

## **On the Front Lines**

Thoughts on diversity, equity and inclusion efforts and issues in higher education from three administrators who are immersed in this work every day — Anita Jenious, director of equal opportunity, affirmative action and disability services at Vanderbilt University; Jeffrey Milem, associate dean for academic affairs and distinguished professor in leadership for education policy and reform at The University of Arizona; and Sharon Parker, assistant chancellor for equity and diversity at the University of Washington Tacoma.

### **Anita Jenious**

**Director of Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action and Disability Services Department  
Vanderbilt University**



Anita Jenious has worked in affirmative action and equal opportunity at three universities — Tennessee State University, University of Pennsylvania and Vanderbilt University — over a 23-year career in higher education. Here, she highlights some of what Vanderbilt, a private research university employing 22,000 people and enrolling nearly 13,000 students, is doing in the way of promoting diversity and inclusion on campus and shares her thoughts on diversity and inclusion in higher education in general.

**Q: Tell me about Vanderbilt's Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action and Disability Services Department (EAD).**

**A:** The [EAD](#) was born out of Vandy's Opportunity Development Center (ODC), which came into existence in the 1970s in response to changes in civil rights laws and

government mandates related to these laws. Over the years, the ODC grew from a staff of three to a staff of 11, and in 2010, the name was officially changed to the Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action and Disability Services Department. The department's mission statement best describes what we do: "The EAD's mission is to proactively assist the university with the interpretation, understanding and application of federal and state laws which impose special obligations in the areas of equal opportunity and affirmative action. The EAD carries out its mission by continuously developing, implementing, evaluating and revising action-oriented programs aimed at promoting and valuing equity and diversity in the university's faculty, staff and student body. The EAD's core values include equity, diversity, inclusiveness, accessibility and accommodation, all of which represent the spirit and purpose of the EAD."

To help meet this mission, the EAD collaborates with several other campus departments and organizations, including human resources, the Black Cultural Center, the Women's Center, the Office of Leadership Development and Intercultural Affairs, the Office of Religious Life and the Office of LGBTQI Life, just to name a few.

**Q: Tell me about the Office of LGBTQI Life. I know that some institutions have programs in place to address LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) issues, but I imagine an entire office dedicated to this is quite uncommon. Is Vandy ahead of the curve on this? And what is the mission/purpose of the Office of LGBTQI Life?**

**A:** We're very proud of our [Office of LGBTQI Life](#). It seems that these types of offices or departments are more common in private institutions (especially those located in major metropolitan areas) than in public institutions. Our Office of LGBTQI Life was started in 2008 and is part of the Office of the Dean of Students. The office serves all members of the Vanderbilt community — students, faculty, staff and alumni — by creating educational, cultural and social opportunities. The office also supports and advises LGBTQI-related campus groups and activities, including the Lambda Association (the undergraduate gay-straight alliance); the Delta Lambda Phi fraternity for gay, bisexual and progressive men; Out in the Academy (a group for graduate and professional students and those wishing to work within academic institutions that regularly meet and discuss issues related to LGBTQI experiences and identities); and many more.

The office also oversees Vandy's Safe Zone program, which aims to create a visible network of support for LGBTQI individuals and their allies by providing an avenue through which any member of the Vanderbilt community can show their support (by placing the Safe Zone symbol on doors or showing the symbol to others, Safe Zone members signify a space is safe to discuss LGBTQI issues). The Safe Zone program also provides ongoing educational experiences between Safe Zone members and the Vanderbilt community, thus encouraging students, faculty and staff to explore cultural identity, values and stereotypes in order to better understand how these issues impact not only them as individuals, but also the greater community.

**Q: It sounds like Vanderbilt is doing some great things in the area of diversity and inclusion. What are your thoughts on the overall state of affairs of diversity and inclusion in higher ed today? Are we making strides? Are there still groups that are routinely discriminated against? How can we continue to move forward toward equality for all?**

**A:** Have we made strides? Of course we have. What's interesting is that I can literally see the change on campus. I'm a graduate of Vanderbilt, and I worked here earlier in my career, too, so I've been affiliated with the institution off and on since the early 1980s. I can definitely see a difference today, as compared to two decades ago, in not only the student body, but also the makeup of the faculty, staff and administration.

Are we where we need to be? Of course not. The AA officer in me knows that our census information tells us that there is a much greater availability of people of color than we currently utilize in a number of key areas in our workforce, and that's going to be the case on most college campuses.

Another area where I think we're lacking is in the hiring of people with disabilities. I think we're doing a good job of *accommodating* our folks with disabilities, but are we making the same efforts in recruiting these folks to our campuses? Probably not. But I do think we'll see some steps in the right direction in this area over the next few years, primarily because the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs has brought into the spotlight employment issues related to veterans and people with disabilities.

And of course there's an ongoing debate in several cities and states about the sexual orientation piece of the puzzle. Many of the same protections other classes of people enjoy just aren't there for the LGBTQI population. For example, while we include those groups in our anti-discrimination policy at Vanderbilt, the state of Tennessee (and the federal government) offers them no protection against discrimination.

**Q: Since there is no federal law mandating protection against discrimination for LGBTQI individuals, it would seem that institutions would need to take it upon themselves to make this a part of their culture. How can we do this? How can we convince our campus communities that this is the right thing to do, even though the law doesn't say we have to?**

**A:** You have to believe what you're selling. We are institutions of higher education. We value the whole educational experience. In those regards, you want the best people you can get. If the sharpest young Ph.D. coming out of Harvard or Oxford or Vandy or wherever, who is burning up the track in terms of research, who's poised to become the next Einstein or Stephen Hawking, but also happens to be transgendered or gay or lesbian or whatever, are you telling me that you're going to hold that against that person

and not hire him or her based on that alone? This type of discrimination just doesn't make sense, and it's not good for business.

Part of life in academe is working with and interacting with people who have different backgrounds and beliefs than your own, be they political leanings, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, ethnic identities ... the list could go on. You don't have to subscribe to their notions or agree with their beliefs, but we *must* all be respectful of one another, because ultimately we're all working toward the same goal, which is to make our institution the best it can be.

**Jeffrey Milem**  
**Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Professor of Higher Education,**  
**Ernest W. MacFarland Distinguished Professor in Leadership for**  
**Education Policy and Reform**  
**The University of Arizona**



In addition to the long list of impressive titles above, Jeffrey Milem also serves as department head of educational policy studies and practice and director of the Center for the Study of Higher Education at The University of Arizona. Prior to joining the faculty at The University of Arizona, he served as an associate professor and graduate program director for the higher education administration program in the department of education policy and leadership in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, where he also served as director of the provost's research collaborative, a longitudinal research program which studied the ways in which students' experiences with diversity while they were at University of Maryland influence a range of important learning outcomes.

Milem's research interests focus on racial dynamics in higher education, the educational outcomes of diversity, the impact of college on students and the condition and status of the professorate — including the ways in which faculty effectively utilize diversity in their classroom teaching. He is co-author of the book *Making Diversity Work on Campus: A Research Based Perspective*, which translates research demonstrating the educational benefits of diversity to develop a "roadmap" for college leaders of the conditions that must be in place if they are to maximize the opportunities for teaching and learning that racial diversity provides.

So who better to talk to us about the important topic of diversity and inclusion in higher education than Professor Milem?

**Q: I know your work focuses primarily on diversity as it relates to the student population, but can you speak to your research on the state of affairs of diversity, equity and inclusion in the higher education workforce?**

**A:** We've made some strides in increasing the diversity of our faculty populations. Most notably we've seen an increase in Asian faculty members — many of whom weren't born in the U.S. but came here to study then stayed for faculty appointments. As far as the proportional representation of Latinos and African Americans in faculty appointments, the gains aren't that great if you look at the trends over time. We haven't made the progress that one would expect we could or should make with those populations. And the number of Native American faculty has remained troubling low, particularly in states that have a large proportion of Native Americans, like Arizona, New Mexico and Washington.

As far as the ratio of males to females in the faculty population, discipline plays a big part in this. In some disciplines we've seen tremendous progress, in others, not so much. I'm thinking college of education (female faculty members are common) vs. college of engineering (mostly male-dominated), as one example.

When it comes to the diversity of administration and staff members in higher ed, it really depends on where you look. In the services, in the trades, in the entry-level positions, we are seeing more diversity, particularly racial, ethnic and gender diversity. However, if you look further up the ranks, you'll find a more homogeneous population. If you're looking for women deans in colleges of engineering, you likely won't find many. But you may well find several women deans in colleges of education or social and behavioral sciences.

The fact of the matter is, at 30,000 feet, the diversity ratio of the higher education workforce might not look too bad, but if you zoom in a little closer, you'll see that there are many areas in which we still need to progress.

**Q: So why haven't we progressed? What needs to be done to step up these efforts as they relate to the higher ed workforce?**

**A:** As for the "why" part of the question, I think a variety of factors are at play. The most prominent one, in my view, is that people still hold very narrow and traditional views of what "excellence" is and who's "qualified" for what position, and when you hold to these types of narrow views (views that privilege some groups over others), you perpetuate stratification and prohibit forward movement among entire groups of people.

The basic argument behind diversity as a compelling educational interest is that diverse learning environments provide more opportunities for teaching and learning — opportunities that don't exist in more homogeneous environments. With a diverse student body, faculty and staff (and I'm talking diversity in the sense of not only race, ethnicity and gender, but also the "other" aspects of diversity — religion, sexual

orientation, social identity, class, ability/disability and myriad more), you're allowing for and enabling more vast and varied experiences and you're exposed to more ideas and viewpoints.

So what needs to be done to move our higher ed workforces toward these truly diverse environments? We need to not only make efforts to increase the flow of diverse people into the various institutional pipelines, but also implement corresponding programs and push for the climate and culture changes necessary to support these folks on their journey. You can't just hire a bunch of diverse people and think "problem solved." You have to create and provide opportunities for these groups of people to come together and communicate and collaborate across their differences.

**Q: There seems to be a plethora of information out there regarding institutions' efforts to increase the diversity of their student bodies, but in my research for this article, I found very little information on these same efforts as they relate to institutions' workforces. Why do you think this is?**

**A:** In these days and times, given the changing demographics of our society, for an institution to fail to say that it supports diversity is a form of institutional suicide. The most outwardly visible population on a campus is the student population, so institutions are of course going to prioritize their diversity and inclusion strategies around this group. But that's not to say that all institutions, even if they do have stated goals related to a diverse student body, are achieving these goals. We still see large-scale stratification in students, particularly at the more "elite" institutions.

As far as faculty diversity, many institutions do have a statement on faculty diversity; it just may not be as visible and out in the open as their student diversity statement. And again, even with the presence of a statement on faculty diversity aspirations and goals, in reality, most institutions still come up far short. I'm sure that many institutions also have stated goals for increasing the diversity of staff and administration, but these goals are more internal and probably couldn't be stumbled upon by the average citizen perusing an institution's website.

Also, several states (Arizona being one of them) have banned affirmative action, making it illegal to use race, ethnicity or gender as a factor in any state employment decision. So for public institutions in these states, it's tough to find the right balance. On the one hand, institutions want to publicly state that they're working to increase the diversity of their workforce, but on the other hand, they may feel that they can't deliberately move in this direction because they might be accused of hiring a particular person over another person to "up a quota," and that's illegal. It's definitely a slippery slope. While the Supreme Court has upheld (in cases like *Grutter v. Bollinger*) institutions' use of affirmative action admissions policies to "further a compelling interest in obtaining the educational benefits that flow from a diverse student body," that same sort of legal support doesn't exist for the employment side in many states, and that's the conundrum.

**Sharon Parker**  
**Assistant Chancellor for Equity and Diversity**  
**University of Tacoma Washington**



Sharon Parker is now in her fifth year as University of Washington Tacoma's first assistant chancellor for equity and diversity. Although she's relatively new in this particular position, she's been in this line of work for more than 30 years, working in or with higher education, nonprofit organizations, corporations and small businesses on issues of social justice, equity and diversity. She also worked for six years on the [American Association of Colleges and Universities' Campus Diversity Initiative \(CDI\) Evaluation Project](#), which was established to determine the impact of the James Irvine Foundation's CDI, a six-year initiative designed to help 28 independent California institutions "prepare all students for leadership in a diverse society and promote the success of underrepresented student populations."

We talked with Sharon about UW Tacoma's [Diversity Resource Center](#), which she oversees, and how the Center and the institution's other diversity and inclusion initiatives have impacted the campus community.

**Q: Tell me about UW Tacoma's Diversity Resource Center.**

**A:** The Diversity Resource Center (DRC or Center) was established just prior to me joining UW Tacoma in 2007. The Center was established to be the guiding force of the university's diversity and inclusion efforts (the Office for Equity and Diversion hadn't yet been created). With the DRC, the university was able to reach out to the campus community and the larger Tacoma community to enhance education and spur dialogue around the topics of diversity, equity and inclusion. The Center also enabled UW

Tacoma to form partnerships with organizations in the Tacoma area to help further its goal of building a more diverse campus community.

The DRC is also a place where people can come together to learn about diversity-related issues and topics. We host programs and discussions (recent topics have included immigration, homelessness, poverty, gender stereotypes and LGBTQ issues); sponsor events on campus when we want to bring attention to specific topics or issues (we recently cosponsored a campus event bringing attention to the plight of migrant workers, which has become a very hot topic in Washington state, and we sponsor the annual days of service for the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday); maintain a library of resources (DVDs, books, CDs, etc.); and take our presentations into the classroom at the request of faculty.

In short, the DRC is a rich resource of information, materials and networks for the UW Tacoma community. And we're very proud of it.

**Q: Tell me about some of UW Tacoma's other diversity/equity/inclusion efforts.**

**A:** The UW Tacoma campus sits on ancient tribal land and is near three major reservations. When I came to the institution, I quickly realized that there weren't very many ways for these tribal communities to connect with the campus. So I made it a priority to develop activities that would bring us into partnership with these communities that surrounded us. One of these initiatives is an annual symposium for faculty and staff members on Native American issues in higher education. We discuss issues in higher education generally, and at UW Tacoma specifically, that impact native people and examine the perspectives that native people can bring to higher ed.

My work also involves educating faculty and staff members about different populations, looking at how this diversity is reflected in our curriculum, and finding ways to bring faculty and staff from under-represented communities on board at UW Tacoma.

**Q: Since the inception of the DRC and the Office of Equity and Diversity, has UW Tacoma experienced a culture change or mindset shift as it relates to diversity, equity and inclusion on campus?**

**A:** I do believe it has. I've personally seen a shift in the behaviors and mindset of our campus community. There seems to be a greater awareness of equity issues across campus and in most of the academic programs. Just in my five years here, I've seen a growing openness and less resistance to these issues. And we've only just begun!