**Being Effective in an Environment that Values Diversity**

David Vasquez

I am incredibly drawn to the vision of UHDS to engage students, enrich their lives and help them thrive. The Residence Halls are unique places giving students an opportunity to grow personally, socially and academically. They also play an integral role in helping students adjust and form connections to the OSU community, so it is crucial that the Residence Halls are caring and inclusive places that value diversity. The Area Director for Academic Initiatives plays an incredibly important role in creating an environment that values diversity through education. The role is also important in removing barriers and creating pathways to success for students.

My professional and personal background has provided me experience in creating an inclusive and caring environment for students, staff, faculty and members of the community. As an Instructor at LBCC, the Dean of Education wrote in my review, “You do a wonderful job creating an open, welcoming, supportive atmosphere. It’s clear your students feel at ease.” I feel that developing relationships and being kind and caring can help tremendously in creating an environment that values diversity. As an instructor, I loved seeing the nervous quietness of the first week being replaced with warmth and support as the students got to know me, other students and my desire for them to learn and succeed. It would be my goal to bring this same energy and community building to this role.

Besides being an instructor my role at the Basic Needs Center has been transformative for me in learning how to work in an environment that values diversity. The first part of why this was so important is our leadership understood the power of education and our staff continually engaged in active learning in how to create and foster an environment that values diversity. We were also given time to read and discuss books like, “Feeding the Others” which helped create a safe and supportive community for discussion. This open discussion allowed me to learn from others and expand my own knowledge. Second, I led our Food Assistance Program where I processed around 1,200 need-based applications per term. My work included reading through at risk applications and then providing additional support and resources for students struggling from small to very large and complex issues. It could often be difficult and challenging seeing some of the struggles that students were going through but was an incredible learning experience that has allowed me to grow in both empathy and my desire to support students.

While my roles in Student Affairs and as an instructor have allowed me to foster an environment that values diversity, I have also discovered the power of data and technology as tools that are quite effective in understanding issues and advocating for change. While working in the Division of Student Affairs I was asked by the Dean of Student Life to analyze demographic data at the Career Development Center. I was able to utilize Python and Java to gather and analyze almost five years of past data that allowed us to see what student groups were not being supported as fully as they should. I wrote multiple reports from this data that were used by leadership at the Career Development Center and the Division of Student Affairs. I also utilized this data to work with leadership at the Career Development Center to found an Advisory Committee with business partners from companies like HP, Target and the United Way.

As an undergraduate student I worked as an intern at Legacy Health System. In this role I worked with the Director of the Supply Chain to create a plan to attract and retain more minority owned vendors. I utilized data to understand their current supply chain and then spent time in the community learning from minority business owners about the struggles and challenges they faced. I utilized this combined knowledge of personal experience and data to put together a plan to make it easier for minority owned businesses to partner with Legacy Health System which created the foundation for what they use today.

There are many barriers and challenges students face when they first begin their time at University. I did not come from a strong academic background and remember well the feelings of stress and shame of performing poorly on a midterm. The support and community I found at OSU allowed me to learn, grow and succeed. Through their support I was able to gain a master’s degree in the College of Engineering funded by the Department of Energy, publish and receive a grant and be nominated by faculty and selected as an ARCS Fellow. My goal in this position would be to help remove the barriers students face. My time at the Basic Needs Center really helped me understand the unique needs of traditionally underrepresented students, low income and first-generation students.

I firmly believe that education can transform individuals, create more equitable environments and build up entire communities. My goal in this role would be to work with the Academic Learning Assistants and other staff to create a positive learning environment that fosters a connection to others in the Residence Halls, academic resources and the OSU Community.