

Democracy's College

Episode 22: Chief Diversity Officers in Higher Education, Part 1

Heather: Welcome to the Democracy's College podcast series. This podcast focuses on educational equity, justice and excellence for all students in P-20 educational pathways. This podcast is a product of the Office of Community College Research and Leadership, or OCCRL, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Learn more about OCCRL at occrl.illinois.edu.

This is the first of two episodes where Chaddrick Gallaway from OCCRL talks with James Felton III, chief diversity officer at SUNY Cortland, and Michele Smith, associate provost and special assistant to the president for diversity and inclusion at William Rainey Harper College about chief diversity officers in higher education.

Chaddrick: Hello. My name is Chaddrick Gallaway with the Office of Community College Research and Leadership, and today I am joined by James Felton III, chief diversity officer at SUNY Cortland, and Michele Smith, vice-president of workforce solutions and associate provost for curriculum at William Rainey Harper College, and today we'll be having a brief conversation about chief diversity officers in higher education. With that said, we're going to jump right into the podcast, right into the conversation.

Thank you, Michele and James, for joining me today. I'll jump right into the first question. The literature on institutional diversity and campus climate is largely focused on four-year institutions. Can you share what issues related to diversity matters and campus climate are present at community colleges?

James: Sure, I'll take the lead on that one, but first I'd like to say thank you, Chaddrick, for inviting us to be a part of this podcast.

When we're thinking about issues of institutional diversity and campus climate at two-year institutions, obviously we want to particularly focus on the transient nature of community college students. We find that those obviously are non-traditional students, first-generation students, and so there are issues around access and, particularly as open-access institutions, meeting students where they are. The campus climate about that is trying to find out who they are in terms of their sense of identity and purpose in life, and how that meshes with the institutional culture of the particular community college campus.

I think the issues of completion are another issue particularly that is addressed at the community college level when we're looking at campus climate. Again, for students who are first-generation, they may not know how to navigate the college process or are familiar on what a college-level course is, looking at credits and degree plans as well as career exploration, and so that completion agenda is definitely, I think, more prominent at the two-year level versus the four-year level.

And then I think I just mentioned it, but again, social capital is extremely important. The social capital is the idea or the notion that social networks are central, they're transactional, and they're marked by levels of reciprocity, cooperation, and trust between one or more groups. So again, as we have lots of different students or types of different students coming before the two-year colleges or institutions, really helping them navigate, again, that sense of identity, who they are and who they are in relation to others, and what does that look like in terms of their own personal achievement, completion, and success.

Michelé: Yeah. Chad, I agree with James. First of all, thank you as well for this opportunity to talk about this really important and relevant issue at the community colleges now, in terms of diversity and equity and issues of inclusion.

I think, to James's point, the issues around changing demographics are not only race and ethnicity, but as our students change in terms of age, what they come to us with in terms of higher learning experience, and looking for credit for that, socioeconomic status ... we're seeing a higher number of students that are Pell-eligible these days ... and then first-generation students. So I think all of those matters of diversity are impacting the community college landscape, and the chief diversity officer in these spaces has to be ready to respond to those varying needs.

And you have to find ways to get it done so that the student who are coming to us often looking to earn certificates or credentials in ways that work with the rest of their life ... they're working, they may be parents, they may be pursuing other interests ... so not only is there the diversity of students that you're adjusting to, but it's also in the different ways we might deliver instruction, what do we do in terms of online or blended formats.

And then the other thing I think ... and it's probably really recently, this year ... that's impacting issues around diversity and inclusion or this conversation around free speech versus hate speech and the distinction between the two. And I don't know that community colleges expected to be faced with these issues at the rapid rate and the frequency at which we're seeing them show up on our campuses these days.

Chaddrick: Can you say more about that, free speech versus hate speech? I'm sorry I'm going off the script here a little bit, but I'm interested in that. Can you say more about I guess the issues that community colleges or chief diversity officers are facing around that?

Michelé: Yeah. I think that what has happened a little bit more, as we look even at the political landscape in the last 12 months, 16 months or so, there seems to be a movement where people ... and some of this started, I would argue, as social media got on the rise, where people feel a lot more comfortable saying what they really think, when they really think it, and I think those conversations are bleeding over into community college campuses.

I think where students are walking into classrooms and seeing anti-Semitic symbols on walls in classrooms or in bathrooms, or speakers coming to campus ... because public institutions typically have free speech guidelines, but if I'm a member of the Ku Klux Klan

or some other hate organization, how does a campus respond to, "We promote free speech, yet the speech that's being promoted is hateful and marginalizing and sometimes terrorizing to the student body which we serve, which is very diverse?"

So chief diversity officers are being called into those conversations and being asked, "What do we do? How do we continue to honor the First Amendment for everyone, but also how do we create a safe space for our students in the midst of what some may label as hate speech, when others may say it's really just a matter of free speech?" We have legal definitions of that, but I don't know that we have a *person* definition of how we do that effectively, continue to honor being public institutions and open to everyone, but also helping our students and staff not to feel afraid in the midst of these narratives.

Chaddrick: Thank you for that. Before we go on to the next question, James, did you have anything to say about that in particular, the free speech/hate speech on campuses, community college campuses or four-year campuses in general?

James: The only thing I would add to what Michele said is looking at the topic of free speech in democratic terms versus free speech terms, because I think when we look at it from a democratic perspective, then we have an opportunity to engage both sides of the coin, if you will, in terms of those who are in favor of the issues and those who are opposed to the issues. I think what we've done for too long ... and what higher education has been attacked for ... is that we take on sometimes an overly liberal approach to looking at these issues.

And again, as we think about issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, we have to provide those spaces for all voices, whether they're voices we agree with or not. And so I think having democratic, deliberate debates and dialogues, where people can have opportunities to *engage* in a discussion that's thoughtful and educationally appropriate around these issues, versus being reactive to controversial speakers or the message they're trying to spew in and of itself.

Chaddrick: Great, thank you. Thank you for that. Moving on, community colleges, what we have been talking about already, are among some of the most culturally pluralistic postsecondary institutions given their vast, diverse student population. However, the role of the chief diversity officer in higher education normally in two-year institutions is a newer role. Beyond changes in the demographics, what do you think accounts for the growth in CDOs, chief diversity officers, in community colleges, and what impact do you feel CDOs can influence college culture?

James: In the academy, we have taken the community colleges for granted for many years in terms of that culturally pluralistic demographic of our society. I think we're now at a point in the current landscape of our country where we no longer can just sit back and be spectators to the changing demographics. We have to, as one of my former presidents used to say, "You're either going to be at the table or on the menu." And so in terms of directing the policies and the practices and procedures around diversity, equity, and inclusion, we want to be at a point where we're not being mandated or

forced to do this work, but we're doing it because it's the right thing to do, but we also understand the *impact* that it has on our institutions.

And I would say that also we understand the impact that it has for the changing demographics of our students, and particularly community college students. I would say that gone are the days when higher education could simply just say, "We're here to provide a service of imparting knowledge and provide you with a diploma." We have outside influences and global influences now that we have to take into account, and preparing the growing and changing needs of our students and our population in our world.

And so I think *that* has promoted an uptick in the presence of chief diversity officers at the community college level because again, making sure that we have a seat at the table, and that these issues are, one, relevant, but two, intentional in creating this presence or notion of inclusive excellence that permeates throughout not only a campus culture but our policies, our institutional practices, and how those impact our daily interaction in our workforce as well as our academic community with our faculty and our students.

Michéle: You know, Chaddrick, I just wanted to add a little bit there. I think James makes such a good point about this "being at the table" conversation. If nothing else, that chief diversity officer at our community colleges is about being at the table. So as a member of the C suite, you often see the chief financial officer sitting at that table, the chief information officer sitting at that table, and so what does that mean? That means issues around the financial health of the institution are front of mind. When the chief information officer is sitting at that table, issues around the technological infrastructure of the institution are front of mind. There's your chief HR officer, et cetera.

When a CDO is sitting at that table, we now make issues around inclusion and equity and diversity for our changing demographic of students, they now become front of mind at that table. And so they are not secondary, they are not afterthoughts, they are actually a part of the main menu, if you will. So I think that is really, if nothing else, a key point for why these CDO roles, as they continue to increase, are so vital, and being a part of that C suite so they are part of a natural conversation, and a part of the natural conversation around the holistic health of the organization or the institution.

Chaddrick: Absolutely. And I guess one follow-up to that I want to ask, should there be just one chief diversity officer or just one CDO, or do you see a team of CDOs across campus in these C-suite meetings? What would you like to see in terms of this CDO role moving forward? Right now we might only have one chief diversity officer at the table, but would you like to see more or multiple, or maybe everyone in that C suite, that's at that table, have a chief diversity officer mindset or focus? Does that question make sense?

James: Yeah, absolutely. I think the ultimate goal to doing this work is that there isn't a need for a chief diversity officer. Certainly we are not at that point, definitely with our current landscape of cultural and social and political climate that's happening globally. There's definitely a need to have some strategic diversity leadership at our institutions who, again, are focused on this.

I think that it depends on the institution and what the needs of the institution are, and the type of institution it is, in terms of whether you have one CDO or several CDOs. I think that you have to be mindful of the type of work that that person is being asked to do. There are some institutions where it may be important to focus more on the student experience. There are other institutions where it may be important to focus on the employee experience around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

One of the things that we've been informed by our work as professional colleagues over the last couple of years is this publication by the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, or NADOHE, for short. They published in 2014 a list of professional standards for chief diversity officers, and so this list is in no way to be an end-all, be-all for every chief diversity officer, but it does give some credence and some credibility to the day-to-day responsibilities of the work that we do.

And that's one way to, I think, figure out what are the needs of each individual campus, and particularly at the community college level. I think it's relative to size, I think it's relative to locale, whether you're rural or urban. There may be more pressing needs in terms of whether you need to focus on issues of compliance, employee engagement, curriculum, or what have you. I don't know if you want to add to that, Michele.

Michelé: No, I think that makes perfect sense. I think that James's point about in the perfect world we would need just one person to focus on issues around inclusion and equity. I think that is the utopia we'd all like to get to, so in *some* ways that lends itself to the narrative that everybody should kind of have some skin in the game, but I think that comes with issues around accountability. What resources are you giving to the chief diversity officer? How are your leaders held accountable to being a part of the solution and not part of the problem? What expectations do we have on our workforce in our various institutions to being a part of making students from various backgrounds feel welcomed and included?

I think that grows that mindset, because it really is a culture shift for many institutions. You know, the reality of it is higher education, in and of itself, was not really designed for those that are historically underrepresented in the system, which is why they are historically underrepresented in the system.

James: That's right.

Michelé: And so in order to change that dynamic, we've *got* to begin to change the thinking, and oftentimes you do that by shifting where people are held accountable. That helps them to start to wake up and see that they need to do things differently, and so hopefully you get to a place where this is natural to the work that everyone does in terms of it not having to be one person's responsibility.

Chaddrick: One thing that I want to I guess peel back for our listeners who all may not be well versed in the position of the chief diversity officer or the literature on the chief diversity officer, which kind of goes back to something that James recently said. In terms of the chief diversity officer, James, a minute ago you said that they can focus on faculty, they

can focus on staff, they can focus on students. Just for our listeners, in what ways do you, James or Michele, in what ways do chief diversity officers work with these different groups of people on campus as far as like staff, students, faculty, just really quickly for our listeners?

Michel : Yeah, I'll start with that one. I think one of the things that James and I and then Clyde Wilson Pickett, our co-author on the book that we authored together, one of the things that we came to the reality of, as we got to know each other attending conferences and realizing we had the same job titles but we were doing very different work at our institutions, is that different institutions have different needs.

When I served in the chief diversity officer role, it was really very much an employee-facing role. The job was really about kind of where are we as an institution as employees around bias and issues of underrepresentation? What are our unconscious biases that we are carrying? What do our policies look like? How welcoming do we make our campus feel? We've had some major shifts in the socioeconomic status of the students that are enrolling at our campus really quick, in a 10- year period. What adjustments have we made to that? So we did a lot of introspection, retrospection, forming employee resource groups, forming mentoring environments for one another, putting in accountability measures, very employee-focused.

I would say that Clyde would argue his work was very compliance-focused, Title IX, EEOC, and James may speak to the work that he was doing, but when we first talked, a lot of it was more student- and community-focused. So there's this idea that I always argue that the way different institutions need different types of presidents depending on what season they're in, I would argue the same holds true for your chief diversity officer. Your campus may need a different type of chief diversity officer and a different focus, depending on what season and where they are on the spectrum in their growth.

James: Absolutely. And I think the key to making it work is in terms of looking at the skillset of the chief diversity officer, you know, what is their background in higher education? When these positions started, people were picked because they simply looked the part, and so having a sophistication and being well learned in strategic diversity and issues on your campus I think helps to advance the work and the agenda of the CDO.

And then I think what also makes it work, I think Stephen Covey once said that transformation and change happens at the speed of trust, and so we have to be strategic initiators, we have to be diplomats, we have to be collaborators. Those NADOHE standards really give some insight, I think, in terms of the work that needs to be done primarily by the CDO, but then how do you use that knowledge, that sophistication, that skillset to then create transformational change on your campus? And you have to do that working with the various entities at your institution.

Chaddrick: Thank you. Thank you for all the *side* questions. I'll try to get back on script here.

Michel : No problem.

Chaddrick: You both recently co-authored an article entitled "The Chief Diversity Officer's Growing Presence at Two-Year Colleges," published in *Insight Into Diversity*. In the article, you state that a sense of belonging is important in the persistence of students of color to degree completion. How can chief diversity officers create a campus environment that fosters a sense of community, belonging, and connectedness for students of marginalized racial identities within the community college context?

Michéle: Chaddrick, one of the things for me that sticks out about that, and part of the reason we included it in the article, is there has been a lot of work. Vincent Tinto did a lot of work around belonging, a sense of belongingness, and recently some of that work has been challenged with the argument that his definition of feeling like you belong or that you're connected to an institution was not really looking at some of the issues that students of color or students from low socioeconomic backgrounds or students that might be single parents, et cetera ... it wasn't necessarily considering some of the *other* challenges that students from diverse backgrounds might have. For example, how *you* define what makes you feel welcome and included may differ from the way that *I* define what makes me feel welcomed and included.

And so I think the challenge with chief diversity officers is this concept of how do we figure out what makes *our* students feel welcome and connected and included. And I think you only get to that answer if you get the student narrative. So we can all go to conferences, and we can come back with what we like to call our "best practices," and I think one of the risks with best practices is it might have been best over there or in that state or in that community, which might be way *smaller* than your community or maybe dealing with different challenges. I think the real challenge is how do I go and hear about promising practices, and then come back to my institution and figure out if there's a way to make that fit here. So I think this is a place where the chief diversity officer can help the college really hear the student narrative and hear what it takes.

If I'm a student of color, I may not be comfortable asking for directions to a classroom in the early weeks of the semester. If I have issues that have made me believe that asking questions makes me look inferior or stupid, if I already know, you know, I've experienced some serial-type threat through my K-12 experience, I may not ask you just because you're wearing a button that says "Ask Me" or you're wearing the college ID. We may need to be more proactive.

We may need to be available to students in the first couple weeks of classes, and we may need to walk up to students and say, "Can I help you with something? You look like ... where are you headed? What class are you going to?" Be proactive. That might be what makes it feel welcoming, as opposed to, "Well, we had signs up. Well, we were available. Well, we had our buttons on, all they had to do was ask." I think oftentimes as CDOs, we hear that comment, "All they had to do was ask," and we're not honoring the fact that everyone doesn't ask in the same ways and everybody doesn't feel welcome in the same ways.

I heard my president say something today. The one thing about this work as a chief diversity officer is you do this work in public. When you're a faculty member, you can do that work pretty much in private. You go in your classroom, you and your students and

whoever, it's vacant. But this work, you really do it in public. People are watching you as a chief diversity officer.

How are *you* creating a sense of welcomeness and inclusion amongst your colleagues? How are you creating that on campus for the employees? What are you doing to signify to students that they're welcome and they should be included? So folks are watching you in that role, and it's I think your responsibility to help the campus understand how we can be more responsive to our student body simply by hearing what they have to say.

James: I agree with everything Michele said, and not only are you always in the public on campus, you're also in the public in your community, particularly at the community college level. And so there is, I think, sometimes a greater sense of responsibility and accountability in this emerging world of the CDO at the two-year college, because people always expect you to be on and be able to address the particular issues and needs of community college students. And again, that oftentimes extends beyond the traditional workweek or when the students are on campus to take classes.

And even when they take classes, it looks dramatically different at the community college level than the four-year level. They could be taking classes 24/7. They could be taking classes in the evening, they could be taking classes on the weekends. They could be taking classes at different site locations other than the main campus. And so, yeah, I think that whole sense of fostering community and belonging not only happens on campus, but it also has to take place in the community as well.

Chaddrick: In what ways in your roles as chief diversity officers have you fostered that role of diversity, equity, and inclusion, I guess on campuses and off campuses?

James: The first thing that I noticed, when I first became a chief diversity officer it was at Anne Arundel Community College, which is one of the larger community colleges in the country with total enrollment of close to 50,000 students. That's credit and non-credit. They had a main campus and then four other various state locations, if you will. The work of diversity, equity, and inclusion there was large, and it was a one-person startup when they hired me as the inaugural chief diversity officer.

And so understanding the particular needs of community college students for me, in terms of building that community, I chose to focus on looking at a CDO from the perspective of a community outreach and engagement officer. That was looking at developing collaborative relationships, not only on campus with faculty and staff and the various affinity groups or student clubs and organizations, student government, but also a number of human and social service and leadership and civic engagement organizations in the community, and looking at tying some of our major players in terms of the student employee experience to growing industries. It was important that I developed relationships with some of those key leaders in those industries while working with various, again, religious groups and organizations, social service agencies.

Obviously, again, the needs of community college students, particular populations, they need services outside of the classroom, and some of those services the community college is not equipped to provide them with. But connecting to resources in their own community was vitally important to their completion and success. And so whether it was with the Community in Action agency, whether it was with leadership programs or working with some of our I would say mentoring groups and programs that were out in the community ... the Boys & Girls Club, the YWCA ... they have all resources and information to share with students and can engage students in ways that aren't always even appropriate, I think, for the community college employees to do that with.

That's kind of the approach that I took in terms of looking at building a sense of community and a sense of belonging, that there was kind of a seamless transition for students in their backyard on whether they were on our campus or whether they were at home or down the road at various agencies or organizations.

Michéle:

You know, Chaddrick, I think that James makes a really good point about this sense of building community, this idea of creating connections and being a connector, because I think that's a really important role for the chief diversity officer. As the inaugural chief diversity officer at our institution, I really had more of that employee-facing, that employee officer role, and so one of the things that I did in that role was to try to model what inclusion and connection and welcomeness felt like.

In the work as a chief diversity officer ... this might be surprising ... but when new employees would start and they had get approved through the board, or someone would get a promotion or someone would get a new job change, nobody ever sent anybody a note. So my office literally did handwritten card notes to anybody who was being promoted, and I got the information from my board packet, so I could tell when the board of trustees approved somebody that was a new hire or what have you.

As a new employee, you received a note from my office. Myself and my admin would sign off on it, and so the beginning of your time at the college was, "Oh, who is this Office of Diversity and Inclusion?" And, "*Somebody* cares that I'm here, or *somebody* cares that I got promoted. They bothered to congratulate me, and they actually signed it with real handwriting. It wasn't an email." So those little personal touches were the thing that became synonymous with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

There's a new-employee reception that's sponsored twice a year, so we do kind of a rotation. The first six months that you're here, there's a special reception. It's held in the afternoon. You're invited, your supervisor is encouraged to come, and senior leadership is there. Often new employees have no idea who sits on the president's cabinet, who these people are, so how could you possibly ever move up or become an integral part of the organization if you don't fully understand the organization? A very unintimidating way of bringing people together.

Also folks know that me personally on this campus, I often invite new employees to join me for lunch in our student dining room, so it gives them an opportunity to see what our students are doing. It's, you know, relatively cost-effective for me, and just again an opportunity for me to connect with people, find out who they are, what talents and

skills they bring to the organization. Then when it's time to create intergroup dialogues and I'm looking for facilitators, I know people ... because I know them personally, I've connected with them ... that I can reach out to to serve in these facilitator roles.

When folks know that they need to file an Issue of Bias, they're more comfortable coming to me. They've met me in a much less threatening and stressful environment, so now they feel comfortable having a conversation with me. Putting posters up that talk about being a welcoming environment, and not mandating them for everybody but having people say, "I want that poster or that T-shirt that says you're welcome or you're safe here in various languages." So people have to kind of take some action to be a part of this inclusion movement. I found that those things are really helpful.

And as I did that from the office for other employees, we began to see employees mirroring that for the students that they were welcoming in or that they were teaching in their classroom. It's real small, kind of picking away at the mountain, but it gets you there little by little. I think you have to, as a chief diversity officer, not only have thick skin and have lots of good friends, but you also have to be willing to be *patient* for the work to take impact in some cases. And that's challenging, but I think it's necessary. That speed of trust that James talked about, that's vital if you're going to be successful at this work.

Heather:

Tune in for the second episode of this podcast, where Chaddrick Gallaway continues to explore the role of chief diversity officers in higher education, and a call to action, with James Felton III and Michele Smith. Background music for this podcast is provided by Dublab. Thank you for listening and for your contributions to educational equity, justice, and excellence for all students.

Democracy's College

Episode 23: Chief Diversity Officers in Higher Education, Part 2

Heather:

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Chaddrick:

Hello, my name is Chaddrick Gallaway with the Office of Community College Research and Leadership, and today I am joined by James Felton III, chief diversity officer at SUNY Cortland, and Michelé Smith, vice president of workforce solutions and associate provost for curriculum at William Rainey Harper College. And today we'll be having a brief conversation about chief diversity officers in higher education. So with that said, we're going to jump right into the podcast, right into the conversation.

Thank you, Michelé and James, for joining me today. Can you please share how chief diversity officers respond to campus climate concerns for minoritized groups beyond racial and ethnic minorities, tend to the needs of students with disabilities, students who are parents, older adult learners, the LGBTQ community of students, among other marginalized collegians, and I guess the intersectionality of these student identities as well.

James:

First, I want to say in terms of the history of the campus climate is so vitally important to chief diversity officers are primarily focused on campus climate. All of our campuses are one diversity crisis away from making the national headlines, and we've seen that for a number of institutions over the last year and a half. And that's going to continue to rise as our institutions are ill-prepared to really think about proactive versus reactive strategies to this. And so again, I think it's vital that the chief diversity officer is working to create campus climate for minoritized groups and you said, just beyond race. So really, for us understanding who are the, not only the students, but the employees who are coming from the various groups. And how do you recognize them, and how do they wish to be self-identified and recognized on campus I think is important in terms of knowing how to address campus climate. You need to know who the audience and where the actors are.

I think you also have to think about mobilizing those folks. And again, around issues of crisis, you know, this work is not for the faint of heart. Can't be timid,

and you can't work behind the scenes as Michelé talked about previously. You have to be front and center and you have to be willing to be on the front lines with folks. Not necessarily in an activist approach, but in a way that you're engaging them and you're supporting them. And you're providing an opportunity for their voices to be heard. And so you get around that notion of I'm creating safe spaces and brave spaces. Before you can get to the brave spaces, I think you have to create a lot of safe spaces with a *number* of different groups.

And I think that these positions are inherently afforded a certain level of cultural agency, or at least that there is an assumption that CDOs have a certain level of cultural competency and being able to work various social identity groups. And so you have to take advantage of that and engage folks. You know, go to them, meet them where they're at. You know, I sit in an ad hoc capacity for a number of some of our advisory groups on campus related to LGBTQ, PIA issues, related to disability issues, related to interface issues, related to first generation. And particularly our EOP program that we have, a very successful EOP program here at SUNY Cortland as well as throughout the SUNY system.

And so, you know, those are pockets where you'll find various groups, and so it's important to engage those groups, I think, on a regular basis. To understand, again, what their particular, their individual, and their collective concerns and issues are around feeling included and safe and welcome on campus. And then I think you then move into those brave spaces where you're able to engage folks from different social identity groups together.

And the second part of your question I think talked about intersectionality, or issues of intersectionality. And I think that's part of the coalition-building piece as well as building those brave spaces. And obviously we have to give credit to Beverly Crenshaw in the whole notion of intersectionality, but as I interpret it, she really saw it as a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. And so as we're thinking about campus climate issues, we need to figure out, again, who our actors are in our workforce as well as in our classrooms. And then where do those groups get to experience moments of inclusion? And then where are they experiencing moments of exclusion? And in those moments of inclusion and exclusion, you'll find where the power bases are. And we have to dismantle those traditional sources of power and kind of rewrite the narrative so that those folks to have a voice and they do have agency and they do have social and cultural capital on campus and can advocate for themselves.

But I think that that's vitally important in terms of looking at campus climate, is that it's definitely gotta be about that mobilization, it's definitely gotta be about the coalition building, and then definitely a CDO has to have astute sense or level of cultural competency to be able to engage folks in a way that, again, that they feel like they can be trusted and supported and heard.

Michelé:

And Chaddrick, I just want to add one thing to what James is saying. First of all, James, I love that safe space, brave space comparison there. I think that

sometimes folks move into these roles either, as James said, because they look the part or they always had a propensity toward social justice. And sometimes they want to go to those brave spaces so quickly and then not figure out where those safe spaces are. So one of the things I think is really important, something that chief diversity officers can leverage that business environment has done for years are the concepts surrounding employee resource groups.

The chief diversity officer cannot expect to, nor should be expected to, know every diverse demographic, what their challenges are, what their needs are, what makes them feel safe, what doesn't. You will drive yourself insane and you will mess up a lot.

Employee resource groups are great because these are employees on your campus that often identify with those various student-affinity groups, so they may be the employee who is parenting. They may be the employee who was an adult student. They may be members of your LGBTQ community, or from your diverse employee background, or members or employees with disabilities. And these employees can help you identify the challenges that your students who identify in those same ways might be experiencing. They actually can serve as gatekeepers to get access for student information when you as a chief diversity officer may not yet have earned that trust that James talked about, moving at the speed of trust.

So I think chief diversity officers have to be comfortable not only working publicly, but being comfortable understanding all the work cannot be done by you individually. And so leveraging the other resources is going to be helpful, because then you will figure out what the needs are of the students on your campus community are, and you'll figure out how to go about changing them in a way that the change is sustainable, is transformative, and is lasting.

Chaddrick:

And in terms of focusing that lasting change, one thing that we always focus on when we talk about diversity is students. But one thing, or one group, that needs to be focused on as well is faculty, because they're also impacted by issues of campus climate. So in terms of retaining a diverse faculty in higher education on two-year and four-year college campuses, how do chief diversity officers influence recruitment, hiring, and retention?

Michéle:

Chaddrick, James, I'll start with that one if you're okay. I think something that we've done really well on our campus particularly, because we focused on that kind of employee chief diversity officer role, is we've really taken a hard look at this idea of recruiting, hiring, and retaining diverse faculty.

And so there are three initiatives that started as I moved into the role that the campus worked on together and either initiative in conjunction with the Office of Human Resources and the Office of Institutional Research, and quite honestly, our faculty leadership. And one of them is our Diverse Faculty Fellow program, which is very much a grow-your-own type of program. So, again, as a

community college, we're not growing master's degree and doctor degree students. That's not who we're graduating, so they're not really our own.

But we collaborated with a nearby university and wrote a two-year fellowship program that would be attractive to people from diverse backgrounds, racial ethnic backgrounds. So that they would be interested in pursuing, or at least examining, careers as community college faculty. And this fellowship is set up in such a way that fellows get some teaching and mentoring, they get coaching within their department, they really become a part of the faculty and campus community. If they make it to a second year of the fellowship and they get a job at the end of that, year two of that fellowship will count as year one toward their three-year tenure path. So it was important that we design something that was not only attractive to potential applicants but also provided some benefits for us as a campus.

And it's given us a chance to have more diverse employees on campus in front of our students in the classroom, and it's also helped to challenge some of the belief that faculty have previously had about who we hire and how much experience they really require for you to be excellent or to become excellent in the classroom. So that's been huge in terms of that attraction and recruitment.

We've also been really intentional about search committees. So when we talk again about the hiring piece, we notice there clearly have been some unconscious bias in our hiring process. We'd often have an applicant pool where a third of it were employees of color that applied, but yet we were not phone interviewing folks or hiring people. And so now we require that cultural competency training be repeated every three years for anyone who wants to serve on a hiring committee for faculty or administration. And that means, are there people who don't do the training? Absolutely, but they also don't serve on those hiring committees. But it's helped us to be really intentional about the rubrics that we use to assess applications, to be intentional about the questions that we ask when we're interviewing folks on the phone or in person, and it's also created an opportunity for us to be more conscious about how we make applicants feel welcome. And understanding that, not only are we interviewing them, but they're also interviewing us. So it's really shifted the way we do business in terms of that hiring process.

And then I would say our employee resource group, DREAM is the name of it, and they really are for employees of color. In particular them, along with SAFE, which is our LGBTQ employee resource group, and LAND, which is our Learning about Abilities, not Disabilities employee resource group. Those groups have been helpful in helping us retain employees that come from underrepresented groups. Many of them have mentoring programs. They actually have a regular meeting time. They sponsor brownbags on campus. They really tap into the skills and talents that employees from underrepresented groups bring to the campus, and they help us to spotlight those and showcase them. And that's helping to make us richer as a campus community as a result of this diversity. So we're actually seeing what we say, which is a diverse environment is better for

everybody. We're starting to see that because we're really embracing folks and helping shepherd them through the politics of the landscape of navigating through community college. And that's huge when you're a faculty member on a tenure path.

James:

Yeah, I would add to that. You know, Michelé talked a lot about a number of initiatives that helps to influence that recruitment, hiring, and retention and so I don't have much to add to that. But I think the other issue related to that is the framing of all those initiatives. Framing is so important, I think, at the leadership level and how you are able to articulate this work and the vision and the mission that you have for doing the work.

But I was able to attend a workshop session by one of our colleagues in the field, Mary James, the dean for institutional diversity and inclusion at Reed College, at the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity this past May. And she really talked about her initiatives in terms of recruiting faculty at her institution. And it was all framed around looking at the numbers and looking at the changing demographics. And she really kept emphasizing this whole notion of 2040 and 2050. And what our world and our society is going to look like in terms of the changing landscape. And how that is reflected on our college campuses and what are we doing to prepare for those pivotal years in terms of the demographic shifts.

And I think when you frame the conversation in that way, not that you're blaming people or that we're behind the eight ball, we've got to catch up, but what little things can we do in the here and now. And so that representation is important, and so as we frame the conversation around increasing diversity of our workforce, in particularly the community college level, it is really about that face time that folks who we're serving in our community are able to come in and identify with folks who look like them, and who have a similar background to them. Who have a social lived experience that they can relate to. And so it reduces that stereotype threat in terms of am I really cut out for this work, can I do it? And there's somebody who understands, who looks like me, who understands what I'm going through kind of thing. And so I think that's important.

And I think that the other thing is for our majority students, it's important to have that face time with a diversity, particularly of faculty but as well as staff as well. But definitely in the classroom so that we begin to challenge their stereotypes and notions of what marginalized and minoritized groups look like in this society, and so that they have positive images and role models of minoritized faculty who are able to transform and shape their lives as well. But I think that framing piece is important. And then you're able to, I think once you get buy-in from folks, do all the things in initiatives that Michelé did.

And in fact, the power of connections and relationship building, I actually kind of took her idea for her Faculty Diversity Fellows program and recreated it in a

small scale on campus. And it had some similar effects to the work that she's doing at Harper College as well.

Chaddrick: Awesome. What call to action or advice would you offer our listeners, relative to creating a welcoming environment that fosters diversity, inclusion, and promotes equitable student learning outcomes at community colleges?

Michéle: I think the biggest call to action for chief diversity officers and for community colleges at any institutions of higher learning is we've got to be willing to listen, listen, listen. We've got to listen to our students. We need to be willing to listen to our employees. We need to be willing to listen to our community, to our peers.

I think that too often we fall prey to deciding that we've figured out the answer after we read one or two articles or attended one or two conference sessions, or saw what someone down the street was doing. You know, James mentioned the Faculty Fellowship Program. He saw that idea, and he found a way to do it at his campus that works for his campus. And it doesn't look exactly the way it does at my campus. So it was a promising practice that he took and figured out what would work at his formative institution and then made it make sense for that place. I think we've got to remember to listen, to hear what are people telling us makes them feel welcome, included, valued, in this place? And be okay with that that may look different at the place down the street.

I also think the other call to action work is about self-reflection. We've got to be willing to look ourselves in the mirror and say, "Who are we as an institution? What are our bright spots? What are our blemishes?" We've got to look at the data, let's pull out the data around our students. If people don't believe that students from underrepresented groups are not doing as well, or in some cases doing better, than our majority students, let's pull the numbers out. Let's disaggregate the data, let's stop saying ...

You know, we had some gentleman on our campus about a month ago doing a presentation on diversity symposium from Brown and Associates. And they talked about so often we take the Latino students and treat them as if they are a monolithic group. Disaggregate that data. What does it look like if a Mexican-American versus Chicano versus Puerto Rican. Have we considered that? That it's not the same for every one of them. That every male student's experience is not the same. Every female student's experience is not the same.

And I find that when we give people information that it gives them power. And that when people know who they really are and how they're *really* being experienced by our students that the average person who does this work, they want to do better.

So I think listening and kind of that self-reflection and some self-exposure, that really will help us to make a difference in these areas. And not just be window dressing.

James:

Yeah, Michelé, I think articulated that perfectly. And you know, that piece about self-reflection I think speaks to what Dr. Damon A. Williams, who's the leading expert in the field of diversity in higher education and as well as the role of the chief diversity officer. But he talks a lot in his work about narrowing the institutional diversity DNA at your respective college or university. And when you know that diversity DNA, I think it helps you to understand what to tackle first. You know, there's some low-hanging fruit and there's large-hanging fruit, or different puzzle pieces. And figuring out how all that makes sense.

But it takes a lot of self-reflection because you can't cookie cutter this work, and you can't look at some of your peers at other institutions and see some of the advancements that they've made thinking that you can kind of replicate that and do it at lightning speed. And so, particularly as we're centering this conversation around the chief diversity officer, I think knowing your institutional DNA is important. I think also, in terms of looking at fostering diversity and inclusion, or I think equitable student outcomes, and I tie it back to the employee outcomes as well because I think that's also important.

But you have to go under the support of your college president. And you know we've talked a lot about this in our articles and our book that we wrote as well that these positions have to sit at a cabinet level or someone who's connected to the cabinet level to be able, again, to be able to have the bend-the-ear hourly, daily, weekly of folks to make this work relevant. And to understand what folks are reporting to us in terms of their particular needs and issues.

I think Michelé also said this earlier, but you know, conducting a needs assessment. It is about the data and about the numbers. And so that needs assessment, I think then sets the agenda for the work that needs to be done as well for CDOs on our particular campuses.

And then research the best practices at the different institutions in terms of their climate and culture. So, Michelé talked about that as well in terms of what works well at one institution may not work well at the other institution. But if you personalize it, tailor it to understanding what your climate and culture needs are, then that promising practice then does become a best practice.

And then I would say the final thing is to make sure that when you're doing this work that, you know, this work can be very isolating and very lonely. And again, the power of connection I think in the work that Michelé and I and our co-author Clyde Pickett has done in terms of just connecting to each other to understand and to vent and to figure out how are you operationalizing this work. I think you need to align yourself with individuals who are doing this work as well as organization that support the work of diversity, equity, inclusion, and particularly the CDO. And the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher

Education, whom I think of as being the leading organization that is having a concentrated focus or interest in the work of the CDO in the higher education arena.

Chaddrick: So both of you have mentioned Clyde Pickett and a book a couple of times. Is there a title for this book that you all have been mentioning?

James: Yes. So our connectivity to each other, that was a *long* process. That's why I had the chuckle there, but we are very proud of the work that we've done in the last year and a half. It's *Inclusive Directions: The Role of the Chief Diversity Officer in Community College Leadership*. And the publisher is Rowman and Littlefield.

Michelé: We finished the work in March and April. And it was published in June of 2017, this past June. So you can find it on Amazon, Barnes & Noble. You can do it through the publisher. But it gives you kind of a view of what we talked about a little bit today here. You can see the three different lenses of the chief diversity officer. One is the appliance officer. One is the community engagement officer and one is the employee officer. And we take those different perspectives and show various roles of chief diversity officers. And then there's also a kind of an assessment that you can do to see what type of chief diversity officer your campus needs, or kind of a mini-needs assessment that we got from the work of Dr. Damon Williams and Katrina James.

James: Wade-Golden, yeah. Dr. Katrina Wade-Golden.

Michelé: Wade-Golden. I was going to do her name backwards and I knew that I was wrong. [inaudible 00:23:25]. Oh, it's a very accessible book. Many folks are finding it helpful in terms of figuring out, those who are trying to begin this work, reinvigorate themselves within this work. It was written to be very accessible and user-friendly. A few colleagues expressed to me they've literally used it as just that is a resource manual of sorts. They dog-ear some pages and use them as areas for reference, et cetera. So that was our intent in writing it, and so, yes, we're very proud of the work, but it came about, quite honestly, through us connecting at various conferences and realizing there was a need to help share this kind of information for others pursuing this work.

Chaddrick: No problem. And can we get the title one more time?

James: Sure. *Inclusive Directions: The Role of the Chief Diversity Officer in Community College Leadership*.

Chaddrick: Awesome. Thank you so much for that. Well, I know we are definitely beyond our time, and I definitely want to say thank you on behalf of everyone here at the Office of Community College Research and Leadership for this amazing podcast. I feel like I've learned a lot and now I have a new book to read, which I'm excited about even though my book list is definitely expanding. Life of a grad

student. But again, I just want to thank you both so much for taking this time out of your busy schedules in order to do this podcast.

Michel : Thank you.

James: You too.

Michel : Bye.

Heather: Tune in next month when Dr. Heather Fox from OCCRL talks with Dr. Elvira Abrica, assistant professor of higher education and organizational change, at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln about immigrant, migrant, and multicultural populations in postsecondary education. Background music for this podcast is provided by Dublab. Thank you for listening and for your contributions to educational equity, justice, and excellence for all students.