

[MUSIC PLAYING]

All right. Happy spring, Penguin Nation. This is Rhianna Johnson, Director of Guided Pathways and Partnerships, here to talk about all things Guided Pathways at the college. I've got Nicole Harris in the building. So we're going to get into it shortly.

All right. Hi, Nicole. How are you?

Good morning, Rhianna. Happy spring.

Happy spring. Welcome to the studio. So today, friends, we've got Nicole Harris with us. And Nicole is the director in the Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. And if you've been following the *Penguin Pathways* podcast so far, you know that Guided Pathways and diversity, equity, and inclusion are hand in hand, tied closely together, really interconnected, very focused on equity gaps and ensuring that all of our students have an opportunity to be successful at Clark College.

So I'm really excited to have you today. We weave that into all of our sessions. And really excited to hear about all the good things that you're doing for our students. So one of the Guided Pathways that you're working on is related to Black Student Transfer Pathways. So can you start by telling us a little bit about that?

Yeah, absolutely. And thank you for having me today, Rhianna. And I'm so glad that this space exists. Yeah, so the initiative for the Black Student Transfer Pathway, it's not official, and it's not official launch. I do want to put that out there first.

So the sort of my brainchild around that was to figure out a way to get early awareness out for Black students and their families around early college access and opportunity and then beyond that, right? So after students complete their associate's degree here at Clark College, what are their next steps? Obviously, they're either going into the workforce or they're transferring to a university where they can earn their bachelor's degree, so their four-year degree.

So with the gaps and the data around gaps of transferability and the rates, and there's more bumps in the road, so to speak, for Black students when it comes to transferring and transfer pathways, I wanted to be able to offer an opportunity for our Black students here at Clark College who are transferring into a university and going on to earn their four-year degree. So with that, the idea behind it is to include their family or support people in that process because culturally, having the family experience and family buy-in for Black families as we're navigating both college and career is very valuable for us.

So this year was really year one. And thanks to the funding from Guided Pathways, this just gave us a opportunity to do our evaluative year. And then next year, we'll get more into the weeds and work with OOI and, of course, the Student Affairs Office and advising to really figure out what our program needs to look like and what it needs to be and obviously tie those with the equity strategic plan of the college.

Awesome. What a great initiative. And in Guided Pathways Advisory Council this year, we've really reviewed a lot of data. And the data has shown that there continue to be some significant equity gaps in various success measures for students of color.

And we need to address those things. And we need to do some things to alleviate those gaps. So can you talk a little bit about why it's important to have culturally specific strategies to support Black student success?

Oh yeah, absolutely. I mean, it goes back to what you were saying, Rhianna, around the data. Unfortunately, we continue to see the disparities with Black students and completion and continuing on in their programs. So we just want to really be able to provide opportunities and pathways and services and supports to be able to help close those gaps and address the disparities that come along with it. So it's really important.

One of the cultural aspects is obviously having staff and faculty on the campus and in the classrooms who look like students to be able to have that sense of belonging. So that's one area. The other area, like I mentioned before, is really engaging family for the Black community and within Black families.

Our culture is rich, and it's deep, right? And so having our support system come along with us and being able to understand the systems of which our students are entering into and helping our students navigate those systems is really important. But we first have to be aware that they exist-- roads and access to education, and then that they exist.

And then once we have a better understanding, we can build education and supports to help the family and support people, those who are coming along in the education journey of Black students understand financial aid, so FAFSA, additional or other funding streams for education as well, all the support services within a college system.

So it's really important that we have an opportunity to understand what's going on inside the college for our students. And that's really personal to me because I'm a mother. And I have 1, 2, 3 young adults in college right now. And so as a family, we sat down. When my daughters were making their college decision, we sat down as a family.

And for at least two of them, I was able to travel down to their campus and see the campus, the atmosphere, if there was going to be inclusivity and belonging. And that's how we made our decisions about where the girls would attend college. And I do recognize I had the opportunity to do that, and not all families have opportunity to travel with their students to be able to make those informed decisions.

Yeah, absolutely. And we've definitely looked at our onboarding processes throughout the year in GPAC and recognizing that the fire-hose method does not work for most of our students. So speaking of engaging families and things like that, why don't you tell us a little bit about the event happening on Saturday, actually, two days from now?

Yes. Yes. Yeah, we are having, as part of the Black Student Transfer Pathway Initiative, one of the tenets on that are events, culturally specific events. So this event is the first-ever Black Student College Family Fair. It will be right here at Clark College, in Gaiser Hall in the Student Center.

We will start continental breakfast at 9:00 AM. And then we will have events throughout the day that will include student success tracks. We'll have a parent track. We'll even have a kids zone for the kiddos.

And Nikki Brown Clown, who's a culturally responsive educator, she's going to come out, and she'll do story time and balloons and crafts with the younger kiddos. We have Girls Inc. that's going to come in and host a STEM session. So the elementary and middle school students will get to go over to the STEM Building and have a live simulation of insects and bugs, which is super cool.

So we really try to make it inclusive and meet all aspects of a family unit. So again, realizing that when students are making decisions about their college journey, the family is involved. So that's why family is included, the community is included. So we just wanted to make it a fun day and a day that also centers Black joy and belonging.

So it will be culturally-- there will be some culturally Black aspects to it. We will have entertainment. We will have a band. We have dancers. So it is going to be a day of early college awareness and access and opportunity and just a day to celebrate as a community. So yeah, so come on out.

I love it. I'm so excited. Yeah, my husband and I will definitely be there, at least for lunch, if nothing else.

Come on through. Come on through. Oh, Ja'Das Soul Food is doing the catering for lunch, so. And a special shout out to the foundation, Clark College Foundation, for sponsoring that-- catering the breakfast and the lunch, so.

Absolutely. We get a lot of support from the foundation.

Yes.

Many groups definitely tapping into those funds. Well, listen, it's so wonderful to have you here today and to hear about some of the things you're doing. I'm really excited to see what's next, for next year to build on all the great work that you've done towards student success. So thank you so much for being here.

Thank you, Rhianna. This was really fun. Thank you.

Awesome