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Office of Equity and Inclusion Newsletter

October 1, 2021



A Message from Dr. Keith Johnson, Vice President for Equity and Inclusion

“Indigenous Peoples’ Day: Recognizing the Oppressed and Not the Oppressor”

Dear Friends,

Indigenous Peoples' Day recognizes that Native people are the first inhabitants of the Americas. Indigenous Peoples Day reimagines Columbus Day and challenges people to rethink history. It also challenges the celebration of colonialism and presents an opportunity to reveal historical truths about the genocide and oppression of indigenous peoples in the Americas. And it presents an opportunity to celebrate indigenous resistance.

Indigenous Peoples Day is observed on the second Monday of October each year. This year it will take place on October 11th, coinciding with Columbus Day. To recognize the contributions of Native Americans, former President Donald Trump declared November

as National Native American Heritage Month. While this is a noble gesture, to isolate recognition of any group or race to one month diminishes the culture and heritage of remarkable Americans who deeply enriched the quality and character of our Nation. And thus, it should be a part of everyday American history.

I spent most of my childhood growing up in a small rural community in Hollister, North Carolina, located in the eastern part of the state where the current population is less than 700. Hollister is located approximately 25 miles from the area cities of Roanoke Rapids, Rocky

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Land Acknowledgment

We recognize that there are folks from many parts of the country but would like to take a moment to acknowledge that ETSU resides on the territory that was taken from the Cherokee people. The Cherokee people once spread across the lands of southeast and eastern Tennessee, western North Carolina, western South Carolina, North Georgia, and Northeast Alabama. Today the Eastern Band of Cherokee reside within the Qualla Boundary in western North Carolina. Our hope is that this acknowledgement will serve as a reminder to all of us to recognize and honor those who were here before us and to honor and care for the land in which we reside.

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Continued ~ Message from Dr. Keith Johnson

Mount, and Louisburg, NC, and about 60 miles northeast of Raleigh. In 2019, the median income was just over \$20,000. You can imagine what it was like when I was a child in the early 1970s. Demographically, the largest population is Native American (61.7%), followed by Black (21.1%), 2+ races (9.1%), White (3.7%), Hispanic (2.6%), and Asian (1.7%).

If you are a fan of “America’s Got Talent,” then you recently saw this small town and its native culture highlighted as contestant and native of Hollister, N.C., Brooke Simpson, sang her way through to the finals where she placed fourth. She inspired a new generation of young Native Americans to follow their dreams and brought pride to her tribe and many others who don’t really see themselves adequately represented.

As a child, I attended school, church, and other activities with many Native Americans. The community where my family and I lived was divided between two counties, Halifax, and Warren, both were the heart of the ancestral homelands of Native Americans who were a part of the Haliwa-Saponi people dating back to the early 18th Century. The tribe consists of over 4,000 members spread across the United States. Dating back to the late nineteenth century, schools and other institutions were created to preserve their identity and culture. The indigenous peoples share a strong bond around activities and oral traditions.

In 1955, Hollister natives constructed a one-room structure to hold tribal meetings. Two years later, a private native serving school was born. The school continued to function and grow for many years. On February 3, 2000, the manifestation of what the tribal leaders envisioned came to reality. The North Carolina Board of Education

approved the tribe’s application to become a charter school.

The curriculum was reflective of Native American history, crafts, culture, and other related studies. Each year, there is a Pow Wow, which is a very high energy weekend when Native Americans: dancers, singers, drummers, artists, and craftspeople display their heritage and culture. This event educates the public about Native Americans, past and present, through the arts. The Pow Wow weekend is the largest community event in Hollister, where thousands of people come to town to be a part of the celebration.

I challenge you to get to know someone from an indigenous population and learn about their culture and traditions. What you will pleasantly discover is that they value the same things that you and I do. You will also discover that we are more alike than different in so many ways. Too often, we allow variables such as race and ethnicity to divide and keep us from getting to know and appreciate each other and value contributions that different people have to offer.

Unfortunately, many of us have been taught to judge and evaluate peoples’ worth and value, solely on those things that we outwardly see or hear such as skin color and language. Those same perceptions have in part, aided in creating environments that are less inclusive and celebratory of contributions from people who appear to be different.

At ETSU, we are a campus that is striving to create an environment that will support and celebrate Indigenous Peoples by creating an equitable and inclusive work, living, and learning space for its faculty, staff, students, and community.

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Continued ~ Message from Dr. Keith Johnson

ETSU is a campus and community where discrimination based on race, color, or national origin will not be tolerated and definitely is not welcomed. We are an institution whose people are always growing into our university mission where:

PEOPLE come first, are treated with dignity and respect, and are encouraged to achieve their full potential;

RELATIONSHIPS are built on honesty, integrity, and trust;

DIVERSITY of people and thought is respected;

EXCELLENCE is achieved through teamwork, leadership, creativity, and a strong work ethic;

EFFICIENCY is achieved through wise use of human and financial resources; and

COMMITMENT to intellectual achievement is embraced.

Sincerely,
Dr. Keith Johnson

Gravitating Toward the Culture of her Indigenous Ancestry by Debi Thibeault, DSW, LCSW, ETSU Assistant Professor



When I was asked to write this article it was difficult to pinpoint one area of focus because there is so much Indigenous history and current issues that are not taught or discussed. I will touch on a few topics and provide resources in hopes that you will explore more.

During October, the honoring of Christopher Columbus conjures up feelings of sadness and anger for me. The stories shared in most schools and dinner tables across the country do not speak of the attempts to extinguish the millions of people who were already living on, what most Indigenous people in the Western hemisphere call, Turtle Island.

It is estimated that over 100 million people were already living across the America's in 1492. Mainstream stories about Columbus and Thanksgiving are shared in a manner which reveres the colonizers. Yet, there is hope as more educational institutions, cities, and states across the country are replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day. Perhaps we will see that on our calendar at ETSU in the future.

Indigenous peoples are the original inhabitants of a geographical area. "Native Americans" or "American Indians" are Indigenous people to the land within the United States. Several elders I know say the term "Native American" does not make sense because anyone born in America is native to America. They also are not fond of "American Indian" because it was a term imposed upon them by the United States government. Today there are over 550 federally recognized tribes in the US as well as tribes that are not recognized by the federal government. Tribes or nations have their own culture and language. They do not speak

Continued ~ Gravitating toward the culture of her Indigenous Ancestry

“Native American”, they speak Cherokee, Lakota, Ojibway, Cree, and the list goes on. It is always best to reference the persons nation or tribal lineage. What I have learned - if you do not know, “Indigenous” is the way to go.

Millions of Indigenous people died from war and diseases because of the US governments efforts to extinguish them. Did you know the US government delivered smallpox through blankets to some of the tribes? When it was deemed poor practice and was no longer cost effective to kill them off, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 forced Indigenous peoples in the United States onto reservations and in 1883 Captain Pratt coined a famous saying, “Kill the Indian, save the man”. This began the movement of cultural genocide through forced assimilation. Probably the most well-known act of forced assimilation was the establishment of boarding or residential schools.

These schools across the United States and Canada were designed to remove Indigenous children from the homes and communities to take the “Indian” out of them. Children were removed from their homes around the age of four or five. Typically, they were placed in schools far away from their home so that their parents could not visit them. The children were taught how to be domestic workers. Many of the children endured trauma. In addition to being forced to cut their hair (a sacred part of their culture) and forced not to speak their native language, many experienced physical and sexual abuse by their caregivers.

The boarding schools began in the late 1800’s. By 1930 almost one half of Indigenous children in the US were in boarding schools. Many families were never told what happened to their children, they just never returned home. By 1970 many of the schools closed and those that still exist no longer have assimilation as their mission. The boarding school era is always at the forefront of Indigenous Peoples minds because of the atrocities that took place.

Recently, this wound opened further with the hope that some healing will take place. In May of 2021 the uncovering of 215 children’s bodies found in unmarked graves on former residential school land in Canada sparked a movement among Indigenous Peoples across the US and Canada to search and find all the bodies buried at these boarding schools. Since May, thousands of unmarked bodies have been uncovered and the searching continues. Information like this can feel like “it happened so long ago”. Let me put it in some context. I am 54 years old. In my travels and through my research I have met many people my age who were forced to grow up in a boarding school for Indigenous children. They and their families are still living with the trauma they experienced.

It is a common to hear Indigenous people say that they are the “forgotten” ones. Many challenges for Indigenous Peoples are hidden from society. It is though the media does not find it important to share this news. This includes the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples by law enforcement, environmental injustices, and the high rate of missing and murdered Indigenous women and children.

While I gravitate toward the culture of my Indigenous ancestry (Mi’kmaq), part of my ancestry is colonial. That said, I want to make it clear, that I do not share this information to “guilt” anyone with colonial ancestry. I share it in hopes to create awareness. Only by understanding what others did before us, can we walk in a better way today.

A common phrase across many Indigenous nations is “All my relations”. This phrase acknowledges the connection we have with everything around us. And so, I sign off acknowledging my connection to all of you.

All my relations (Msit No’kmaq)

Debi Thibeault

Digital Resource for the Indigenous World

Want to learn more....

There is a lot of media in *Indian Country Today* (<https://indiancountrytoday.com/>) about the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and about the Boarding Schools - Sept 30th was [Orange Shirt Day](#) - a day of remembering the children of the boarding and residential schools.

Indian Country Today serves the Indigenous communities with news, entertainment, and opinion.

Indian Country Today is an independent nonprofit, multimedia news enterprise. Their digital platform covers the Indigenous world, including American Indians and Alaska Natives. Indian Country Today is also a public media broadcast carried via public television stations, including FNX: First Nations Experience and Arizona PBS World channel.

Land Acknowledgment Statements

Land acknowledgment is a traditional custom that dates back centuries in many Native nations and communities. Today, land acknowledgments are used by Native Peoples and non-Natives to recognize Indigenous Peoples who are the original stewards of the lands on which we now live. Before public events and other important gatherings, a speaker offers this acknowledgment on behalf of everyone present.

Making a land acknowledgment should be motivated by genuine respect and support for Native Peoples. Speaking and hearing words of recognition is an important step in creating collaborative, accountable, continuous, and respectful relationships with Indigenous nations and communities.

“When we talk about land, land is part of who we are. It’s a mixture of our blood, our past, our current, and our future. We carry our ancestors in us, and they’re around us. As you all do.” Mary Lyons (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe)

Tips For Creating an Indigenous Land Acknowledgment Statement (from the [Native Governance Center](#))

- Start with self-reflection.
- Do your homework.
- Use appropriate language.
- Use past, present, and future tenses.
- Land acknowledgments shouldn’t be grim.

For more details, please visit [A guide to Indigenous land acknowledgment.](#)

**The 3rd Annual Equity and Inclusion Conference at ETSU
Was Met with Warm Hearts and Open Minds
By Contributing Writer, Elizabeth S. Cloyd**

As I attended my first Equity and Inclusion Conference at ETSU on September 20, 2021, I was no stranger to Social Justice. But I was met with a collection of valuable data and helpful perspectives that will profoundly shape the way I think about and interact with people. And it will affect the way I teach. This conference was so full of useful and profound information that I cannot possibly tell you everything that happened. But I will try to provide you with some of the highlights.



Day One:

After President Noland's welcome, we were treated to a brief, but interesting overview of the Cherokee who originally owned and occupied the land that ETSU sits upon. Next was a talk by keynote speaker, [Dr. Paul Farmer](#), from Partners in Health, whose years working in Haiti have shaped him into a global voice for social justice in medicine. And he emphasized that a huge piece of the efforts in Haiti center around, "Working with those who have been shut out of modern medicine," he said. Farmer spoke specifically about the need for higher education opportunities in countries like Haiti. And he gave a call to decolonize global health. "We need to put in place those services and higher education opportunities which never occurred under colonial rule," he said.

The next session featured Dr. Michael James Yellowbird, Dean and Professor of the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba. He spoke extensively about de-colonizing college curriculum. He stated that he believes decolonization is becoming a global movement. And he works specifically to supplant, "How social work education trains students and shapes the scientific discipline which is imbued with structures of white supremacy," he explained.

Yellowbird learned about colonization first-hand while attending schools where the prevailing attitude was, "Kill the Indian, save the man," he said. He observed that people in the United States present impatience and discomfort with this movement for social justice by rushing to reconciliation. He also emphasized the importance of keeping the decolonization movement separate and distinct from other social justice efforts. "It needs to be separate, or it gets lost," he said.

This lively morning wrapped up with "Lessons in Inclusive Excellence through Cultural Competency" where we had a panel of speakers offering insight into the most effective ways to increase multicultural knowledge. Next was a sobering and deeply informative overview and discussion of health disparities in marginalized and underrepresented populations. And the day ended with a novel and exciting concept in the session "Creating Brave Spaces" in the classroom.

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If you were a registered attendee of the conference you still have access to the Whova conference platform. Recordings of the sessions, along with numerous documents, speaker bios, discussion boards, etc. are available for the next three months on your desktop and six months on the Whova app.

Continued ~ 3rd Annual Equity and Inclusion Conference

Day Two:

The second day of the conference was equally impressive with an expansive exploration of “Social Class Identity in Higher Education.” as the first session. This talk presented massive amounts of research to support the fact that higher education has been designed to promote the privileged. “The poor lack citizenship in higher education,” said Dr. Becki Elkins, Associate Professor of Student Affairs Administration and EdD Program Director, University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse.

And Dr. Krista Soria, Assistant Professor, University of Idaho explained the myth of meritocracy, “We live in a society where the overriding myth of success in higher education is to ‘pull oneself up by the bootstraps’—that one can be successful if one simply applies oneself and works hard.” And she further explained, “That very fiction is a narrative spun by a system carefully and intentionally designed to limit social mobility in the first place.”

Next was a study in “Intersectionality- Why, Now & Always!” led by the dynamic Chaz Kellem, Director, Office of PittServes, University of Pittsburgh, who opened with a Land Acknowledgement. Kellem explained how intersectionality can be better managed and better understood, “Through (hearing) peoples’ stories.” And he emphasized the value of taking the time to recognize personal biases to be an effective ally in promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI.) “Simply take a moment to see that world isn’t just about you,” he said. When he was asked what could help on a structural level, he explained, “We have to be willing to give up our power. We are not losing power; we are changing the landscape!”

Then we had the opportunity to attend a breakout planning session called “Planning Your Next Steps.” This was an open forum where instructors exchanged ideas and concerns about structuring a curriculum and a classroom environment that prioritizes DEI. We were then treated to a lively panel discussion on “Racial Justice.” The day ended with a session led by keynote speaker, [Vernon Wall, President, One Better World, LLC.](#)

Wall opened with a Land Acknowledgement to the native people whose land he was broadcasting from, and he reiterated that, “Social Justice isn’t new; it’s a term from the sixties... But it’s frightening that Equity and Inclusion isn’t (more) developed in higher education. This should be continually developed.” Wall presented valuable ideas on developing both individual and group identities. And he clarified that equal is not necessarily equitable. “Equality is making sure everyone in the room has shoes; Equity is making sure they fit,” he said.

Day Three:

Dr. Keith Johnson, Vice President of Equity and Inclusion opened the third day of the conference with a summary of desegregation, an update on the increasing diversity in the ETSU student population, and a Land Acknowledgement. The air was full of energy and enthusiasm as the first student tracked presentations rolled out. Prolific writer, scholar and activist, Wes Moore was the keynote speaker for the first session. He was engaging as he highlighted his intrinsic journey as a man of color, a scholar, a writer, and an activist when he penned the now famous book, [“The Other Wes Moore.”](#)

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What others are saying—

“One of the most informative conferences in a long time. Virtual formats are challenging and ETSU along with WHOVA did an excellent job! Great networking as well!!!!” ~ BD

Continued ~ 3rd Annual Equity and Inclusion Conference

Moore talked about the significance of the title. “The most important thing about the title is ‘The Other,’” he explained. “Our society is full of others.” He commented on the fact that our society is at a tipping point with race and class. And he further explained that it is hugely important to know who you are going to fight for, citing his single mother as his inspiration. “Don’t forget who you are supposed to be fighting for,” he said. “That’s what your legacy is going to be.” Moore also emphasized our interconnectedness in society and how impactful striving for social change can be for everyone. “The best way to protect your existence is to protect everyone’s existence,” he said.

Moore was a hard act to follow. But Jessie Wang, Director of Student Success, Clemmer College ETSU held her own while explaining microaggressions in “Where Are You Really From: Recognizing and Responding to Microaggressions.” This session broke down exactly what a microaggression looks like, and we were provided with specific tips to address this issue. And we reviewed the important lesson of understanding intent versus impact. “Separate intent from impact,” Wang said. We were also exposed to the fact that people of color risk coming up against more microaggressions when they speak out against them. Thus, as educators we are charged with constantly challenging stereotypes.

Next we examined the possibilities of “The Leader Within: Race, Culture, Ethnicity and Leadership” with a graduate student panel and Vernon Wall. Leadership is a multilayered concept. And the pain that motivates social change is significant to everyone. “We all identify,” Wall said. “This is personal for all of us.”

Then we enjoyed a session on how to have healthy conversations about gender and sexuality led by ETSU Graduate Assistant at Patricia Robertson Pride Center, Adam

Derrick, and Graduate Assistant at ETSU Women’s Resource Center, Alison Dyer. This session was an eye-opener on the importance of pronouns, respect, identity, and empathy. “Pronouns are important,” Dyer explained. “It’s the next best thing to being called by name.” Both Derrick and Dyer unpacked how much pronouns validate people. And they also emphasized the importance of understanding how to be a true ally to a marginalized person or group. “Our job as advocates and allies is NOT to burden the already marginalized with consoling or educating us,” Derrick clarified.

The day ended with a speech by artist and activist, [D’Lo](#). We learned about his voyage to develop his unique identity with parents who struggled to understand his sexuality, work, and transitions. He was funny and charming as he recalled taking his mother to see a show in which he featured a character based on her. It was a great way to end the day and the conference.

I could have easily written a feature article on every speaker, moderator, and attendee I came across. And it was challenging to try to boil down three huge days into such a small space. It was a collection of powerful personal and group stories that wove together in a kind of magic. I was genuinely moved by all the work that went into planning and executing this. And I found the information sometimes uncomfortable to absorb as a settler, a woman who enjoys white privilege, and as a long-term ally. But it’s clear that sitting through this discomfort is both necessary and productive for anyone interested in promoting social justice. I truly look forward to learning more.

“I really enjoyed being part of a wonderful panel talking about topics that really mattered.” ~ Anonymous

Upcoming Events

October 2021

Tuesday	October 5th	Lunch and Learn Lecture Series <i>Equity and Inclusion in the Sustainability World</i>	12:00-1:00pm	CANCELLED
Wednes.	October 6th	WGAS on Wednesday “The Untold Stories of Gender Diverse Individuals with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome” Stacey Williams, Dept. of Psychology	12:00-1:00pm	Join Zoom Meeting
Tuesday	October 19th	Lunch and Learn Lecture Series <i>Microaggressions</i> Discussion leads: Dr. Teresa Carnevale, Director of Quality Improvement, Assistant Professor, College of Nursing; Dr. Chassidy Cooper, Coord. Office of Equity and Inclusion; and Chelsie Dubai, Internet Program Support Coord.	12:00-1:00pm	Join Zoom Meeting
Wednes.	October 27th	WGAS on Wednesday “Navigating Queer and Trans Self-Disclosure in Higher Education” Mickey White, Dept. of Counseling and Human Services	12:00-1:00pm	Join Zoom Meeting
Thursday	October 28th	Hispanic Student Day	TBD	Culp Center Ballroom

November and December 2021

Tuesday	November 2nd	Lunch and Learn Lecture Series <i>Exploring Ways to Honor Indigenous Peoples in the Classroom</i> Discussion lead: Dr. Debi Thibeault, Assistant Professor, Social Work	12:00-1:00pm	Join Zoom Meeting
Wednes.	November 3rd	WGAS on Wednesday “Hardboiled Hysterics: Shell Shock and Tough Guys” Michael Jones, Dept. of Literature and Language	12:00-1:00pm	Join Zoom Meeting
Thursday	November 4th	Asian Culture Celebration Series - Event #1 Women’s Identity in Chinese Literature Guest Speaker: Dr. Anna Meng	3:00-4:30pm	Via zoom
TBA	TBA	Asian Culture Celebration Series - Event #2 Martial Arts as a Way of Life, Guest Speakers: Master Amanda Olson and Master Keith Olson	TBA	Multicultural Center
TBA	TBA	Asian Culture Celebration Series - Event #3 1st ETSU Open Martial Arts Tournament This event will be a fundraiser for helping the families of the victims of the shootings in Atlanta that happened back in March, 2021.	TBA	TBA
Tuesday	November 9th	Lunch and Learn Lecture Series <i>Wellbeing through Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Lens</i> Discussion lead: Dr. Nicholas Hagemeyer, Associate Professor and Vice Chair, Department of Pharmacy Practice, Director of Student Professional Development, Director of Pharmacy Practice Research Fellowship	12:00-1:00pm	Join Zoom Meeting
Wednes.	December 1st	WGAS on Wednesday Title To Be Announced Jessica Wang (Clemmer College)	12:00-1:00pm	Join Zoom Meeting

Equity and Inclusion Diversity Champion Spotlight

Lee Ann Rawlins Williams, Ph.D., CRC, CFLE, Assistant Professor and RHSC-BC Program Director, College of Clinical and Rehabilitative Health Sciences/Department of Rehabilitative Sciences believes the role of the Office of Equity and Inclusion and the Equity and Inclusion Advisory Council is to connect the ETSU community through education, communication, and actions that support equity, diversity, and social inclusion on campus. The office and council should address concerns, bringing forth solutions for considerations, and make recommendations for improvement.

Her definition of diversity emerges from her background in disability. Lee Ann considers the individual first. Her definition looks to how we express our differences in a common voice, viewing diversity not only in the typical ways but how we explore the world around us based on our heritage and ways of life. Lee Ann states, "Diversity starts at my door". When students, faculty, staff enter her space they see books, artifacts, items that represent diversity. She wants people to know that she welcomes the uniqueness in each of us. In her courses, she encourages students to explore their unique abilities and to share their cultures and backgrounds through their work and discussion. Lee Ann enlists the support

of international scholars to explore international diversity and social justice issues related to disability. She talks directly with colleagues and creates bodies of work for publication focusing on social justice.



When dealing with discussions surrounding difficult topics, Lee Ann's approach is to "agree to disagree". She feels that each of us has our own way of considering and understanding certain topics. In her work certain topics can become heated and her approach has always been to try best to understand the position of the other person and respect them for their personal view.

Lee Ann shares that she will continue contributing to academic journals publishing articles on issues directly related to diversity, equity, and social justice. Lee Ann wants her approach to be all-encompassing so that her meaning can emerge from all aspects of her work with others at East Tennessee State University and the local, national, and global communities.

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