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Fall 2021

### Equity & Inclusion Matters- Issue 11

Otterbein Office of Social Justice & Activism

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# EQUITY & INCLUSION MATTERS

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



## Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Fellows Creating Open Dialogue About Race through Alumni Oral History Project

In 2020, Otterbein was selected by the Association of American Colleges and Universities as one of 23 universities to host Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) Campus Centers across the United States. Otterbein was the first institution in Ohio to receive this recognition.

Part of the work of a TRHT center involves looking inward towards your institution and experiences lived by the campus community. It was this imperative that spurred the work of Otterbein's student TRHT Fellows.

Four students began to work with faculty mentors to collect oral histories of alumni who are People of Color (POC). Beginning in the summer of 2021, after receiving training on interview skills and a set of questions, the students began to conduct phone or virtual video interviews. On average, students spoke with six or seven alumni.

The calls were recorded to be transcribed and archived by the

Courtright Memorial Library for future academic use.

TRHT Fellow Hannah Brown '22 sees this as a major step in the right direction for Otterbein.

"It was clear, at least to me, that the POC alumni wanted to participate in an open dialogue about their experiences, even if they weren't always positive," Brown said. "It was necessary to further conversations about race and identity at our institution and what it means for future generations of students."

It might not be the most comfortable conversations to have, but they are necessary in moving the TRHT mission forward.

"These stories need to be told so we can see where we've been and what we still need to do. I'm proud Otterbein is reaching out to voices that are not always heard," Brown said.

The Fellows' project will continue into the 2021 semesters.

## CALENDAR

**Oct. 20, 4-5 p.m.**

Under the Lights – Diversity in Sports, Chapel

**Nov. 5, 7-8 p.m.**

Social Justice and Literature: Beyond the Page, Towers Hall, Philomathean Room

**Nov. 16, 4-5 p.m.**

Under the Lights – Diversity in Sports, Chapel

**Nov. 18**

**4-5 p.m.** Native American Heritage Month Program, Towers Hall, Room 110

**7-8 p.m.** Reading Diversely Book Club - Raybearer, Library, Common Book Atrium

**Nov. 19, 2-3 p.m.**

Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee Meeting (all are welcome), Roush Hall, Room 116

**Dec. 17, 2-3 p.m.**

Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee Meeting (all are welcome), Roush Hall, Room 116

## Disability Services Consultant Working to End Stigma for Better Student Access

BY CATIE DUZZNY '21

"The concepts and philosophies of disability as a social experience have shown that this is not just a medical diagnosis, but something that impacts lives every day. Part of my responsibility is removing societal barriers in order to create access for students," said Andrew Sydlik, accessibility consultant for the disability services office at Otterbein University.

Sydlik is legally blind, so his personal experiences have helped inform his advocacy and ambition to learn more about disability studies. Throughout his time researching, he has been able to learn more about himself and how he could help others that face challenges.

"I grew up in an environment where we did not talk about disability, it was seen as a stigmatized taboo thing," said Sydlik.

Much of his work is helping end those stigmas, talk about mental health issues, discuss disabilities, and help those in our community.

Part of his role at Otterbein includes helping students register with Disability Services and set up any accommodation they need, and then helping students work through any twists and turns they may face.

"I'd like students to think about any of these services as another tool that you can put in your tool-kit along with study guides and test taking strategies; these things are here for you to use for academic success," stated Sydlik.



*Andrew Sydlik, accessibility consultant for the disability services office at Otterbein University.*

### from the **DIRECTOR**

Greetings Cardinals,

I hope your time at Otterbein is off to a great start this year. This is a very layered and uncertain time for all of us. Our movement back to in-person operations has come with its pros and cons. On one hand, we can connect with people we care about and work and learn in the same spaces. On the other hand, we are still in so much uncertainty and need to be cautious whether you are vaccinated or not.

I am empathetic to our sophomore class who did not have a full first year college experience last year and the rest of the students who have had to endure these modifications. This creates several emotions in us as we go through our day-to-day journeys. All those emotions are real and understandable. Some of those emotions have caused tension throughout our country and the greater world. None of us know what the future holds, but I ask that we be understanding, authentic, and flexible with each other throughout this process.

Though the pandemic has created challenges for us as an institution, our goal is still to further integrate diversity efforts into the core aspects of our institutions, 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.

Accomplishing inclusive excellence is a long-term commitment and must have a full approach that embeds holistic appreciation and best

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### Otterbein welcomed 570 new first-year students to campus this fall!

This class is 28 percent students of color, the largest percentage for the 8th consecutive year. There are 26 states and three countries (Brazil, Norway, Vietnam) represented within this group. In terms of affordability, 34 percent are Federal Pell Grant eligible, and 43 percent already have college credit coming with them from high school and community college partnerships.

Welcome, Otterbein class of 2025!



## WeRISE Connecting Westerville, Otterbein Resources for Community Change



**WeRISE**  
FOR GREATER WESTERVILLE

When Westerville for Racial Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice Engagement (WeRISE) began operation in January 2021, they looked towards Otterbein President John Comerford's words for direction: "we can do so much more when we are not siloed."

Otterbein, the City of Westerville, Westerville City Schools, and the Westerville Public Library are working on their own initiatives focused on equality, equity, and inclusion. With members from each of these partners on the WeRISE Board of Directors, connections between organizations and intersections of all their important work is taking shape, utilizing the strengths of each group and understanding where there are missed opportunities in the community.

Executive Director of WeRISE Renée L. Thompson sees having an office on campus alongside Student Affairs as a valuable asset to the organization.

"Being on campus and having the opportunity to learn from and work with young people is so important. These are the future leaders for our world, and they are not afraid to affect changes they see needing to happen. This campus space is the perfect fit for WeRISE," Thompson said.

Immediate plans involve a new art exhibit, in collaboration with WeRISE and the Columbus-based Fresh A.I.R. Gallery, focusing on racism and mental health. It is slated to open in an Otterbein gallery space during Fall Semester 2022.





## Professor Worked on Graphic Novel Connecting Puerto Rican History with Pop Culture

BY CATIE DUZZNY '21

Assistant Professor of Spanish Modern Languages and Cultures Amy Sheeran wanted to bring culture into her Otterbein classroom, and she acted on it. Professor Sheeran co-edited a graphic novel, *United States of Banana*, which intersects pop culture with Puerto Rican history, and works of art and literature, into a fictional story with real-world lessons.

"One of the things that I really love about this novel is that there is an entry point for everyone, it's a lot of collage and riffing and bringing things that seem unconnected, together," said Sheeran. "There's some way for everyone reading it to get into it."

Professor Sheeran wanted the novel to propel conversations around different cultures and works of art in the classroom setting, which she has introduced to her Otterbein courses. She hopes her students gain an overall sense of different voices in literature and how they connect.

from the **DIRECTOR** *cont.*

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