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Richard Moberly

*University of Nebraska College of Law, moberly@unl.edu*

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## In Memoriam—Anna Shavers

In January 2022, the University of Nebraska College of Law and our broader community lost a wonderful law professor, a valued colleague, and a fierce advocate for justice. Anna Shavers was the Cline Williams Professor of Citizenship Law and the Associate Dean for Diversity and Inclusion at the College of Law. But she was so much more for those of us who were able to call her our friend.

Anna and I became good friends over the last five years as we worked closely together when Anna was Associate Dean for Diversity and Inclusion. Of course, I have known Anna for all my eighteen years on our faculty. It was an amazing gift for me to have gotten to know and be friends with Anna through our work.

Work friends are an interesting strand of friendship—we don't travel the world together or eat out at fancy restaurants. We may share anecdotes of our families, but people don't necessarily invite work colleagues into that inner circle of spouses, children, and soccer games. Nevertheless, over time, you get to know a person through the banalities of conferences you attend together, of shared problem-solving, and of joint frustrations in the day-to-day grind of that activity that consumes so much of our lives: work.

It was through work and work experiences that I got to know Anna. More specifically, Anna and I became close because I was in a lot of meetings with her. I mean, a lot of meetings—literally hundreds.

We had weekly staff and administrator meetings, weekly one-on-ones, all-day Zoom retreats, lengthy faculty meetings, all-college town halls, and everything in between. In many ways, it is those experiences that I think has given me some insight into Anna, her approach to her work, and her impact on others.

So, what I will do in this short essay is tell you what I learned from Anna from all those meetings with her—and I believe these are good reminders as we think about how to make sure her work continues into the future. Also, I think Anna would get a kick out of me using meetings as a metaphor for her impact, because she famously *hated* meetings—so much so that when she was the College of Law's Acting Dean she tried to limit them to one day a week and then banned most

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\* Dean and Richard C. & Catherine C. Schmoker Professor of Law, University of Nebraska College of Law.

of them. I like thinking about her laughing about this metaphor—in that full-on hearty laugh she had when she was truly tickled—and that makes me feel a bit better too.

So, the first takeaway as I thought about Anna's relationship with meetings is that Anna *showed up*. I know it sounds simple, but take it from someone who has been an administrator for eleven years, not everyone shows up and not everyone does so regularly. Anna did. Despite not liking meetings, Anna showed up for meetings because that is actually where a lot of work gets done—through relationships that are developed when people are in a room together. Anna knew that relationships mattered and that she could advance her work if she showed up. She showed up when students asked her to sponsor student groups, like the Anti-Human Trafficking group or the Muslim Law Student Association. She showed up when the College was figuring out to respond to hateful student speech and the George Floyd murder. She showed up when this University needed leaders to promote antiracism. She showed up across the country and the world for ABA meetings, advocate meetings, and academic conferences. She showed up when junior colleagues presented their works-in-progress and at university-wide workshops on her areas of specialty. She engaged in these nitty-gritty, behind-the-scenes meetings because, I believe, she knew that the work of advancing justice did not happen with big flashy programs. The needle gets moved when good-faith people come together, build relationships, and put in the work—and she showed up for that. All the time.

Second, when she showed up, she *listened up*. Anna was a tremendous listener—and she truly wanted to understand those with differing viewpoints. She listened to people with whom she disagreed, and she did so respectfully—sometimes becoming their best friends. People felt heard and seen by her—and that is incredibly empowering. A generation of Nebraska Law students of color looked to her while they were in law school because she heard their stories and saw their successes and challenges. Anna taught me that it is important to show up, but it is just as important to listen once you do. By listening, Anna brought people together, built coalitions, and charted new paths forward.

Finally, she did more than listen up—she *lifted up*. Anna was often the only person of color in a meeting and was conscientious about bringing the perspectives of those who might not be in the room. Whose voices were we not hearing? How could we lift up those voices and make sure they had a chance to weigh in? One of my favorite Anna moments was her bringing students from our Multicultural Law Students group to a faculty meeting and giving them the floor for an hour, so that our mostly white law faculty could spend time hearing about how students of color experienced this place. It was profoundly

moving and the result of Anna's determination to lift up voices who have not been heard regularly. She took inclusion seriously and worked tirelessly to ensure that everyone felt invited to the table.

Anna showed up; not just to meetings of course, but for all of us in our everyday lives. She listened up; to hear those who had not been heard, to understand those who struggled to be understood. And, most of all, she lifted up; she raised the concerns of those who weren't in the room, and she worked to make sure more perspectives were invited in the first place.

For someone who didn't like meetings, Anna sure knew how to use them. She used them to teach all of us lessons about how to lead—*you show up!*; how to engage—*you listen up!*; and how build a more just community—*you lift up!*

Anna Shavers impacted our lives, our work, and our community because she was there for *all* of us, because she engaged with *each* of us, and perhaps most importantly, because she lifted us up, individually and collectively, to let our voices be heard.

What a role model. What a life to celebrate. I miss her.