

Contribution to Diversity

My life's work centers around working in trans-disciplinary environments to advance towards a more just and liberated world. To that end, my interactions with students, campus constituents, and broader communities are guided by my desire to improve access and opportunities for all students, particularly those from historically marginalized backgrounds. As an advocate for health equity, my principal desire is to inspire students to be leaders of social change in addressing a broad spectrum of health and social problems.

As a first-generation college student, I connect with students from marginalized communities who rarely see themselves in the front of the classroom or in leadership positions. As a Black female, the intersection between my group affiliations provides me with a unique lens for examining health policies and practices, a lens sometimes scarred by bias, racism, discrimination, and oppression. As such, the environment in which I exist and excel is very similar to the milieu of the students who show up on our college campuses. My teaching philosophy is undergirded by my acceptance of students as individual learners who thrive in environments conducive to learning. As an administrator, it is my desire to support faculty and staff in their effort to create a positive learning experience for students from all backgrounds.

My commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is evident in the way I use my academic training and experience to lead and manage academic units. The following are a few concrete examples of how I have worked to advance the principles of DEI.

One clear example of my work in advancing DEI is evidenced in the work I have done in establishing the Helen Rucker Center for Black Excellence (HRCBE) at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB). As the founding director of the center, I was secured resources, developed partnerships, and launched programs to support Black student success. The center now serves as a hub for the advancement of Black students, faculty, staff and community members and include a vast array of services. One of the most prominent programs is the African Heritage Research Collaborative (AHRC). The lab established to actively engage students in a collaborative research experience supported by faculty who are committed to examining health and other disparities and experiences across the African diaspora. My work with AHRC students is meaningful as it allows me to develop deep connections with students from myriad racial and ethnic identities (the lab is open to students from all races and ethnicities) while engaging in scholarly research as a high-impact practice. To date, AHRC has served over 50 students, each of which has experienced a timely graduation and/or continued on to graduate school. It is important to note that my work in launching and sustaining the (HRCBE) served as a precursor to the start of El Centro (a center for Latine students), the Queer Center (a center for LGBTQA+ students) as well as the planned Multicultural Center (a brave space for all students to find their identity).

While writing scholarly articles contributes to learning among academics and a limited number of practitioners, there is a pressing need to advance DEI in communities external to the campus. As such, I have worked to develop partnerships with local organizations and agencies to improve conditions that affect the most vulnerable populations. The best example of this integration can be seen in my work with Building Healthy Communities (BHC) and the Colibri Cohort for the Monterey Bay Unified High School District (MPUSD). The Colibri Cohort is a community-driven collaborative development to advance towards racial equity. For more than a year, my colleagues and I worked with systems and structures that shape the lives of community members to address to lift children, youth, families, and residents that have been harmed the most by racial inequities. Given the need to reestablish power structures, create an environment of mutual respect and care, and foster a foundation of trust among all participants, I through effective facilitation and organizing skills, I was able to create an environment in which individuals, many

of whom had not had positive experiences with the district in the past, felt comfortable to share their stories, express their opinions, and push for the types of changes needed to create more equitable opportunities for our youth.

As a result of commitment to DEI, I have been selected to present at various forums, including: the Consortium of Race and Gender Researchers, the Silicon Valley Women Leaders, the North Carolina Commerce Division of Rural Economic Development, and numerous panels and webinars focused on issues that affect marginalized populations. As a recognized social equity scholar/practitioner, with a specific focus on health equity, I was honored to have been selected by the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) leadership to interview former US Surgeon General, Dr. David Satcher; to serve on the ASPA Pandemic Task Force; to write numerous op-ed pieces on a variety of topics, including the COVID-19 pandemic. These non-traditional opportunities allow me to use my voice and advance towards a more just and equitable society for all populations.

In closing, my commitment to DEI is evident. While I am undoubtedly a racial equity scholar, I am truly committed to the advancement and success of all students. My body of work includes advocacy for women, Latine, Native American, Indigenous, unhoused, marginally housed, uninsured, those with visible or invisible disabilities, neurodivergent, and individuals who have been “othered” by the system. In this regard, my commitment to diversity is deeply rooted in my scholarship and practice and is the guiding force that undergirds my entire career.