



# Office of Equity and Inclusion Newsletter

July 7, 2023



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

**“Disabilities and Different Abilities  
are Worth Celebrating”**

Dear Friends,

July is a month filled with many celebrations, including, but not limited to Independence Day (July 4th), Minority Mental Health, and World Heart, to mention a few. In addition, for over 30 years, July has also been an important month for those with different abilities and disabilities. “Disability Pride Month is a time for all disabled people to unapologetically celebrate our bodies as they are,” said Daphnew Frias. Whether you are disabled or an ally, Disability Pride Month is full of so much to be proud of and celebrate as well.

On July 26th, 1990, The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed. This significant piece of legislation paved the way for Americans with disabilities to become fully engaged in the American community as the country worked to create an equitable and inclusive society for people with disabilities and different abilities.

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**"A hero is an ordinary individual who  
finds the strength to persevere and  
endure in spite of overwhelming  
obstacles." - Christopher Reeve**

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## Continued ~ Message from Dr. Keith Johnson



Since the passage of this act, cities across the county, including Boston, who was first to celebrate, began celebrating with marches, pageants and parades. Years later, in 2015, Mayor De Blasio of New York followed up by officially establishing July as Disability Pride Month for the city.

Leading up to the passage of the ADA, there were literally thousands of individuals who paved the road that made such an historic act possible in the first place. Without the disability rights movement, arguably, the ADA would not exist as we know it today. These same individuals with disabilities, and their allies challenged societal barriers that excluded people with disabilities. These efforts became the driving force to what was to become, The American with Disabilities Act of 1990.

In addition, many parents with children with disabilities joined the fight against exclusion and segregation of their children. These collective forces, began the independent living movement that challenged the notion that people with disabilities needed to be institutionalized. This movement also led to many of the services available today that are being provided to individuals with disabilities to make it possible for them to live within a community, rather than a facility.

We set aside this time to celebrate those who protested, licked envelopes and stamps, sent out communications, testified, drafted legislation, lobbied, negotiated, filed lawsuits, and in some cases, got arrested for efforts to demand accommodations for those who have been overlooked and excluded in our society.

These thousands of unsung heroes made inclusion possible for those with different abilities and disabilities. To celebrate, here are some things I challenge you to consider doing:

*Consider donating to organizations that embrace people with disabilities and their causes.*

*Attend events that supports Disability Pride Month.*

*Celebrate noteworthy news from the disability community, including, but not limited to the Special Olympics.*

*Help ensure that your employer is disability inclusive.*

*Ensure that your workplace includes the hiring of disabled people.*

*Teach those in your presence about disability justice.*

*Read and encourage others to read books by authors who are disabled.*

*Volunteer to help with Special Olympics.*

~ continued on page 3 ~

## Continued ~ Message from Dr. Keith Johnson

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This is by no means an exhaustive list of all you can do to support and celebrate our community of individuals with different abilities. There are many more things that can be done to support the community of disabled individuals. Sometimes, it is as simple as asking someone, is there anything that I can do to help? You might be surprised by the response you receive.

ETSU embraces all faculty, staff and students, regardless of their ability or disability. As an institution, we strongly believe that

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; and

COMMITMENT to intellectual achievement is embraced.

Sincerely,

Dr. Keith Johnson

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## New Addition to ETSU

A new disability access golf cart has found a home on the campus of East Tennessee State University.

The process for eligibility to use the golf cart is in the development phase.



# Americans with Disabilities Act

The **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in everyday activities.

The ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability just as other civil rights laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion.

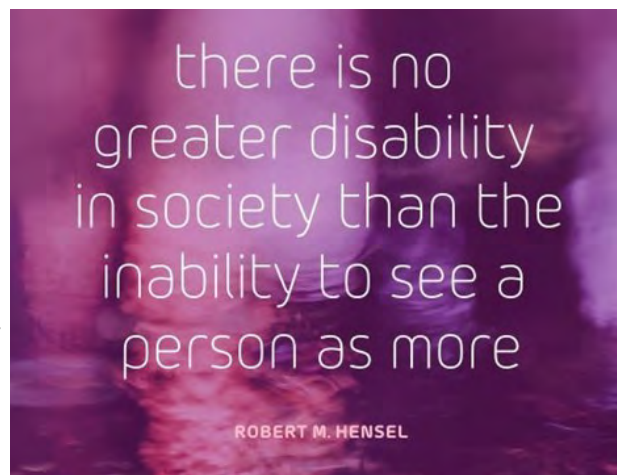
The ADA guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to enjoy employment opportunities, purchase goods and services, and participate in state and local government programs.

A person with a disability is someone who:

- has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities,
- has a history or record of such an impairment (such as cancer that is in remission), or
- is perceived by others as having such an impairment (such as a person who has scars from a severe burn).

If a person falls into any of these categories, the ADA protects them. Because the ADA is a law, and not a benefit program, you do not need to apply for coverage.

Learn more at [ADA.gov](https://www.ada.gov).



## ETSU Disability Services

ETSU admits students without regard to disabilities. The university is committed to making physical facilities and instructional programs accessible to students with disabilities. Disability Services coordinates accommodations and services designed to provide access for students with disabilities.

While students are not required to disclose disability information during the admissions process, students are encouraged to begin the registration process upon being accepted and committing to attend East Tennessee State University. There is no deadline by which registration with Disability Services must be completed, although we encourage students to be proactive and [register](#) as soon as possible.

Navigate Campus by viewing the ETSU [Accessibility Map](#).

Faculty and staff are entitled to reasonable accommodations, which can be a modification or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things are usually done during the hiring process. Contact Disability Services if you require [Workplace Accommodations](#).



# My Time with ETSU Disability Services

## by Savannah Bennett (she/her)

I started my ETSU graduate school journey in August 2020. I remember entering this chapter of my life full of excitement and hope. I was 22 years old and had been living with mental illnesses and a physical illness for several years. These facets of my life influenced my day-to-day actions, choices, and general lifestyle, but I didn't speak about them with anyone. Due to stigmas of shame or pity often surrounding terms like "disabled", "chronically ill", and "mentally ill", I didn't want people in my life to know when I was struggling.



By the end of my third semester in my program, everything in my life felt as if it were collapsing. Mental illness and physical illness symptoms had a grip on my life. Instead of seeking help from trained professionals or even loved ones in my life, I was determined that I could "fix myself" all on my own. I came very close to dropping out of graduate school. This was at no fault to my colleagues, professors, or the university as a whole—I was simply convinced that I did not have it in me. That I was not strong enough or deserving of help.

I spent winter break in the arms of my family and friends, who convinced me that I should try for a little longer. I started speaking out when I needed support, and asking questions about how I could receive support while on campus at ETSU. I scheduled an appointment with my doctor, who helped me establish a treatment and recovery plan. It was in my discussions with her that I learned I could involve Disability Services in my recovery plan if I felt comfortable doing so.

When I returned to campus for the spring semester, I started to feel a glimmer of hope again. I scheduled an appointment with Disability Services to see what accommodations I might be eligible for. Disability Services helped me procure permissions to live with an emotional support animal on campus, which was a large part of my treatment and recovery plan. They also made me aware of accommodations that I could use to ease my time in the classroom as a person with a chronic illness.

My meeting with Disability Services was an enormous turning point for me, during a time in which I was convinced that I needed to give up. I received support for my disabilities on a university level, which was integral to the process of obtaining my degree. Additionally, working with Disability Services encouraged me to reevaluate the ableist stereotypes that I had allowed myself to succumb to and perpetuate at one time in my life. "Disabled", "chronically ill", and "mentally ill" are not dirty words. They are not inherently shameful or pitiful. Including these terms as a part of one's identity can be an affirming, reassuring, and life-changing choice, in the most beautiful ways. I know that it was for me.

I proudly identify as disabled, both during Disability Pride Month and year-round. I celebrate my disabilities for many reasons: because they make me unique; because I have found friendship in the disabled community; because I am deserving of love and celebration, regardless of my mental and physical health.

I graduated with a Master of Arts in Appalachian Studies in December 2022, and am now working as the collections manager at the ETSU Reece Museum. I am thankful that I asked for assistance from Disability Services when I needed it—I would not be where I am today without them. I am also thankful for my coworkers at the Reece and my colleagues in the Department of Appalachian Studies, because they see me and accept me as I am: disabled and proud.

~ Savannah Bennett

# BIPOC Mental Health Awareness

The theme of [Mental Health America's](#) 2023 BIPOC Mental Health campaign is ***Culture, Community, & Connection***.

## BIPOC COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT HISTORY

- Throughout history, BIPOC communities have carved out culturally responsive spaces that give room for individuals to feel connected with their communities and maintain physical and psychological safety. These spaces of support include cultural hubs, community gardens, community care systems, social clubs, art collectives, sports teams, and more.
- BIPOC communities are rooted in collectivist cultures, which recognize that each person's health and wellness is deeply interconnected with their community's. When one person seeks to take care of their mental health, it has an impact on the wellness of the community at large.

## CHALLENGES FACED BY BIPOC COMMUNITIES

- Historically, BIPOC populations have been pushed out of their living spaces intentionally and forcefully. Even if a BIPOC individual hasn't dealt with community displacement in their own lifetime, generational and historical trauma can still impact their current mental health and quality of life.
- Community displacement disproportionately impacts all individuals within BIPOC communities, not just the individuals forced to move. Gentrified neighborhoods see an increase in cost of living, lose small and local businesses, and disrupt community culture and safety.
- Many BIPOC communities have faced forced relocation and removal that has distanced them from their loved ones, cultural practices, languages, and sense of identity. This generational trauma has impacted the ability of BIPOC individuals to access services, feel secure, and have positive mental health outcomes.

## IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

- A sense of belonging and inclusion in communities is vital for well-being and mental health. BIPOC individuals may frequently feel othered or as if they are tokenized in spaces in which their identities are not embraced or reflected.
- Community safety is more than just physical. Psychological safety consists of inclusion and the safety to learn, contribute, and challenge the status quo.
- Having a sense of community creates a sense of support and belonging, which can reduce feelings of isolation.
- Community-led spaces are vital sources of belonging that promote overall mental health and wellness. This includes cultural hubs, which are areas of people with a specific cultural background who have come together to live, provide services, or connect with one another.
- Individuals who have strong connections to their communities have better mental health outcomes, including lower rates of suicide, violence, and feelings of isolation.

Learn more at [Mental Health America](#).

# Call For Proposals - Borchuck Plaza Fountain

East Tennessee State University (ETSU) is accepting creative design proposals from artists or artist teams for a public fountain that [commemorates the first five African American students to integrate ETSU](#). The selected artist/team will design, fabricate, and install a permanent public fountain in [Borchuck Plaza](#), in front of Sherrod Library, in the heart of ETSU's campus.

**Budget:** \$225,000 (contingent upon a successful campaign)

**Request for Qualifications Submission Deadline:** August 1, 2023



The plaza is located in front of the Sherrod Library on ETSU's main campus and is comprised of a circular plaza, benches, and a centrally located circular brick display area. The scope of public artwork shall be confined to an existing 20 ft diameter circular display area (memorial placement area) in the center of the circular plaza. The existing circular display area has water and electrical access.

## Eligibility:

- Artists age 18 or older may apply as an individual or a team
- Must have experience in completing outdoor/indoor public works of similar scale
- Must be available for on-site visit to ETSU
- Applicants must reside in the United States
- There is no fee to submit to this opportunity

## Project Criteria:

- The artwork must include a water feature but can also include other media. The site location does have existing underground water line access.
- Artistic interpretation may be representational or non-representational in design. Creativity is encouraged.
- The artwork must be structurally sound and safely secured.
- The artwork must be of a scale large enough to be clearly visible from a distance.
- The artwork must be capable of withstanding adverse weather conditions, including hot summers, cold winters, rain, wind, and snow.
- The artwork must have a low exposure to pedestrian injury. The public must be protected from possible injury from materials.
- The artwork must be original to the designer(s) and address the project theme of serving as a memorial to the first African American students to desegregate ETSU.

Timeline, Additional Budget Information, and the Path for Design Submission can be found at [Borchuck Plaza Public Arts Project](#).

## Upcoming Events

July 2023				
Wednes.	July 12th	<b>Reshape Your Organizational Culture with a Holistic, Action-Based Framework</b> <i>Two action-based philosophies Trauma-Informed Care and Constructive Living—a person-centered framework that offers recommendations for improving organizational culture, work-life balance, time management, and burnout in academic settings.</i> Discussion Lead: Dr. Wendy Doucette, Graduate Research and Instruction Librarian	12:00-1:00pm	<a href="#">Register here</a>
Tuesday	July 18th	Lunch and Learn <b>Intersectionality</b> Discussion Lead: Khia Hudgins-Smith, MS, LPC-MHSP, NCC, Clinical Counselor	12:00-1:00pm	<a href="#">Via Zoom</a>
Wednes.	July 19th	<b>Constructive Living &amp; Kaizen</b> <i>Constructive Living is an action-based philosophy for reframing individual response to everyday situations. Kaizen is about simplifying and painlessly improving process and workflow to achieve progress without striving.</i> Discussion Lead: Dr. Wendy Doucette Graduate Research and Instruction Librarian	12:00-1:00pm	<a href="#">Register here</a>
Wednes.	July 26th	<b>Naikan</b> <i>The Japanese philosophy of Naikan (gratitude through introspection) can be used effectively as a transformative personal mindset as well as in small or large group settings to decrease feelings of alienation and increase feelings of cooperation. Interact with Naikan as a practical, person-centered, hands-on tool for improving communication, empathy, and understanding among co-workers.</i> Discussion Lead: Dr. Wendy Doucette Graduate Research and Instruction Librarian	12:00-1:00pm	<a href="#">Register here</a>
Wednes.	July 26th	<b>Accountability and Incentives for Advancing Racial Equity</b> Discussion Lead: USC Race and Equity Center	1:00-3:00pm	<a href="#">Via Zoom</a>
August 2023				
Tuesday	August 1st	Lunch and Learn <b>The Libraries' Role in Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion</b> Discussion Lead: Christiana Keinath, Health Sciences Librarian, Assistant Professor, Sherrod Library/Research & Instruction Services	12:00-1:00pm	<a href="#">Via Zoom</a>
Thurs-day	August 24th	<b>Fostering and Sustaining Inclusive Classrooms for Students of Color</b> Discussion Lead: USC Race and Equity Center	1:00-3:00pm	<a href="#">Via Zoom</a>



**USC** Race and  
Equity Center

# Accountability and Incentives for Advancing Racial Equity

*East Tennessee Higher Education  
Regional Alliance*



**Wednesday, July 26  
1pm-3pm EDT**

**Ryan Davis** Ryan Davis is a Senior Strategist at the USC Race and Equity Center where he provides equity coaching and organizational development for clients across public and private sectors. Ryan also leads a management consulting firm that provides coaching and strategic planning to support organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. Ryan's prior appointments included serving as the Associate Vice President for Institutional Equity and Diversity at Brown University; Director of Assessment and Educational Programs at Purdue; and Senior Program Manager for UNCF's Gates Millennium Scholars Program, a \$1.6 billion dollar initiative funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Ryan has co-authored more than 20 publications on equity

Register at [www.uscrec.info/ETHERA\\_7](http://www.uscrec.info/ETHERA_7)

The recording of this live session will be  
available on [equityconnect.usc.edu](http://equityconnect.usc.edu).

# eConvenings

## East Tennessee Higher Education Regional Alliance

# USC Race and Equity Center

This professional learning series is for full-time and part-time employees at Alliance member institutions. Each month, nationally renowned equity experts will offer a highly-engaging live session via Zoom on a different racial equity topic. Useful tools and practical strategies will be provided in every synchronous three-hour experience. Every campus can send up to 400 employees to each session – it could be the same 400 people, or a different set each month. While there is no cost, advance registration is required for each individual session.

### **Understanding and Addressing Implicit Bias**

Thursday, January 26 | 1-3pm EST

Register at [www.uscrec.info/ETHERA\\_1](http://www.uscrec.info/ETHERA_1)

### **Engaging in Productive Conversations About Race and Racism**

Tuesday, February 28 | 1-3pm EST

Register at [www.uscrec.info/ETHERA\\_2](http://www.uscrec.info/ETHERA_2)

### **Understanding the Effects of Racism on Students' Experiences and Outcomes**

Thursday, March 30 | 1-3pm EST

Register at [www.uscrec.info/ETHERA\\_3](http://www.uscrec.info/ETHERA_3)

### **Confronting Explicit Acts of Racism and Racial Violence on Campus**

Wednesday, April 19 | 1-3pm EST

Register at [www.uscrec.info/ETHERA\\_4](http://www.uscrec.info/ETHERA_4)

### **Strategically Recruiting Employees of Color**

Monday, May 22 | 1-3pm EST

Register at [www.uscrec.info/ETHERA\\_5](http://www.uscrec.info/ETHERA_5)

### **Supporting and Retaining Employees of Color**

Thursday, June 30 | 1-3pm EST Register at

[www.uscrec.info/ETHERA\\_6](http://www.uscrec.info/ETHERA_6)

### **Accountability and Incentives for Advancing Racial Equity**

Wednesday, July 26 | 1-3pm EST

Register at [www.uscrec.info/ETHERA\\_7](http://www.uscrec.info/ETHERA_7)

### **Fostering and Sustaining Inclusive Classrooms for Students of Color**

Thursday, August 24 | 1-3pm EST

Register at [www.uscrec.info/ETHERA\\_8](http://www.uscrec.info/ETHERA_8)

### **Meaningfully Integrating Racial Topics Across the Curriculum**

Friday, September 29 | 1-3pm EST

Register at [www.uscrec.info/ETHERA\\_9](http://www.uscrec.info/ETHERA_9)

### **Engaging Students of Color in High-Impact Educational Practices and Experiences**

Tuesday, October 24 | 1-3pm EST

Register at [www.uscrec.info/ETHERA\\_10](http://www.uscrec.info/ETHERA_10)

### **Using Disaggregated Data to Identify and Address Racial Inequities**

Thursday, November 9 | 1-3pm EST

Register at [www.uscrec.info/ETHERA\\_11](http://www.uscrec.info/ETHERA_11)

### **Strategic Planning and Action for Racial Equity**

Tuesday, December 5 | 1-3pm EST

Register at [www.uscrec.info/ETHERA\\_12](http://www.uscrec.info/ETHERA_12)

**race.usc.edu**

Direct all inquiries to  
**Dr. Minh Tran** (mctran@usc.edu)



**USC** Race and  
Equity Center

# EQUITY CONNECT



**INTERACT**



**CONNECT**



**SHARED LEARNING**



**FORM INTEREST GROUPS**



**VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES  
OF PRACTICE**



**FIND RESOURCES**

Learn more at  
[equityconnect.usc.edu](https://equityconnect.usc.edu)

This portal is for employees of colleges and universities that are members of the USC Race and Equity Center's alliances, equity institutes, leadership academies, and other partnerships. It includes video recordings and assets from eConvenings, as well as other downloadable racial equity resources. This portal also allows persons with authenticated profiles to form and actively participate in virtual communities of practice. Posing questions of practice, offering advice to colleagues, sharing effective practices, and fostering new collaborations are all possible in the virtual communities.

## Meet Diversity Champion, Matthew Gilbert



**Matthew Gilbert,  
Accessibility  
Coordinator,  
Disability Services**

*The Office of Equity and Inclusion at ETSU plays a vital role in cultivating a campus community that values individualism. It supports and*

*empowers individuals by fostering inclusivity. The Advisory Council, in fulfilling its role, develops initiatives and programs that address systemic barriers and promote equal opportunities for all members of the campus (including but not limited to racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, individuals with disabilities, non-traditional students, and first-generation students). By championing equity and inclusion, the Advisory Council can create more encouraging educational experiences for every student, faculty member, and staff.*

*An acceptance of diversity encourages social growth as it encompasses the kaleidoscope of history, emotions, and intersections of human experiences that contribute to evolving communities. Embracing diversity honors the uniqueness of people and recognizes that creative and social growth flourishes when we unite the threads of varying perspectives and viewpoints. Every person—whether we know them personally or not—holds a unique string, adding strength and richness to the quilt of our collective experience. We must embrace the beauty of diversity by being open to distinct and alternative points of view, for it is through blending our differences that a greater masterpiece of understanding and growth emerges.*

*Working with both students and faculty, I often get*

*asked the questions, "How?" and "Why?" While these questions come from a place of hesitation and fear, the questions are good ones because they demonstrate an interest in learning. Often challenging questions require a complex-solution process, but they can also be simpler than we expect. Change can only occur by engaging the questions and concerns posed and recognizing the reasoning behind each point of view. Seeking the solution creates new discourse, and often the answers come from the willingness to talk about change and collaborate with the campus community.*

*I am reminded of Maya Angelou who said, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." Having taught and worked in nursing homes earlier in my journey, I listened to stories often unshared in the pages of mainstream narratives, the ones that people fear sharing. Working as the Accessibility Coordinator allows me to engage those untold narratives, challenge preconceived beliefs, and empower communities to embrace their unique voices and strive for equality.*

*When I accepted the position in Disability Services, the opportunity drew me in to work collaboratively with other departments and staff to increase awareness of disability and the marginalization of people with disability. However, disability is only one part of complex identity, and a successful approach to assisting students and the community comes from recognizing and supporting the intersections of everyone. Development is key to growth, and solutions develop from individual voices speaking up and sharing their perspectives, resources, and networks. As one part of the campus collective, I hope to create and help facilitate conversations and projects that allow all students, faculty, and staff to feel welcome and heard.*

*~ Matthew Gilbert*

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**Webpage:** <https://www.etsu.edu/equity/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/etsuequity/>

**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](mailto:maturo@etsu.edu).

To add a name to our mailing list, please email Kim Maturo at [maturo@etsu.edu](mailto:maturo@etsu.edu).