



BELONG TOGETHER

OFFICE OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

## From the Executive Director.

Dear EMU community and friends,

The last nine months I have been busy connecting with the EMU community and learning about what is important to our community and how we can make EMU a place where we all can share our humanity and authentic selves.



A place where we all thrive and not just merely survive. A place where bravery flourishes due to our passions and not out of a necessity to survive. A place where we openly share our struggles and celebrate our successes.

This newsletter is part of this effort. My goal with this newsletter is to keep you up to date on DEI-related initiatives at EMU and learn from each other. If you (faculty, staff, or student) have any DEI related news that you wish to include in the next newsletter, email the news (and photos if you have them) to [dei@emu.edu](mailto:dei@emu.edu). It can be a DEI initiative that you have started, a class assignment that advances any of our DEI strategic priorities, a DEI event, or any other DEI related news. This is a space for us to belong and share together. My goal is to start with

sharing two newsletters per academic calendar year (one in fall and one in spring).

Warmly,  
Jackie N. Font-Guzmán, JD, PhD

## **DEI grants announcement**

The Office of DEI welcomes students, staff, and faculty to take part in our work of fostering a diverse and inclusive campus community. To support these efforts, two new grant opportunities have recently been announced. The [Inclusive Excellence Grants](#) program provides funding to support collaborative initiatives that result in structural changes and advance a culture of belonging. Grant applications are being accepted through **March 11**. In the fall, we will launch our second grant program, the [Hertzler-Koshy Faculty Fellowship](#). This is an opportunity to support faculty/student collaborations that will lead to more diverse curricula in the areas of race, ethnicity, disability, and gender. Both grants have been made possible thanks to the generosity of [Jose Koshy '76 and Jean Koshy-Hertzler '79](#). Email questions about the application process or deadlines to [dei@emu.edu](mailto:dei@emu.edu). The application deadline is firm but the other deadlines may be modified depending on the project.

## **Meet the Office of DEI student workers team**

We are excited to announce that we have three amazing students working in the office of DEI. Here are three fun facts about each of them.

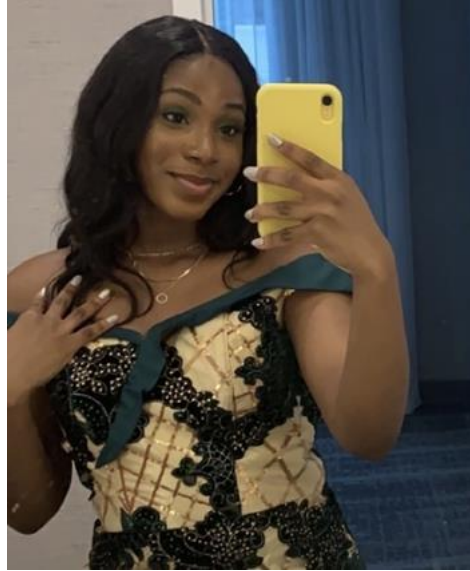


**Katie Mulembe**, Inaugural Graduate Associate to the Office of DEI. She is a graduate student at EMU's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding and will be graduating in May 2022 with an MA in transformational leadership.

Favorite Book: *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver is a beautifully written story about family bonds, religion, identity, colonialism, and so much more. I re-read it every few years, and each time I take something new away from it. Also, during the last couple of years I've found myself constantly reaching for adrienne maree brown's *Emergent Strategy* as I look for encouragement and direction in my work for social change.

Best Trip: In 2018 my husband and I took a trip to Costa Rica to celebrate our 10-year anniversary. We had the best time zip lining through rainforests, soaking in hot springs, and sipping delicious coffee. We hope we can go back there with friends and family someday.

Fun Fact: I have a talent for memorizing song lyrics. Usually after I hear a song a few times I can sing it through entirely. Unfortunately, I don't have a great singing voice – but that usually doesn't stop me from belting it out.



**Adesola Johnson**, Inaugural Inclusive Excellence Student Leader. She is a biochemistry(pre-med) major in her first year at EMU.

Favorite Book: *Children of blood and bones* or anything from the *Harry Potter* series.

Favorite TV show: Blacklist

Fun Fact: I love nature and have a mini obsession with lakes and pretty parks.



**Meredith Lehman.** Student volunteer with the Office of DEI. She will graduate in May 2025 with degrees in political science and biology.

Favorite Book: *Water for Elephants*

Fun Fact: I play the violin.

Best Trip: Kathmandu, Nepal

## "For me, DEI and belonging at EMU means..."

During Scholarship Weekend on Feb. 4-5, **Jackie Font-Guzmán** and **Adesola Johnson** shared with prospective students the Office of DEI's mission and vision for EMU. Adesola also asked students to share what DEI and belonging meant to them. This was their response:



## Mentoring faculty cohort hires through a DEI lens

The cohort hire is still ongoing and once the process is completed, I will share the results. In the meantime, we are getting ready to mentor our new colleagues. Mentoring and supporting faculty is a crucial component of retention and creating welcoming spaces. Based on best practices, we are piloting a program to mentor and support the cohort faculty. The program includes three faculty and a staff member who will provide advice and support to the new faculty on their first day. The charge of this team is to mentor the new faculty in summer/fall 2022 according to the road map and mentorship program

developed by the Executive Director of DEI with the input/collaboration of the faculty mentors.

The program will complement existing onboarding and mentoring activities that happen at the department level such as professional and research support; it will not be a substitute. However, the focus will be on DEI. Specifically,

- What do new faculty need as it pertains to DEI?
- How can we meet their DEI needs?

The primary DEI needs that will be addressed are:

- Safe Space - create spaces for faculty to discuss and process unique and individual experiences without being invalidated, questioned, devalued and/or disrespected.
- Sense of Community (within and beyond EMU) - providing both an intellectual and/or social community where faculty feel a true sense of belonging at EMU and beyond EMU.
- Emotional Support - support in dealing with the common stress and pressures of transitioning to life on the tenure track and possibly a new city.
- Access to Networks (within and beyond EMU) - support in identifying potential research collaborations, navigate external funding, and access opportunity structures that might not be immediately apparent to them as a new faculty member.
- Relationship Building within the cohort hire - allocate time with the intentional purpose of connecting across their differences.

The following faculty and staff have accepted to join Jackie in developing a mentoring program and serve as mentors: David Berry, Violet Dutcher, Steven Johnson, Ronda Rittenhouse, Marilyn Harris

## **Civility training**

Thinking long term, the office of DEI believes that the foundation for sustainable DEI work at EMU is to build a relational infrastructure. It is a way of continuing our journey together towards having a community in which

everyone feels a sense of belonging. We also believe that leading and belonging together means that leaders must role model the change they want to see. With this in mind, we invited Civity to campus.

Civity is a nonprofit organization that focuses on strengthening communities and institutions through workshops that equip people with the necessary skills to have conversations across social differences. Civity provided training at the Cabinet retreat and the Board of Trustees in fall 2021 to:

- heighten their own capacity for engaging in relationship-building conversations across difference themselves; and
- build their capacity for creating spaces for others to engage in these conversations.



## **University Climate Assessment Group**

We strive to have a campus with the institutional capacity to offer equal learning opportunities for all students while addressing structural inequities that are negatively impacting our ability to attract and retain talented students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds (e.g., BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, non-Christian). Investing in ways to increase a sense of belonging among all students, faculty, and staff is part of EMU's 3-Year Priorities.

The findings of a climate assessment will provide a baseline and be instructive as we seek to develop and

sustain an inclusive, supportive, safe, nondiscriminatory, and welcoming community of learning - one grounded on mutual respect and where everyone feels a sense of belonging. Our use of the term “assessment” here is intended to represent a comprehensive, mixed-method approach to gathering experiences, perspectives, data and contextual information. While this work may include a questionnaire (survey) sent to members of the community, it will extend beyond that singular form of data collection. The results will build on prior work and inform the development of a DEI strategic action plan.

The Climate Assessment Group sent out requests for proposals and will be evaluating them this semester. We are thankful to the members of this group::

- Jon Swartz, Student Life (staff representative)
- Ji Eun Kim, Assistant Professor in Political Studies (faculty representative)
- Rachel Roth Sawatzky - Staff (CODI representative)
- Thaddeus Jackson, (student representative)
- Mary Jensen, Lancaster representative
- Jackie Font and Scott Barge, co-chairs

## **Selected DEI-related events on campus**

### **Inaugural National Queer History Month (October 27, 2022)**

EMU hosted this [event](#) featuring author, activist, and public historian Gregory Samantha Rosenthal, PhD who spoke on their forthcoming book “Living Queer History: Remembrance and Belonging in a Southern City” (University of North Carolina Press, December 2021). The event was sponsored by the Office of DEI.

### **Celebrating Indigenous Peoples' Day**

The Land Acknowledgment Committee, the Multicultural Student Services, and the Office of DEI prepared a series of events that took place October 11-26, 2021 to celebrate Indigenous Peoples' Day. The office of DEI sponsored the poetry reading event with Ishmael Hope, a Tlingit poet and storyteller included in the anthology “When the Light of the World Was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through.”



### **Celebrating MLK at EMU**

Celeste Thomas reflects: January finds us in a unique place at EMU each year. After many years of struggle and debate, we take Martin Luther King Jr's birthday holiday away from traditional classes to do what we say we do. Micah 6:8 calls for us to "Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with Our God". This may sound simple to those who do not struggle understanding that equity and inclusion are the best ways to be inclusive of all. For others, the thought of sharing that which you think should only belong to you brings feelings of fear and sometimes rage.

This year's celebration included a variety of opportunities to celebrate the legacy of Dr. King while engaging in a day of education and service. The highlight of the celebration was the Anne and Emmett play which took place in a fictional place called "Memory." Issues of religious and racial hatred were expressed in the play. The themes were a glance into what can happen when intolerance takes a front seat. The unfortunate part of the themes in the play is that 50+ years later, the un-United States of American still continues its struggles with intolerance.

I pause and ask the question, "are you going to be a part of the problem or a part of the solution"?

### **Celebrating Black History Month**

As we reflect upon The Black Student Alliance's Black History Month theme, we must pause and pay homage to the giants whose shoulders we stand upon. We realize that a month is not nearly enough time to adequately celebrate the fullness of what our culture has contributed and is still contributing. The theme, "Celebrating Black Excellence" means that we must first be about the business of teaching our past so that we can continue the journey to create the future.

Our burdens are lighter due to Booker T. Washington, Ella Fitzgerald, Al Green, Mahammad Ali, Benjamin Banneker, Dorothy I Height, Fannie Lou Hamer, Malcolm X, Angela Davis, Joseph Lowry and the good trouble that we are encouraged to get into by John Lewis. We stand in solidarity with them and thank them and others, too many

to mention for all they have done and continue to do to show us what “Black Excellence” looks like.

We hope that you are able to join us as we look forward to the celebration of contributions by women in March.

Celeste R. Thomas



### **Inaugural Lavender Ceremony at EMU's 2022 Commencement**

During graduations it is a tradition for students to wear stoles, or vestments, at Commencement and pre-Commencement ceremonies that are symbolic of their cross-cultural background or identities.

This year, the Office of DEI, Student Life, and Safe Space are partnering to host the first-ever Lavender Graduation Ceremony at Eastern Mennonite University to celebrate the accomplishments of self-identifying LGBTQ+ undergraduate and graduate students. Students are invited to invite their networks of support to celebrate with you on your achievement!

### ***What is a Lavender Graduation?***

Lavender Graduation is an annual ceremony conducted on numerous campuses to honor lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and ally students and to acknowledge their achievements and contributions to the University. The Lavender Graduation Ceremony was created by Dr. Ronni Sanlo, a Jewish Lesbian, who was denied the opportunity to attend the graduations of her biological children because of her sexual orientation. It was through this experience that she came to understand the pain felt by her students. Encouraged by the Dean of Students at the University of Michigan, Dr. Sanlo designed the first Lavender Graduation Ceremony in 1995. The first Lavender Graduation began at the University of Michigan in 1995, with three graduates. By 2001, there were over 45 Lavender Graduation Ceremonies at Colleges and Universities nationwide. Graduating students, including undergraduates and graduates, are invited to take part in the celebration, which occurs each year the week prior to university-wide commencement events. (Description from the Human Rights Campaign)

### ***Why a Lavender Graduation at EMU?***

Lavender Graduation is a cultural celebration that recognizes LGBTQ students of all races and ethnicities and acknowledges their achievements and contributions to the university. Through such recognition LGBTQ students may leave the university with a positive last experience of the institution thereby encouraging them to become involved mentors for current students as well as financially contributing alumni. (From the Human Rights Campaign)

This ceremony will take place during the same week as the donning of the Kente ceremony that has been celebrated at EMU since 2016. According to Celeste Thomas, Director of Multicultural Student Services, the

ceremony celebrates the accomplishments of graduating students of color as well as the history of black students' and students of color achievements at the university. International students have also had a choice of wearing stoles to identify their country of origin.

We welcome students to participate in all the ceremonies. Students do not have to choose one over the other.

- Donning of the Kente | 2 p.m., May 1, 2022 | Martin Chapel, Seminary Building
- Lavender Graduation | 5 p.m., May 6, 2022 | Discipleship Center

## **How do you experience gender inclusivity at EMU?**

We would like to hear from you! In partnership with the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, a needs assessment will be conducted by MA in Counseling students to hear what transgender and non-binary students need to feel safe and supported on campus. Keep an eye out for an email survey coming soon!

## **EMU students now have access to online therapy at no cost to you**

This includes unlimited messaging, as well as the option to schedule one live session (via chat, audio, or video) with your Talkspace therapist each month. When you are ready to sign up, click "Get Started" at [talkspace.com/EMU](https://talkspace.com/EMU). Talkspace communication is confidential and secure. We will never know who uses the service or for what purpose.

For students with an existing therapist on or off campus, signing up can still connect you to a library of self-care tools. If you have any questions about Talkspace, you can go to [emu.edu/talkspace](https://emu.edu/talkspace) for more information and FAQ's.

For upcoming DEI events click [here](#).



Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion  
emu.edu/diversity  
1200 Park Road, Harrisonburg, VA, 22802

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