

1-19-2016

## Faculty and Staff Experiences

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### Recommended Citation

Amin, Julius A.; Henderson, Kathleen; Washington, Versalle; and Crosson, Kenya, "Faculty and Staff Experiences" (2016). *Critical Examination of Our Times: The State of Race on the University of Dayton Campus*. 18.  
[https://ecommons.udayton.edu/afs\\_symp/18](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/afs_symp/18)

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## **Faculty and Staff Experiences**

*Julius Amin, moderator; Kathleen Henderson, Versalle  
Washington, Kenya Crosson*

We would like each speaker to address the positives and challenges [of working at UD] and how you navigated them, as well as suggestions for future directions to make UD a more inclusive community. Each speaker will have 15 minutes. The session will be opened to questions and discussion following the final presentation. The moderator will provide a five-minute wrap-up of session.

### **Kathleen Henderson**

Go out and tell our story, let it echo far and wide, make them hear you...how justice was our battle, how justice was denied. Make them hear you...

And say to those who blame us for the way we choose to fight that sometimes there are battles that are more than black or white. And I could not put down my sword when justice was my right. Make them hear you...

Go out and tell our story to your daughters and your sons.  
Make them hear you. . . And tell them in our struggle, we  
were not the only one. Make them hear you...

So your sword can be a sermon or the power of a pen, teach  
every child to raise their voice and then my brothers then,  
will justice be demanded by ten million righteous men.  
Make them hear you. When they hear you, I'll be near you  
again.

— Coalhouse Walker Jr., *Ragtime*

Coalhouse Walker Jr., one of the central characters in the Broadway play and movie *Ragtime*, delivers this poignant message through song at a pivotal moment in the story. Walker delivers these words to a mob of angry black men seeking justice from years of mistreatment in the early days of twentieth-century America. Successful in his efforts to quell the mob, he is ultimately killed by the police who take him to be an instigator of the mob's protests. After all these years, I remain deeply moved by the lyrics and the message. I believe the lyrics can help us set context for what the symposium planners asked us to do: tell our stories.

My name is Kathleen Henderson. I currently serve as an associate director in the division of enrollment management. My UD-employee story is quite long. And quite varied, in that I've worked in the School of Law, student development, the Office of the Provost, academic affairs and learning initiatives, and now enrollment management. Over the course of 34 years, I have been an exempt and non-exempt employee. I've held titles such as: Secretary, Assistant Director and Multicultural Programmer, Director, Executive Director. I've served law students and faculty, undergraduate minority students, faculty, parents, senior

administrators and alums. Why, I even “did some time” as a grievance officer. ☺

So as you can imagine, there are *lots* of angles to my story. Using the symposium planners’ guidelines provides the best opportunity for me to share snippets of this story from: my perception upon arrival, my orientation to UD, my mentoring experiences, what has worked for me and why, as well as what has failed and how.

### **Perception upon Arrival and Orientation to UD**

My “orientation” to the University of Dayton is twofold. My first orientation occurred in 1977 when I entered the University as a student. I was 18 and a graduate of local Jefferson Township Senior High School. At that time, the racial mixture of my school district was approximately 50% black/50% white. The majority of the white students at my high school were children of farmers. While the white students I would encounter at UD were from much larger cities and communities. It was quite the cultural shift and the nexus of how I would come to view my UD experience.

I was enrolled in the School of Business Administration. And as a black female I often felt alone, unworthy, and truthfully intimidated in many of the classes I would take. There were few women in SBA let alone black women. So imagine my terror when hearing a rumor that the then-Dean of the Business School didn’t believe women *belonged* in business. Although this was only “rumored,” it fed my fears: I thought, if he wasn’t happy about women, he would most assuredly not be too thrilled to have a *black* woman in the SBA!

Then, late one evening as I was walking through the faculty halls of Miriam Hall to turn in an assignment, I caught site of a tall, burly, older black gentleman. His arms were heavy-laden with many papers and books. I just knew he wasn’t a student but I didn’t know why he was there either. I told him I was looking

for my professor's office. He pointed out the office and watched me slide my paper under the door as he unlocked a door nearby. This helpful, pleasant, and fatherly *black* man stood with a key to a faculty office—*his* office. I was in shock. I recall sputtering something to the effect of, “You’re a professor?! I don’t know who you are, or what you teach but I want to take your class!” I tell you, I was star-struck. Because it wasn’t the norm for me to see anyone who looked like me in *classes* let alone someone leading a class. He told me his name was Jim Wright and that he taught one of the upper-level business classes. In my young mind, I believed he could be someone to understand and mentor me, someone I could go to express my frustrations and fears, someone I could go to at those times when I felt I didn’t have anyone else in the SBA—or the entire University—who might understand my experience there. In just that short exchange, he had become my hero sent to rescue me when I felt lost. Sadly, he left UD before I could take a course with him; however, he remained an image of hope that I could complete the business degree. Of course there was, and remains, heartbreak for this missed opportunity.

My second orientation came in 1982. I was sitting out (from my undergraduate pursuit) when I learned of the UD employee-benefit tuition remission. I applied to work full-time in the School of Law as a faculty secretary (level 3) and was, thankfully, hired. I found a supportive community of women in the secretarial pool who would eventually become friends. I believe we found a bond as women in a very male-dominated environment.

I believe I was a bit of a novelty not just because of my race but also due to my age (23), marital status (single), aspirations (college degree), and outspokenness. This outspokenness was evidenced when a secretary on the first floor thought she would pay me a complement after hearing me talk. She said, “Well, Kathy, you don’t talk like most black people so I’m sure things

are different for you.” My response: “Exactly how many Black people do you *actually* know? Not the characters you see on television.” She grew quiet. I continued: “I speak this way as do many in my family, church, school, and community.” When she tried to explain (justify), I coolly shared that the characters she watches on television are nothing more than that—characters designed to perpetrate negative stereotypes of people who look like me. “It’s not authentic. Yet you, and others like you, move about this country operating from a position of ignorance. Sadly, not stepping out of your own prejudices and biases causes you to miss out on a lot in this world.” And I think this is where my role as a diversity educator began.

## **Mentoring Experiences**

Mentors at UD have come in all shapes, sizes, and colors for me. And sometimes they were found in unexpected places.

- The law professors who discovered I aspired to be an attorney and would subtly encourage me to pursue this dream.
- Dean Fred Davis, who asked me to come work for him (as a Secretary V) and supported my continued pursuit of a bachelor’s degree while allowing me to represent UDSL at minority law forums and college fairs.
- Deborah Moore, Tim Spraggins, and Verda George, who all served as mentors to me in my first professional role at UD. Here in the Office of Minority Student Affairs, I would be reminded that when I attended meetings I not only represented myself but also those who are unable to “find a seat at the table.” So it became comfortable for me to participate in meetings and on committees, recognizing that I am here to represent those black students who have not yet found their voice. And sometimes just being the brown face—like Jim Wright

was for me—who could possibly understand their experience.

- After the departure of Debra Moore and Tim Spraggins, Vice President for Student Development Bill Schuerman told me he wanted to appoint me to the directorship. Not recognizing my own growth and abilities, I said no. I didn't believe I could lead. Bill encouraged me to meet with Athletic Director Ted Kissell, Provost John Geiger, and President Ray Fitz to hear what they thought of my serving as director. I learned I was being watched more than I ever knew! I had no idea they had been watching—and I dare say participating in—my career trajectory. Each of those men said of course you can do this. Each recognized something in me that I didn't see for myself. They knew what I was capable of before I could even own it.

This is the role I try to play with students. Oftentimes we know what these young people are capable even when they don't know—or can't own—it. A gentle reminder of one's potential sometimes is all that is needed to turn a day around.

## **What Has Worked for Me and Why**

**Being Present.** There are times when I don't have answers for situations our students are encountering. I recognize that sometimes just to sit with an adult and be heard is all they seek.

**Being Honest.** I am honest with the young person to say, "I don't know, but let's take a moment to pray"; or to find some words of inspiration, to guide and direct.

**Leaning on God and Allowing His Creativity to Guide Me.** I never hide from the beauty of working in a faith-based institution and being free to lean on my (our) faith for answers. Many years ago I remember working with an engineering student, a black female, who was having a "bit" of a struggle. So

frustrated with her in-class experience, she was ready to give up. When she arrived at my door I could see in her face—and feel in her spirit—she was ready to bust! I remember thinking, God, I don't know what to do with her or what to say to her. I grabbed her by the hand and we took off walking in silence. She was so filled with rage at that time that I needed her to work some of that energy down. We walked from O'Reilly Hall to Stuart Hall back down Stuart Hill and over to St. Mary's Hall. I walked her into St. Mary's to look at the pictures of the graduates on the wall. The student was a chemical engineering major. I knew that in the composites on the wall was a picture of UD's first black graduate, Jason Alexander, also a chemical engineering student. Mr. Alexander graduated from the University in 1924. I believed she *needed* to see him so that she could see it was possible to graduate from UD as a person of color in engineering. I reminded her, "If this man could do it—when the KKK was attacking the University—and somehow the Marianists protected and guided him so he could complete his degree, then it's possible for you to get through this challenge."

These simple images—although vastly unchanged—are important for people to see. [In these images, they] see themselves reflected back. As Dr. Terrell Strayhorn of Ohio State University suggested in a SOCHE [Southwestern Ohio Council for Higher Education] talk, the images (pictures, art, etc.) implanted on our campus give students a sense of belonging. He reminds us of the importance of these images especially when the number of people of color is so low. The placement of a picture, statue can communicate volumes when we can't be in that space or place.

As a side note: I would love to see a statue of a black alum/faculty member or student erected on a central route through campus. This way, when the campus tours are underway and I or you are no longer here to tell the stories of what we've experienced today, then maybe some young person on that

tour—and not just black children and their families but also the white children and their families—can see that diversity reflected and embraced through the Marianist charism.

**Knowing Who I Am.** Recognizing my blackness has guided me every day and in every step on my way. I *am*, unapologetically, a black woman.

**Working for Something Greater than Myself—Education.** As I mentioned when I started here, it was about coming to work to finance an education. It wasn't so much about the paycheck. I believe this helped me to weather many storms of intolerance and ignorance.

**Being Mission-Driven.** I recognize, for me, the work I do is probably more mission-driven than it is financially driven. There is much in the Marianist mission and philosophy which undergirds my work. Understanding how the Marianists were formed, who they are, and who they report to be is important, especially when others might want to present a different idea about inclusivity and diversity.

**Saying Yes to the Marianists' Invitations.** When I think of the many invitations I've received to serve on programs, committees, panels, etc. to discuss our Catholic and Marianist identities, I often walk away growing more in my own faith tradition. I can recall a conversation I had with Father Gene Contadino where I chided him about *yet one more* invitation to discuss the Catholic and Marianist identity. "Why do you all keep asking me to be on these sessions about Catholicism.? You can't figure out yet who you are?!" I kidded. "You know I'm not Catholic, I'm not white, and I'm not male. Why do you want me there?" His answer to me was simply, "Because, Kathleen, you're not Catholic, and you're not white, and you're not male. That's why we *need* you there!" "In that case," I replied, "Ok." I knew I could do this, because it wasn't a matter of trying to fit in. It was a matter of being totally and fully who I am, and what I

could bring to this University as well as what I can share that helps this University to grow. So that's what has worked.

**Active Listening.** There's a passage in a poem [Max Ehrmann's "Desiderata"] that has guided me for many years: "Speak your truth quietly and clearly; / and listen to others, / even the dull and ignorant; / they too have their story." In order to help or to guide, we have to *really* listen to what's being said—and what's being left out. And at times we even have to listen to our own pain, in order to share it to help our campus and community grow and move.

### **What Failed and How**

While there are many failures I could point to over my 30-plus year career at UD, I would have to say the toughest—yet best lesson—came from recognizing when I had acted too quickly to take on another's battle, only to recognize they were not willing to participate in the fight themselves. Because I failed to do that deep/active listening, I found myself carrying another's mantle without full information and or their commitment. As Dr. Phil would say, "even the flattest pancake has two sides"! So I really try to listen and direct, not rush in to rescue.

Finally, I believe many in this millennial generation have a naïve—albeit surface—understanding of diversity. While they might know the music, foods, and even dress of a few differing cultures, they don't know much more—there's no real depth there. However, when I am too quick to judge them and be dismissive of their experience, I am reminded that when we were college-aged we too had a very naïve view of the world. When I forget this, I know I am on course to fail.

## Conclusion

I wish to share with you my hopes for this place called UD: That we will continue to provide fertile ground for our students and community, to test out theories and beliefs through more conversations like this symposium. That we will be open to learn from the usual as well as the “unusual” suspects. That we will learn to sit—at least for a little while—in our uncomfortableness as we strive to learn, lead, and serve in more inclusive ways. That we will remember UD is a place of learning and be open to learn as much as we can, to grow as much as we can, and recognize that discomfort is nothing more than growing pains.

I am appreciative of the invitation to share my story today. And I thank you for listening.

### Versalle Washington

#### Musings of a Black Lecturer at the University of Dayton<sup>1</sup>

My remarks have been influenced by reflections on W.E.B. DuBois’s concepts of the “the veil” and “double-consciousness,” which he poignantly explains in his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Originally published in 1903, the main argument that race is the main problem of the twentieth century remains relevant in the new millennium. Though DuBois uses these terms separately, their meanings and usage in his works are truly intertwined. These two concepts gave a name to what so many African Americans felt but previously could not express due to a

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<sup>1</sup> This is a portion of an essay “‘The Veil’ and ‘Double Consciousness,’” which Washington posted anonymously on the University of Virginia’s American Studies website. See <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug03/souls/defpg.html>.

lack of words to accurately describe their pain. The implications and connotations of these words were far-reaching: Not only did they succinctly describe the plight of being black and American back then, but they ring true to the core and essence of what it means to be black and American today.

### **My Experience at Dayton**

I arrived at Dayton in 2003 as a new professor of military science. The U.S. Army is a diverse organization, and one of the very first things that struck me about Dayton is that it was not very visually diverse. As I went about my duties, meeting department chairs, deans, the provost, and the president, that assessment did not shift. Probably the only thing about my experience at UD that hasn't been fabulous is that we haven't moved much further along the road to a diverse community of scholars.

We still don't, thirteen years later, have many black administrators. We briefly had a black vice president of enrollment management; we have a black vice president of human resources; and we have a black director of public safety (chief of police). There may be others, but these are the ones that come to mind. There are, I believe, no African Americans in academic leadership positions — no provost or associate provost, no deans or associate deans. Partly this is because we have developed a gap between the long-serving senior black faculty and the junior black faculty, so there aren't many candidates for these leadership positions — which is a structural flaw that is unlikely to change without substantial and intentional effort.

The second thing that struck me was just how evident, to borrow Elijah Anderson's term, the "cosmopolitan canopy" has been. From the moment of my arrival on campus, I have been embraced and included in a far greater fashion than I had anticipated. I associated myself with the black faculty, or at least

those of the black faculty who have chosen to associate, so I have had plenty of sage counsel from Vernellia Randall, Donna Cox, Andrew Ewwaraye, Kathleen Henderson, and many others. I have also, though, benefited from the encouragement and guidance of Joe Untener, Riad Alakkad, Deb Bickford, Janet Bednarek, and a host of other folks who don't look like me. There is plenty of support for us here, and while I can't claim a typical experience, I feel that the only limit to my opportunity at the University is my own choices.

I have had the great good fortune of getting to participate in the changes I want to see in the University. Symposia like this, mentoring and teaching, and traveling to recruit underserved populations have all allowed me the opportunity to shake the community out of its torpor, to question the apparent policy of gradualism, and to remind us that the Marianist charism calls for us to embrace the whole community, not just those who can afford the tuition.

Dr. Anderson told us last night that much of what we feel about whether we are in a white space or in the cosmopolitan canopy has to do with perception. Fair enough — and I mostly agree, although I sometimes have to acknowledge that there might not be any other way to perceive an intentional moment of unwelcome. The perception of the Santa Semana photos [depicting celebrants of the Spanish Holy Week tribute wearing traditional vestments, which are nearly identical to the robes worn by members of the Ku Klux Klan] in ArtStreet [a UD student residential community] a few years back may have been a misunderstanding, as might have been the UD police arrival at the BATU St. Patrick's Day party or the student who decided to intentionally step over several of the Black Lives Matter protesters a little more than a year ago (and don't get me started on the hatefulness that permeated the Yik Yak space during that event). But taken in aggregate, they begin to paint a disturbing picture of our community and of the welcome that black

students, staff, and faculty might expect to encounter periodically on our campus.

In many conversations with my black colleagues, I have come to recognize that despite the cosmopolitan canopy, there are some here who would indulge their baser instincts in microaggressions, in intolerance, and even in causing a moment of extreme disrespect. I am grateful that this has not been my experience here, both because I enjoy my work here at the University, and because I would not like to place Chief Chatman in the position of having to arrest me. I haven't been good with tolerating extreme disrespect, so I hope that streak of civility continues for me.

So where, in my view, does that leave the state of race on the University of Dayton campus? I fear that I have to echo the sentiments of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. more than half a century ago: Like the rest of our country, we have come a long way, but we have a long way to go.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.

## **Kenya Crosson**

### **Perception upon My Arrival to UD**

Everyone I encountered upon arrival was friendly, welcoming, and helpful—from administrators, to faculty, and staff. It was apparent from my interview visit that UD had a culture of civic engagement and there was a strong emphasis on creating an integrated living-learning community.

### **My Orientation to UD**

My orientation began a little early, during the summer before I began my appointment. We were able to meet with members of the black faculty and staff, who welcomed us and gave us tips on the transition to Dayton and the University. This was a helpful way to start the orientation process. Opportunities for informal

networking and mentoring can help with transitions, facilitate engagement with the UD community, and help the faculty member successfully navigate the academic environment. When these opportunities are not created or cultivated, it can lead to isolation for persons of color who encounter professional challenges or are not in welcoming or supportive academic units.

I also participated in the formal first-day orientation meeting and subsequent workshops and dinners held throughout the first year. Beyond those events, I had informal meetings or lunches to introduce me to other female engineering faculty.

### **Mentoring Experiences**

I had one formal mentoring experience through the Women's Center and informal interactions within my department and through the Black Faculty Association. We all know it is important to have a variety of mentors. I was fortunate enough to have a faculty member of color and a female faculty member in my department—and they provided good insight and resources. Also, it is helpful to know other senior black faculty who can help you navigate difficult situations. Matters of race or inequality are not always easy to discuss in professional settings, but for persons of color it may be necessary.

### **What Worked and Why**

The early orientation experience with other black faculty was key. Additionally, having individuals who acknowledge and recognize potential biases helps to combat feelings of isolation. Senior faculty who help you advance professionally and include you in activities or recommend you for activities that will help you advance professionally are key. As are leadership and administrators who send a consistent message about diversity to the community: for instance, last semester when President Curran sent a message to the community regarding race and

climate on campus and expectations of the campus community to respect the dignity of every person.

### **What Failed and How**

Recruitment and retention efforts have not been consistent. I have been on several search committees since I was a master's student at Penn State University. At times, I think the recruitment of faculty of color on this campus start and end with having a person of color on the search committee. The recruitment has to start before the search begins and needs to be ongoing. Other universities are doing this work on a consistent basis at conferences and through campus symposia. The participation of underrepresented faculty in these committee activities provides an opportunity to consider a diverse perspective. If you are the lone underrepresented person on the committee, you can present diverse perspectives, but one person cannot usually change a committee decision. If you are an untenured faculty member serving with senior faculty on these committees, you may not be comfortable being the person that has to provide the dissenting, but reasonable opinion.

Additionally, on committees tasked with working on diversity and inclusion, you usually see the same people who have a passion and/or personal interest in diversity. There should be more mechanisms in place that demonstrate that diversity is everyone's responsibility, and that academic units and the University have a clear, consistent message on diversity that everyone knows, can communicate, and supports.

UD has a consistent message about community and Marianist traditions that everyone can communicate. But what happens when you hear that message but the actions of others in the community indicate that you do not belong to the community or are not valued in the community? Overwhelmingly, this has not been my personal experience, but I know it has been the experience of other faculty and students of color, and this affects

retention. My only experience with this was when [tell experience of student surveys of faculty position candidates that said “just hire a white, male professor”]. But I know many other faculty who endure poor classroom behavior, unfair, and unsubstantiated comments on teaching evaluations, and other negative interactions. Students and parents often do not expect me to be the professor. When faculty spend time trying to improve teaching evaluations that were already biased, their research suffers. When you add the service load to this problem for faculty of color, it can feel like tenure is not achievable.

In my opinion, climate surveys are not very effective. Certain identifying information on these surveys (gender, ethnicity, academic unit, years of service), make it impossible for me to be anonymous.

The system for dealing with inequity—it is not transparent, and it is not apparent that it yields actionable results.

### **Any Conflicting Feelings?**

While I enjoy supporting diversity efforts on campus, and I think it is important to provide my diverse perspective, it is often overwhelming to be one of the persons on campus that is consistently called upon to discuss or provide a diverse perspective or approach. We should *all* feel empowered to discuss and support diversity in the context of UD’s mission and Marianist traditions.