

PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH OFFERS INSIGHT INTO CURRENT ATTITUDES

February 15, 2023

Communication key to building strong relationships

As we celebrate Black History during February, we are mindful of the many nuances and powerful topics that are highlighted during the month. Many of the subjects cast a spotlight on the most critical social, economic and legal issues at the heart of American democracy.

The original purpose of “Negro History Week,” established by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History in 1926, was to give living testimony to the year-round study of African American history. Since 1976, February has been designated Black History Month.

The history of enslavement, institutional discrimination and triumphs of African Americans since 1619 translate into a clarion call for equity and social justice. It’s a call that demands a response in these times of hate-inspired crimes, cynical demands to limit the teaching of African American history, and an increasing income-and-wealth gap based on race.

We take great pride in the work of our talented faculty and their scholarly understanding of the social, cultural and political forces that shaped the African American experience. Placing the highest priority on the values of diversity, equity and inclusion, we believe, is a direct and compelling approach to open doors to opportunity and social mobility.

While both the percentage of underrepresented minorities (URM) faculty and students have increased during the last six years, there is room for improvement and growth. Through Pell Grants, student aid, scholarships, work-study programs and the Golden Grizzlies Graduate initiative, we are working tirelessly to recruit and retain URM students.

Further developing a campus culture of diversity, equity and inclusion has been at the core of the work of Office of Multicultural Initiatives, DEI Council and the mission of our Chief Diversity Officer Glenn McIntosh. Their dedication and impressive impact are documented in the [“Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Annual Report 2022.”](https://www.oakland.edu/Assets/Oakland/diversity/files-and-documents/DEI-24615_AnnualReport_ADA.pdf) (https://www.oakland.edu/Assets/Oakland/diversity/files-and-documents/DEI-24615_AnnualReport_ADA.pdf).

At times, we haven't always been as clear and timely as we should be in asserting our commitment to DEI. For instance, last fall, we should have responded more promptly, after an incident at the Rec Center. Last week, I met with the members of the Association of Black Students to acknowledge that.

As we honor African American history, our promise is to always aim to live up to the ideals of diversity, equity and inclusion reflected in the aspirations of those we celebrate during Black History month – those whose words and acts inspired millions, and those whose everyday acts inspire us to be better than yesterday.

We look forward to an open and ongoing discussion about the concerns of students, faculty and staff as together we continue to build a welcoming campus.

Regards,

Ora

Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, M.D.

President, Oakland University

For more on African American Celebration Month at Oakland University, please visit: <https://www.oakland.edu/cmi/aacm/>
(<https://www.oakland.edu/cmi/aacm/>)