

## **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to convey my deep commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in higher education. You can see from my Curriculum Vitae that DEI issues and challenges are a passion of mine. As interim Vice President, I immediately worked to create a leadership team position in DEI for the campus and the community. We hired our inaugural Executive Director for Strategic Diversity Initiatives in a matter of months after taking on the interim role. I served for two consecutive terms on the Oregon State University President and Provost's Leadership Council for Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice. On that committee, I helped draft a report on faculty retention, particularly aimed at retention strategies for faculty of color. I was also part of a working group that was focused on faculty recruitment to enhance diversity. As Associate Dean, I was a member of the OSU-Cascades Diversity Committee and have undertaken Search Advocate Training, Safe Zone Training, and the Bravely Confronting Bias workshop. At the University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS), I served on the University of Colorado System's Ethnic and Minority Affairs Committee where I spearheaded the effort to develop a strategic diversity plan.

Since my early academic career, access to higher education has been critically important to me. While an undergraduate at the University of Southern California (USC), I learned of the Joint Education Project (JEP). One of my professors in a Public Administration class introduced me to the project that took students from USC and put them in local K-6 classrooms. Our job was not only to teach them a subject that the classroom teacher had in mind, but also to give the young students some insight into what college was about. Although I was offered extra credit for this particular Public Administration course, I continued to volunteer for the JEP throughout my undergraduate career. I relished the opportunity to meet with students in the local community. For many, English was a second language. For others, school lunches came with assistance. But for all of the students, their eyes lit up when they saw us coming. Just knowing that they could talk about their dreams for an hour on this particular day was enough.

I was in graduate school and at USC the day civil unrest began in 1992. These days were stark reminders of the privilege that I had growing up. I never had to worry about justice. I never had to worry late at night when pulled over by the police. While some were elated at the canceling of final exams, I was worried about the people in the neighborhoods around campus that I had grown to know – not only for their safety during those days but a bigger worry about their dreams and their “allowed” trajectories.

After I graduated, I stayed around USC as a Research Professor. I visited the outdoor basketball courts, and I used my position to talk to local kids on the court about school, higher education, their dreams and how to go about making those dreams a reality. Many of these kids were not getting messages about college at home. One voice, on a half-lit basketball court, was the only voice they heard about the possibilities and promises of higher education. I don't know if that time with those kids made a difference, but I do know that not having those conversations would not have led to a different outcome.

I have had experience in higher education at OSU-Cascades, UCCS, the US Air Force Academy and USC which all serve diverse student populations. At these institutions, access to higher education has remained a top priority for me. Access isn't just getting in to college; access is also about one's ability to stay in college. Many students are first generation where access and retention is tenuous. Supports are not always available when students need them. There can be stigmas for students seeking help. Housing and food insecurity can also be the difference between completing a degree and not. Breaking down these stigmas and working to provided access and retain all students, but particularly underserved students, is part of what I am and part of what I do. I look forward to continuing this passion at Colorado State University, Pueblo where minoritized communities, particular at this Hispanic-Serving Institution, need and deserve support in their higher education endeavors.

DEI issues and challenges can be daunting, but it is critically important to the recruitment and retention of students, faculty, and staff. I look forward to continuing the tough conversations that are necessary to move DEI forward as the CSU-Pueblo campus continues to grow.