



Dear EMU Community,

My first few months at EMU have been energizing. I am thrilled to join the EMU community as the inaugural Executive Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). It is an honor to serve in this role and be a part of this transformational new chapter in the history of EMU.

As a faith-based academic institution, we have a moral duty to prepare global leaders who advance DEI and a sense of belonging wherever they go. For me, this duty begins with modeling the behaviors I expect of others. It is about sharing power, stories, challenges, wisdom, and dreams with authenticity to forge a campus community where we can share our common humanity. It is about connecting and building relationships with each other. It is about eliminating structural racism. With this in mind, I began my one-on-one meetings with members of the campus community.

During these conversations, I learned what we value as a community, our challenges, and our dreams. I also heard a passion for making EMU a campus where everyone feels that they belong and can be their authentic selves. I heard and felt an unwavering commitment to bringing our vision to life for every member of our community:

"We will open new pathways of access and achievement for all students who aspire to grow as unifying leaders equipped with intercultural competence, oriented toward peace and justice, and rooted in an active faith modeled on the life and teachings of Jesus."

I also heard that we have some healing and work to do if we want to fully live into the ideals that we proclaim in our vision and mission statements.

I feel a deep sense of responsibility after listening to what you had to share. As American anthropologist Bryon Good said, “Whoever asks the question has a responsibility with what they hear.” My intention is to invite connection with our deeper selves and one another as a means of promoting a sense of belonging and racial justice to enjoy a more diverse, equitable, and compassionate campus. Implementing this plan in ways that move us toward action requires that we all join forces.

As we go on this change journey together, there may be times of uncertainty, disruption, and maybe even some failures along the way. These challenges will be opportunities for us to learn from our mistakes, take corrective action, and remind us of our interdependency. We will also pause along the way to celebrate our DEI milestones and successes. I share Alice Walker’s belief that, “We should dance furiously at hard times.” These are challenging times and DEI is hard work, so we will create spaces to dance furiously.

Do not hesitate to reach out to me with your DEI concerns and innovative strategies to eliminate systemic racism. Or stop by my office to say hi. I will continue to meet with all of you and the broader Harrisonburg community—being present, constant communication, and transparency will be an integral part of my tenure. I look forward to the many conversations still to come as we design our future together and hold each other accountable.

DEI News!

Shortly, I will be announcing new DEI initiatives and the implementation of others that began before I joined the EMU community. As a preview, I am sharing two exciting new developments. I am thrilled to announce that Patience Kamau has joined the DEI Office as a part-time associate director of DEI effective August 2021 for a one-year term. Patience will be sharing her time between CJP and DEI. She brings a wealth of experience, energy, and creativity to the DEI office.

The second news is that the [gender-inclusive language](#) initiative allowing for the collection of biographical data on institutional documents to include gender identity and pronouns—in addition to the already collected gender for reporting—is now in effect.

This change recognizes that the options mandated for reporting are not comprehensive of all genders. Pronouns are an essential part of one's identity. This change is in tandem with the introduction of Campus Names. We recognize that many people in our community use names other than their legal names to identify themselves. The use of appropriate pronouns and Campus Names, as indicated by each fellow Royal, is crucial in building a culture of respect and belonging at EMU.

We are grateful to Luke Mullet and the members of the Recruitment and Retention CODI subcommittee for their leadership in starting this initiative in the admissions office. The initiative became campus-wide and built on the superb prior work of EMU Safe Space, CODI, and leadership/advocacy by many queer students and employees. Also, kudos to the Gender/Pronoun Task Force who worked with the logistics of bringing this policy to life: Jenni Piper, Jason Alderfer, Kent Palmer, Shannon Dycus, Becky Brenneman, Charles Cooley, Scott Barge, Luke Mullet, and Holden Byler.

We continue to develop resources to inform the campus community and beyond. We invite you to check out the [DEI webpage](#).

Stay tuned and connected for more exciting DEI News!

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