

FACULTY LEADER

VALERIE JOHNSON: DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION LEADER

Valerie Johnson is a faculty leader with a passion for and commitment to making cultural competence a standard at DePaul and beyond. Johnson, associate professor and chair of the political science department, has served on the university's Faculty Council and the Center for Identity, Inclusion and Social Change Advisory Board and the Faculty of Color and the Concerned Faculty groups, pressing for tenure equity at DePaul. Outside of DePaul, she is chair of the State of Black Chicago Congress, a steering committee member of the Illinois Committee on Black Concerns in Higher Education and involved with the Illinois Black and Hispanic Higher Education Alliance.

"In order to change anything, you must shape structure and day-to-day practices," Johnson says. "Conservative students feel they don't have a voice. Black students and the Black Student Union also feel marginalized." Johnson believes that to engage these and other marginalized groups, faculty and staff throughout the university need to become educated about and model cultural competencies. "We have to be more intentional than we typically are so students will understand and respect different perspectives, and know how to live in a civil society."

No stranger to advocating for cultural competency, Johnson recently discovered one of her own cultural blind spots by attending a workshop on transgenderism in the classroom. "I don't know much about sexual identity or the literature, the language of transgenderism. But I'm teaching on subjects where these might come up. I learned so much. One very

critical thing I learned was that Title IX has been tied to sexual identity and provides protection regarding sexual orientation."

Johnson is a strong supporter of the university's commitment to diversity and inclusion, but emphasizes that cultural understanding doesn't just happen. "Diversity is a value, but it has to permeate every unit,

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behavior and dialogue universitywide. We have to rise above our risk aversion over having difficult dialogues. Faculty have to be evaluated on creating a bias-free classroom."

"I've had some really engaging discussions about the election and about race, and I think people walk away with a different perspective," she says. "I understand more clearly how they feel; otherwise, your fears are projected onto other people."

Johnson is hopeful that universitywide practices will foster thoughtful and courageous dialogue, increase efforts to recruit diverse faculty and students, and promote a review of the curriculum to ensure diversity is reflected. She is actively working to promote and instill those practices in her department and throughout LAS. "I share my dean's vision to make LAS the vanguard of diversity and inclusion practices across the university," Johnson declares.



Johnson on promoting diversity & inclusion

- Town hall meetings that promote dialogue with people of diverse backgrounds
- Mandatory cultural competency training for each unit and faculty and staff
- Dedicated diversity-related questions on the university's institutional compliance test
- Creation of college diversity advisory committees to augment the role of college diversity advocates