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Equity and Inclusion Newsletter

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Equity & Inclusion Matters- Issue 9

Otterbein Office of Social Justice & Activism

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EQUITY & INCLUSION MATTERS

Otterbein's Office of Equity and Inclusion: Making the Invisible Visible



Otterbein University Enrolls Most Diverse Class in History, Exemplifying Mission of Inclusivity

This fall, Otterbein welcomed the first-year students of the Class of 2024, which has the distinction of being the most diverse in the university's 173-year history. The 133 students of color and of non-Caucasian ethnicity make up nearly 27% of the class — a 98.5% increase from the 67 ethnically diverse students entering class in 2012, when current Vice President for Enrollment Management Jefferson Blackburn-Smith came to Otterbein. He says the growth is about community and not numbers.

"It's about the environment. We want this to be a home for students, not just a place they go to school. Otterbein is, and always has been, a college of opportunity. We want to meet students and families where they are, see them as a person first, and then help support their journey to where they want to be," said Blackburn-Smith.

Targeted admission campaigns and scholarship initiatives are key drivers in how Otterbein has been increasing student diversity year after year. Efforts began in Columbus City Schools in 2013, then expanded to other central Ohio Urban districts in 2015 and became the Opportunity Scholarship for Ohio residents earning less than \$60,000 per year in 2018. With the expansion, Otterbein could take its commitment to affordability statewide, covering the full cost of tuition beyond state and federal aid up to the student's full financial need as determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

Once students commit to attending Otterbein, they are invited to our Nurturing Educational Success & Transitions (NEST) program. NEST is a pre-orientation program that aims to ease the transition of first-year students that identify as first-generation, transfer and/or students of color.

"When we think of Otterbein University, we must think of including everyone in our pursuit of excellence," said James Prysock, OSJA director. "Our programs help each new student connect with their peers, a mentor, and ultimately, the institution as a whole." Whether it is the 27% of students of color, 10% Latinx, 11% out of state or the 33% Pell Eligible students that make up the class of 2024, Otterbein University continues to be engaged in the conversations that lead to a more equitable society. ■

CALENDAR

Now-Dec. 4

Magda Parasidis: Ghosts in Sunlight art exhibit, Miller Gallery

Now-Dec. 4

On(c)es Forgotten art exhibit, Frank Museum of Art

Oct. 21

COVID Conversations: COVID and its Effect on Communities of Color with Prof. Rob Braun and OSJA, 7 p.m., BB Collaborate

Oct. 22

LGBTQ History Month: Our Stories Make History with Suzanne Ashworth and FreeZone!, 9-10 p.m., WGSS Zoom

Oct. 27

Talking About Race: Media Literacy, 4-5 p.m., OSJA Zoom

Nov. 4

Under The Lights: Diversity & Sports - Sexual Orientation and Sports, 4-5 p.m., OSJA Zoom

Nov. 10

Native American Heritage Month Speaker: Raven Manygoats '19, 4-5 p.m., OSJA Zoom

Nov. 12

Human Library, 6-9 p.m., Courtright Library



Frandie Francique '21 (left) and Angel Banks '21 (right).

Q&A with OUSG President Francique and Vice President Banks

President Frandie Francique '21 and Vice President Angel Banks '21 ran for OUSG's highest offices together on a platform of "continued collaborative efforts with campus officials, open dialogues and student support... to serve students in the ways that they need."

Q: What do you want to accomplish along with the University during your tenure?

F: The only way to succeed is together, and we hope to promote the coming together of opinions, perspectives, and knowledge to create an Otterbein that meets the needs of everyone. Our focus on textbook affordability, inclusivity, sustainability, and transparency looks to the collaborative efforts of faculty, staff, and students to be accomplished.

B: We want the entire Otterbein Community to be involved in creating a safer and productive environment for students in and out of the classroom. Amid all that's happening in our world, we want to ensure that students can feel seen and heard.

from the **DIRECTOR**

Greetings,

We are in a very layered time in our society. We are experiencing a global pandemic, civil unrest and an election year simultaneously. In order for us to navigate a space we've never experienced before, we must operate in ways we never have before.

When we think of Otterbein University, we must think of including everyone in our pursuit of excellence. Inclusive excellence involves implementing steps to intentionally support a comprehensive and harmonized set of systemic actions that focus purposefully on fostering greater equity, inclusion and accountability at every level of the institution.

Our goal is to further integrate diversity efforts into the core aspects of our institution, such as academics, leadership, quality improvement initiatives, decision-making, daily operations and organizational cultures. Some of those efforts are captured in this newsletter and the Equity and Inclusion page on our website.

One example is our racial healing efforts. As a recognized Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Center, we can intentionally work with our community regarding the topic of race and racism using Racial Healing Circles. These circles provide us with the platform to engage in healthy dialogue, share and understand narratives and leave with a call to action. If we are going to change the landscape of injustice, we must first leave our egos at the door and center other people. We have three choices in life when it comes to how we respond to others. We can be apathetic, sympathetic or empathetic. Apathy completely removes yourself from personal responsibility and interest in another human being. Sympathy allows you to feel sorry for others but requires no action or

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Q: What are the most important messages you hope students and members of the Otterbein community read and understand from the OUSG and African American Student Union joint statement on racial equality?

F: Above all else I hope to inspire the Otterbein community to stay informed and active when it comes to issues that impact them and their peers. We have to all work together to create the change that we want to see tomorrow starting today, including faculty, administration, and students. I want Otterbein to hold itself accountable to fostering an environment that prepares students to enter the world with the confidence to act.

B: Our intention was to let the community know that we see them and offer our support from a distance. Hopefully our statement has led the campus community to start building conversations about how to implement plans and policies to create a more equitable environment on campus. It is not enough to say that Black Lives Matter; we must be continuous and transparent in our efforts to change.

Q: How do you feel being the first two Black women to serve as president and vice president of OUSG?

F: Representation matters. We feel empowered to be in these positions. We hope this inspires other BIPOC (Black and indigenous people of color) students to run for leadership positions. We worked our way up to president and vice president not just for the sake of the title, but as a reminder to all students that they are capable of anything.

B: We acknowledge how amazing of an accomplishment this is, but our legacy is not simply going to be being the first Black women to serve as president and vice president of OUSG. Our legacy is going to be as student leaders who advocated for their peers to go after the opportunities that they may not think are possible and to be a part of the change they know is needed. ■

International Spotlight: SPPC Students Virtually Enroll at Otterbein

Otterbein University began a relationship with Shanghai Publishing and Printing College (SPPC), in 2018 as a way to encourage international students from China to choose Otterbein. In past years, Otterbein faculty traveled to China and taught as adjunct faculty at SPPC. This year, the first three students from SPPC decided to transfer to Otterbein and enroll full-time. Due to COVID-19 health and travel precautions, they could not be on campus in-person. However, the three students have been able to take advantage of Otterbein's distance-learning tools to still attend classes. They have been taking illustration, photography and other communications courses via Zoom and Blackboard.



Student Organization Spotlight: Men of Vision

Men of Vision is an organization of Otterbein male student leaders. This organization promotes male leadership within the Otterbein community, recognizing the importance of developing and exchanging views and ideas among college men on campus. The goals are to encourage Otterbein males to become active in leadership roles and service on and off campus, in addition to enhancing and further developing the skills and talents of male student leaders. This year our organization is focused on the Find Your Element Campaign which is focused on helping our members grow in Leadership, Scholarship, Exploration, and Vision!

- Elijah McCutcheon '22, Men of Vision President



Men of Vision.



Woods-Spikes presents on Zoom for the first Art & Activism session.

English's Art and Activism Series Shines Light on Social Justice Issues

The English Department's fall Writers and Scholars speaker series, Art and Activism, was born out of Otterbein English majors' concerns about maintaining community in the age of Zoom and a compelling need to connect their literary education with recent racial justice demonstrations.

Responding to a survey put out by the Otterbein Department of English, one student responded "I think there are always ways to connect literature and writing to social justice. In fact, I think it's crucial."

Department of English Chair Margaret Koehler reached out to three Columbus artist-activists and invited them to share their perspectives on the relationship between activism and art-making in their lives. Columbus documentary filmmaker Donte Woods-Spikes spoke on Sept. 8, spoken word poet and social justice consultant Kimberly Brazwell gave a performance on Oct. 5 and artist/activist Scott Woods will speak Nov. 10 on journalism and founding of the Streetlight Guild.

Plans are also in the works to connect the Art and Activism Series across the Humanities at Otterbein. You can find recordings of the Art and Activism Series presentations online after the live events on Otterbein's YouTube channel. ■

from the **DIRECTOR** *cont.*

accountability. However, empathy in its purest form requires an individual to not only seek to understand a person, but how they can actively support them.

In addition, we must continuously engage in self-reflection and media literacy. It is easy to get caught up in the labeling language that we come across daily and to not recognize how that influences our thoughts, words and actions. The most educated people in society are those who understand multiple perspectives and realities before deciding how they feel about something. This involves hard work, transparency and being uncomfortable.

Accomplishing inclusive excellence is a long-term commitment and must have a full approach that embeds holistic appreciation and best practices into the very fabric of Otterbein's organizational culture. But in order to do so, it starts with the individual. As you filter through the material, please think about what your role is within the work that is being done and the work that has yet to be done. We all have spheres of influence in our daily lives. How can you use your

influence to create a more inclusive culture within your classrooms, families, friend groups, communities, etc.?



JAMES Prysock

Executive director
Office of Social Justice and Activism