

3-1-2021

2021: Tiffany Taylor Smith

Tiffany Taylor Smith
University of Dayton, ttaylor-smith1@udayton.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/women_of_ud

Recommended Citation

Smith, Tiffany Taylor, "2021: Tiffany Taylor Smith" (2021). *Women of UD*. 61.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/women_of_ud/61

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Women's Center at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Women of UD by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact mschlangen1@udayton.edu, ecommons@udayton.edu.

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 2021: Leading with Character and Resilience

2021: Tiffany Taylor Smith

Executive Director of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion

I had planned to drive to New Jersey, to pick up my daughters for them to come to Ohio for Spring break. Then the message came out asking people to leave campus within 24 hours. I left here on the 13th to go to New Jersey, and then we were going to go take the train to the A-10 Tournament in Brooklyn to see Dayton play. I was glad we planned to drive and take the train because as it got closer, I knew we shouldn’t get on a plane. It looked like New York was the epicenter of the virus. Then I thought, “OK, we’re not going to New York. We’re not taking the train.”

We’re going home and we’ll cheer them on via television, because I’m not putting us in that situation.” And then, we realized, “They’re not even going to play.” You just knew it was bad. I remember thinking, “I just need to get us to Ohio, just get us to my house, and then make sure that we’re safe.” When we got to Dayton, I could take a breath, but I thought, “We need to make sure we have toilet paper. We need to make sure we have hand sanitizer. We’ve got to have Clorox wipes. We’ve got to have bread, milk, water, all the basic necessities.” I don’t think I really was able to exhale until we got back from the grocery store and had everything we needed. Then, I felt like we’d be OK.

The main thing was the protection and care for my daughters. I was actually really thankful that my daughters were older: 14, 17, and 23 at the time. I totally had love and care in my heart for my colleagues and friends who had children under the age of 10, who were trying to figure



out how to navigate being in meetings, or work activities, and their children are looking at them like, “Wait a minute, you’re here. Oh my goodness. I want to sit on your lap and I ... who are you talking to?” or, “My mom or dad is present. Why can’t I go talk to them?” It probably took me about two or three weeks to kind of find that rhythm around how we manage the day to day, and then there was a sense of, “OK we can do this.”



But, then, my work intensity increased. We were trying to figure out how to switch from providing events and experiences on campus to doing them on Zoom. Prior to the pandemic, we knew at some point we were going to want to offer our trainings online – we just hadn’t gotten to it yet. So I was like, “Guess what? I’ll do that now.” I have a really small, but mighty, amazing team and we figured out how to do that. There were moments and things that challenged me and I wondered, “How am I going to get through this?” or, “How am I going to fix this or support someone who’s shared something that’s really troubling and challenging? How do I help them?” The work I’ve been asked to perform at the University is important and it’s meaningful. Diversity, equity, and inclusion, right now, is a key part of our success, and our leadership is working to make sure that this remains a priority.

To me, it speaks to tenacity and resilience that, despite what comes at us that we hadn’t planned for, we ask, “How do we make this work?” It was never, “Oh, we just won’t do it.” It was, “How do we do this given these sets of circumstances?” It’s 2021. Things are different now. The world is different.

The way in which we work to recruit students – the students that we need to come to our university, and we want to come to our institution and we want to feel included – may not have been included 30, 50, 60, 70 years ago. But this effort isn’t just about me. It’s about who do I need to collaborate with? Who do I need to partner with across campus? I’ve met amazing people – faculty, staff, students, and alumni and parents – who were doing some of that work prior to my arrival. Our office is figuring out how to leverage that.

I’m always trying to figure out how to help us be better as humans and to help us get along, and a specific example is our work on race and anti-racism. People really were trying to make sense of it: “OK, we’re going to be an anti-racist institution. What does that mean?” We had a plan and were talking about a curriculum. We were working to provide a space where we brought faculty and staff together to learn, and to hear each other’s stories. But as the summer

hit, we knew we needed to talk about this right now, to address what was happening in the moment.

There were some adjustments we had to make in the content that we were offering, and Dr. Leslie Picca was willing to help teach an eight-session series. We had never done that before, but I thought, “OK, let’s make it work.” That’s what’s been most important: we think that we don’t have an option, we’re going to figure out how to do this. I love what I’m doing, it feels like breathing, it’s just natural. Some people say, “Oh, are you doing too much?” I say, “What are you talking about? I know my limits and never want to be satisfied with just average performance. I always want to challenge myself to grow, and to be open to new learning and experiences. This is just what I do.” This is just what we do. These things that I do are just a part of who Tiffany is. It’s the way my parents raised me, the opportunities that they gave my sister, brother and me. They instilled in us what we call the “Taylor Tenacity.” I feel like I am exactly where I’m supposed to be. And I love it.