



Academic Affairs is a community of educators that supports the university's mission by enrolling, teaching, retaining, graduating, and inspiring diverse, lifelong learners prepared to contribute to the common good.

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This monthly newsletter features stories about events and programs within the Division of Academic Affairs. It is intended to inform, engage, and recognize members of our esteemed Community of Educators, all the faculty and staff who are committed to student success.

*Our next issue comes out on **March 30**. Should you wish to submit a story for the March issue, please click the button below. Submissions must be received by **Friday, March 24**.*

[Submit Story Here](#)

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Dear Colleagues,

February is Black History Month and, with that in mind, this issue of *The Provosts' Post* features stories from across the university of how WCU honors this aspect of our shared history and recognizes people who have inspired and challenged us to celebrate our differences and embrace a more inclusive environment.

As many of you know, West Chester University has embarked on an ambitious journey to take a more equity-minded approach to education with the Moon Shot for Equity mission aimed at closing institutional equity gaps, with investments in tools and technology aimed at student success, and with a renewed commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. In this issue, we feature **Dr. Tracey Ray Robinson**, WCU's first Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, a cabinet-level position. We also call attention to the roll out of our new student information system that will enhance efficiencies and prioritize student success. The **COMPASS program** is helping close equity gaps with Black male students, and **RUCCAS** is influencing change in communities across the region with two community-based academic programs providing hands-on learning and long-term community partnerships: the Urban Community Change (RUX) major and the Youth Empowerment and Urban Studies (YES) minor.

While these programs are on-going, WCU also hosted several events honoring Black History month. The executive director of the **Lest We Forget Museum of Slavery**, the only slavery museum in Philadelphia, Gwen Ragsdale, gave a free lecture on the diverse history of Philadelphia. Author **Heather McGhee** sparked an exciting conversation around the barriers to human commonality and the benefits we gain when we come together as a community. To celebrate diversity and inclusion, the Department of Art and Design collaborated with the Wells' School of Music on "**Women on Record: Music Vanguards of Pennsylvania**," an exhibit in Knauer Gallery celebrating women in the music industry.

These are only a few examples of the excellent programming and work taking place at WCU that reflect our commitment to student success and academic excellence. Be sure to scroll down to "Resource Corner" for important updates on trainings, submission requests and important information.

Sincerely,

Laurie and Jeff

BEING STUDENT READY

Update on WCU's Student System Modernization

As most of you are aware, WCU is modernizing our student information system (SIS). This process involves all units across campus including Academic & Enterprise Systems (AES), Registrar, Admissions, Financial Aid, Bursar, Institutional Research, Student Affairs, and Academic Affairs. You can view the project team on the [webpage](#). Launching this work more than a year ago, the goal is to fully implement our new system by August 2024.

In addition to a large contingent of staff and faculty contributing to the work, the process involves multiple layers of decision-making to create more flexibility, a modernization of business systems, increase efficiencies, and prioritize student success. You can learn more about the [guiding principles](#) for the project on the webpage.

To generate student engagement, the team introduced a naming contest to find a name to replace myWCU. As of today, we've received **almost 300 entries**. Students can submit entries **before 11:59 pm on March 3**. The SIS team will select the top three choices for campus to vote on. Winner will be announced in April.

In the coming weeks and months, the project team will provide status updates, decision highlights, and go lives through various channels across campus. These are designed to provide a window into the progress of the project and allow for the campus community to provide feedback along the way. Training for the new system will begin in fall 2023.

If you would like more information, please see the webpage and if you have any questions, email sis@wcupa.edu.

[More Info on the
Webpage](#)

STUDENT SUCCESS

WCU's COMPASS Program Closing the Achievement Gap

Many of you have heard about the COMPASS program, but do you know what it once stood for? Originally called the "Commitment to the Objective of Mentoring, Perseverance, Achievement, Sustainability and Success," it was renamed COMPASS after the pilot. COMPASS is aimed at supporting Black males currently on academic probation through collaborative efforts at

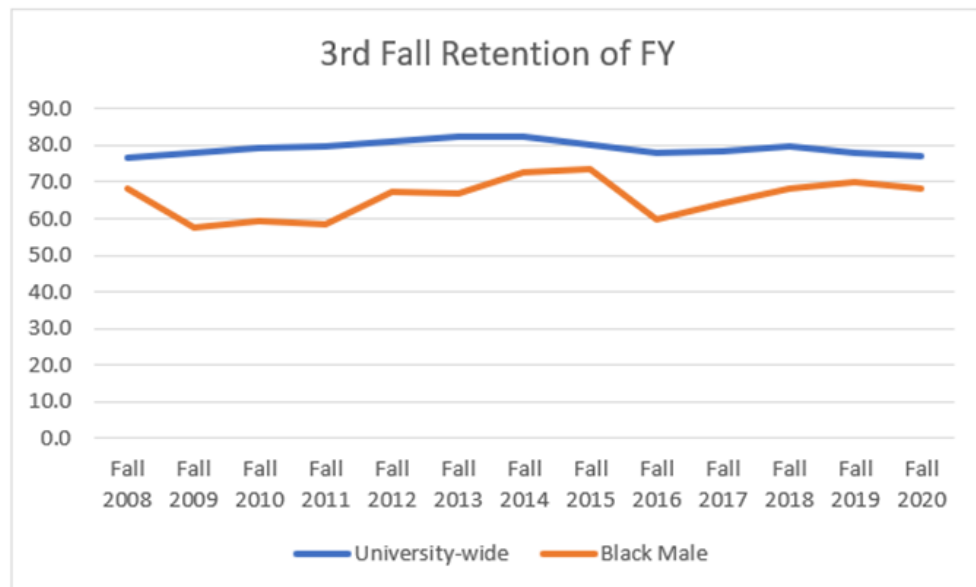


WCU. This institutional approach is multi-layered and involves direct, individualized contact between students and graduate level academic mentors.

Studies show Black male students are at a higher risk of dropping out, with retention rates at WCU between 1st and 3rd years consistently lower than the university average. In Fall 2020, the percentage of Black males who were retained through their third year was 8.8% lower than the rest of the university. This is known as an “equity gap.” In the past 13 years, that gap has been as wide as -21%. (See chart below from WCU Office of Institutional Research.)

COMPASS students attend weekly meetings which offer a safe space in which to foster trust and allow them to share successes, barriers, and challenges they face as a student at West Chester University. This program empowers students to advocate for themselves while connecting them to resources and services across the campus. The program objectives are: 1) To increase the 2nd to 3rd year retention rate among Black male students at WCU; and 2) To reduce the equity gap between Black male students and the rest of the student population by 20%. Our approach to the COMPASS program is multifaceted and has various components such as an academic graduate mentor, mandatory study halls, and mandatory tutoring.

Of the 23 students enrolled in COMPASS, four have graduated, seven are still enrolled and nine are no longer enrolled, but are in good academic standing to continue at WCU or elsewhere. **That's an 87% success rate!** Of the 23 who started in the program, of whom we might not expect ANY to be retained and go on to graduate because of their academic standing, 20 got back on track.



[Learn More](#)

ACCESS

WCU and Reading Area

Community College Sign Dual Enrollment Agreement

As part of a first-time partnership, Reading Area Community College (RACC) and WCU came together today to sign a degree completion agreement that will provide greater access to a baccalaureate degree for RACC students. The new agreement between the two institutions enables qualified, enrolled RACC students to earn an associate degree and then transfer seamlessly to WCU with a renewable scholarship and priority housing. Eligible RACC students will receive a joint invitation from RACC President Dr. Susan Looney and WCU President Dr. Chris Fiorentino to enroll in the new dual admission program.



Effective February 6th, more than 25 associate degree programs at RACC will transfer directly into parallel programs at WCU for eligible students. In addition, a renewable scholarship award of up to \$2,000 per academic year will be available to eligible RACC students.

[Learn More](#)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Community Organizing: Making a RUCCAS

On February 8th, the **Rustin Urban Community Change Axis (RUCCAS)** offered three student and alumni perspectives on Community Change Studies, in a "Lunch (En)Counters" webinar hosted by the Frederick Douglass Institute. RUCCAS is a university-community center which houses two rigorous community-based academic programs that provide hands-on learning and long-term community partnerships: the Urban Community Change (RUX) major and the Youth Empowerment and Urban Studies (YES) minor.

Lilah Saber (WCU '18, YES and Social Work) is now the Director of Organizing for Philadelphia at the faith-based organizing outfit, POWER (Pennsylvanians Organized to Witness, Empower and Rebuild). She shared the ways prejudice and oppression arose after 9-11 and affected her Middle Eastern-descent family. After coming to WCU and taking YES and other courses, and being placed as an intern with POWER, she realized that people could come together, raise their voices, and push to hold those in power to account, and once she realized this was possible, she "didn't have any other choice" but to become an organizer.

Sean Donoghue-Neider (WCU '23 RUX and Sustainability), a returning student, discussed his capstone fieldwork in RUX 400 which built on his already-ongoing struggle alongside his co-workers to establish a union at his job, which is with an agency that provides

coaching and support for individuals with developmental disabilities. He proudly noted that they are about to have a union vote, after about eighteen months of organizing, and win or lose, they will have come together in solidarity.

Amina Witaker, a new transfer to WCU, noted that actually being asked to do the presentation allowed her to reflect on her history of community change work--and recommit to Community Change Studies and WCU as a whole. Her community work began from the time she started at a youth media program at Temple, which taught her that her voice and perspective mattered, to her current RUCAS course, YES 300, where she is able to integrate her ongoing hands-on work in Philadelphia around youth, gentrification, homelessness, racial justice, and housing, with theory presented in the course. The small class size allows for integration of the two and support of other students and faculty.

Questions about RUCAS can be directed to **Dr. Hannah Ashley, Director**, or **Dr. tonya thames-taylor, Associate Director**.

DIVERSITY

WCU Welcomes Executive Director of Philadelphia's Lest We Forget Museum of Slavery

On February 13, Gwen Ragsdale presented a free lecture in person and virtually in WCU's Philips Autograph Library. Ragsdale is the founder and executive director of Philadelphia's **Lest We Forget Museum of Slavery**, which is the only slavery museum in Philadelphia and the only museum with legitimate artifacts from the Transatlantic slave trade. An exhibition tour and reception followed the presentation in the University's Museum of Anthropology and Archeology in the Old Library.



Using her collection of rare, authentic artifacts as a guide, Ragsdale illustrated the different coming-to-America experiences held by enslaved people. Her visit is part of a series of lectures held by WCU's museum in connection with its **Beyond the Bell: Philadelphia's Global Heritage exhibition**. Created in partnership with the **Global Philadelphia Association** (GPA), the exhibit was designed to inform attendees of the diverse history surrounding the greater Philadelphia area.

According to Michael Di Giovine, museum director, director of the Museum Studies Program, and lead curator for the exhibit, "Gwen's talk, in which she points out that not everyone came to Philadelphia for the same celebrated reasons such as freedom of religion or to participate in a robust labor market, causes us to stop and think about the sacrifices of so many different people, the suffering of so many different people, and how we should be empathetic toward others and grateful for the lives we have today."



Annual Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Campus Commemoration 2023 features "A Conversation with Heather McGhee"

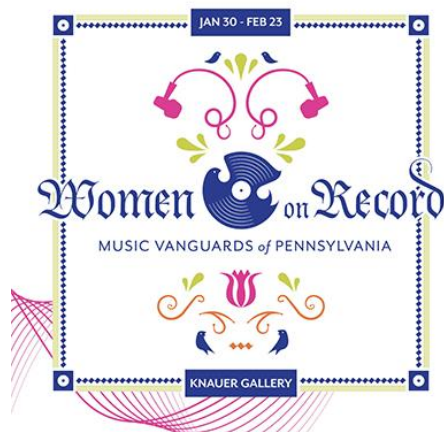
Heather McGhee, author of New York Times Bestseller "The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together,"

came to WCU on Tuesday, January 31, 2023. Members of the WCU community were invited to join in an exciting conversation with Heather McGhee, speaker, advocate and bestselling author, around exploring barriers to human commonality and the benefits that we gain as a community and country when we come together in unity to accomplish things that we cannot do on our own, a concept McGhee has coined as the "solidarity dividend." The event was sponsored by the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, in collaboration between Delaware County Community College and West Chester University.

To learn more about the cost of racism, click the link below to Heather's TEDTalk.

[Heather McGhee's TEDTalk](#)

SCHOLARSHIP & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Women on Record Exhibit Showcases Women Vanguard in the Music Industry

The Department of Art + Design opened **Women on Record: Music Vanguard of Pennsylvania** in Knauer Gallery, Swope Music Building & Performing Arts Center, 817 S. High Street, West Chester. The exhibit, which explores the achievements of women vanguards from Pennsylvania who challenged the exclusionary practices of the music industry from

colonial America to today, was on display during the month of February.

Dr. Hayoung Heidi Lee of the Department of Music Theory, Wells School of Music, and Karen Watkins, Department of Art and Design, College of Arts & Humanities, were awarded a PASSHE Faculty Development grant to create this collaborative exhibit with students from Dr. Lee's Gen Ed. class on women in music and students from the Department of Art + Design.

Watkins says, "From local to global music stages, women musicians have encountered persistent barriers to musical composition, recording, and performance opportunities. Bold and visionary musicians overcame pervasive gender and racial discrimination through

creativity, innovation, and advocacy. Their stories are the sounds of inclusion and equality."

FEATURED STAFF

Dr. Tracey Ray Robinson has served as West Chester University's inaugural Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer since 2018 and, as of July 1, 2022, she was named WCU's first Vice President for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, both Cabinet-level positions.

Dr. Robinson has been working in higher education for over 20 years, serving in many capacities in academic affairs, student affairs and as a faculty member. Previously, she worked at North Carolina State University for 20 years where she served as the Assistant Vice Provost in the Office for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (OIED), Director of Multicultural Student Affairs, Interim Director for the African American Cultural Center, Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Department of Curriculum Instruction & Counselor Education and an adjunct faculty member with the Africana Studies Program.



Her background as a Social Psychologist has enabled her to conduct research and program assessment to assist with effectively advancing university-wide leadership and assessment in the areas of student recruitment, retention and graduation and well as campus climate, diversity education, advocacy and professional development. In her WCU role, she also supports faculty and staff diversity initiatives including new employee orientation, new faculty orientation, and faculty pipeline initiatives such as West Chester's Frederick Douglass Teaching Fellows Program and NC State's Building Future Faculty (BFF) program. She has led unconscious bias and prejudice reduction workshops, as well as taught undergraduate courses on cultural competence. She has designed programs and courses that promote personal, professional and leadership development, while fostering student, faculty and staff engagement and success.

Dr. Robinson has presented at several national conferences including the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education (NCORE), the American Psychological Association (APA), the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), Association of Black Cultural Center's (ABCC) national conference, and the National Science Foundation (NSF) Engineering Research Centers Annual Meeting. In 2013, she served as the conference co-chair for the 12th Annual Social Equity Leadership Conference: Globally Engaged, Locally Responsible- New Challenges for Social Equity. This annual international conference hosted through the National Academy of Public Administration highlights existing and emerging issues involving social equity in nonprofits, education, policing, and at-risk communities including immigrants, aging and the elderly populations, housing, transportation, environmental protection & sustainability. She is also a trained facilitator through the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI).

Prior to entering academia, she worked at various levels for a Raleigh, North Carolina based non-profit organization, Community Partnerships, Inc. which serves individuals with

disabilities through an array of community-based services from birth through adulthood. In 1999, she received the Citizen Involvement Award through the Raleigh Mayor's Committee on Persons with Disabilities. In 2006-2007, she co-chaired NC State's 50th Anniversary of African American Undergraduates Task Force. More recently in 2018, she was awarded The Old North State Award, by Governor Roy Cooper in North Carolina for her exceptional service and dedication.

Dr. Tracey Ray Robinson earned a B.A. degree in Psychology, an M.S. in Social Psychology and a Ph.D. in Social Psychology with a minor in Public Administration from NC State University. She firmly believes in global citizenship and can often be found sharing the quote, "The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page."
~Saint Augustine

RESOURCE CORNER

Call for Proposals: Provost's Enrollment Enhancement and Planning Grants

West Chester University has been fortunate to experience an extended period of enrollment growth, which has contributed to our success. However, we have begun to transition into a new era of enrollment management where growth will be more difficult, and retention will require additional attention and investment. Given all of this, we are pleased to announce the creation of the **Provost's Enrollment Planning Investment Grants (PEPI)**. These grants are meant to fund proposals from teams of faculty and/or staff that seek to address our enrollment challenges and opportunities. We welcome proposals from entire departments, interest groups, collective bargaining units, shared governance leadership teams, and others. We view these grants as not only an investment in our students' success, but an investment in our faculty and staff.

Proposals should include a brief abstract (less than one-page), a narrative not to exceed five pages, and a budget detailing any faculty and/or staff compensation and any operating needs. We are looking for proposals that will focus their initial work during summer of 2023 and seek to complete the work no later than the end of the spring 2024 semester. The goal is to implement the interventions no later than the 2024-25 academic year. **Proposals should be electronically submitted to the Office of the Provost by April 3rd, 2023** via e-mail to Provost@wcupa.edu. Award notifications will be distributed by April 28th, 2023. Questions can be directed to Cheryl Neale-McFall, interim Associate Provost for Research and Creative Activity at CNeale-McFall@wcupa.edu.

For more
information

Equity-Mindedness Leadership in Practice Sessions

Part of WCU's **Moon Shot for Equity** mission, you're invited to a special session on Equity-Mindedness Leadership in Practice. This training, offered in partnership with EAB, is geared toward faculty and

staff across campus who are helping to foster equity-mindedness in our work.

Session Overview: EAB team members will define equity-mindedness and what it looks like to cultivate this mindset in support of student success and institutional transformation. This session will also address institutional contributions to inequitable outcomes and how leaders can reflect on their own work to begin the process for change. The discussion will focus on how inequity emerges across many strategic pillars of an institution and how barriers to change often manifest.



Dates (choose 1):

Tuesday, February 28th 8:30-10 am (Merion 113)

OR

Wednesday, March 1st 3-4:30 pm (Anderson 211)

Please click button below to register for one of the two sessions.

***Note:** if you attended this session in October 2022 please do not sign-up again.*

[Register Here](#)

Call for Manuscripts: JARIHE 2023

The Journal of Access, Retention, and Inclusion in Higher Education supports research in the areas of developmental education, access, retention, inclusion, and student success in higher education. Contributors provide scholarly research, practical insight, and accounts of best practices to support students from traditionally underrepresented, first generation, and other marginalized communities. Readership includes faculty, program managers, legislators and college/university senior leadership. Submissions will be accepted through April 1, 2023, and can be accepted at jarihe@wcupa.edu. Please direct any questions to John B. Craig, Ed.D., Editor, at jcraig@wcupa.edu.

[For more information](#)

WCU IRB Q&A Zoom Sessions

The WCU Institutional Review Board (IRB) will host IRB Q&A Zoom sessions for the campus community. Please find linked below the spring 2023 Q&A Zoom sessions dates, times, and zoom links. All may attend any of the scheduled sessions.

[Click to Register](#)



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