

Diversity Statement

Over the span of my professional career, I have witnessed a great need for and efforts to change in part the role of the community college. One important impetus for that change has been the opportunity and challenge to work toward achieving diversity and equity at the community college level. If ever there was, there no longer is a “typical” student in the modern community college. I sincerely believe in the importance of public institutions- - especially educational ones- - to *willingly* engage in activities and create and follow policies that foster diversity, equity, and a general sense of inclusiveness and belonging. Every individual, including myself, faces unique challenges, and when addressing diversity and equity it is important to grapple with the systemic inequalities and oppressive realities that occur due to racism, sexism, ableism, poverty, all phobias associated with sexual orientation, and many other realities that seek to divide rather than include. For me the importance is personal.

I grew up largely absent a father or father figure. Essentially raised by a divorced working mother at a time when divorce was not so common, women earned far less than men for the same jobs, and latchkey child was not a well-known term, I was “different.” This experience helped me develop a true sense of empathy for others who face far more severe and numerous socio-economic roadblocks than I. Those early experiences are probable reasons why I am involved on a personal level with Boy Scouts, youth sports coaching, and the Barton County Food Bank, and on a professional basis facilitate the inclusion of programs such as Upward Bound, Student Support Services, Disability Services, the Educational Opportunity Center, an on-campus free food pantry, and convenient child care for our students.

Education was not a priority and my mother imposed no expectations that I do well in school. Were it not for athletic interests, I would not have been the first in my family to go to college. Because I personally understand how college can change lives, I have long been an advocate of dual credit programs and workforce training as evidenced by my involvement and leadership in the formation of the Northern Arizona Vocational Institute of Technology (NAVIT), an area vocational district serving regional high school-aged youth. College should be accessible to those who desire it.

While an undergrad, a summer employment opportunity lead me to Birmingham, Alabama for work on a landscape crew. Racism exists everywhere unfortunately, but the more subtle form I barely perceived in my small city life in Iowa did not prepare me for the glaringly overt racism I observed as the only non-African American member of the crew. It would have been difficult to miss the superior attitude given to my African American boss by the white-only customers we worked for. More often than not, customers assumed that I was in charge, and not my much older and experienced boss. Working side by side in the heat and humidity of an Alabama summer with my African American co-workers heightened my awareness of and distaste for all racism on the covert to overt continuum. My experience that summer was certainly valued later when, as the chief academic officer while employed in Arizona, I was the liaison officer to three tribal nation governments. My work was in part to help identify educational and training needs. Carrying out this responsibility required sensitivity and respect for each nations’ unique tribal government and cultural traditions. I know these life experiences solidified my belief that education was a key that could help meet the challenges encountered by those who face economic disadvantages, racial intolerance, and low expectations. I would soon find out first-hand how assuring diversity and equity would impact those with mental and physical challenges.

In my first higher education position as faculty member and Department Chairperson for Special Needs programming, I was responsible for a host of learning and psycho-social programs benefitting students

with physical and developmental disabilities. Experiencing the first hand benefit gained from locally responsive learning opportunities that were afforded to and adapted for the unique circumstances of those with physical and mental challenges, communicated to me, that higher education can be a part of the answer for all populations. Little did I know that accessing resources for students with disabilities would come full circle when my first-born child was diagnosed with Autism, intellectual disabilities, and later the onset of Multiple Sclerosis. Once again, personal experience proved to be a quick route to advocacy for equity.

NORMAL (n): *The usual, average or typical state or condition.* Four 19-year-old Caucasian females all from the same mid-size city start college on the same day. Are they the normal, usual, average or typical community college student? Who knows? They certainly have some commonalities, but to make their educational experience equitable, their diversities need to be considered as much as their commonalities. One may be lesbian, another a product of the state's foster care system, another enlisted in the Army, and the other incarcerated in a state prison. "Normal" is a tough adjective to define community college students, but to say that they are diverse and deserve equity is not difficult at all.

The growth of the Hispanic population in Kansas leads Barton to tailor its admissions and advising services; among other things, we strive to employ personnel who are culturally sensitive of the challenges facing our Hispanic communities. It was doubly gratifying when we found Barton's International students also taking advantage of those same services. Education can be an answer for all, so Barton has a large presence at two State of Kansas prison facilities; as inmates are released, those who took the opportunity to earn degrees and/or certificates of completion during their time of incarceration have a much better chance for life-long freedom. Working cooperatively with the U.S. Army, the time sensitive needs and challenges facing military personnel became apparent. Barton continues to respond and has implemented accommodations to best service this student body. It is gratifying to serve men and women who sacrifice for our liberties.

Many of my life experiences have fostered my belief in the importance of diversity efforts including advocating internally to the college constituents and externally to community constituents. In order to address our responsibility to advocate for all, Barton has an Inclusion and Diversity Team that is charged with identifying strategies to foster a climate that promotes "inclusiveness, mutual respect, appreciation, and understanding." I don't think anyone needs to personally experience all forms of division in order to understand and be willing to engage in activities that enhance campus diversity and equity efforts.

I have remained dedicated to the mission of the community college and this includes promoting the best service possible for all immediate communities and their populations. In terms of the impact diversity has had in my life, each experience that is embedded in the above developments have cumulatively made me a better person.