



## Spring 2024 Office of DEI Newsletter, Issue 4



### Message from the Vice President for DEI

Our Royal community has done it again! As you will read in this newsletter, we continue to advance DEI together. Amid a hostile national environment towards DEI, EMU continues its unwavering commitment to having an inclusive and equitable campus where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

In this newsletter, we have spotlighted a few DEI initiatives spearheaded by EMU's departments and some community members' DEI accomplishments. I invite you to read about their DEI work and feel free to express your gratitude when you see them around campus.

Finally, please check out our *Viewpoint with Dennis Quaid* Premiere - A Celebration of Belonging Together! The event is free of cost, but you must RSVP. See link below.

In solidarity,

Jacqueline (Jackie) N. Font-Guzmán, MHA,JD, PhD



## **EMU's DEI work is being featured in the TV series *Viewpoint with Dennis Quaid***

Come watch the minisode premiere, hear from Royals who led us into the DEI journey, enjoy student performances, and then dance the night away— think red carpet meets awards show after-party!

There is still much work to do to fulfill EMU's DEI mission; let's celebrate the progress we've made!

***Vibe Together!* Please RSVP here!**



## A Transformational DEI Journey in EMU Undergraduate Admissions

The EMU Undergraduate (UG) Admissions team has transformed over the past year, emerging as a hub where diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) takes center stage. Luke Litwiller, the Director of (UG) Admissions, shares insights into the team's journey and commitment to fostering a sense of belonging.

Luke is passionate about the ongoing DEI initiatives within the UG Admissions team. Despite acknowledging the work ahead, they express deep gratitude for the team's collective spirit, emphasizing, "It can feel cliché, but we must work together."

## A Glimpse into DEI initiatives

From inclusive language training for LGBTQ+ individuals to optional pronoun fields on forms and integrated gender identity options in application forms, the UG Admissions team is rewriting the narrative of belonging.

Luke gives a special nod to Information Systems, Student Life, and the Committee for Diversity and Inclusion (CODI) for enabling EMU's data systems to include pronouns on ID cards, demonstrating the power of collaborative efforts.

In 2023, the UG Admissions team, in collaboration with the Intensive English Program (IEP), trained multilingual students as interpreters, easing the journey for prospective undergraduates and their families as they navigate EMU and higher education.

Team members bring their unique and authentic identities to meetings through a goofy question, a check-in prompt, or a song. Gratitude takes the spotlight, with five minutes dedicated to appreciating each other during every team meeting. And let's not forget the cowbell— a symbol of celebration when an Admissions counselor rings it for every tuition deposit paid by a future EMU Royal.

Valuing transparency, the UG Admissions team embraces constructive disruption. Team members are encouraged to question the status quo, asking, "Why do we do it this way?" This shift challenges traditions that might unknowingly perpetuate biases, microaggressions, or inefficiencies.

The introduction of an Enrollment Onboarding Checklist on myEMU is a game-changer for incoming students. This tool simplifies the onboarding process and ensures a smoother start to their EMU education.

The UG Admissions team opens its doors wider with a revamped group visit structure, welcoming visitors from community-based organizations and new-to-us high schools. The goal? To forge new partnerships and extend campus visits to students with potential interest in EMU.

Admissions marketing at EMU infuses storytelling with inclusive narratives. From the Black Lives Matter mural to Gender-Inclusive Housing and the Inclusivity Science Mural, these stories highlight the university's commitment to diversity.

In a collaborative process, the team reevaluates the cultural constructs of "professionalism," revising the dress code to provide specific and inclusive attire guidance. This collective effort signifies a step towards recognizing and celebrating diverse expressions of professionalism.

## **Final Comments**

The EMU Undergraduate Admissions team is a leader in DEI. As they continue this journey, one thing is sure – at EMU, we connect, disrupt, and vibe as we admit future global leaders. “I am so proud of the commitment our team has to authentic and transformational DEI work. This work can be messy and difficult, but we have seen the ways it can improve all of our lives. For me, our team's work towards creating a more equitable culture is a tangible expression of my Anabaptist values of non-violence, peace, and justice. I have no doubt that we will continue growing in our DEI journey together, creating an environment where each of us can thrive and radically welcome new students and families to EMU.” - Luke Litwiller



## Celebrating MLK Day



This year's MLK Day celebration ignited a vibrant fusion of artistry and Black culture. Joining the celebration were the voices of the Virginia Union University Gospel Choir and the stories told by Actor and Writer, University of Kentucky Assistant Professor of Acting at Jeremy Gillett.

This year's events focused on Black spaces and narratives unburdened by the majority's comfort. "Black & 25 in America" was a rich tapestry of diversity, with characters embodying the essence of Black life - from a man forged in the crucible of a trap house to a proud lesbian woman and a middle/upper-class gentleman. The unmistakable cadence of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) was present throughout the performance, painting an authentic portrait of Black culture. Gospel melodies were a reminder of the resilience and spirit that permeates Black History. At the forefront of this display of events were the leadership of Mikayla Petus, Professor David Berry, and Director of Multicultural Student Services, Celeste Thomas.



Attendees participated in talks and discussions on MLK's legacy, diversity, inclusion, and social justice issues. The campus amplified African American voices, with MLK Day fostering community and highlighting positive Black experiences. There were requests for more Black-centered spaces on campus to combat code-switching exhaustion and maintain multicultural students' authenticity.

Celeste Thomas emphasized the significance of history and education, urging students, faculty, and staff to remember the sacrifices made for their presence today. She highlighted the importance of acknowledging and celebrating MLK Day within the campus community, aligning with the university's ethos of justice, mercy, and humility.

"MLK Day is about creating black-centered spaces, where Black people can be unapologetically themselves." - Celeste Thomas.



## EMU Brings to Campus “The Opening Doors: The Art of Inclusion” Exhibition

Left: *Playtime!* – J. Poole

Right: *More Than a Sign* – J. Holsopple

The Arts Council of the Valley and The Arc of Harrisonburg and Rockingham commissioned 20 local artists to use doors as canvases for celebrating inclusion. The doors were on display in Downtown Harrisonburg from May through October 2023. Because of the exhibit's impact on our community, Mayor Reed wanted to continue telling the stories of inclusion beyond the city. She collaborated with the Office of DEI, Student Life, Advancement, and Facilities to bring the display to campus in December.

Our faculty members Justin Poole and Jerry Holsopple contributed to this project. Justin Poole's "Playtime!" door is on the first floor of the Campus Center. “Participating in this project allowed me to reflect on how grateful I am to live in a community with so many interesting people with diverse backgrounds. It was validating as an artist to see my work, celebrating the Valley's diversity, in front of the Court House and then in EMU's Campus Center.” -Justin Poole

Jerry Holsopple's "More Than A Sign" door is on the first floor of the University Commons near Admissions. “To be able to create art that would be in public spaces where many people just walking by might see it, along with collaborating on the whole with 20 artists was exciting. Getting to use photos of so many people I have met around the world, who represent an amazing diversity on almost any spectrum, and offering a message of welcome into our community is important to me on a personal level.” -Jerry Holsopple

We have scattered these doors throughout our campus as a visual representation of the values we cherish. These doors will be on display until the end of the semester, inviting everyone to pause, reflect, and engage with the powerful narratives of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Join us in celebrating the art of inclusion as we open doors to a more connected and compassionate community.



## EMU Offers its First Queer History Course



In the fall of 2023, Professor Heike Peckruhn, a faculty member in the School of Theology, Humanities & the Performing Arts (PATH) Department at EMU, taught the first Queer History class in the history of EMU. Peckruhn structured the class to examine Queer History through the lenses of activism, philosophy, politics, and its interconnectedness with religion.

Despite her initial preparedness to focus on a global perspective, the class ultimately gravitated toward an in-depth exploration of Queer History within the United States. Peckruhn acknowledged the students' interest and their desire to focus on the relevant political environment, resulting in a course that explored the complexities of queer experiences in a national context. The approach emphasizes the importance of Queer History and its intersection with broader socio-political contexts, providing students with an understanding of the ongoing evolution of queer experiences.

Emphasizing the significance of offering such a class at EMU, Peckruhn highlighted the transformative impact it could have on institutional perspectives. She expressed, "Anytime you change an institution in its bones, you're faced with, 'Where's this coming from?' or 'Why can't we just do that now?' Understanding how some of these conversations and struggles have been lived before can only guide us in forging the path forward. Part of it is understanding that this isn't new, and also it's not old yet either."





## **New DEI Course this Fall 2024!**

The new DEI course, "Power, Justice, and Systems" (CORE 300), will be offered for the first time in fall 2024 and spring 2025. The development of this course is part of the Black Student Alliance (BSA) Demands. The class will focus on race, gender, economic inequality, class, and other dimensions of identity and difference. Students will describe and analyze how structural inequality shapes their lives and the lives of those around them. Students will develop creative and ethical ways of strategically disrupting and transforming unjust systems.



Professor David Evans, School of Theology, Associate Professor in the School of Humanities and Performing Arts, will teach the course in fall 2024. Professor Deanna Durham, Associate Professor and Program Director of Social Work in the School of Social Sciences and Professions, will teach the course in the spring of 2025. Both will receive a Hertzler-Koshy Faculty Fellowship Grant to assist in finalizing the development of this course.



## **Course with DEI-Related Content in Fall 2024**

In Fall 2024, Prof. Andrew Suderman will teach "Liberation Theologies." This course will explore different forms of theologies of liberation that have arisen, including Latin American Liberation Theology, Black Theology, Feminist Theology, Womanist Theology, Queer Theology, and theologies that occur in and challenge the logic of Empire.

The course will grapple with questions such as: How do we interpret the Christian message or "gospel" as liberating or emancipatory? How is Jesus' proclamation of "the Kingdom of God" good news for those who suffer from poverty, oppression, violence, and injustice? If you want to know more about this course, contact Prof. Suderman.







## Ashley Mellinger's Debut Novel Captures High School Experience.

**Go Ashley!** Ashley Mellinger is a senior nursing undergraduate student at EMU. She wrote the novel throughout high school and published the book on January 23, 2024.

Mellinger's book explores the adolescent experience and resonates with everyone. Capturing the highs and lows of growing up, and the ascent and descent in the pursuit of one's true self. You can learn more about the book in our recent [EMU News article here](#).

[Order her novel here](#)



## Meet our new Sustainability Student Leader!

Isaac Huyard joined our office in the Spring 2024 and is a junior who is majoring in Environmental Science.

Favorite Author: Aldous Huxley

Favorite TV show: It's always sunny in Philadelphia

Hobbies: Biking, guitar, foraging

Favorite Food: steak

After grad adventure: Bikepacking in New England



Prayer walk ©Molly Peters / Courtesy of the Apache Stronghold

## Oak Flat Prayer Rising - Bridging DEI and Sustainability at EMU

In a display of solidarity, EMU students, faculty, staff, and community members gathered November 4, 2023, joining the [Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery](#) in support of [Apache Stronghold's](#) movement to protect Oak Flat. This sacred site has been cared for by the Western Apache for centuries, and faces threat of destruction from the Resolution Copper mine.



The resistance led by Apache Stronghold is rooted in their religious practices and spiritual connection to the land.

EMU students provided

- a space for intentional learning about Oak Flat,
- organizing a solidarity walk to the EMU Hill, and
- facilitating time for reflection and prayer.

While hundreds gathered at Oak Flat in Arizona for the prayer rising event, 29 other groups from the Coalition participated from afar, praying and being in solidarity together.

Maria Menjivar, a senior in the leadership of Peace Fellowship, said, “Part of EMU's land acknowledgment talks about responding to calls of support and solidarity from indigenous communities and I think joining in on the Oak Flat prayer rising was a great way to represent the values we have as a university and community...I think actively keeping in touch with the connections that we do have already is a great way to keep sustaining more relationships, not just with indigenous communities, but also with other universities that are participating in these support efforts.”

This campus action was coordinated by Earthkeepers, Peace Fellowship, and Sustainable Food Initiative, with support from Student Life and the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. This effort highlights the interconnectedness of EMU's core values. It emphasizes the importance of weaving together elements of colonization, indigenous solidarity, faith, spiritual life, DEI, and environmental sustainability.

Protecting sacred land in Arizona highlights how faith groups can support indigenous solidarity and environmental justice even when physically distant.

## [Click here to Support DEI](#)

Join us on our transformative journey, where every donation, big or small, becomes a catalyst for a positive impact in shaping our future of belonging.



Visit DEI's [Resource](#) and [Communication](#) pages.

### Share Your DEI Story

Would you like to share DEI stories with our EMU community? Do you have a DEI-oriented event, announcement, article or recognition you would like us to promote through our DEI communication channels? Contact [dei@emu.edu](mailto:dei@emu.edu).



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Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

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