

### Diversity Statement

The college experience provides connections with faculty, staff and students that have the potential to transform lives. In many cases this transformation extends to students' families, allowing each generation to live well, fulfill dreams and thrive. I have been fortunate to work at several comprehensive institutions where the promotion of diversity, inclusion and equity have been mission-critical values and where I have played a key role in advancing efforts to promote these values. Each student's journey towards a college education poses challenges, some shared and some unique. A responsive university has systems and policies in place to provide support and, more importantly, help students to embrace the inherent strengths they bring with them from their individual backgrounds and cultures to find solutions to, and overcome, the various challenges they face during their college experience while being their authentic selves.

My own student history may be more of a shared experience: first generation, immigrant, non-traditional, and female STEM major. A college degree had been my family's expectation but with very little understanding of the process and when it came time to embark on this journey I was, quite frankly, petrified. When I finally gathered the courage to attend in my early 20's, I missed the typical "college experience" as I was a part-time student and working full-time to support myself. Even so, I quickly realized how fortunate I was. The small liberal arts school I attended (because it happened to be in town) allowed me to make very special connections with faculty members who are still cherished friends and colleagues to this day. They saw my strengths, encouraged me to excel, hired me as a tutor and provided strong recommendations when I chose to go to graduate school. They saw and believed in my potential before I even knew it existed.

My twenty years of teaching at universities in rural Georgia, in the Appalachia Mountains of North Carolina and at the interface of northern Kentucky and urban Cincinnati, OH allowed me to interact with and learn from students from vastly different backgrounds and experiences. In 2011, while at Northern Kentucky University (NKU), I became the director and PI of Project SOAR, a National Science Foundation funded S-STEM grant program providing cohorts of incoming Pell-eligible STEM students with over a million dollars of funding to meet their cost of attendance for up to four years. Beyond providing funding for college, Project SOAR provided these students from both rural Kentucky and urban Cincinnati high-impact programming including faculty mentoring, research experiences, and opportunities to attend regional and national conferences, as well as strong encouragement to engage in cultural activities and affinity groups on campus. With an average first-year retention rate of over 90% and more than 50% four-year graduation rate, Project SOAR became a cornerstone in NKU's mission of improving student success.

My experience as a faculty member and as director of Project SOAR solidified my belief that access to a college education is not only the ability to attend college but to have the learning and living opportunities that support all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender affinity or economic background. It has also focused my approach as a leader and administrator in Higher Education to equate our dedication to student success to ensuring the university faculty and staff strive to be student-ready with a strengths-based approach to teaching and learning, as well as fostering a campus culture focused on humanity, belonging, and care.

## Gail Mackin

While at Central Washington University (CWU), I have built a truly diverse team which includes the Registrar, the Director of Research & Sponsored Programs, the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and the Director of Academic Analytics and Insight, and several support staff with intentional care in the hiring process to ensure the continued high quality of our employees and to contribute to the growth of diversity. Over the past six years, seventy five percent of the hires I have directly overseen represent Central Washington's growing Latinx community and the indigenous peoples of the northwest United States. I lend encouragement to these individuals and support their professional goals and initiatives while being mindful of the university's tendency to seek out the few who add diversity to committees and taskforces.

For new faculty of color, the risk of overtaxing time, energy and heart as a natural consequence of being in a small affinity group for both faculty and students can lead to damaging consequences, especially in light of the pressures for achieving tenure. Academic leaders must promote awareness and provide ongoing and meaningful diversity learning experiences for deans, department chairs and faculty to establish supportive allies and mentors. Those universities that truly espouse to be learning communities of equity and belonging adopt broad definitions of scholarship to include the scholarship of engagement and scholarship of teaching, providing pathways to tenure for faculty with a passion to promote equitable opportunities in higher education. Building and maintaining a learning community of equity and belonging requires passion, commitment, and a great amount of focused work by the entire campus community.

This work must include a deep and honest review of policy and practices that impede the ability of students to navigate the highly structured establishment that is Higher Education. As the Provost's liaison to the CWU Faculty Senate Affairs Committee responsible for drafting and reviewing policy-related academic regulations, I championed change for streamlining admissions policy to exclude the traditional reliance on standardized test results, reduce the reliance on non-credit-bearing developmental courses in math and writing, reduce and rewrite policy concerning registration holds, and guided discussions around the numerous entrenched practices established decades ago that served an entirely different student population.

When a university provides an environment where students feel welcome, engage with ease with their peers both within and outside of their affinity groups, and are able to focus on their college journey without fear of being "othered," these students become our best and most reliable promoters and recruiters of future generations of students. I wish to be an integral part of a university leadership team that is fully committed to embracing this work to advance and become a leader of diversity, equity and belonging within Higher Education.