



Office of Equity and Inclusion Newsletter

April 4, 2022



A Message from Dr. Keith Johnson, Vice President for Equity and Inclusion

“Living With Fear”

Dear Friends,

East Tennessee State University, like all other colleges and universities in the country, is well into its third calendar year defined by COVID. The pandemic continues to threaten and shift the stability and existence of many institutions. Infrastructure, operations, and budgets are all taking a hit. And declining student enrollment in higher education is just one part of its anxious spiral.

On a positive note, over the last two years many colleges successfully implemented new operations, new curriculum, established and expanded on-line learning, broadened their recruiting territories, and developed new policies for working remotely. And COVID provided a lot of additional state and federal funding to colleges and universities. This funding accelerated many important projects that would normally have been placed on hold.

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***“We are stronger when we listen
and smarter when we share.”
~ Queen Rania Al Abdullah ~***

**We Moved!!
Visit us in our new location at
109 Burgin Dossett Hall.**

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But some trends in higher education- such as low enrollment for people of color- were accelerated by the pandemic, and this is pushing universities to respond. Across the United States and prior to the availability of vaccines, over ten percent of Latino and Black students cancelled their postsecondary education plans for the fall semester of 2021.

White and Asian students were least likely to cancel their postsecondary education plans at a rate of just over five percent. And despite vaccine availability, students who already planned to, then dropped out by more than fifty percent across all racial and ethnic groups. When students delay college plans, they are less likely to complete their degree. This leads to depressed wages and marginalized, frustrating lives.

According to the National Student Clearing Research Center, undergraduate enrollment declined over all by three and a half percent in the Fall of 2021. This percentage represents approximately three-fourths of the institutions who reported. ETSU also experienced a dip in enrollment and weathered budget cuts. Many institutions will continue to struggle to attract students.

During our current economic instability and our deep political divides these low enrollment challenges may not be easily overcome, especially for community colleges. However, declining enrollment, lack of significant funding, budget cuts, tuition increases, and the distressed state of a current economy are all common issues that universities have managed successfully in the past.

But during this pandemic, universities across the country have been drawn into a partisan fray like no other. And it may impact the way we educate students. Diminishing trust in postsecondary education, particularly among conservatives, inspired lawmakers to argue that colleges and universities drag students to liberal viewpoints and create environments deliberately hostile toward the GOP. Critical Race Theory and other progressive concepts are used as examples to describe hostility toward the right.

Governing boards and policymakers- closely tied to the state leaders who appoint them- have begun to intervene in higher education more intensely. Many universities across the country are under greater scrutiny from law makers and governing boards. Decisions impacting chancellor appointments and accreditations are affected. And educational agencies are using philosophical differences instead of facts to determine whether or not faculty may testify in lawsuits against the state.

Governing bodies are usurping their authority. For example, Nikole Hannah-Jones, the Pulitzer Prize winning writer for the New York Times Magazine, was denied tenure at the University of North Carolina by the board of trustees because of her work on the **1619 Project**. The project established that in 1619 when slavery began on our soil, it was the watershed event that would lead to the development of United States of America.

The backlash labeled Jones's work as propaganda, and her work has galvanized a

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continuing debate from conservative groups. North Carolina legislature appoints the university system's Board of Governors. This board has significant control over the university's Board of Trustees.

The opinions of over 40 UNC journalism department faculty members determined that Hannah Jones's twenty-year distinguished record far exceeded qualifications for the position in question. So, after much backlash and national attention, the Board of Trustees for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reversed their decision, granting Jones tenure, which she did not accept.

And South Carolina legislature is considering the elimination of tenure for faculty in public higher education employed after December 2022. The bill is called the "Cancelling Professor Tenure Act." One of the provisions is to add language to a new hire contract, limiting employment to five years and a provision that allows termination of a teaching contract prior to the expiration date. This, among other similar cases, threatens the freedoms included in tenure and promotion processes. For more information please [click here](#).

In 2021, a Republican delegation of the Tennessee senate sought to punish student athletes who protested by kneeling during the national anthem at a sporting event. The same committee asked the senate to require university leaders to establish a policy banning athletes from protesting. These and other types of active involvement of state officials continues to disrupt the operations in public higher education institutions across the country. For example, in my opinion, [House Bill 2670](#) is a deliberate attempt to rewrite history and further limit classroom discussions about the ugly truth of our country's past. Just because our country has a ugly past, it doesn't mean that our present and future are limited to just that. Therefore, past, present and future in the context of teaching history or any other related subject matter is important to truly understating who we have become as a country.

Tennessee Bill 2670 assumes that students are being indoctrinated to extreme liberalism by learning about divisive concepts such as sex, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, color, and national origin. If it passes, then current inclusive curriculum may be deemed a threat to the unity of our country. This legislation mainly prohibits blaming White Americans for the oppression of Black Americans over hundreds of years, through slavery, and subsequent segregationist laws and the codifying of hate crimes against people of color well into the twentieth century.

But shifting regional and national outcomes mean that ETSU needs to take strong, long-term steps to meet its traditional mission with a greater accent on equity and inclusion. ETSU has grown in diversity, but a huge amount of work remains to close the gaps for people of color, or of other diverse backgrounds, in student and faculty success and engagement.

Continued ~ Message from Dr. Keith Johnson

ETSU has set an aggressive goal to embed diversity, equity and inclusion in the work of the university throughout teaching, research, service, and training. This work will lead to the application of becoming a [Higher Education Excellence in Diversity](#) (HEED) designated institution. Those goals will be incorporated into a long-term strategic planning process that will unfold during 2022.

As an institution, East Tennessee State University continues to embrace our core values which include the following:

- **PEOPLE** come first, are treated with dignity and respect, and are encouraged to achieve their full potential.
- **RELATIONSHIPS** are built on honesty, integrity, and trust.
- **DIVERSITY** of people and thought is respected.
- **EXCELLENCE** is achieved through teamwork, leadership, creativity, and a strong work ethic.
- **EFFICIENCY** is achieved through wise use of human and financial resources.
- **COMMITMENT** to intellectual achievement is embraced.

Sincerely,
Dr. Keith Johnson

National Arab American Heritage Month

Arab American Heritage Month is in April. It celebrates the Arab American heritage and culture and pays tribute to the contributions of Arab Americans and Arabic-speaking Americans. Arab Americans include many faiths, races and ethnicities, and ancestry in any one of 22 Arab countries that span northern Africa to western Asia. What these diverse countries share most in common is the Arabic language.

The [Arab American National Museum](#) (AANM) in Dearborn, Michigan is the nation's only cultural institution that documents, preserves and presents the history, culture and contributions of Arab Americans. The AANM offers [Cultural Competency Workshops](#). Workshop participants will gain a better understanding of the history, culture and contributions of Arab Americans through interactive cultural activities.

The [Alif Institute](#) was established in Georgia to foster the understanding and appreciation of Arab cultures. They offer programs/classes in Arabic Language, Study Away/Abroad, Cooking, Art, Dance, Music and more. Alif also partners with [StoryCorps](#) to preserve and share stories to build connections between people.

Honeycomb (Khaliat Al Nahl) Recipe

Honeycomb bread or khaliat al nahl in Arabic is a middle eastern dessert, especially popular in Yemen. It translates to beehive because the dough is divided into many pieces and connected to look like a honeycomb. It can be described as a fluffy, soft bread filled with cheese and drenched in honey from the mountains of Yemen.

The recipe can be found at:

<https://www.arabamerica.com/honeycomb-khaliat-al-nahl.../>



The World of Arabic Coffee



More than a thousand years ago, coffee beans were known in Africa and the Middle East for their stimulating and fortifying properties. The legend goes that an Ethiopian goatherd named Kaldi, or perhaps Khalid, saw his goats prancing about after eating the berries of a wild bush and thought he would try them too. From Ethiopia the consumption of coffee beans spread to the Middle East, where it became especially popular among Sufi monks, who used the beans to stay awake and alert through long nights of prayer and while practicing their devotions. Read more: <https://www.pinkjinn.com/2022/02/16/dive-into-the-world-of-arabic-coffee/>

Meet Rawan Felemban, Future Dental Hygienist



As an international Saudi student living in the United States, for five years, I have learned many things, such as opening my mind to different cultures and religions. Seeing the world from a different perspective will make you more patience and wiser. Besides, I grew up in a house that taught me to follow my passion and try everything when the chance comes to me. Studying abroad, especially in the United States was constantly a hope and dream to get my education and now I'm getting my undergraduate degree as a dental hygiene student in spring 2022.

Traveling on budget and making an itinerary was new to me and I have learned here. Furthermore, I had the chance to do my bucket list. For example, the Grand Canyon, Horseshoe Bend Canyon, and Niagara Falls. While traveling I explored myself, finding inner peace and to appreciate the little things I have. Being adventurous will take my energy to the maximum level of enjoyment. Lastly, I have made friends across the country between the states such as Arizona, California, and Boston. I always like to teach my friends some basic Arabic language such as Thank you (Shukran), Bon Appetit " bil-hanā' wa ash-shifā'. ~ Rawan Felemban

Get Acquainted With....



**Lamis Ibrahim, MD, FACP,
Quillen College of Medicine**

Dr. Lamis Ibrahim is of Palestinian origin, born and raised in Lebanon then moved to the United States of America in 2005. She is currently an Associate professor of Medicine at East Tennessee State University's Quillen College of Medicine. Board certified in Internal Medicine and Infectious Diseases, she serves on the faculty of the Department of Internal Medicine, Division of Infectious Diseases and is also the Director of Senior Medical Student Education. She is an Infectious diseases staff physician at the Johnson City Medical Center and Franklin woods Community Hospital.

Dr Ibrahim earned her medical degree in Lebanon and then completed both her residency in Internal Medicine and her fellowship in Infectious Diseases at East Tennessee State University.

Dr. Ibrahim is co-author of several book chapters, in addition to articles in peer-reviewed journals.



**Dr. Matthew Fehskens, Assistant
Professor for Foreign Languages,
Associate Professor, Spanish**

Dr. Fehskens joined the East Tennessee State University faculty in fall 2011, where he has been active as a publisher and researcher, working primarily in deep readings of Hispanic Modernism in a transatlantic, denation-alized context. This interest has taken him to studies of French philosopher Henri Bergson, and most recently to the Jesuit roots of aspects of Literary Modernism in Spanish. He is Director of the ETSU Education Abroad program to Spain, and recently has returned after traveling the Iberian Peninsula with twelve amazing students. For the past three years, his curiosity has taken him to study the Arabic language and the pervasive presence of Arabic language and culture in Spain; he was able to apply this knowledge most recently when teaching the history of Al Andalus in Toledo.

Dr. Fehskens has continued to study Arabic through an on-line tutor as well as various friendships he has made at the Islamic Center of Northeast Tennessee. He recently returned from Quito, Ecuador, where he is creating several programs for ETSU's Year of Global Engagement with this South American Country.

Call for nominations: ETSU Staff Woman of the Year - 2022

The **ETSU Commission for Women Standing Committee** and **Women's Resource Center** are seeking nominations for the ETSU Staff Woman of the Year Award.

This is a prestigious honor that recognizes one extraordinary staff member. Nominators are asked to submit a nomination form and a narrative about the nominee. Nominators are strongly encouraged to submit nominations for staff-classified women and to highlight the often-unnoticed accomplishments of those women who have made a notable impact in the workplace and/or improved the quality of life for others.



The award recipient will receive a cash award and plaque. The deadline for nominations is April 15 at <https://www.etsu.edu/wrcetsu/award.php>.

For more information on the nomination process, contact the Women's Resource Center at (423)439-5772 or wrcetsu@etsu.edu.

Day of Giving, April 19, 2022

4 **Easy Ways** to Help on Day of Giving, April 19, 2022



Give on April 19, 2022 at www.etsu.edu/give.



Advocate for ETSU by sharing with others.



Inspire others with a matching or challenge gift.



Follow Advance ETSU on social media.



ETSU DAY OF GIVING
★ ★ 2022 ★ ★

[Visit the ETSU Day of Giving 2022 webpage](#)

TBR Grant Opportunities – 2022-2023

Course Redesign – High Impact Practice Grant (CR-HIP)

This grant is intended to assist faculty in the re-design of courses for which data show evidence that performance gaps exist for student populations in the course and that re-design efforts will address those gaps. Maximum funding is \$8,000 to be used primarily for faculty release time. The grant is available to fund redesign of courses to add a particular HIP for courses based on institutional self-study data.

*Proposals should be reviewed by the Office of Equity and Inclusion before the **April 8th** submission deadline. [Click here](#) for more information and to access the application and grant platform guide.*

Grant Application Timeline: Application Status – Open
Notice of award decisions: by May 6, 2022

Student Engagement, Retention, and Success (SERS) Grants

The primary purpose of the SERS grant is to provide funding for innovative and effective outside-of- the-classroom programs or projects that increase success rates and improve educational outcomes for traditionally underserved students or underrepresented populations.

*The Office of Equity and Inclusion is now accepting SERS grant proposals for fiscal year 2022-2023. Proposals should be received by the Office of Equity and Inclusion by **April 18th** for review before the **April 29th** submission deadline. [Click here](#) for more information and to access the application and grant platform guide.*

Grant Application Timeline: Application Status – Open
Notice of award decisions: by May 20, 2022

Black Male Success Initiative Grant

This grant program is designed to address access and success rates for black males. This will be a multi-year grant to allow for planning, implementation, and assessment.

Grant Application Timeline: Application Status – Not Yet Open
Application Submission Deadline: TBD
Notice of award decisions: TBD
Program Timeline: TBD

For information regarding the substance of the grants or inquiries about the grant portal contact Josh.Koller@tbr.edu.

The TBR Access & Diversity (A&D) grant program was initially established in 2008 to provide for continued implementation of initiatives to eliminate barriers to post-secondary access and diversity. In 2010 the program scope was broadened to include a focus on student success and completion.

The program focuses on initiatives to increase success rates for traditionally underserved groups of students and employees. Historically these groups include, but are not limited to

Black, Hispanic/LatinX employees and students, as well as low-income/Pell-eligible, and adult students.

The funds are available as block grants for student financial assistance, student recruitment and retention, faculty/staff recruitment and retention, and specific program administration costs. Institutions can also apply for additional funds through the Access & Diversity Competitive grant application process (see above for current opportunities).

Draft Report from 125 Chapter 2 Equity and Inclusion Taskforce

Equity and Inclusion Task Force: Diversity, equity, and inclusion are embedded in the work of the university throughout teaching, research, service, and training.

ETSU is aspiring to be recognized as a Higher Education Excellence in Diversity institution because all students and employees, irrespective of various group status/intersections, have opportunities to achieve success.

There exists at ETSU a richly diverse environment of learning, working, and playing where differences are valued, and each person in the university community is supported and experiences a sense of belonging, contribution, and purpose.

The institution is being recognized by granting agencies such as the National Institute of Health and National Science Foundation for our support of diverse faculty in research that has impacted the dollars awarded to ETSU through faculty scholarly activity. This is also true in areas of scholarship like Appalachian Studies where the university has been particularly productive at discovering and preserving the rich history of the region.

ETSU brings diverse perspectives together to collaborate and discuss difficult issues. These convenings are not only with internal constituents, but also include community members and elected officials.

ETSU is recognized throughout the region for being a place where people can share and learn without judgement, in an inclusive way, and is a model for other institutions in rural settings for fellowship with the community.

Students who attend ETSU often remark about the ways that the campus made them feel a sense of community, the result of a culture of inclusion. This sense of community was made possible because ETSU imbedded equity and inclusion in all aspects of the institution, and it was not perceived as something required by only a select group. The result is an education that provides for the success of all those who seek the opportunity. This has also helped restore the board community's faith in higher education, something in doubt at the beginning of the ETSU 125 Chapter II process.

[Click here](#) to read the whole ETSU Committee for 125 Chapter II Draft Report and Vision for the 125th Year of ETSU.

Center for Global Engagement

The **Center for Global Engagement** was unveiled in Fall 2021 as a central location to cultivate ideas and increase comprehensive internationalization at ETSU. We are committed to enhancing internationalization across the teaching, research, service, and community engagement missions of ETSU through an array of global learning programs and opportunities available to students, staff, faculty, and partners--near and far.



A group of faculty, staff, and students travelled to Ecuador this past Spring Break on behalf of the Center for Global Engagement and their individual departments. This trip was in anticipation of Global Year of Ecuador, a year-long internationalization effort that focuses on one country, that will be initiated in Academic Year 2022-2023. Faculty propose to lead a variety of research projects, study abroad opportunities, and campus internationalization efforts throughout the year.



EAST TENNESSEE STATE
UNIVERSITY



4th Annual

*Equity and
Inclusion*
CONFERENCE



Creating a Culture of Belonging:
Building Capacity, Partnerships, and
Opportunities for Progress

SAVE
THE
DATE

September 27-29, 2022

Hybrid Conference

etsu.edu/equity

Upcoming Events

April 2022

Wednes.	April 6th	Natasha Trethewey Former US poet laureate	6:00pm	Martin Center Grand Auditorium
Wednes.	April 6th	Unity Fest	10:00am-2:00pm	University Commons
Friday	April 8th	CORAZÓN LATINO FESTIVAL	TBA	Downtown Johnson City
Monday	April 11th	Mary V. Jordan Multicultural Center Diversity Scholars Banquet	6:00-7:30pm	Culp Center, East Tennessee Room
Tuesday	April 12th	Lunch and Learn Series <i>Inclusive Global Discipline Learning: Curricular, Co-Curricular and Extra-Curricular Engagement</i> Discussion Lead: Nate Tadesse, Mentoring Coordinator, Mary V. Jordan Multicultural Center	12:00-1:00pm	Join Zoom Meeting
Wednes.	April 13th	ETSU Faculty Panel Discussion: The Impact of Censorship on the Community A diverse discussion on how the impact of censorship and book banning in libraries affects the whole community. Panelists: Dr. Daryl Carter, Dr. Bethany Novotny, Dr. Scott Honeycutt, and Renee Lyons Moderator: Tiffany Watson	4:00-5:00pm	Register Here for Zoom Link
Friday	April 15th	University Holiday		

May 2022

Thursday	May 5th	DEI Alliance of NE Tennessee and SW Virginia Summit 2022	8:00am-12:45pm	Meadowview Conference Center, Kingsport, TN
Thursday	May 5th	Lavender Graduation Celebration	5:00-7:00pm	Culp Center, East Tennessee Room
Friday	May 6th	Multicultural Graduation Celebration	7:00-8:30pm	Culp Center, Ballroom
Saturday	May 7th	Commencement	10:00 am 2:00pm	Ballad Health Athletic Center
Monday	May 30th	University Holiday		

July 2022

Tuesday	July 12th	Lunch and Learn Series <i>Impact of COVID-19</i> Discussion Lead: Georgita Washington, PhD, RN, MSN, NPD-BC, MACM, Retire ETSU CON Faculty	12:00-1:00pm	Via Zoom
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September 2022

Tuesday-Thursday	September 27th-29th	4th Annual Equity and Inclusion Conference <i>Creating a Culture of Belonging: Building Capacity, Partnerships, and Opportunities</i>	TBA	Hybrid Event
Thursday	September 29th	4th Annual Equity and Inclusion Conference <i>Student Track Day</i>	TBA	Hybrid Event

Equity and Inclusion Diversity Champion Spotlight



Amanda Sawyers, MA, ISA/DSO, International Student and Scholar Services believes the purpose of the Office of Equity and Inclusion at ETSU is two-fold. One, there is a drastic need to bridge what she refers to as “cultural gaps.” Sadly, some of our students have had limited access to cultures outside of their own. And, the unfortunate reality of this is

isolation and that it tends to lead to othering and racism. The second purpose would be to provide the needed education and support to combat this and related unfortunate side-effects.

Diversity, to Amanda, is an interesting word. She feels Appalachia is insular and the majority of the population is white. She was well into her teens before she ever encountered someone who wasn't part of the “mold.” Amanda never had instructors of different races until she came to ETSU in 2013. She has LGBTQ+ friends from the area, and even today, they are still hesitant about being out and comfortable with their identities. While diversity does recognize our differences, Amanda believes the word should also celebrate these differences.

Over the years, Amanda has seen many shy away from things that differ from their idea of normal. The isolated nature of where she grew up actually fostered the opposite in her. She has always been fascinated by individuals with different stories and backgrounds from her own. Amanda allows others to be their genuine selves. It's simple, but Amanda thinks that's the best means of honoring someone's uniqueness.

Amanda has had a few different roles during her time at ETSU. It's only now in her current role as an International Student Advisor that she believes she is in a position where she can do more to aid and enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion at ETSU. While Amanda is still learning the role, She is interested in and has discussed some means of expanding International Student and Scholar Services and doing more to connect domestic and international students.

The office is currently in the process of hiring a new International Student Success Coordinator. Amanda would like to work with this individual in facilitating activities and programs that will not only enhance the experiences of ETSU international students, but that will also expose our domestic students to the diversity they are lacking here in Appalachia.

The Center for Global Engagement is also a resource for individuals to learn about [International partnerships](#) and programs across campus. They strive to connect people to the appropriate resources. The Offices of Education Abroad and Prestigious Awards are also housed under the **Center for Global Engagement**. They look forward to connecting with you!



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Instagram and Twitter - [etsu_equity](#)

**We would like to
hear from you.**

If you have an announcement, event, accomplishment, etc. you would like to have published in the newsletter send them to Kim Maturo at maturo@etsu.edu.

To add a name to our mailing list, please email Kim Maturo at maturo@etsu.edu.