September 1, 2016

Dear Clark community,

Welcome back! I am delighted to start my tenure as the new Chief Officer of Diversity and Inclusion (CODI) in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. During my first weeks on campus, I have spoken with many students, staff, and faculty committed to advancing diversity and inclusion at Clark. I have been particularly inspired by the students who had the courage to tell their stories and express their experiences during the two race fora and by the commitment laid out in the University’s Academic and Financial Plan, 2016–2021 to ensure that “Clark is recognized locally and globally as an exemplar of liberal education built on an abiding belief in the educational and ethical values of diversity and inclusion” (p. 21).

As a first-generation graduate from college, I learned the value of hard work, perseverance, and developing the necessary drive and passion to succeed and give back. This ethos extended to my work as an attorney and currently as a diversity professional. Since my transition into higher education, I have pondered on the question: What does it look like to successfully advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education? Accomplishing this goal requires data-driven strategy, research, evidence-based solutions, valuing the lived experiences of individuals, and building collaborative partnerships.

We are at a critical point in the history of our nation and in higher education to address the longstanding, systemic issues facing underserved communities. These historical issues have transcended into higher education where many students from historically marginalized communities have been denied equal access to education and resources. I recently presented at a national conference for diversity professionals — National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) — on the topic of leveraging leadership from climate survey to actionable results. Some key tenets that I utilize are effectively summarized in Dr. Damon A. Williams’ work on strategic diversity leadership principles (At the Crossroads: UNLV Strategic Diversity Leadership Report Executive Summary, March 2015):

1. Redefine issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion as fundamental to the organizational bottom line of mission fulfillment and institutional excellence;
2. Focus on creating systems that enable all students, faculty, and staff to thrive and achieve their maximum potential;
3. Achieve a more robust and integrated diversity approach that builds on prior diversity models and operates in a strategic, evidence-based, and data-driven manner where accountability is of paramount importance;
4. Focus on diversity-related efforts that innovate and transform the institutional culture, not merely make tactical moves that lead to poorly integrated efforts and symbolic implementation;
5. Lead with a high degree of cultural intelligence and awareness of different identities and their significance in higher education.
The Clark community, inclusive of the exceptional work of the founding CODI Professor Betsy Huang, has laid an excellent foundation by committing to cultural awareness and competency training for all campus constituents starting with the senior leadership team and providing the resources to conduct a campus climate survey that will be administered by my office by next academic year. This will ensure that we have a data-driven strategy that captures the voices of the students, staff, and faculty to create a comprehensive plan that is aligned with the University’s Academic and Financial plan.

Since the campus climate survey will not be underway until next academic year, I have some initiatives this year — noting that some may take longer — with the revitalization of the Bias Incident Response Program that will include an element of a community response team in addition to the administrative response; working with Provost Baird on the expansion of the Diversity Advocate role; the creation of the Diversity and Inclusion Certificate Program that will be a professional development program starting with faculty and staff; and the continuation of a co-funding program for students, faculty, and staff that are advancing diversity and inclusion on campus. I will send periodic updates to the campus on the development and status of the diversity and inclusion plan.

At Clark, we are committed to preventing and responding to incidents of sex-based discrimination and harassment. In my role as the Title IX Coordinator, I will oversee and coordinate the University’s policies and practices regarding Title IX — sexual harassment and sexual assault prevention. I will work with the Deputy Title IX Coordinators who will conduct investigations and assist with training efforts for the campus in their respective areas. The Title IX Coordinator and Deputy Title IX Coordinators are knowledgeable and trained in the University’s policies and procedures, and state and federal laws that apply to and the dynamics of sexual misconduct and harassment.

My office is now located in Dana Commons, and I look forward to hosting a welcome reception this fall semester for students, staff, and faculty to visit our new space that now houses the Center for Gender, Race, and Area Studies; the Multicultural and First Generation Students Office; all identity-based student organizations; the McCann Resource Center; the Fireside Lounge for inclusion-related events; the prayer and meditation space; and the Higgins School of Humanities that has been a long-standing resident of this amazing building. Please stay tuned for an announcement to this reception that will give you a chance to learn more about my office and the work we do.

This work cannot be accomplished without dedicated individuals across campus who are committed to advancing the mission of the institution, which includes fostering an inclusive campus community where all members can work and learn in a respectful environment free from harassment and discrimination.

Sincerely,

Sheree Marlowe

Chief Officer of Diversity and Inclusion

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