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## 2020: Mérida Allen

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*University of Dayton*

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*During Women's History Month, the University of Dayton Women's Center coordinates, as an experiential learning opportunity for students, an annual exhibit highlighting the contributions women have made at the University of Dayton.*

*Theme for 2020: Voices of Courage*

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## 2020: Mérida Allen

*Written by Cierra Stewart '20*

Mérida Allen is the Director of Multicultural and Multi-Ethnic Education and Student Leadership in the Multi-Ethnic Education and Engagement Center (formerly known as the Office of Multicultural Affairs). She has been with the University of Dayton since 2015, with previous positions including the Associate Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Director of Multicultural Education and Student Leadership. Prior to her current position, she served as the Associate Director for

TOLEDO EXCEL, a scholarship-incentive program, as well as the Associate Director for the Office of Excellence and Multicultural Student Success at The University of Toledo.

Originally from Toledo, God brought Mérida to Dayton after a mentor at her alma mater encouraged her to apply for a job in what was then UD's Office of Multicultural Affairs, and she has stayed with us ever since. She earned her Bachelor's Degree in Education and Communication from the University of Toledo, going on to earn her Master's Degree in Higher Education Administration, as well as a Graduate Certificate in Communication Studies from The University of Toledo. She is currently a doctoral student at the University of Dayton in the Educational Leadership Program, with a concentration in Higher Education.

Her formal education has primarily centered around education and communication, with a focus on students from underrepresented backgrounds. Mérida has spent the past 15 years of her career providing support, resources, and strategies for college and career success to all students, particularly for racially and ethnically underrepresented students, to assist them on the path to excellence. Mérida has provided leadership on campus by coordinating facilitator trainings, workshops, and programs. She developed the UD Diversity Peer Educators Program, which brings together students from diverse backgrounds and experiences to promote social justice education and intergroup relations through peer-to-peer workshops and activities that explore identity and group dynamics, with the goal of better understanding themselves and others. She has extensive experience with intergroup dialogue, having attended The University



of Michigan National Intergroup Dialogue Institute and The Intergroup Dialogue and Diversity Education Institute at Hope College.

When asked what makes her most proud about her work, Mérida believes that when seeds are planted in students who are just starting out, being able to watch those seeds grow and see students progress in their own success is especially rewarding. In her own words, “When students have an “a-ha!” moment, or accomplish a goal, and are willing to give back to their community, or just any success that I can see in others, makes me proud.” What has certainly become a theme throughout her career, Mérida has worked closely with students who, “had all the odds set against them,” or “for personal reasons, could have quit, could have given up, or taken a different path,” but in believing in themselves and trusting her as a mentor, were able to overcome adversity and complete their degree -- some even going on to pursue law school, graduate school, and most importantly, their own careers.

Mérida is a proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Sigma Omega Chapter. She appreciates this opportunity to honor women as leaders, and specifically to highlight the individuals who may not have the loudest voice. “I believe the most powerful impact we can have sometimes is to have the courage to advocate in spaces where no one else is looking and to be an ear for those who feel no one is listening.