

ZACHARY N. CLARK, M.A.

EDUCATOR | CHANGE AGENT | COLLABORATOR

724.882.5133 • z.n.clark@gmail.com • 1813 Dime Road, Vandergrift, Pennsylvania 15690 • zachclarkeducator.com • he/him/his

Personal Statement on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Social Justice

It may sound trite, but since my time in elementary school, I've always admired the words and works of Martin Luther King, Jr. He once said, "An individual has not started living until he [sic] can rise above the narrow confines of his [sic] individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity." His sentiment here acutely captures my own passion surrounding work with diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice: each of us must first understand and accept our own identities, privileges, and detractions, then we must open our eyes to those around us and acknowledge and accept their identities, and finally we must free our hearts and our minds to those identities, stripping away preconceived notions and biases so as to acknowledge their concerns and show them support. Beginning with the foundational and moving towards the aspirational, allow me to express my understanding, experiences, and values pertaining to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In my educational and workplace experiences, I've always defined diversity as the presence of a variety of identities as part of a community of individuals, equity as fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for individuals without regard to their identities, and inclusion as a variety of individuals with a variety of identities having power and opinions in decision-making constructs. To that end, social justice would be considered advocacy for change of society or of an individual institution based on these principles, while minoritized and privileged individuals stand in solidarity demanding values of human rights and dignity for individual human beings irrespective of their identities. I've also come to value the impact of intersectionality in the work of social justice within higher education, defined as the compounding and interplaying multiple privileged and marginalized identities that each of us have, of which some become more or less prevalent in individuals' experiences based on the context or environment in which they exist but also on the interactions with others' privileged and marginalized identities. I've been able to develop these frameworks through countless professional development opportunities, hundreds of hours of trainings and workshops, and close interactions with students with minoritized identities throughout my undergraduate, graduate, and professional experiences, especially while developing and managing multicultural education, outreach, support and programming for Black / African American, LGBTQ+, women and gender diverse, military-affiliated / veteran, Latinx, undocumented / mixed status, APIDA, American Indian / Indigenous, and other minoritized and marginalized campus populations while employed at CLC. Moreover, in my current service on Diversity Council, Lancer Equity & Success Council, the CLC Anti-Racist Committee, and the Black / African American, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ student-facing and employee-facing advocacy committee, I have been able to put my knowledge of JEDI theory to good work, translating such into powerful action on behalf of our entire community, on and off campus.

Other cogent examples of applying and committing to diversity, inclusion, and equity in higher education include my work with the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) Research & Scholarship Group (RSG), where I helped draft the new association-wide *Competencies for Diversity & Inclusion* document, which guides student activities professionals in their daily work and their ongoing professional development needs, and I helped revise the *Research Agenda* document, which guides assessment and research prerogatives for the association and its members. In its most recent iteration, we intentionally interwove diversity, equity, and inclusion in each focus area of the agenda compared to five years ago which had diversity, equity, and inclusion as a separate area, and appeared to be little more than an afterthought. I also worked in-depth to integrate meaningful diversity, equity, and inclusion training experiences for my former student leaders on IUP's campus programming organization, including use of the *ADDRESSING Model of Intersectionality*, the *Preconceived Notions* group activity, and the *Pyramid of Familiarity* group activity during Fall, Spring, and weekly professional development. Finally, since Summer 2020, I've participated in hundreds of different experiences, accounting for nearly two hundred hours of professional development pertaining directly to diversity, equity, and inclusion, including the Equity Summit, the Higher Education Assessment Conference 2020, the Assessment Institute, a variety of NACA and other workshops, and various town-gown opportunities, including the No Justice, No Peace Downtown Indiana initiative. Through these experiences of pushing predominantly white institutions in predominantly white communities to think more intentionally about JEDI work, I have been able to clarify, embrace, and rally my own JEDI values.

These frameworks and experiences culminate in an exceptional value for any institution and help drive incorporation of greater diversity, inclusion, and equity initiatives in any campus community. Institutional mission, vision, and values statements that directly and intentionally include greater social justice initiatives prepare institutions for success and student-centeredness in the twenty-first century and overlap with my own experiences and passions. Whether I was advocating for incorporating DEI priorities throughout the NACA Research Agenda, restructuring IUP campus programming to reflect collaborative and diverse programming and assessment, removing barriers to ongoing student success, driving majority white faculty and staff members to get involved in diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development opportunities offered by the Division of Student Affairs, or helping construct socially-aware, equity-responsive, equity-focused quantitative and qualitative assessment, evaluation, and research projects, such as institutional climate studies and engagement and community surveys, I passionately supported diversity, inclusion, equity, and social justice imperatives in the future of higher education.

I vehemently believe that I meaningfully contribute to diversity, equity, and inclusion work, not just as a seasoned student affairs educator but as an individual possessing various marginalized identities, as someone who is a white, cisgendered, male with a position of power who can do some good in advocating for and using his microphone to amplify the voices of those 'othered,' and as someone who stands as an ally to those harmed and othered by systems of privilege and white supremacy. I stand with fellow disruptors willing to break down barriers and rise to speak truth to those with power. And I will be able to do such at present and future institutions: 1.) translate theory and data into sound and informed practice, 2.) leverage my experience and the intersection of my visible and invisible identities to stand strong and speak truth to power, and 3.) build up a community of collaboration, trust, transparency, and respect that is the salient result of real diversity, equity, and inclusion work.