

Increasing Faculty and Staff Diversity through Search Advocacy Capacity Building

Advocates help advance inclusive excellence by asking questions to help committee members:

- **Examine, explore, and reflect on their thinking, decisions, and processes.**
- **Understand places where bias commonly shows up during the search.**
- **Identify and promote practices that advance access, equity, and inclusion.**
- **Minimize the impacts of cognitive and structural biases.**

There is a growing body of evidence that supports the importance of building organizational infrastructure that fosters validity, equity, and inclusion in faculty and staff searches. In a [2016 Chronicle of Higher Education article](#), Beth McMurtrie examines the notion of searching for diversity in detail.

Further illustrating its importance, Search Advocacy programs now are deeply embedded into higher education DEI operations across the country, including at the [University of Colorado](#) system, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Nevada, University of Northern Colorado, and Oregon State University.

At the University of Colorado, search advocates work alongside search committees as consultants and process advisors to provide committees with support and guidance at every stage of the process.

PASSHE also is innovating in this critical area of inclusive excellence. Last year, approximately 30 faculty and staff participated in a systemwide initiative to strengthen the State System's ability to recruit, hire, and retain faculty and staff that represent the diverse tapestry of the commonwealth. The program, offered through Oregon State University, was established in 2007 to work in collaboration with the offices of Human Resources, Equal Opportunity, Institutional Diversity, and others to support equitable recruitment and selection processes.

"As an external advisor, the search advocate participates with other search committee members throughout the search and selection process," according to Oregon State University's *Search Advocate Handbook* (2019). "Advocates do not substitute their judgment for the judgment of committee members; most often they ask questions to help committee members test their thinking and recognize the implications of assumptions, strategies, and practices under consideration.

"Advocates promote equity, inclusion, diversity, and justice by sharing information, recommending inclusive and equitable strategies, supporting full committee and

Message from Vice Chancellor Denise Pearson

A hearty "welcome back" to students, faculty, and staff! I hope everyone enjoyed a happy and healthy holiday season.

On a personal note, I entered 2024 with an elevated appreciation for work-life harmony. It is with that alignment between my personal and professional values that I begin the new year with a renewed sense of urgency and commitment to strengthening the partnerships needed to achieve PASSHE's strategic priorities as affirmed by our Board of Governors.

In the spirit of collaboration and systemness, I also want to take a moment to recognize the leadership of university chief diversity officers (CDOs) for their unwavering commitment to creating inclusive environments for all students, faculty, and staff throughout 2023. The role of CDOs can be fraught with opposition and challenges; however, they stayed focused last year on advocating for policies and practices that promote belonging and improve student and staff experiences systemwide and at their respective universities.

That said, there is much more work still to be done. The State System DEI Office looks forward to supporting universities' efforts in 2024 and beyond!

stakeholder participation, and consulting with Search Advocacy program staff as needed."

During the Search Advocacy workshop, participants had an opportunity to come together to explore considerations related to faculty and staff searches that included:

- The search advocate's role.
- Definitions of diversity.
- Implicit bias (cognitive and structural).
- The legal and regulatory environment.
- Position descriptions.
- Screening criteria.
- Screening, interviews, and references.
- Hiring and onboarding.

At the conclusion of the four-week, 16-hour program, PASSHE participants completed a brief satisfaction survey to inform future planning and suggest how their learning might be scaled. Most participants were satisfied with the knowledge gained from the course and reported that they were likely to apply the learning on their respective campuses.

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Kutztown University Multicultural Service Hosts an Indigenous Display

By Angelica Mishra | Administrative Assistant to the Chief Diversity Officer and Multicultural Services

On Nov. 15, Kutztown University's Multicultural Center, home of the office of Multicultural Services, hosted a well-attended event to honor and recognize local and global Indigenous communities. The event featured local Indigenous artists and musicians, members of the Lenape Nation, and Indigenous food. The Multicultural Center worked closely with the Widoktadwen Center for Native Knowledge, whose mission is to promote the visibility of Native Americans in Berks County and beyond through community education, leadership, and activism. A local artist painted the image below during the event; it now hangs in the Kutztown Multicultural Center.



East Stroudsburg University Awarded Garret Lee Smith Suicide Prevention Grant

By Cornelia Sewell-Allen, Ph.D., LPC | Professional Counselor

East Stroudsburg University's Department of Counseling and Psychological Services has been awarded the Garret Lee Smith Suicide Prevention grant through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The objectives of the project are threefold: to increase the identification of individuals at risk for suicide and suicide attempts among ESU students; to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors for suicide; and to increase help-seeking behaviors.

In addition, ESU will take part in the JED Foundation's Campus Fundamental program, an 18-month journey during which campus community needs will be assessed, a customized strategic plan will be built, and evidence-based tools, strategies, and techniques will be implemented to sustain improvements in student mental health and community connection. The increase in the identification of students at risk will be addressed with a two-pronged approach: extensive gatekeeper training of targeted helpers who are in frequent contact with students and intentional screening for mental health and substance use disorders.

Key campus constituents will be certified as Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) for Higher Education and Campus Connect instructors in order to sustain training of students, staff, faculty, and administrators to be more aware of and better equipped to respond to signs of mental illness, suicidality, and substance use. Once certified, these staff members, in conjunction with CAPS professional staff, will conduct training for key groups of students including athletes; members of the Men of Color Alliance (MOCA), Women of Color Initiative (WOCI), and student government; and leaders of student clubs and organizations.

In addition, faculty, staff, and administrators will be invited to take part in training held throughout the year. Finally, a Student Support Network will be established with the goal of training students to identify, support, and refer peers who may be struggling with mental health concerns.

Commonwealth University's Open Educational Resources (OER): Spread the word!

By Nichole Book | DEI Coordinator & Title IX Deputy

Lis B. Tomlin, Ph.D., LPC/LMHC, NCC | Assistant Professor, Clinical Mental Health Counseling

Katie Yelinek - Professor | Research/Scholarly Publishing Librarian

[Commonwealth University's OER Working Group](#) has been busy advocating for textbook affordability across the three campuses at Bloomsburg, Lock Haven, and Mansfield. The group's mission is to advocate for and facilitate the use of open educational resources (OER) and other no-cost course materials wherever appropriate within the curriculum to support equitable access to education, improve student success, and showcase the unique offerings of the university.

One aspect of this work recognizes that different disciplines and classes require different course materials at varying price points. To this end, the group adopted three definitions to help faculty in identifying appropriate material for their classes:

- **Open Educational Resources (OER)** are teaching and learning materials that you may freely use and reuse at no cost, and without needing to ask permission. The important point here is that these no-cost materials are also free of most copyright restrictions. They are instead licensed under Creative Commons licenses, which let faculty freely use, alter, and copy material. Examples include textbooks from the Open Textbook Library, LibreTexts, and Open Stax.
- **Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC)** refers to courses that don't require students to pay anything, but that don't use OER. These may instead utilize free copyrighted material such as websites from the free web, library ebooks/articles, free materials distributed by faculty, etc.
- **Low-cost** refers to courses that require \$40 or less for ALL course materials, fees, etc., regardless of the type of material used.

A spring 2023 survey showed that 59 faculty members from all three campuses used an OER or taught a ZTC course, for a combined estimated cost savings to students of \$164,000.

Editorial note: Research suggests that implementing OER into the curriculum strengthens student learning and mitigates barriers of access and affordability. To learn more about Open Educational Resources (OERs) as a strategy, the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) offers *Leveraging Open Educational Resources to Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Guide for Campus Change Agents*. AAC&U's Cooper (2023) adds to this discussion in *Making the Case for Open Educational Resources*.

West Chester University is Creating Culturally Responsive Classroom that Promotes Inclusivity and Engagement for Diverse Students

By Tiffany Bennett, Ed.D. | Department of Early and Middle Grades Education

The research proposal titled "Project Makeover: Creating Culturally Responsive Classroom that Promotes Inclusivity and Engagement for Diverse Students" has been recommended for funding by the Provost's Research Grant (PRG). The purpose of the PRG is to support faculty research, scholarship, and the production of scholarly/creative outputs, all of which must demonstrate student impact. Through the College of Education and Social Work mission, the core objective for this study is to engage West Chester teacher candidates in educational settings that allow them to learn through innovative experiences. The project takes an interpretive framework on how emerging teachers look at issues relating to children's social and cognitive development and children with special behavioral, emotional, physical and intellectual needs when constructing their future classroom. To help teacher preparation programs prepare teacher candidates to support diverse learners, this grant will fund a two-year research study providing teacher candidates interested in working in urban school districts with the opportunity to understand how classroom environments foster inclusivity and student engagement. Teacher candidates will then collaborate with PK-grade 5 teachers to design an inclusive learning environment that enriches students' engagement and increases student learning outcomes.

Recap of Connectivity Live! and What's Next in 2024

By emily howe, Ph.D. | Manager of Special Projects and Research



Connectivity Live! is an Office of DEI event series that stemmed from feedback from the DEI Summits in 2021 and 2022 where staff, faculty, and students reported wanting more opportunities to connect, build relationships, and collaborate on promoting inclusive excellence across the State System. The series was launched in March 2023 and sessions were held in June, October, and December. Each session is virtual and lasts one hour.

The most recent meeting was held on Dec. 1, 2023. In it, participants brainstormed and discussed future goals and activities for the group in 2024. We also debriefed and received feedback about our Overbooked book club and the DEI Summit, which happened a few weeks prior.

Some of the ideas for future activities included:

- Problem-solving sessions where people can pressure test ideas.
- Highlighting ongoing work of staff where participants can share projects and learn from each other and a potential Lunch & Learn series.
- Professional development (e.g., grant writing).
- Student-focused professional and career development.

Frederick Douglass Institute – 2024 Douglass Debates, Research & Creative Arts Conference

The [Frederick Douglass Institute](#) is excited to host the 2024 Douglass Debates Research & Creative Arts Conference on April 9 and the 2024 Douglass Debates Conference on April 10 at Millersville University.

Meredith Hankins, a student at Commonwealth University, who presented at last year's research and creative arts conference on "Racial Inequities in Special Education: Addressing Issues of Educational Environmental (In)Justice," had this to say about her experience:

"It was so great being in an environment with other people who shared the same passion for social justice that I have. It can be hard in our day-to-day lives trying to stand up for truth, but the conference was so empowering and a great recharge. So many of the topics presented equipped me with powerful tools to go do the work upon returning home."

Debates are necessary parts of a representative democracy, and we're delighted students can build these debating skills today. We know they will serve students well in the future, whether negotiating salary or policy choices.

Mark-Handy Phanor, a Kutztown student who debated last year, said this about his experience:

"This compelled me to think critically and pay attention to detail on multiple perspectives that exist in the world today. This was an enjoyable and also educational experience!"

We encourage your participation!

Search Advocacy - contd.

Several participants indicated that although overwhelmingly valuable, the 16-hour program was too lengthy. As a result, a smaller working group of participants was assembled to develop a framework to enhance diversity, validity, and equity of systemwide search and selection processes. Leveraging the Search Advocacy training, the work will highlight and incorporate effective search processes currently utilized across PASSHE universities. The group met once before the holiday break and anticipates completing its work, including a report to the Council of Chief Academic Officers, before the end of the 2024 academic year. The committee is representative of faculty and staff across PASSHE and includes:

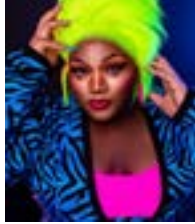
- Yvonne Catino, Chief Human Resources Officer, East Stroudsburg University
- John Craig, Dean, University College (Interim), and Associate Professor, Interdisciplinary Studies and Academic Support Programs, West Chester University
- Joseph Croskey, Associate Professor, PennWest Clarion
- Cheryl Hodges, Senior Talent Acquisition Manager, Millersville University
- Anthony Jones, Chief Diversity Officer, Slippery Rock University
- Leo-Felix Jurado, Dean of the College of Health Professions, Commonwealth University – Lock Haven

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS • JANUARY - MAY

Kutztown Women's Center and LGBTQ+ Resource Center Events - Spring 2024

- **Thursday, February 22, at 2 p.m., McFarland Student Union 218:** Speaker Wanjiku "Wawa" Gatheru, environmental justice warrior, Rhodes Scholar, and founder of Black Girl Environmentalist.
- **Thursday, March 7, at 6 p.m., McFarland Student Union 218:** Speaker Chanel Miller, advocate for campus sexual assault prevention and author of *Know My Name: A Memoir*.
- **Thursday, April 4, at 7 p.m., Schaeffer Auditorium:** Drag show featuring regional and local performers. Headline performer is Kornbread Jeté, also known as "The Snack."



Ujima Conference - February 20-22 at Kutztown University

KU welcomes PASSHE students, staff, and faculty to its annual Ujima Conference, which celebrates and honors Black history and culture. Sessions include workshops facilitated by student leaders, Kutztown alumni, and local community members. This year's theme, "It Takes a Village," reflects on the importance of collaboration and fellowship while working toward belonging for communities of color.

14th Annual Diversity Conference - March 1 at Kutztown University

The Kutztown University Commission on Human Diversity invites PASSHE students, staff, and faculty to campus for its 14th annual Diversity Conference. This year's theme, "Inspirational Advocacy Through the Arts," highlights the importance of advocacy in all areas of diversity, including multiculturalism, social justice, inclusion, and equity in all areas of life and education.

FDI Spring Conference and Debate – April 9-10 at Millersville University

The Frederick Douglass Institute (FDI) hosts the 2024 FDI Conference and Debates at Millersville University, with a theme of "The Power of Community: Uniting to Amplify Voices and Foster Well-Being." Students will present research and creative works, and will debate school choice in K-12 education.

Please contact dei@passhe.edu to include your events or highlights advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion on your campus in the upcoming issue of *Connectivity*.

Search Advocacy - contd.

- Pamela Keye, Chief Social Equity Officer, Cheyney University
- Lisa Newell, Department Chair, Psychology Department, IUP
- Denise Pearson, Vice Chancellor and Chief DEI Officer, Office of the Chancellor
- Jennifer Weidman, Chief Human Resources Officer, Kutztown University
- Thomas Wickman, Associate Provost, PennWest California
- Lara Willox, Dean of the College of Education and Human Services, Millersville University

STAFF PROFILE

Giovanni Negron-Garcia, DEI Graduate Research Assistant

What first sparked my interest in DEI?

DEI initiatives often ignite interest by tapping into the fundamental values of fairness, empathy, and social progress. Individuals may be drawn to DEI when they recognize its power to create environments where everyone, regardless of background, feels valued and has equal opportunities. The prospect of fostering innovation through diverse perspectives, promoting a more just society, and contributing to organizational success can be compelling motivations for engaging with DEI efforts. Ultimately, the desire to be part of positive change and make a meaningful impact on both personal and collective levels sparked my interest in DEI.



Why did I pursue a career in higher education?

Choosing a career in higher education can be a fulfilling and intellectually rewarding path. It offers the opportunity to contribute to the academic and personal development of students, fostering critical thinking, curiosity, and lifelong learning. As a college professional, you play a crucial role in shaping the future by imparting knowledge, inspiring creativity, and guiding individuals on their academic journeys. Additionally, higher education provides a dynamic environment for personal growth, research, and collaboration with diverse minds, making it a meaningful and impactful career choice.

What excites me most about my work?

I am thrilled by the dynamic intersection of my work in higher education and DEI. Every day I am inspired by the opportunity to contribute to the transformative journey of students from diverse backgrounds, fostering an inclusive learning environment where everyone feels valued and empowered.

In the realm of higher education, the constant pursuit of knowledge and personal growth fuels my passion. Witnessing students embark on their academic endeavors, overcome challenges, and evolve into critical thinkers is genuinely rewarding.

Search advocacy capacity-building efforts are mission driven and aligned with the State System's [DEI strategic priorities](#). The emerging innovations have the potential to breathe greater life into the [Board of Governors' Statement of Affirmation](#), which upholds its commitment to ensuring that PASSHE embraces values that foster the success of all students, faculty, and staff, built on a foundation of diversity.

The DEI Office will share the results of the committee's work as it seeks to strengthen the collective understanding of search processes; broaden participation in those processes; educate and inform (including legal and ethical perspectives); promote an inclusive mindset systemwide; and emphasize the importance of measuring the impact of these efforts.