that he is the originator of the iron clad barrier that we have inherited. He spent his life pulling the flax from the land in Blacksburg Virginia and turning it into balls of yarn that left iron threads for us to follow 117 years later. Every loop of Thomas' section of the family history is riddled with knots and redirections as he starts over again, and again, and again, each redirection firing and shaping our family iron clad barrier.

It is estimated that the chattel slavery arm of our family starts when our first patriarch was brought to America from Angola in the mid-18th century. By the second generation the family appears on records with the surname Fraction. Where the last name comes is pure speculation since (at the time of this publication) no enslaver of that surname has been found. If you ask our family, it's because fraction was also used like fractious during that time which meant likely to quarrel, or likely to fight. John Fraction (born in 1798) is the first time we see the surname Fraction. His having a surname was very peculiar for the time as most enslaved did not have a surname, and post emancipation, most surnames were likely adopted from the surname of their enslaver. The Fractions would be enslaved by the Preston family for multiple generations, estimated from 1759 through the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. The first Fraction would be enslaved at the Smithfield plantation in Blacksburg, Virginia. As the Fractions had children, the family would be spread among the Preston daughters, sons, and cousins as the Preston family married, died, and grew their estates and wealth through marriages with other families who also held plantations with hundreds of enslaved individuals. Our family would be separated and sold throughout Virginia and as far as Kentucky.

The Fractions are more than a footnote in history. Their story is outlined in my book *More Than a Fraction* which is an example of how different descendant interpretation can be, and the challenges of doing so within the Eurocentric environment that is the United States. The book is based on research and documentation available through several sources such as the United States National Archives, the Virginia Tech Special Collections, Historic Smithfield, and the United States Military records. All these documents have been viewed, considered, and referenced in scholarly works. However *More Than a Fraction* aimed to do more by offering personalities and mannerisms of the Fractions based on ourselves who are their descendants, since we believed that we have learned our mannerisms, habits, cultures, and talents from them as they were passed down generation to generation. Since the Fractions were connected to an influential family like the Prestons, there is more documentation available about them than is normally afforded to people of African descent during slavery.

We are also a complicated family. A further testimony to the fact that when you dive into enslaved families and get to know them and explore them as human beings having an experience, a conscience, and a life despite enslavement, you get to know a family like any other. The Fractions and the enslaved community held multiple responsibilities for the Prestons. They raised children, were Blacksmith, farmers, and builders. They were sent on tasks to take care of business for the Prestons (like acquiring an elaborate gravestone for the paternal member of the Prestons upon his death). All the while, they attempted to escape to freedom and took advantage of opportunities for freedom during the Civil War. While we are currently unclear how many Fractions escaped to freedom, we do know of five including two named Granville and Wilson who ran and unfortunately drowned during their attempt. During the Civil War, when the Union Army closed in on the area where the Preston plantations were, one Preston named Robert Taylor addressed the enslaved community warning them not to try to run towards the Union Army. During the Civil War the enslaved would seek out the camps of the Union and follow them as contraband or try to enroll. Robert Taylor would threaten the families with death should they try to run and be caught. Regardless, at least three members of the Fraction family, Thomas (my many times over great-grandfather; Great-Grandma's grandfather) and his brothers, Othello, and Oscar would run from the Preston plantation and join the Union Army fighting for the 40th and 15th U.S. Colored Infantry.

The Preston family is of Irish and Scottish descent and first arrived in the Americas a few years before purchasing their first enslaved Africans in 1759. They were told to survey on behalf of the King of England and settle the land that stretched from modern day Virginia to Tennessee and Kentucky. As one would expect, the first Preston settler, William Preston, arrived with his uncle James Patton who found the land occupied by the

Indigenous tribes of the area that included, at least, the Monacan, Tutelo, and Iroquois. A long and documented history of conflict, terrorism, murder, and war proceeded and eventually decimated the Indigenous community, and rendered their long history (a history that I wish I had the knowledge and experience to address) to a footnote in the "illustrious" and "benevolent" history of the State of Virginia and the Preston family and legacy.

For the past four years or so, I have been discussing with Preston descendants and working with Virginia Tech as they explore and acknowledge their history, and the plantations that benefited from the institution of slavery. Furthermore, after the emancipation of the enslaved, Virginia Tech benefited from the federal dollars for the land grant universities, and I am sure, a plethora of other benefits to the social ideals and system founded on White superiority. The University has publicly acknowledged their history with slavery and the displacement of Indigenous peoples, they have renamed a cabin believe to have housed enslaved individuals in honor of the Fraction family and others enslaved on the site. As I write this, we are trying to determine the most appropriate exhibit to go into the cabin. The University has held speaker series and has supported faculty sabbaticals to write on the subject. They even dedicated an entire section of their sesquicentennial celebration to focus on and address this history. I am in the middle of all these actions; participating and stating my part, but I am often burdened with ensuring my cousins and fellow descendant community that we are "unsatisfied." Why? Because any notion of satisfaction still feels like a betrayal to the ancestors that experienced enslavement; because I'm not sure what *should* be done, let alone know a measurement of what is enough.

Within the complex scope of what *is* and what is *satisfying*, our family organization, the More Than a Fraction Foundation, is attempting an innovative case study project between the Preston family and our family. This case study seeks to use a holistic, strength focused, and reality-based model that expands literature, philosophies, and ideas of reconciliation and reparations by testing the *feasibility* of reconciliation. Initial observations during the case study include challenges in language that would allow the two families to interact with each other and discuss the unfinished business of enslavement, so we haven't done that yet. For example, amongst the descendants of the enslaved there are uses of language or the focus on language that suggest "permission" (whether that be the need for permission or repetitively expressing the rejection of the need for permission), language that refers to being granted actions and opportunities, and language that at times fulfils an internal need to continuously declare freedom. Among the Preston descendants, there is language that assumed authority, hinted of "White Saviorism," and at times displayed ignorance of the practice of historical fantasy (the most common was the idea of the benevolent slave master). Within the case study we are also exploring mental health issues related to the unfinished business of slavery including epigenetics, post traumatic syndromes, and narcissism as obstacles to address the unfinished business of American chattel slavery. Another consideration is that the Preston family has realized that they will not acquire massive buy in from majority (let alone all) Preston family members causing inner familiar turmoil and literal conflict for their efforts, without having the tools to address it.

Susie passed away in 2015. She missed when the thread led to Virginia Tech. She missed seeing the land where Thomas pulled the flax to start the first threads. But I would like to think that she was with me as Virginia Tech ignored the calls from others to leave the room, and watched as they looked inside the opened bag that I offered and asked them to "pick one". And so, Tech and I sit in a room knitting their portion of the story together. We are not sure where the pieces go all the time. And we are not sure what to do about the damaged parts of their section. There may even come a time where the project dies, and we lose the skill to knit it. But what I've learned from Great Grandma, what I have learned from Isabelle Fraction, is that even when the skill is lost, the threads are always there. Over the years, I have conjured up Thomas' name as a homage to our resilience and given Susie the credit for being the catalyst for all that is achieved today. But I don't declare the legacy that is Isabelle. And for that, I am sorry. So, here's to Isabelle. For her needles and for passing on the family iron clad barrier that can stand the friction to shape the Hokie.

In Reverence,

Kerri Moseley-Hobbs

Founder and Executive Director of More Than a Fraction Foundation

About the author

Kerri Moseley-Hobbs

Dr. Kerri Moseley-Hobbs is the 4th great-granddaughter of Thomas Fraction, who was one of the last members of the Fraction family enslaved by the Preston family at the Smithfield plantation which today is a part of the campus of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Walking on Sacred Ground: Honoring and Challenging the Past

KAREN DRIVER

Dear Higher Education,

Do your events start with a land acknowledgement?

Sitting in the audience is a Native American who hears you knowingly admit that the institution is benefitting from historical and contemporary colonization, even while they personally have difficulty being there on a day-to-day basis. Some of these institutions hire people like me to help them navigate how to talk about and address those harms.

My name is Karen Diver, a citizen of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. My remaining homelands are in Northern Minnesota, just west of the tip of Lake Superior. As a first-generation graduate of college, I earned a bachelor's in economics from the University of Minnesota Duluth, and a master's in public administration from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

I served as the first woman leader of my Tribe, Chairwoman, from 2007-2015. I left that position to serve in the Obama White House as the Special Assistant to the President for Native American Affairs from 2015 until the end of the Administration, representing and advocating for Tribal rights with 24 federal agencies in service to 574 Tribes.

After leaving the Obama Administration, I served as the inaugural Faculty Fellow for Inclusive Excellence-Native American Affairs at the College of St. Scholastica, a private college in Duluth, Minnesota. This was followed by a position as Director of Business Development facilitating the Indigenous education needs of Tribes at the University of Arizona.

I'm currently serving as the inaugural Senior Advisor to the President for Native American Affairs at the University of Minnesota. As a part of the President's senior leadership team, I facilitate ongoing relationship building with the eleven Tribes that call Minnesota home. Through these Tribally led communications, the University of Minnesota develops priorities that attempt to repair relationships, increase service and support Tribal sovereignty.

The positionality of my role within the President's office is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, Tribes are NATIONS, government entities that pre-date the forming of the United States. The nationhood status of Tribes is well established legal fact. This makes the relationship based on Tribes political status not about race, despite the fact that Indigenous peoples have unique cultural and spiritual backgrounds and have been the subject of intense genocidal and assimilationist policies.

Having my role in the President's office means that I can provide guidance in building meaningful relationships with Tribal Nations in Minnesota and provide a direct conduit to senior leaders within the institution to affect system change work. Whether working on affordability with tuition waivers and housing supports to building capacity for Native American student support services.

Secondly, especially for land grant institutions, the very formation of higher education in the United States

was funded through land theft which was used to fund endowments. Thirdly, except for Tribal colleges the demographics of institutions of higher education don't begin to match the population of Native Americans in students, staff, or faculty.

Building capacity for Native focused educational efforts will generally cause concerns for the ability to find the resources. Most institutions will want to focus on philanthropy to mitigate the lack of resources. Clearly, this does not create sustainable efforts to support students or faculty pursuing research and knowledge creation for Indigenous peoples. Regular and meaningful allocations from endowment, legislative appropriations and earned income are needed to provide stability. To fail to provide these allocations is to perpetuate systemic racism.

Finally, the academy is nearly completely devoid of any pedagogy that is not western based in focus and has perpetuated ongoing harm through exploitive and paternalistic research practices and erasure in the curriculum. The University of Minnesota has robust Indigenous Research Guidelines (IRG) that require Tribal affirmative consent to do any university work on Tribal lands or with its citizens. The IRG stresses that Tribes are governments, and that higher education should be in good relations and provide services that are desired by Tribes, rather than driven by our own agendas and interests.

Native learners do not see themselves represented in their degree programs. The most often seen erasure is demographic data sets that do not even list Native Americans, and simply lump them as "other". From traditional ecological knowledge to culturally competent health care services among others, the academy is slowly recognizing that there is robust knowledge creation that has happened, and continues to happen, that does not rely on the approval or concurrence of mainstream educational systems. The best way to include Indigenous knowledge in the academy is to invest in Native faculty who are proving to be adept at adapting their own mainstream based educations and aligning it with their own knowledges and values.

It's also hard to recruit and retain Native learners without creating support structures outside the classroom. To feel supported, they need to be in community. There are many strategies that are not mutually exclusive including Native student groups, Native student advisory boards, dedicated navigator/problem solvers, living and learning communities to full blown Native American Cultural buildings. The financial strain of the full cost of attendance should be a goal, as is flexible learning options including cohorts, hybrid, and online learning programs. Creating pathways from Tribal colleges and allowing all credits and degrees obtained to transfer into mainstream higher education. Unfortunately, most often imposition of judgement about "academic rigor" or other gaslighting is used to exercise control and pass judgement, rather than partnership and communication in barrier removal and allyship.

All of this is to say we can and must do better with our Native Nations and Indigenous peoples. While the institutional racism affects us the same, the solutions need to recognize more than the fact that you are on our land. It's recognizing that the colonization of our peoples continues unless we can see ourselves in higher education, and that higher education is a barrier free part of the solutions towards the well-being of Indigenous peoples and the support of the sovereignty of Tribal Nations.

Sincerely,

Karen Diver

Senior Advisor to the President for Native American Affairs, University of Minnesota

About the author

Karen Driver

Karen Diver is currently the inaugural Senior Advisor to the President for Native American Affairs – University of Minnesota. In addition to previous roles in higher education, Karen served President Obama as the Special

Assistant to the President for Native American Affairs at the White House in the Domestic Policy Council from November 2015 until the end of the Administration. Karen served as Chairwoman of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa from 2007 -2015, and Executive Director of the YWCA of Duluth from 1992-2003. Her current service includes the Great Lakes Fishery Commission as a US Commissioner, and member of the Climate Related Financial Risk Advisory Committee of the Financial Stability Oversight Council at the Department of Treasury. She has a Bachelor's in Economics from the University of Minnesota, Duluth, and a Master's in Public Administration from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

How a Name Can Change

BOB LEONARD

Dear Higher Education,

I was surprised when I was asked to chair the Council on Virginia Tech History. I'm a theatre maker, albeit deeply committed to community engagement and partnering across difference, and I had no idea how my name might have surfaced in the upper reaches of the provost's office for this kind of assignment. When I learned the purpose of the Council was to gather personal stories from a fully inclusive range of people who had ever been a part of Virginia Tech since its beginnings, however, I jumped on the opportunity. The Council was formed to prepare for the celebration of Virginia Tech's 150th Anniversary, its Sesquicentennial, in 2022, and it seemed like an exciting and most worthwhile endeavor to locate that celebration around personal stories and not simply the recounting of the institutional journey. That was nearly five years before the official Sesquicentennial. There were many more surprises to come.

The Council was made up of about 25 members. There were university level administrators from the Office of Inclusion and Diversity, University Libraries, Facilities, Alumni Relations, and University Relations. There were faculty from several disciplines including History, of course, but also Sociology, English, Appalachian Studies, Biomedical Engineering, Public and International Affairs, and Performing Arts. Student representation was from undergraduate as well as graduate programs. We were a lively bunch, with a broad range of interests in the project – some with strong inclination to celebrate, some wondering what this might really be about, some wondering if they actually were or even wanted to be a "Hokie" despite all the normal social pressure to live up to the school mascot's enthusiastic pride. Over the course of a semester's worth of regular meetings, the Council lit on 6 projects that would research, design, and implement a variety of "products" to be launched during the Sesquicentennial year. These projects were quite ambitious, each peopled with enthusiastic teams of faculty, staff, and graduate and undergraduate students from even more widely diverse disciplines – Landscape Architecture, Rhetoric, Computer Science, Dance, Engineering, Visual Arts, Architecture, Biology, Religion and Culture, Science Education, Simulation and Gaming, Political Science, and on.

I learned that the president of Virginia Tech had, some years earlier, encouraged and provided funding for the English department's creation of a story-gathering team under the leadership of a faculty member passionately committed to the value and practice of story as an essential element of community building. The president was interested in reaching out to alumni and former faculty and staff in order to strengthen former Hokies participation in university fund raising campaigns. By the time the Council was formed, this team, called VT Stories, already holding a rich cache of stories as well as effective field-tested practices, was prepared and ready to become a key asset for the Council's strategies, along with several historians long committed to deep research unearthing multiple perspectives and unique experiences through tales and stories from times long gone.   We were amply prepared to supply the Council's production projects with stories and experiences from a multitude of perspectives about, and relationships with the university.

We were plenty busy. After the first semester's commitment to visioning the project, the Council itself shifted to a more supervisory function, meeting roughly once a semester to hear and advise on progress, while daily work

shifted to the individual project teams. To keep the overall project focused and on track, we formed an Executive group, made up of the chair of the Council, the Vice President for Strategic Affairs and Diversity, an expert historian of Virginia Tech history, a staff person from the Office of Strategic Affairs, and a Graduate Assistant assigned to the Council. This group met regularly, at least every two or three weeks, more as needed. The Council chair met with each project leaders, as needed, and periodically called a gathering of project leaders to gain from cross-project learning exchange and problem solving.

As we advanced, the research deepened. The projects moved through research phases to recruiting practical engagement with multiple resources on and off campus. The project teams demonstrated preliminary draft production elements for invited review. The Council was hearing stories from recent alumni with tales of transition from college to career; quarry workers who for generations have excavated and carved the limestone (known affectionately as Hokie Stone) used across so much of the campus; stories from retired faculty, staff, and alumni who lived through the campus havoc of the Vietnam War era; stories from those alumni, retired faculty and staff who had been pioneers in moving the university from a Southern white male military, agricultural and engineering school – led in the institution's early decades by former Confederate officers – step by difficult step to a more and more open institution, however slowly, through the first admission of women students, Asian students, Jews on the faculty, African American students, the first public recognition that there were gay students at Tech. The months of the Council's work became years. The COVID 19 pandemic overtook us. The brutal slaying of one Black person after another by police and neighborhood watch volunteers became a near din.

In early June 2020, our president called on the Council to address and respond to the issue of renaming a dorm that had been named after an 1896 alumnus and long-time, highly regarded engineering faculty member who had, among other things, constructed a system that regulated all the clocks on campus, helping to keep order in class times. That same faculty member, when a student at Tech, had been publicly touted in the 1896 yearbook as a leader – "the father of terror" – of a campus group called the K.K.K.

Now I had heard of this matter of renaming the dorm. In fact, the issue of this particular dorm had been a campus concern for more than 20 years. The issue had been raised and considered by numerous people on and off campus. On more than one occasion it had been taken up by Virginia Tech leadership, only to drift off to an obscure death in the far reaches of bureaucratic non-action. But I had not been told that the Council was in place with the purpose to take up the issue, review the situation and offer a resolution for action to the administration.

In 2018 during that first semester of the Council's life, I did hear, in a kind of quiet "inside information" frame offered as private advice, that the administration had wanted to create an ad hoc committee to be in place should the renaming matter reemerge. I heard that those who were asked to serve on that committee had quietly declined, on the grounds that the recommendations of previous such committees had been ignored, shunted or otherwise disregarded. I heard, further, that there was a possible, though unspoken line between the abandoned effort for an ad hoc committee and the creation the Council as a possible forum, beneath the ostensible purpose of the Sesquicentennial, to be in place for this call, should the occasion arise. But nothing was said about this directly to me or to the Council at the original formation of the group. I was curious about this as I received quiet "heads up" advice but left it as something for later, when/if it should ever actually arrive as an official agenda.

Then in 2020 the issue did, indeed, reemerge from its cycle of obscurity. This time in the form of a public, on-line petition with national participation that helped fuel on-campus actions for change. There were thousands of signatures: current students, alumni, concerned citizens from around the country, oldsters nearly worn out by raising their name only to have been forgotten, young people who had just realized the implications of naming a dorm that houses engineering students after an otherwise long forgotten engineering professor who had also been an advocate for the Klan. The intensity of the petition – its notable numbers and its clarity of purpose – joined the national turmoil surrounding the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, and brought the matter to a boil on campus. The president framed his call to the Council as a response to campus demonstrations and rallies by students, faculty, staff, and alumni supporting the Black Lives Matter movement and calling for the question of renaming to be taken up again.

The Council was, in fact, well positioned and fully prepared to answer the call. With two years of research and story gathering under our belt, we had access to and familiarity with an inclusive range of facts, experiences and perspectives from the university's earliest beginnings through the many changes that had occurred in Virginia Tech's evolution to the 21st century. We understood the exceptional value of matching the expertise of skilled and talented scholars with the expertise of lived experience. As a deliberative body, the Council had established a reliable level of trust and openness within its membership through the process of having worked through multiple agendas with complex and contentious topics. We shared a vision of how our history not only leads to our future, knowing our history prepares us to help shape our future. We were organized and fully functional, able to meet the demands of this urgent agenda.

We met three times in June and early July. We were asked to consider and recommend whether renaming should happen and, if so, to recommend a new name. With ample research, all in hand and commonly shared, on the 20-year history of the issue, including individual stories of the impact of the dorm's name on the students assigned to live in the dorm, as well as credible research on the facts of the dorm's original namesake, we were able to reach unanimous agreement in a single meeting that, in this case, it should. Further, because of the research accomplished and stories gathered, we had immediate and reliable access to exceptionally fitting alternative names to consider. As the president observed in expressing his thanks for the Council's work, our recommendations were based on "input from existing groups, commissions, faculty, staff, students, and alumni within the university community," openly establishing the authority of our recommendations on a highly informed and fully transparent process.

Among the several names of people the Council considered, one African American couple rose the top. Janie and William Hoge had opened their Blacksburg home to the first African American students admitted to Virginia Tech in the 1950s. These six African American men enrolled as engineering students at Tech between 1953 and 1959 were not allowed to live on campus. The Hoge's welcomed them, supported them, and made it possible for them to gain the education they sought. In doing so, they became major contributors to the pioneering efforts of these students, leading the way for Virginia Tech not only to include but to welcome African Americans and all people of color. At the same time, the Hoge's gracious hospitality brought these young men into the embrace of the African American communities of Blacksburg together with the friendships, comfort, enjoyment, and the ordinary avenues of belonging that comes with community. It seemed particularly apt for the dorm that now houses two "living learning" communities in Engineering, the very area of study these pioneering students sought, to honor the exceptional actions and contributions of Janie and William Hoge.

During our deliberations considering the case of this one dorm, the Council recognized that a second bore the name of a historic personage, briefly the president of then Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute (now Virginia Tech), who was recognized in the early 20th century as a national advocate for the practices of eugenics and white supremacy. On the basis of the Council's on-going review, the Council recommended removing the namesake of this second residency hall and that it be renamed to honor the first Black student at Tech permitted to live on campus – James Leslie Whitehurst Jr, who graduated from Virginia Tech in 1963. Not only did this young Tech alumnus go on to become a fighter pilot with the U.S. Air Force in Vietnam, a major in the Air Force Reserve in Virginia, a member of the Air National Guard, and an attorney leading a private practice in Richmond, Virginia, Mr. Whitehurst became the first African American to be appointed to the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, serving from 1970 to 1974.

The Council's recommendations went first to the university's Commemorative Tributes Committee, where its careful research and deliberative reasoning successfully withstood any challenges. Following that review, the recommendations met the approval of the president, who forwarded his recommendation for both actions to the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors who voted final approval on Thursday, August 13, 2020.

The surprises that came to the Council over the four-year build up to our Sesquicentennial in 2022 were eye-opening in the large scale of national perspectives as well as the immediate scale of individuals' personal experiences. A stand-out example for me are the research findings on the source of funding for land grant

universities across the nation. I must admit that, before this assignment, I personally knew next to nothing about the actual history of the land grant institution and, if asked, would have harbored the uninformed and wholly erroneous guess that the founding grant for land came from federal land within the state of the intended new institution. In fact, the Morrill Acts were funded entirely by the sale of federal land west of the Mississippi, land procured in part through the Jefferson administration's Louisiana Purchase from the French, but ultimately obtained from Native American tribes through occasional treaties, Indian Land Cessions, and simple seizure. The sale of this land to fund land grant institutions was of large numbers of small parcels spread across huge expanses. Recent research reveals the sale of which bundle of parcels funded which institution, allowing the Council to publish a map connecting the originating sources in counties across several western states with the Blacksburg campus.

Similarly, although on reflection an obvious and practically unavoidable reality, it was equally mind-expanding to learn that the first five presidents of Virginia Tech were former officers in the Confederate Army, as were many, if not most of the teaching faculty over the first decades of the institution's history. There are many buildings on campus named after our institution's early leaders. There are those that might consider whether all such should be reviewed for renaming, unless we understand the importance of not simply recognizing but honoring our actual history where honor is due as opposed to trying to hide or dismiss its actuality. Why then did the Council elect to recommend renaming of these two dormitories? The Council drew on a comprehensive understanding supported by extensive research findings and gathered personal experiences that can only be gained over considerable time to evaluate the merits of these specific cases. This kind of standing could not be accomplished effectively by ad hoc committees considerably more subject to the whims of the social moment. Further, the Council's originating charge to publish its findings in a variety of broad public forums puts these histories into public conversation, allowing for particular choices to be grounded in the broad body politic, rather than the act of temporary administrative units. In preparing for its Sesquicentennial, Virginia Tech may have stumbled (or insightfully designed) its way into recognizing the importance of an on-going public conversation about our history supported by the expertise of both academic scholarship and broadly inclusive personal experience.

With care and gratitude,

Bob Leonard

Professor of Theatre

About the author

Bob Leonard

Robert H. (Bob) Leonard is a theatre maker, writer, teacher and arts organizer at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, where he is the primary advisor for the MFA program in Applied Theatre and Public Dialogue (formerly the Directing and Public Dialogue program).

WHY WE BELIEVE
TRANSFORMATION IS POSSIBLE

Decolonizing Education through Immersion: Increasing Intentional Study Abroad throughout Africa

NICOLE RICHARDS DIOP

Dear Higher Education,

I am a Black American Assistant Professor at a predominantly White women's liberal arts college. Hailing from Rochester, New York, with familial roots in Newport News, Virginia, and Montgomery, Alabama, I now move between work on the west coast of America and summers on the west coast of Africa. It is only fitting, for as an only child raised by two dedicated Black educators, my upbringing was grounded in a global Black education. Armed with Black books, Black Barbies, Black names of Black leaders, my meticulously crafted childhood reached a kind of zenith at age 12, when I traveled to Nairobi, Kenya with my father, before traveling to Egypt the following year. Experiencing the richness of the Black world as an adolescent, coupled with the untimely loss of my mother to pancreatic cancer three years ago, have profoundly shaped my present. Both life and loss, have been instrumental in propelling my work as founder and executive director of Rose Pan African Education, an organization committed to fostering decolonial learning throughout the African continent.

Decolonizing education is an active process of disruption and creation; it simultaneously unravels the reliance on Euro-America as a necessary center and point of origin for thought, while generating pathways for us to imagine other worlds of knowledge and possibility (Davies, x). Particularly in our study of the African continent, decolonial learning then, is imperative. For decades after decolonization movements and the rise of brilliant Black thinkers like Kwame Nkrumah, Walter Rodney, and Frantz Fanon, knowledge of Africa remains asphyxiated by an intellectual hollowness. Indeed, it is frozen and forgotten in our Western consciousness, receiving only slightly elevated attention than it did centuries ago when Europe commenced its voracious staggering across Africa's breathtakingly textured terrain. Centuries have elapsed, and yet we are still guided by Hegel's blind colonial (justification) formulation made in 1806, that "Africa is no historical part of the world [with] no movement or development to exhibit" (86). Africa in the American educational imagination still struggles to break free from what has become the "common sense" of its place in the world; indeed, Africa remains a series of dead-end tropes—a place of unceasing death, danger, disorder, disease and both literal and intellectual darkness.

The process of pulling Africa in from the abyss that Eurocentric paradigms set into motion, can assume many forms—from offering more diversity on Africa in our construction of curriculum, to structuring pedagogies that reflect African cultural traditions of knowledge exchange. For example, how would student life be enriched across the social sciences and humanities if local African histories, philosophies, cultural practices were integrated into not only specialized or upper-level courses for undergraduate students, but also introductory classes on literature, ethics, political thought? How illuminating would it be for students to understand that Africa is not left behind as Europe violently consumes the world, but at the center of knowledge production and exchange by way of trafficked Africans transported to Europe and the Americas—indeed, by way of Europe and America's continued colonial extraction of Africa's material, cultural, and intellectual resources. Further, what of Africa's

myriad indigenous teaching practices—teaching while outdoors, teaching within a circular structure. This and much more. Much, much more.

All of this is necessary for our educational system's expansion and edification across the United States in public and private institutions. But what I advocate for now, as a faculty member of higher education and the director of Rose Pan African Education, is the power of decolonial learning through global immersion. With only an alarming 2.44% of United States college and university students studying abroad in Africa compared to 66% in Europe, and with two-thirds of 2.44% studying in *Anglophone* South Africa, Ghana, and Kenya, Africa remains perhaps read, heard, and seen in ephemeral snippets, but largely unfelt, unengaged, unknown. Thus, I turn to global immersion, as a more *intentional* and rigorous study abroad engagement on a local scale, as an indispensable form of learning in our press towards decoloniality in our higher educational process. Yes, following the Martinican philosopher Edouard Glissant, if we want to be *global* we must get *very* local. And here, I emphasize the local of African communities. Unlike conventional study abroad programs, this immersive approach prioritizes humility, curiosity, and a meticulous focus on integrating local African systems of knowledge into the higher education landscape. I claim that we must use the resources available to us in higher education, to not only draw alternative systems of knowledge into the university and college classroom, but also connect ourselves conscientiously with Africa, given our historically violent, dismissive, and prescriptive engagement.

In honor of this deep need in our higher education systems, I have developed a program for students and faculty called "Decolonizing Education", which commenced in 2022 and has completed three courses with undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty. The aim of this program is to decolonize learning of Africa by way of close engagement with African local histories, school systems, ways of life, and spiritual practices—beginning with Senegal, a West African nation. Importantly, a multi-racial, multi-ethnic cadre of students and faculty are not only acquainted with the country's fairly well-known cosmopolitan metropolis of Dakar, but participants have an opportunity to travel to the rural farming village of Sebikotane and the holy, self-governed and foundationally decolonial city of Touba. All these spaces stand alongside each other as parts of knowledge production that inform Senegal's rich way of life. Knowledge unfolds with more than a French educational model, but with a multi-faceted spiritual and ecological life. Upon arrival, students may or may not have French language skills, but with an emphasis on the significance of language as an entry into alternative knowledge systems, students participate in Wolof classes—the country's lingua franca. Learning about the country's strong leadership with regards to decolonial thought through the works of historian Cheikh Anta Diop, filmmaker Ousmane Sembene, and African feminist Mariama Ba, we then move through various powerful sites including the African Renaissance Monument and Goree Island.

Engagement deepens by walking through cultural textures of the everyday—the salience of the market, the omnipresence of fishing, the paramount importance of farming, the coffee vendor, the restaurant. Students studying Political Science, History, and Literature have expressed astonishment over how little of Senegal was known to them prior to arrival—how the country came alive through walking its streets and speaking with local students, teachers, elders, and citizens in a way that short excerpts, academic readings, and video clips could not compare. Several students were so moved as to express a desire to return for more academic fieldwork. Decolonizing Education Immersion has power as an educational tool; it begins with Senegal and will turn to Ghana and Rwanda within the next year.

I have focused here on the United States' deep need to bridge thought; however decolonizing systems of knowledge in higher education, is a project for both sides of the Black Atlantic. It is not simply within an American educational frame that Africanness needs critical nuance. Within African educational systems, understandings of indigenous and global Blackness are in want of further curricular integration. In December 2023, I had the pleasure of meeting an astonishing young Senegalese woman finishing her third year of undergraduate study at the University of Cheikh Anta Diop in Senegal's cosmopolitan metropolis. Cheikh Anta Diop, for which the university is named, is one of the most important originators of African decolonial thought—famous for shifting our framing of civilization as a distinctly European phenomena, to an African one, beginning with Ancient Egypt.

Given the legacy and contribution of this Senegalese pedagogical freedom fighter to not only academic thought but also the global Black community, I was astonished to hear that as an American Literature student, the young student, did not follow a curriculum that fell outside of Fitzgerald and Hemingway. I would imagine that Diop is shuddering in the afterlife—that a university in his home country bearing his name could teach a history of American development without centering the impact of African presence in and impact on New World (thought). However, in the least, we had each other to share, connect, and circulate new knowledge.

This is indeed what global immersion opens up; it connects students and faculty in various African contexts to students and faculty from the United States. It illuminates out shared space in the world. And perhaps through the continued intimacy of global immersion for undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty, Diop's dreams, and many of our dreams of social justice will finally come true—social justice in education may finally, with our efforts, toward on the ground and hand in hand connection, draw in from the horizon.

Nicole Richards
Founder and Executive Director of Rose Pan African Education

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Dr. Nicole Richards Diop is Founder and Executive Director of Rose Pan African Education, an African education institute committed to enhancing global diversity, engagement, and reciprocity in study abroad. She holds a BA in English Literature from the University of Pennsylvania, an MA in African American Studies from Columbia University, and a Ph.D. in American Studies and Ethnicity from the University of Southern California.

Learning is Transforming: Strategic Education for Inclusion and Equity

MICHELE DERAMO

Dear Higher Education,

Let me introduce myself. I am the associate vice provost for diversity education and engagement in the office for inclusion and diversity. I admit that I never imagined myself at this level. Who even knew what a provost was? I'm a first-generation Italian American woman from a working-middle class family. My grandparents immigrated as children, and as far as I know, none had a high school diploma. A college degree and the economic benefits flowing from it was the American dream my parents had for their children.

My work is that of a thought leader. When you come from the working class, the work of creating ideas is a privileged one. It is important that I protect my time so I can dedicate it to the creative process at the heart of learning. I don't describe the product of my efforts as "training," which suggests conformity and compliance. Instead, I think about language, capacity, development, growth, and the necessity of living intentionally in a space of ambiguity that eludes definitive answers. I can share with colleagues some words and tools that have been shown through research and practice to promote inclusion, foster dialogue, diminish bias, and increase engagement across difference. But–I can't guarantee that they will work. Sometimes we must acknowledge when harm has been done and trust has been broken–possibly beyond repair.

Perhaps my approach is influenced by the paganism of southern Italian Catholicism, where the grind and suffering of daily life was eased through an intermediary. While I'm not claiming to be the saint on the shelf, perhaps I am someone whose approachability makes the challenging work around equity possible. After all, I was raised to be nice, to please, to smile through adversity. My intention is not to convert. Instead, I approach diversity education as a form of cultural work that offers words, practices, stories, and community so that we can do better and be more fully ourselves.

In this letter, Higher Education, I want to make two points about educating for diversity, equity, and inclusion. The first is that diversity education should be a tool for building the capacity of the committed rather than a cudgel for converting the minds of the skeptical. A 90-minute class or workshop is unlikely to produce significant change. What it does provide is a space for acquiring new insights, practicing new skills, and growing confidence in your beliefs. As more people voluntarily deepen their ability to listen and dialogue, and as more people seek out knowledge of and exposure to the varieties of human experience, our communities will flourish. Younger generations will be socialized into an expectation of diversity. Social norms that value inclusion will gain power. These social norms will be codified into processes and policies.

As I reflect on my (almost) thirty-year career at Virginia Tech, I can see how this evolution occurred. In 1995, when I arrived at Virginia Tech from St. Joseph's University (a Jesuit institution with the mission of serving faith through the promotion of justice), there was no office of diversity and inclusion. University leadership was overwhelmingly White, male, and straight. A walk down the hallway of most buildings featured rows of photographs of students and professors who were also, overwhelmingly, White and male, sometimes in military

uniforms. However, there were small cohorts of committed individuals—faculty, students, student affairs professionals, and more—who met in committees to continually raise the questions of race, gender, sexuality, social justice.

Thus, my second point is that diversity education should lead to allyship. Allyship, the authentic kind, is rooted in humility. It incorporates both an understanding of privilege and oppression, as well as an ability to leverage privilege to foreground listening, believing, and making space for those who have been historically excluded. The early diversity committees of the 1990's often lamented that they were preaching to the choir. However, those committees included people from many sectors of the university, some of whom now hold positional leadership. Some of those people are still present today, attending programs and workshops so they can continue to learn—since learning has no end point. They are now situated to influence change in a way that is strategic and transformational, beyond the journey of the individual self.

My work in diversity education began in 2013, after spending almost 20 years administering community-based learning. In my new position, I inherited a program of four-to-six-hour workshops on topics such as fundamentals of diversity, appreciating differences, communicating respectfully, and unconscious bias, as well as a range of electives. Participants completed sets of scaffolded courses to earn Ally or Advocate certificates. Eventually, a third level of Ambassador was created so that long-term participants could develop projects that applied their diversity knowledge to the workplace.

The Diversity Development Institute (DDI), as it was called, was created as one among several recommendations by the Task Force on Race and the Institution (Virginia Tech 2007) convened in response to racist incidents on campus. When DDI was launched, the office of the vice president for diversity and inclusion was a part of senior administration, but its standing on the president's cabinet was a marginalized one. Its staff remained small in proportion to the size of the university, and its leadership was not sufficiently authorized to make strategic decisions. I mention this because the Diversity Development Institute was well received on campus, with hundreds of people enrolling in the courses each year; however, the people attending were mostly administrative staff or professionals. As much as they reported learning and benefiting from the workshops, they consistently wondered aloud: *Now what?* Which was often followed by the question: *Why isn't leadership taking these workshops?*

I believe everyone has a sphere of influence, so it did matter that staff and AP (Administrative Professional) faculty were making time for these courses. But their observations raised several important points about the state of diversity education. First, the workshops were heavily weighted toward personal growth and awareness. Participants were engaged and stimulated within the workshops, but they returned to workplaces where the processes and protocols seemed impervious to change. What more could they do to make a difference, beyond communicating respectfully and paying attention to their own bias?

Further, the design of the long workshop limited who could be involved. Some teaching faculty participated, but many were unable to take four hours to attend a program that did not have a direct correlation to their departmental obligations or the existing rewards structure that was heavily weighted toward research productivity. Similarly, administrative leadership could rarely afford to spend half of a day in a workshop unless it was held outside of the academic semester. Even then, their positional demands made it difficult for even the most well-intentioned to participate meaningfully for more than an hour at a time. Thus, the centerpiece of diversity education, while nicely done, was not strategically placed.

In 2014, a major restructuring for diversity and inclusion work occurred. The existing office was dismantled, and its programs distributed to other units across campus. DDI became a part of the organizational and professional development unit in Human Resources. For one year, the university experimented with a version of a distributed model led by diversity liaisons representing constituencies across campus. It seemed counterintuitive that the plan for establishing a more robust diversity and inclusion commitment would be to eliminate the office. Fortunately, the plan was a transitional one. The newly appointed President of Virginia Tech, Timothy Sands, authorized a search for a Chief Diversity Officer to lead Inclusive VT, the institutional and individual commitment to *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve) in the spirit of community, diversity, and excellence. Menah Pratt, when offered the position,

negotiated that her role included oversight of university strategic planning. In doing so, the diversity office began its migration from the margins to the center of university life.

I returned to the diversity and inclusion team in 2017. We would sunset DDI shortly thereafter. The program had accomplished its original purpose. Now, there were new objectives to be met. The implementation of Inclusive VT was marked by the development of four high-level diversity strategic goals to which every senior management area was beholden and for which metrics were established. Diversity education was redesigned to advance the strategic goals of sustainable institutional transformation, representational diversity, a welcoming campus climate, and the integration of equity across the academic mission.

One of the first actions toward these goals was the implementation of all-campus DEI learning so that every student and employee had a shared understanding of fundamental diversity concepts. The DEI learning modules received approval from the Board of Visitors as a requirement for all incoming students, both graduate and undergraduate, and as an expectation for all full-time wage and salary employees. You may think that the implementation of a sweeping diversity education requirement would meet resistance. For the most part, this did not happen. Virginia Tech was experiencing a sea change in its leadership, with women and people of color entering the ranks of leadership. Colleges created their own diversity director positions. Diversity committees were formed in almost every organizational unit. The distributed model of Inclusive VT, with its clearly defined goals as its beacon, gave direction in a way that catalyzed action. The all-campus DEI learning modules were solid content-wise, but alone had limited impact. (Participants completed the modules online, on their own time.) Its significance lay in what was communicated: that these concepts of diversity, inclusion, equity, belonging—they mattered at Virginia Tech.

The diversity strategic goals prompted other educational innovations:

We produced 20 Inclusive VT Insights, short videos of 6-8 minutes with discussion guides on a single DEI question. These were written in collaboration with and delivered by colleagues across campus so that anyone, anywhere, anytime, individually or by unit, could have conversations and gain actionable skills for being an ally, creating safe and affirming spaces, interrupting bias in the workplace, communicating respectfully, retaining a talented and diverse workforce, and more. Some of these videos were used to construct online courses with discussion boards and quizzes, that could be completed for a digital badge.

We created content to support a diversity search advocates program that informed search committees about how bias showed up in the academic search process and offered tools for redirecting deliberations away from speculation or snap decisions and toward a mission-focused assessment of candidates. Every faculty search committee was required to appoint one of its members as the diversity search advocate, thereby necessitating a supplemental learning experience for fulfilling the search advocate role.

We created ten workshops on inclusive teaching and did so in collaboration with the university Professional Development Network and its computer refresh program that offered faculty new technology and software after completing 12 credits of professional development. We organized inclusive teaching cohorts with academic departments and contributed to a five-year Inclusive Excellence in STEM program led by the Office of the Vice President for Undergraduate Education and funded by a Howard Hughes Medical Institute grant.

We formed a cohort program, White Allies as Transformational Leaders, comprised of senior faculty and department chairs from every college, to meet monthly to read, reflect, and discuss what it means to be an inclusive academy, and how the work of inclusion is embedded in the way we recruit, hire, retain, mentor, and facilitate faculty success. Reflections from some of the first cohort of White Allies are included in this collection. We have recently formed a parallel cohort, Transformational Allies as Inclusive Leaders (TRAIL), for administrative faculty at the director level and higher.

All these efforts were supported by two large-scale touchpoint events: an Inclusive VT Summit held every August to kick off the new academic year and an Advancing Diversity Gathering in January to highlight programs and initiatives occurring across campus.

The summer of 2020 was a turning point.

The quarantine imposed by the COVID 19 pandemic beginning in March 2020 required that we adapt our programming for online delivery using the Canvas learning management system. Prior to this, I had been skeptical about the effectiveness of online courses. The interpersonal engagement of diversity education was too important. People needed to talk with one another, to be in a common space, to form communities of learning. Now, we had no other choice. And then, while we were still figuring out how to organize a Zoom webinar, George Floyd died in the custody of a white police officer on May 25th.

What made the murder of George Floyd stand out among the dreadful history of police-involved killings of Black citizens was the fact that the entire event from arrest to his final breath was recorded on a cell phone, uploaded to social media, and viewed an estimated 1.4 billion times over the next week (Pex in dot.LA, June 2020). I remember the moment—my son, Vincent, running to my room, cell phone in hand. We watched a man die while Derek Chauvin calmly knelt on his neck as his fellow officers looked on, and bystanders shouted helplessly. The viral witnessing of the event galvanized a global conversation around police brutality, system racism, and the insidious persistence of white supremacy.

The corporate and institutional statements followed. I counted 37 statements made by the Office of the Provost, colleges, departments, caucuses, and student organizations at Virginia Tech, in addition to the official university statement signed by President Sands and Menah Pratt-Clarke. Across the university came the recognition that, "from the marked disparities in COVID-19 illness and death across racial, ethnic, and economic divides, to the unrelenting burden of racism, past and present, systemic and overt, we cannot continue to expect incremental change and the goodwill of the majority to solve a multigenerational problem" (University Statement, VTX News, May 31, 2020).

To be strategic, diversity education must also be responsive.

On June 5th, our office hosted the first of a series of webinars, Unfinished Conversations Around Race and Racism. President Sands opened the conversation, acknowledging the pain of Black Americans, and asking "what we can do to accelerate sustainable transformation, beyond words, programs and resources, what structural changes are needed?" Menah and I continued the conversation, using personal narratives of the mothers from whom we came as critical pathways into deeper, structural insights. Menah stated that education was a powerful engine for change, that this was a moment to think out loud about how to move forward. I affirmed that education includes knowing our history, beginning with our own. Three hundred questions were submitted by viewers.

Subsequent conversations over the next year included ones with White male allies, White women allies, with the Virginia Tech Athletics director, Black women pioneers at Virginia Tech, Virgnia Tech's first African American student, and with faculty using anti-racist teaching practices in their classrooms. As the quarantine lifted, we recorded fewer webinars and eventually returned to in-person modalities with a zoom option. Our newfound expertise in using technology, and university investments in equipment and technical support, enabled us to adopt a more inclusive system of delivering education.

As we approached the fall of 2020, my work as a thought leader and content creator had accelerated. I was shifting all diversity education workshops to online, self-paced, digitally badged formats. This required a reimagining of how to present material so that participants were both receiving information and engaging with it. The long workshop, time bound, and place based, now evolved into micro-learning modules that moved fluidly from one topic to the next while allowing participants to stop and resume at their own pace. Even though participants were completing the courses independently, it was important that my presence and voice be vivid to them, and that they be in conversation with one another. Each module concluded with a discussion board, and each course concluded with a 3-2-1 assessment that asked them to identify three insights gained, two actions they would take, and one question they still had.

One of the courses reimagined for the fall 2020 was a workshop I had delivered a few times that went by the name, "Teaching Race While White." In the summer's aftermath, it was clear to me that much more would be demanded of the topic than I had previously delivered. Thus, I redesigned the workshop, naming it Anti-Racist Teaching.

The Anti-Racist Teaching course is comprised of five modules. The first, "Being a Black student on a predominantly White campus", features videos, writing and spoken word poetry by Black undergraduates and graduates describing their experiences of isolation, fear, pressure, and prejudice on their campuses. The second, "Bringing racism into the classroom," identifies seven practices that well-meaning professors often deploy, such as playing devil's advocate or claiming objectivity, that enable racism in the classroom. Each practice is coupled with an alternative, culturally responsive practice. The third module, "Building our racial literacy," guides participants through a close reading of the article, *Pushing Back Against Racism and Xenophobia on Campuses* by MarYam Hamedani, Hazel Rose Markus and Paula Moya (May 14, 2020), that advances the concept of racism as a doing rather than a being, making the point that if we do racism, we can also undo it, and connects them with three JSTOR Daily crowd-sourced collections: The Institutionalized Racism Syllabus, Charlottesville Syllabus: Readings on the History of Hate in America, and most recently, Politics and Power in the United States (giving context to the January 6 insurrection). The final module, "Enacting Anti-Racist Pedagogy," draws upon the "Anti-Racist Discussion Pedagogy" guide by Drs. Selfa Chew, Akil Houston, and Alisa Cooper (August 2020) to present actionable practices such as community guidelines and discussion prompts, that helps participant with the process of revising a course to reflect an antiracist pedagogy.

Since its launch, the Antiracist Teaching course has been the most highly enrolled of the inclusive pedagogy courses. And it is not only faculty in the social sciences and humanities pursuing the course. A significant number are from STEM and Business fields. While there is occasional confusion among some about how to proceed –"I teach cell biology, so we don't have these discussions in class"–most participants discover a point of connection: "There are relatively few BIPOC individuals in my field. I think that by talking about why that is and highlighting notable BIPOC figures, we can spark discussions in the classroom. Just because the subject matter is insects doesn't mean that our field and the way we perceive it is not influenced or informed by social inequities."

Recently, colleagues in Architecture, Arts and Design and the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences initiated an Antiracist Teaching network to create community and advance scholarship among faculty committed to critical pedagogies. These faculty represent some of the most vulnerable in the academy because their expertise in topics of race, gender, queerness, disability, and social disparity makes them potential targets of groups (often external, but not always) wanting to preserve the legacies of white supremacy culture. Academic scholarship is distinct from diversity and inclusion education; however, diversity and inclusion education is dependent upon the work produced by these scholars. We need to ensure that they can continue their work, including their direct engagement with students.

Initially, the one- question-you-still-have prompt in the final assessment was intended to be rhetorical. Learning is generative, thereby producing new questions. I decided soon after implementing this assessment format to respond to each question. A question asked on the Antiracist Teaching discussion board is this: "*How do we effectively and efficiently create an anti-racist environment?*"

Dear Higher Ed, please take note of my response.

To be effective, institutions must be willing to have the conversation, beginning with an interrogation of their own history. They must be willing to have many conversations, in a variety of formats, with varying audiences. But efficiency should not be a goal. To be efficient is to avoid the inherent complexity of doing the work. There isn't an efficient way to address systemic racism or any of the structural inequities that diversity education aims to address. What an institution can do is invest in the task by providing resources for professional development and diversity education. Institutions can invest in the task by rewarding individuals who demonstrate effort by taking time to build their capacities for allyship, as well as rewarding departments that embed a commitment to research-informed best practices for equity into their mission. Institutions can invest in the task by supporting scholars and practitioners within their organization who have thought long and hard about these topics and can serve as our thought leaders and thought partners.

In recent years, diversity and inclusion education has come under scrutiny on multiple fronts–for having negligible impacts, for being performative, for sowing division by focusing on difference. Perhaps we are expecting

diversity and inclusion education to do more than it is equipped to do. Instead, I invite us to engage more deeply with others, to "hear beneath" the surface to better understand the fears and skepticism that often drive division. Personal encounters of vulnerability are what break through the walls of ideological difference. Building trust is an ongoing process, and as trust builds, we feel more courageous about facing the hard questions of our times. I believe that education for diversity and inclusion can give us tools to make this happen.

Let's be courageous together.

Michele Deramo

Associate Vice Provost for Diversity Education and Engagement, Virginia Tech

About the author

Michele Deramo

Michele C. Deramo is Associate Vice Provost for Diversity Education and Engagement in the Office for Inclusion and Diversity at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg. In this capacity, she develops and delivers educational experiences that advance inclusive excellence and build strategic capacity. Deramo earned her Ph.D. from the ASPECT program (Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought) with concentration in cultural and social theory at Virginia Tech. Her research focuses on performative identities in diaspora, forced migration, Italian feminism, autoethnography, and arts-based methodologies. She was inducted into Phi Beta Delta Honor Society for International Scholars in 2009. She earned master's degrees from Duquesne University (Education), and the Iliff School of Theology (Religion and Social Transformation).

Ubuntu's Space for White Allyship

GERDA VAN DIJK

Dear Higher Education,

I am a White, Afrikaans-speaking woman, daughter of a Dutch immigrant father and an Afrikaner mother. I am a White woman born on land that is not my own – does not belong to my people, does not share my people's history. In actual fact, before 1994 my people were responsible for the oppression, segregation, murder and other human atrocities visited on the indigenous people of this land – the Khoisan comprising the Khoikhoi and the San people as well as the Bantu people who arrived in South Africa in the 3rd century from the Congo basin. Europeans would visit these shores from 1488 and a Dutch colony would be settled here in 1652.

The point being, that White people came to South Africa and through a process of systemic racism, colonised and dehumanised South Africa's indigenous people. My own identity work only started late in my academic life. Being the product of White privilege, I never questioned that I would not receive the best primary and secondary education, nor did I wonder whether I would have entry into my chosen tertiary institution, or whether I would obtain employment in my chosen career directly after completing my studies. None of my reality was presented to be as the product of choice or with any sense that by being White, all these were available to me. Being academically astute meant that I was headhunted for positions, and I would comment that I have been blessed to never have had to seek for employment – employment always found me. I had incredible mentors along the academic road, and they were all white men. When I became an associate professor (in South Africa you promote to associate professor after you obtained your PhD degree and written articles, supervised postgraduate students, and obtained funding), I was the 3rd White woman in South Africa's history to become a professor in my academic discipline. All this led to hubris and a very inadequate understanding of identity and life's purpose.

My academic journey took me to a smaller town in another province, away from family, away from the known university, away from the church I was born and raised in and dropped me in an environment which I found hostile. I came to the self-realisation that the hostility I was feeling was me being tested on all aspects of identity – being a woman who was unmarried and hence had to be a lesbian, being Afrikaans mother tongue speaking and hence had to be conservative, being a woman in an academic environment and hence could not possibly be a professor, being a woman in a reformed church and hence would be subservient to the men who knew better. I was none of those and struggled with why people would perceive me as fitting into that mould. I struggled and fought – I fought the men in the church, I became a manager among men in my academic institution, I associated with colleagues who were anti-establishment and deemed radical in their beliefs. I questioned, but I did not yet know what the right questions should be. My questions all related to 'attacking the system' but by 'attacking the system' I continued to perpetuate the binary logic which upheld it. It is only recently that I have started asking questions about White privilege, and cultural competence no longer seeking solace in superficial stances against oppression but asking questions where I experience great discomfort.

Dr. Robin DiAngelo made me aware of how I negated my race as an integral part of my experience. I did not have race and could therefore, not be a racist. I did not have any real sense of a racial identity. I used platitudes such as "I have Black friends", "my domestic worker is like my sister" and through it all I never recognised that I should

confront my own discomfort with my race before acknowledging anything else. DiAngelo profoundly brought this home for me when she stated "That I can live my whole life in segregation. In fact, if I followed the trajectory that my loving parents laid out for me in my good neighborhood, in my good school and my good college and my good career, in which I would ideally rise to the top, I could easily never have any consistent, on-going, authentic relationships with people of color, and not one person who guided me ever conveyed that there was loss".

I sit with that loss – what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie referred to as the "danger of the single story". Without me recognising it, I was living a single story even though I thought I was liberal and open-minded. I did not acknowledge how my own race made it possible for me to be in that position of privilege screaming oppression. While DiAngelo argues that the binary perpetuated by negating race and racism finds its way into language, behaviour and patterns, taking it beyond the individual experience helped me to understand racism as a system of unequal power, a system that is reinforced because I use the language that perpetuates this. My argument here is that this negation is found in every intersection of a person's life – whether it is race, class, culture, sexual orientation, geographic location – it does not matter, the system of inequality is simply not seen in its intersectional manifestation. By not seeing the intersection – my own and others' – I perpetuate what can most easily be 'othered'.

What would my point be to higher education?

First, teach cultural competence. Teach how messy and wonderful identity is within a space where the collective recognises the important contribution of the individual in all their intersections.

Second, support and champion those of us who see ourselves as White allies with the understanding that we know where and how we fit into being an ally.

What I wished my own university understood is how to create that courageous space for safe conversations around cultural competence. Having a LGBTQI+ statement or a policy on inclusivity in teaching, research and learning lays a foundation and provides an indication that senior management is serious about inclusive education. However, beyond the policy there is very little real conversations – we do not provide space for discomfort, and this is where I want to suggest the use of the African philosophy of Ubuntu as foundational in sitting with discomfort, speaking about loss when a single story is all you know, speaking about experiences beyond your own and delving deep into meaning behind cultural competence.

I have experienced how complex, contextually laden, and rich these conversations might be. My research has taken me to having meaningful conversations with women leaders who navigate their gender and cultural intersection in an almost seamless manner, never questioning what the acceptance of that intersection allows to be preserved. When a Black woman in a senior management position shows assertiveness and direct leadership to her team, she can create and communicate a strong sense of self, of belonging and direction for her team. Yet, this same woman would in a senior management team meeting with her peers take a step back, especially when her line manager is a Black man from the same ethnic tribe as herself. She has no real recollection of doing this consciously – she unconsciously navigates the intersection of tribe, culture, gender, years in the organisation and organisational position in a seemingly uncomplicated manner. Her behaviour does not cause her discomfort, she does not recognise how she contributes to maintaining inequality and does not attach meaning to her behaviour beyond what is acceptable (as dictated by her intersections as well as reinforced by the hierarchical bureaucracy in which she operates).

How would Ubuntu help? Ubuntu is the African concept of human-ness. The concept is traced back to words found in the Shona and Kiswahili languages. Julius Nyerere spoke about Ujamaa which refers to familyhood, but the most meaningful way through which Ubuntu has been explained is through the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu (34) who said "When we want to give high praise to someone we say, 'Yu, u nobuntu'; he or she has ubuntu. This means that they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. They share what they have. It also means that my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs. We belong in a bundle of life. I am human because I belong, I participate, I share. A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that

comes with knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are".

This would be the courageous space where conversations around cultural competence can take place. It starts with a small group, with conversations with colleagues around a dinner table where we seek to understand what the intersections are that we live with and why living with them are so important to us. When a colleague's father passed, his older brother became the head of the family. While his brother, in his own house cooks, cleans and cares for his children, once he enters the house of his father, it would be disrespectful to enter the kitchen. Knowing this, universities should understand how we enter a conversation around cultural complexity without judgement, for the purpose of learning but also for the purpose of collectively discussing whether current intersectional identities and practices promote or actively oppose social justice.

I enter this conversation as a White ally. I adopt an intersectional lens when talking about power, privilege, and social justice. On a micro-level the conversation is around individual intersections, understanding identity and having an ability to critically engage with the social conventions that contribute to identity. On a macro-level I use it to disrupt the system by outright recognition given to racism, homophobia, sexism, and all forms of discrimination working in tandem, working in an intersectional manner to allow light being shined on oppression, and on marginalisation. The truth behind creating a policy which indicates interest in contributing to a socially just system is like placing a band-aid on a shotgun wound. The oppression is felt deeply and hurts the whole person – the policy is merely a document unless uncomfortable conversations can be engaged in without judgement.

Ubuntu offers me this space to be an ally. Ubuntu asks me as ally to, firstly, appreciate that every conversation needs to acknowledge power and how it is dispersed (or not) in this conversation. Secondly, admitting that 'whiteness' permeates everywhere and everything – in discussions with students there is a curriculum that I have compiled and to what extent have I ensured that curriculum to be reflective of the voices in the class – how can I ensure inclusivity if my students do not recognise themselves in what they read, see, and experience? Using Ubuntu creates the opportunity for students to see themselves as contributing to what their university will be, accept, acknowledge, and practice because the collective hold each other accountable for honouring the diverse voices. Thirdly, Ubuntu implies social justice as its contribution. If human-ness is its foundation, the process is the discussion of intersectionality, power, inequality and oppression in a courageous space which produces a shift in consciousness, an acceptance of us as multitude social identities and all belonging to a bundle of life. Through self-awareness, education and interaction we do not only demonstrate cultural competence but actively seek the collective understanding and pursuance of social justice.

I know my university has gone through profound changes, from being a White, advantaged institution to an institution that emphasises the value of diversity and inclusion. I want my university to visibly demonstrate its inclusive organisational culture by participating in the co-creation of a foundational, compulsory module reflecting Ubuntu in its pedagogy and cultural competence in its delivery.

In allyship,

Gerda van Dijk

Director of the School of Public Management and Administration, University of Pretoria

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About the author

Gerda van Dijk

Gerda van Dijk is the Director of the School of Public Management and Administration at the University of Pretoria. She has been in academic since 1995 and worked at different academic institutions. Her research has evolved from human resource development to management and leadership development to women's development and women's voices in public policy.

White Allies for Transformational Leadership

MATTHEW T. HOLT

Dear Higher Education,

   Who am I? My name is Matt Holt. I currently serve as professor and head of the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics at Virginia Tech. Additionally, starting in the fall of 2022, I am a co-leader of the Virginia Tech Advantage initiative, a sprawling campus-wide initiative to provide more financial and programmatic support for underserved students. In addition to these things, I am also a first-generation White male originally from the American heartland. Specifically, I grew up on a commercial row crop and livestock farm in north central Indiana in the 1960s and 70s. In addition to my parents, I had 14 aunts and uncles, only one of whom had a college degree. I was the first member of my immediate and extended family to earn a doctorate. And to think, I barely made it to college in the first place, let alone only initially had my sights set on earning a two-year degree in agriculture and returning to the family farm. I am nothing short of a poster child for how a land-grant university can permanently and positively transform not just one life but the lives of many future generations. At a basic, intuitive level, I understand the power of higher education to transform lives and elevate livelihoods.

   What does the above have to do with social justice, being a White ally, or doing the hard work necessary to elevate and implement diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) at a modern university? I believe the conversation starts with a simple word: awareness. Of course, awareness means many different things. And all the more so in the DEIB space. For me, however, awareness starts with the realization that while my background was limited in many ways, all of the policies and institutional structures that supported my higher education journey were designed by, supported, and effectively created for people who look like me. I benefited tremendously from what is known as the Morrill Act of 1862. And while land grant universities, indeed, most U.S. public universities were not explicitly created and managed in a way to be exclusive or exclusionary, in reality, many were. Putting it succinctly, land-grant and public universities often operated in ways that were exclusionary, i.e., racist, and reinforced racial and gender stereotypes and norms. As an undergraduate and a graduate student, I do not recall encountering a domestic BIPOC student in my degree programs. And yet, the evidence is strong: people identifying as BIPOC disproportionately face numerous financial, time management, and social obstacles when working to complete a college degree. Another way of saying it is that to the extent we fail to be genuinely inclusive, a university like Virginia Tech is not truly living up to its land-grant mission.

   Considering the above, how does an individual, let alone an institution, start to make meaningful progress in creating a more inclusive, supportive university? Many metaphors and clichés spring to mind. For example, every journey begins with the first step. And every new book starts with the first word. But when thinking about making meaningful progress on becoming a more inclusive, accessible, and welcoming institution, these clichés have merit: the work, my work, must start somewhere. It also begins by recognizing my power and influence are likely greater than I think. As a department head, I help guide the hiring process. I help decide which graduate students are worthy of funding. Perhaps most importantly, I help set the tone that ultimately defines the culture of my department. As a department head, I have latitude in how I spend my time. Yes, various duties are mandatory and require my prompt attention. I must also deal with ad hoc requests and issues that crop up daily and are part and

parcel of the ebb and flow of any academic unit. But beyond these duties and obligations, I decide which new and ongoing initiatives are worth my time and energy. Put another way, I help shape and guide the strategic direction of my department. Yes, my role is still one of an academic middle manager. But the things I give voice to shape and guide the strategic direction of my college and even my university. To believe otherwise is, in my view, an outright dereliction of duty akin to professional cowardice. If I believe DEIB issues are primary, I have a significant pulpit from which to act.

Have I acted? And if so, what have I learned? Answering the first question is subject to the self-evaluation and self-serving biases that are part of the human psyche. But from an objective point of view, the department I manage has increased its faculty diversity during my watch, even adding and (so far) retaining several BIPOC faculty members. We have enjoyed less success in attracting and retaining BIPOC students. Concerning faculty hiring, my department was able to participate in a campus-wide program that facilitated recruiting and hiring diverse faculty members. I firmly believe in the value of programs that allow departments to identify and recruit diverse talent; without this program, I doubt my department would have enjoyed even our modest gains in building a more diverse faculty profile. Also, to be more effective in recruiting students of color, we need a faculty profile reflective of the diversity we strive to enjoy.

Regarding the second question, what have I learned? I have learned nothing more profound than the obvious. DEIB work is challenging—making progress requires persistence and a long-term commitment. It is also a team effort. For most DEIB initiatives to bear fruit, it is necessary (although not sufficient) that the department, college, and university be aligned. For example, it is helpful to have access to dedicated resources that support faculty and student recruitment and retention efforts. Beyond resources, it has been beneficial to have access to and participate in an established community of like-minded administrators, each with the same overarching objectives. At Virginia Tech, this community was officially launched in 2021 by Dr. Menah Pratt and Dr. Michele Deramo. The White Allies as Transformative Leaders (now the Academic Allies for Inclusive Excellence) has become a space for sharing goals, challenges, and aspirations in the DEIB space. In addition to having a community for support and sharing ideas and information, I have also learned something fundamental. Building a diverse and more representative faculty profile begins with a hire, but the real work starts when the faculty member arrives. While it is in many ways intuitively obvious, the mentoring and coaching needs of BIPOC faculty members often differ substantively from those we might otherwise be more accustomed to. The likely reasons are both obvious and subtle. But perhaps most importantly, and this has been the case in my department, BIPOC junior faculty often have no senior mentors who look like them and have experienced many of the same challenges and barriers. In this regard, I have found no simple formula beyond active listening and constant encouragement. And I confess, more often than not, I feel inadequate to the task. Be that as it may, I am proud of my colleagues; most of them demonstrate a sincere desire to mentor our BIPOC junior faculty members.

What is the path forward for hiring and mentoring BIPOC faculty members? In my profession, we struggle to recruit qualified BIPOC faculty candidates for our academic positions and BIPOC student students for our programs. Although I have nothing to offer except subjective opinions, I believe that part of the problem is we have not tried as hard as we might to recruit. Many departments like mine (including mine) have not formed strong and lasting relationships with, for example, our sister departments in the 1890 land-grant and regional state institutions, which generally serve a more diverse student population. This gap is our fault. It is too easy to shrug our collective shoulders, throw up our hands, and assume the challenges we face are too systemic for us to make progress. We can speculate about why more effective bridges do not exist. But the only thing that matters is what we do moving forward. We also need to be more proactive in our professional associations about forming and implementing shared mentoring programs that are accessible to diverse faculty and students. Many professional organizations and societies have started mentoring programs, including the ones I belong to. But they need our ongoing support and attention. Our students and faculty need the resources and administrative support to take advantage of the various opportunities they have for mentoring.

Much work remains. The work associated with ensuring we have a diverse and representative faculty, staff, and

student profile is daunting; however, the real work in this regard necessarily occurs in academic departments and units. In my experience, success comes in fits and starts; progress often seems slow at best. But this is why it is incumbent on every academic leader to make DEIB an integral and vibrant objective for their area of responsibility. Only in this manner will we hope to create the kind of academy that represents the society within which we live. Let the work begin.

Sincerely,

Matthew T. Holt

About the author

Matthew T. Holt

Matt Holt has been named dean of Clemson University's College of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences, to begin September 1st, 2024. He was Professor and Head of the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics at Virginia Tech since 2017. His Ph.D., in Agricultural Economics, is from the University of Missouri; he earned his B.S. and M.S. degrees from Purdue University. His research encompasses topics relating to markets for food and natural resources, focusing on nonlinear dynamics and structural breaks in econometric time series models. He served on the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association's Executive Board as an elected member, 2005-2008. He has received numerous awards for his research from the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association (AAEA), including Association Fellow (AAEA, 2009).

Pillars of Inclusion

MEENAKSHI GOPINATH

Dear Higher Education,

The 21st century is poised to be the century of women. In education, as elsewhere, their impact is being decisively felt. Around the world, the student demographic in Higher Education is changing in favor of women. They will offer the conceptual alphabet to fashion a new vocabulary of knowledge and power. They have the capacity and responsibility to infuse the learning space with new dialogic tools that engender educational institutions and provide genuinely inclusive democratic approaches to the resolution of conflict to engage with the joys and responsibilities of full civic participation and infuse an ethics of care – to replace divisive hierarchical competitive frameworks of learning.

Universities and colleges are also sites for developing predispositions to cultures of peace and conflict transformation. They have a crucial role in nurturing critical thinkers, shattering myths, and interrogating stereotypes that reinforce "othering processes." They have a special responsibility to restore the canvas of coexistence.

The shrinking of spaces for dissent and growing intolerance that is reflected in clampdowns by powerful university administrations, and new strictures around freedom of expression, scholarship and syllabi are of most profound concern. The narcissism of monocultural identities is becoming a threat to freedom. We need to fashion a discourse that combines the language of critique with the language of possibility to make despair unconvincing and hope practical.

We need to address epistemic injustice and challenge ethnocentric, anthropocentric and androcentric constructions of knowledge.

I refer here also to a shared language – a language that gives utterance to aspirations of human dignity, a language that gives voice and hope to the oppressed and marginalized the world over, a language that seeing the vital interconnectedness of all beings envisions a kinder world of true sanctuary where an ethics of care recognizes that the "peace of our world is indivisible" and our wellbeing cannot be pursued in isolation of others. Above all, it is a language of leadership that offers an alternative, more inclusive vocabulary of power that highlights the courage and resilience that women can bring into the public sphere. Small yet purposeful steps can often yield dramatic results.

I wish to share a small experiment that started in 2005 at the prestigious Lady Shri Ram College for Women (LSR) in New Delhi, India, where I was President between 1988-2014. LSR then was in the Indian public perception akin to a Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Smith, or Radcliffe in the United States. This experiment relates to a collaborative program between LSR and a not-for-profit NGO, the Foundation for Academic Excellence and Access (FAEA), whose mandate was to provide support to students of disadvantaged groups to access the best institutions of Higher Learning in India and also to fund colleges that could engage with issues of inclusion in innovative, even unorthodox ways. The program called REACH – an acronym for Reaffirming Equity, Access, Capacity, and Humanism- brought about significant transformations in the institutional culture of the college within five years.

It was a unique collaboration—a public-private partnership between a college and an NGO free of the

constraints of conventional "grant giving" and "grant spending" protocols. It adopted an approach that underscored embedding the institutional matrix with ways and means of enhancing social dignity and addressing the structural violence (of exclusion) perpetuating disparity, discrimination, and stigmatization. While providing bursaries and scholarships to deserving students from disadvantaged groups, it also focused on institutional preparation to create an environment where inclusivity became part of the consciousness of college. It purposefully strove to blur the spurious separations between Quality and Access, which informed much of public discourse on Higher Education.

REACH recognized that existing schemes under government funding were piecemeal, top-down, and expenditure-oriented rather than vision-oriented in addressing inequity. These schemes were invariably 'ready-made packages' to be 'delivered.' Broadly curriculum-bound (like remedial teaching), there was no room for capacity building of students or development of soft skills crucial for students in Higher Education. The REACH program consciously bridged the divide between 'skills and academic enhancement. There were peer learning modules, and mentorship was integral to the program's trajectory. Faculties were encouraged to take ownership of the program on a rotational basis.   Placements completed the cycle – Placements for this section of students needed to go beyond mere job procurement to include career guidance for higher education, preparation for civil service and management entrance examinations and careers, and training for self-employment and entrepreneurship.

The crux of the program was that an integrated core group of animators drawn from both "disadvantaged" and privileged student cohorts helmed it on the principle of included and equal and NOT separate but equal. This was its essence. Gradually, the program—which included training, field visits, and collaboration with the outreach and voluntary agency placement programs—became a mainstream activity of the college.

The underlying philosophy that propelled the program was a paradigmatic shift from existing practices to desired directional change as shown in Table 1 below.

Existing Practices	TO⇒	Desired Directional Change
Scheme/Project (top-down, rigid, narrow non-participatory approach)		Movement (bottom-up, inclusive, participatory approach)
Quotas (divisive, stigmatizing, discriminatory)		People (valuing students' psycho-social, cultural and historical contexts of experience)
Quantitative ('number' of students in a 'category')		Qualitative changes (ongoing support services to students, liberatory)
Victimhood (feeling of oppression and stigmatization and nurturing grievances)		Agency (enhancement of self-worth and social dignity)
Funding (expenditure-oriented schemes)		Ownership (commitment to the sustainability of a vision)
Boundaries (from restrictive rigid rules and procedures)		Potential Discovery (creating change agents and the ripple effect)
Recipients of the dole (passive recipients)		Contributors of a new discourse (active participants of a learning community)
Linear approach (narrow group of cohorts)		Concentric circles (expansive, resonating for the entire college community)
Compensation for deprivation (mentality of scarcity of resources and opportunities)		Empowering for leadership (mentality of abundance and equitable opportunities)
From receiving applications (from interested students)		Identifying promise proactively in order to nurture potential talent among the disadvantaged

The emphasis was on turning the notion of "disadvantage" on its head and foregrounding agency in a largely 'elitist' environment. It provided a context for those wrapped in socio-economic privilege to appreciate the resilience and spirit of those whose growth trajectories conveyed a unique ability to overcome adversity. In reformulating ideas of success and leadership within the frame of those who "traveled the farthest," the focus was on trajectory rather than outcome, on the learning curve, on succeeding without vying, and on collaborative learning. Throughout the entire process, we were deeply conscious that we were working towards the quality of

the collaborative learning process to maximize non-didactic elicited learning horizons for all students. This then became the college's hidden curriculum.

While acknowledging differences and building on commonalities, REACH enabled overcoming negative stereotypes of the "other." It freed the celebration of 'performance' from the tyranny of composite grades, making the appreciation of another intelligence possible. One important exercise in this was called 'My Story' shared with increasing numbers of the peer group, which dramatically focused the learnings on the path and the skills and strategies employed to overcome challenges and deprivations on the way – and a candid description of personal experiences of exclusion. This provided a learning to those insulated by 'privilege', of realities that classroom teaching could never approximate. Above all, it underscored that while it is important to comfort the afflicted, it is equally important to afflict the comfortable, especially when they are smugly blatantly wrong. It was an attempt to expand the circles of interconnections and empathy and nurture a sensibility that is touched as deeply by the pain on our planet as by the perfection of a bud unfolding.

The vigor of expansive institutions is preserved by the widespread sense that high aims are worthwhile and where students are encouraged to harbor a certain extravagance of objectives so that they venture beyond the safe provisions of personal gratification. And the ability to throw themselves again and again into the tumult of life to make their voice count. REACH was an edifying step in that direction. It helped students to break out of the shadows of invisibility and silence. In a socially stratified society along fault lines of class, caste, ethnicity, and gender, it was a courageous experiment for its time – reinforcing the audacity of hope. The college ethos and student demographic transformed dramatically due to its impact.

Today, an erstwhile 'elitist' space has become something of a flagbearer for inclusion amongst the colleges of the University of Delhi – both in precept and practice.

It has enabled many students from underserviced backgrounds to 'transgress' and resonate with Maya Angelou's famous refrain: "I do not want merely to survive, but to thrive. And I want to do it with some passion, compassion, some humor, and some style."

Meenakshi Gopinath

About the author

Meenakshi Gopinath

Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath is currently Founder and Honorary Director of WISCOMP (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace), an initiative that seeks to promote the leadership of South Asian women in the areas of peace, security and regional cooperation. She is also Chair, Board of Governors, Centre for Policy Research (CPR) and Principal Emerita of Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi, where she served as Principal for 26 years from 1988-2014. She has been a member of the University Grants Commission (UGC), India.

Dancing and Deep Listening through Higher Education

CATHERINE ALTHAUS

Dear Higher Education,

Over 250 million people currently benefit in some form from higher education – a statistic that has more than doubled in two decades. So there is much growth and huge potential to deploy influence from the higher education sector, both in terms of sheer numbers as well as the bounty of ideas that might give effect to positive progress for global society. But many people and more diverse ideas are currently being missed, and as such, the entire world is deprived.

Self-reflection and review is critical. Higher education has created a certain bulwark of stability in the world through its institutional stasis over hundreds of years. Higher education is a 'standing' proposition. Now is the time for its movement; time for higher education to start dancing with the world.

One way I think it can start such dancing is through reflection on its identity, which is both inherited and created. The historical and intellectual inheritance of higher education is full of paradox and room for improvement. While it may have started in the East, the Academy became dominated by the powerful qualities of Western civilisation. That brought certain remarkable benefits, and temporary order and progress, but domination is never a sustainable or thriving solution. For higher education to start dancing, it needs to truly embrace the beauty and richness of its multi-civilisational character.

What we create now for the identity of higher education will help forge new options if we can move away from a worldview of domination towards one of respectful and open freedom, agency and solidarity.

WHO I AM

I am a fourth-generation Irish-German Australian woman from a working class, service-oriented family full of teachers, nurses and rural labourers. Education, health, farming and creativity has always been part of my lineage. University education, however, has only come to my family in the last generation: it is a new phenomenon. The paradox of stability and movement has also been present. Some of us are travellers. Others in my family are moored to particular places.

My story is partly about fractured and forged identities. I am a will-of-the-wisp; not quite sure who I am. And in this I am a product of modernity; clear and stable identity is not something I find familiar. This is because I was born into a place that is not mine. And as the blood that runs through my veins struggles to return to its origins I am linked to my ancestors on the other side of the world. But I am not really known in those places. I am struck through the heart by the familiarity of these ancestral places and voices but I am also torn as my heart rests, too, in my created homes.

My gypsy-like existence makes me a global citizen, whatever I make of that reality. So I have learned to live with connection and disconnection: respect for the past, grief and passion for the present, and hope for the future. The landscape of my heart has broadened and deepened beyond what I knew was possible because it has enlarged

beyond my blood family to include the love I have received from so many places, people and experiences across the world. Without all of them, I am not me.

Reviewing where I came from, who I am and who I want to be is not just a solo endeavor. Collective and institutional reviews are important quests, too, including higher education. Identity can powerfully bring rightful pride as well as harmful rigidity. It can bring understanding as well as grief. In the same way, if higher education cannot review its identity with humility and integrity, we miss opportunities to reform for change as well as draw on strength.

MY OBSERVATIONS

I want to make four points. First, I think higher education is in the midst of reviewing its identity and how good a job it does is going to help or hinder societal progress; we can either keeping standing still, we can fall down or we could start dancing. Second, I believe diversity, equity and inclusive (DEI) education encourages us to honour and celebrate multiplicity and paradox even if we haven't yet figured out yet how to operationalize multi-civilisational education as a reality. Third, we cannot truly achieve DEI education without also embedding time and place into our worldviews and practices; our planet and our purpose are wayfinders that nourish and guide us. Education has ignored or deprioritised these realities for too long. Finally, we are all implicated in DEI education – we are simultaneously all part of the problems and the solutions of our current status quo and what we aspire to achieve. In doing the work, we need to play different recalibrated roles, some of us needing to dampen down our voices and views and some of us needing to dial up our contributions.

MY STORY

Dadirri is from the Ngan'gikurunggurr and Ngen'giwumirri languages of the Daly River region in the Northern Territory of Australia. It is a practice and word given for the concept of 'deep listening', 'quiet stillness and awareness' and 'waiting'. Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann – renowned Aboriginal artist and educator, 1998 Order of Australia Member and 2021 Senior Australian of the Year – says that *dadirri* is a unique gift offered by Australian Aboriginal peoples to the world. It offers healing, wisdom and regeneration. She says: "*Dadirri* is in everyone. It is not just an Aboriginal thing…. *Dadirri* also means awareness of where you've come from, why you are here, where are you going now and where you belong" (quoted in Korff 2023). For this I am truly grateful and I open myself up to what *dadirri* might mean, what it might invite me into, and what it might ask of me.

Aunty Miriam-Rose and the story of *dadirri* is what is important. It is my story for higher education. Not in the sense that it belongs to me. On the contrary, that it is intimately connected to some of the peoples of the place that today is called Australia: one of the oldest enduring civilisations on the planet. The reason why that is important is that *dadirri* teaches me to step respectfully and lightly into this world – literally and figuratively. For such a long time, Aunty Miriam-Rose's peoples have spent time learning about my peoples and their ways. This has been done through forced necessity due to colonization but also with great compassion and respectful resilience. With incredible generosity she invites me and the entire world to tap the deep water sounds of her country, to slow down, to listen, to grow, to marvel, to respect. In this way, she invites us to truly learn.

This shared story is a microcosm glimpse of what is possible for higher education. *Dadirri* invites learning and listening to go many ways. To the planet, to each other, to the seasons of time that ebb and flow to nourish us, to the mysteries of life and growth. It is gentle and kind as well as strong and embedded with deep responsibility and accountability. It demands something of us, as much as it offers peace. Respect and understanding is what Aunty Miriam-Rose and her peoples continue to hope for. Surely this is an essential purpose for any higher education identity into the future? And here, the oldest civilization in our world offers us a wayfinder to help us experience it and embrace the relationships we need to thrive together.

MY DIRECTION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

I believe higher education needs to move towards multi-civilisational education in order to achieve the full effects of diversity, equity and inclusion for ourselves, each other and our planet. *Dadirri* is but one of the many awe-inspiring insights and practices that are offered as alternative ways of being, doing and knowing. If higher education can open itself to new possibilities, ingenuities and authentic relational connections with the diverse civilisations of our world, then we might forge new hope for the peoples and the places we call home. Higher education might just begin to start dancing.

In Hope,
Catherine Althaus

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