



# Office of Equity and Inclusion Newsletter

August 4, 2023



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

### “Law Abiding Citizens”

Dear Friends,

August is the month when universities are gearing up for the start of a new academic year. This past academic year, state lawmakers across the country continued their crusade against critical race theory, passing new legislation in many states, including Tennessee. Many of these laws became effective on July 1, 2023 and will have an impact on the way higher education is delivered. More specifically, some laws regulate how the nation’s teachers and faculty members can discuss racism, sexism, and systemic inequalities and the like.

~ continued on page 2 ~



*How far you go in life depends on your  
being tender with the young, compassionate  
with the aged, sympathetic with the striving  
and tolerant of the weak and strong.  
Because someday in your life you will have  
been all of these.*

~ George Washington Carver ~

### Inside this issue

Message from Dr. Johnson.....	1-3
Town Hall Divisive Concepts.....	3
Faculty Ombudsman.....	4
Meet Yashika Bradley.....	5
Equity and Inclusion Conference..	6-7
Upcoming Events.....	8-10
Equity Connect.....	11
Diversity Champion.....	12

## Continued ~ Message from Dr. Keith Johnson

It is very important that everyone familiarizes themselves with the new laws to avoid committing any unintended violations. During last semester, the Tennessee General Assembly revisited the Divisive Concepts Act with the Tennessee Higher Education Freedom of Expression and Transparency Act. As a result, the Divisive Concepts law was amended to include four new provisions. Though I encourage you to read the law in its entirety, there are a few provisions that I will bring to your attention.

**Using State Funds with Certain Organizations:** The university “shall not” approve or use state funds for fees, dues, subscriptions, or travel in conjunction with the membership, meetings, or activities of an organization if participation is such the organization requires an individual, or an individual’s employer, to endorse or promote a divisive concept.

**Job Duties for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Employees:** All university employees who have the words diversity, equity, and inclusion in their primary title have newly created statutory job duties. These employees must work to strengthen intellectual diversity and promote free and respectful exchange of ideas and work to support student academic achievement and workforce readiness of all students through mentoring, career readiness support, workforce development, or related activities. On the other hand, those positions that have DEI in their titles will be required to submit an annual report to the President of the university on their compliance of the statute.

**Employees and Students notification:** university is required to notify students and employees of the definition of Divisive Concepts and restrictions on the university’s website and in introductory materials provided to new students and employees. <https://www.etsu.edu/provost/divconcepts.php>

There are other provisions? within the law that addresses scheduling and approving university property such as space in the Culp center. In doing so, the university must be neutral and not showing favoritism toward peaceful and law-abiding student groups and their invited guest speakers. This also prohibits the university from requiring a student group to pay fees or security deposits that are not charged to other student groups.

In addition, the amended law empowers students and employees of the university who believes that a violation of the divisive concepts law has occurred, may file a report of the alleged violation with the institution. The university will investigate the report and take appropriate steps to correct any violation that is found to have occurred.

This is a snap shot of the new amended divisive concept law that will have an impact on the university. It behooves us all to learn creative strategies that will allow the university to achieve its mission of educating the people of this region regardless of their race, ethnicity or gender.

## Continued ~ Message from Dr. Keith Johnson

The Office of Equity and Inclusion and the Office of University Counsel will be leading an upcoming town hall to provide our campus an overview of the Divisive Concept Law and amendment and provide a safe space for employees to ask questions on August 21th. Additional information sessions can be offered to your unit by contacting either office.

East Tennessee State University will continue to embrace its values which include:

- 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



# Faculty Ombudsman - Dr. Allan Forsman

The faculty Ombuds provides a confidential, neutral, and independent resource for all ETSU faculty. They are available to listen, help you explore issues of concern, facilitate informal resolution of conflict, clarify university policies and procedures, and identify the appropriate person or department within the university to respond to your questions. The faculty Ombuds aligns with the standards and practices of the International Ombuds Association.

## Meet Your Faculty Ombuds

Dr. Allan Forsman is a professor in the Department of Health Sciences, which is housed in the College of Public Health. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of North Dakota School of Medicine in 1991. He joined ETSU in 1998. His main teaching focus is human anatomy, and his research focuses on the effects of spaceflight on reproductive systems as well as the effects of alcohol and/or high-fat diets on the urinary and reproductive systems.



During his tenure at ETSU, he has served on several committees, including the Faculty Senate, Tenure and Promotion Appeals Committee, and Committee for 125. He was awarded the College of Public Health Foundation Teaching Award in 2011, the ETSU Distinguished Faculty Award in Teaching in 2012, and the Southern Athletic Conference All-Conference Faculty Award in 2018.

Contact Dr. Forsman at: [forsman@etsu.edu](mailto:forsman@etsu.edu) or [ombuds@etsu.edu](mailto:ombuds@etsu.edu)

The faculty Ombuds will:

- listen to faculty concerns and perspectives
- provide a safe and private place to confidentially discuss issues of concern
- help faculty analyze situations, explore options, and answer questions for resolving concerns
- assist in identifying and interpreting university policies and procedures
- identify appropriate university resources and suggest referrals
- safeguard faculty identity
- provide conflict resolution and other communication-related training for departments or other groups
- facilitate communication or mediate between individuals or groups
- remain impartial to all parties involved in a conflict

The faculty Ombuds will NOT:

- advocate for an individual's personal position
- act without consent
- participate in any formal grievance or appeal
- provide legal advice
- overturn decisions made by university officials
- keep identifying records
- address a non-university problem or complaint
- make binding decisions
- mandate policies
- replace formal processes

Read more at <https://www.etsu.edu/provost/ombudsperson.php>

# Meet Yashika Bradley, Compliance Investigator and Title IX Coordinator, Office of University Compliance

Welcome to Yashika Bradley, MCJ, Investigator and Deputy Title IX Coordinator.



Yashika was born and raised in the beautiful city of Johnson City, Tennessee. Having spent the majority of her life in Chattanooga, TN, Yashika called it home for 24 years. Yashika's passion for justice and desire to make a positive impact led her to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Upon graduating, Yashika returned to her hometown of Johnson City in 2020 to further her education. She enrolled at ETSU, where she successfully completed a dual Master's degree in Criminal Justice and Criminology. Eager to put her knowledge to practical use, Yashika recently joined the Office of Compliance at East Tennessee State University.

As a Compliance Investigator and Deputy Title IX Coordinator, Yashika plays a vital role in ensuring that the university adheres to all applicable laws, regulations, and policies fostering a safe and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Yashika's commitment and dedication to her profession makes her an invaluable asset to the ETSU's community.

As an ETSU staff member, Yashika shared *"There are many ways I will contribute to ETSU's efforts to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion in meaningful ways. I will continue to stay updated and educate myself about issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion; foster a welcoming environment where everyone feels valued and respected; support under-represented students; and seek out opportunities to collaborate with colleagues from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. These are just a few ways I will contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable ETSU community."*

*I feel the purpose of the Office of Equity and Inclusion at ETSU should promote an environment that values and respects diversity, inclusion and equity amongst the students, faculty and staff. It should serve as a support system for individuals from underrepresented groups, continually working to create a campus culture that embraces and celebrates the differences among the ETSU community.*

*My approach to dealing with discussions about potentially difficult topics such as race, religion, politics, or sexual orientation is to approach these discussions with having an open-mind, being respectful, and showing empathy. I believe we should give people the opportunity to express their viewpoints without interrupting them or dismissing their perspectives. I like to have a open-mind and be receptive to new ideas, information, or experiences that challenge my existing beliefs. I look for areas of shared values when having difficult discussions, this would create a more inclusive environment for diverse perspectives."*

[Click here](#) for more information about University Compliance.



ETSU's fifth annual Equity and Inclusion Conference will be held September 28-30, 2023. This year's conference theme is "Beyond 'Checking a Box:' Building and Sustaining Campus-Wide Engagement for Belonging."

### ***Bestselling author Imani Perry to headline ETSU conference***

Perry is renowned for her work that explores the intersections of history, race, law and culture. Born in Birmingham, Alabama, in the aftermath of the horrific 16th Street Baptist Church bombing, Perry's life and work have been deeply imbued with a commitment to justice and progressive change.

Perry's academic and literary contributions, including her National Book Award-winning work "South to America: A Journey Below the Mason-Dixon to Understand the Soul of a Nation," explores how the South shapes American history and culture. Her numerous accolades, including awards for her exploration of the life of underrecognized Black artist Lorraine Hansberry, firmly position her as a significant figure in contemporary literature and academia.

[Read more](#)

The conference is open to anyone who wishes to attend. Community members as well as higher education professionals and students from other institutions are welcome and encouraged to join us. ETSU employees may utilize their education benefits to cover the cost of registration. If you elect to use this option, please be sure to select the appropriate ticket type when registering.

## **REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN!**

### **[Register](#)**

#### **Regular Conference**

Early Bird Rate: \$75 (before August 31, 2023)  
 Sleepy Bird Rate: \$100 (September 1-22, 2023)  
 Week of Event: \$125 (September 23-29, 2023)  
 Student Rate: \$25 (with valid student ID)

#### **Student Conference**

Free with valid ETSU student ID  
 \$25 with valid student ID (non-ETSU)

Additional information can be found on the [Equity and Inclusion Conference website](#).





The [5<sup>th</sup> Annual Equity & Inclusion Conference](#) “Beyond ‘Checking a Box:’ Building and Sustaining Campus-Wide Engagement for Belonging” is September 28 – 30, 2023.

We are excited to be welcoming presenters and participants from nearly 20 college, community, and business organizations from in and out of state!

As one of this year’s conference organizers, **I would like to invite you to serve as a conference volunteer.** The efforts of the volunteer team are instrumental to the success of the conference.

There are several roles identified for volunteers including room hosts, greeters (throughout campus), parking lot hosts, hospitality room hosts, set-up crew, and more. As an added benefit, conference volunteers are provided a \$25 registration

## Call For Volunteers



**Do you want to Volunteer?**

discount. You can expect a minimum time obligation of 3 - 4 hours in addition to the 1-hour volunteer training prior to the conference.

If you are interested in volunteering, please complete the [Volunteer Sign-Up form](#) after which you will receive correspondence from me with the volunteer registration code. *We ask volunteers to sign up by August 31.*

Thank you for considering this opportunity. If you have any questions, please contact me at [levasseurj@etsu.edu](mailto:levasseurj@etsu.edu).

With Gratitude,  
Janice Levasseur  
Volunteer Coordinator

## Conference Committee



### Co-Chairs

Ethan Hutchinson  
Joy Fulkerson

### Members

Jillian Alexandar, Programming  
Dr. Chassidy Cooper, Assessment  
Bethanie Dye, Student Programming  
Nathan Farnor, Student Programming  
Matthew Gilbert, Accessibility  
Khia Hudgins-Smith, Student Programming  
Crystal Johnson, Hospitality & Logistics

Janice Levasseur, Volunteer Coordination  
Heidi Marsh, Programming  
Kim Maturo, Budget & Registration  
Christa Reid, Student Programming  
Marc Tucker, Programming  
Rachel Walden, Technology  
Jess Vodden, Marketing

## Upcoming Events

### August 2023

Tuesday	August 1st	Lunch and Learn <b><i>The Libraries' Role in Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion</i></b> Discussion Lead: Christiana Keinath, Health Sciences Librarian, Assistant Professor, Sherrod Library/Research & Instruction Services	12:00-1:00pm	<a href="#">Via Zoom</a>
Monday	August 21st	<b>Divisive Concepts</b> Town Hall Discussion Lead: Dr. Mark Fulks, University Counsel and Dr. Keith Johnson, Vice President for Equity and Inclusion	3:30pm	Forum, Culp Center
Thursday	August 24th	<b><i>Fostering and Sustaining Inclusive Classrooms for Students of Color</i></b> Discussion Lead: USC Race and Equity Center	1:00-3:00pm	<a href="#">Via Zoom</a>

### September 2023

Tuesday	Sept. 19th	ETSU/EAB Moon Shot For Equity Convening	1:00-3:00pm	East Tennessee Room, Culp Ctr.
Thursday	Sept. 28th	Crafting Blackness Initiative Panel Reception	4:00-6:00pm 7:00pm	Ball Hall Slocum Galleries
Thursday	Sept. 28-29th	<a href="#">5th Annual Equity and Inclusion Conference</a> Keynote Speaker: <a href="#">Dr. Imani Perry</a>	8:30am-4:30pm 7:00-9:00pm	Culp Center Culp Center
Friday	Sept. 29th	5th Annual Equity and Inclusion Conference	8:30am-3:30pm	Culp Center
Saturday	Sept. 30th	5th Annual Equity and Inclusion Conference Student Track	9:00am-5:30pm	Culp Center



Our Fall 2023 Lunch and Learn Series is still in the planning stage.

Past recording of sessions can be found on the Office of Equity and Inclusion website under [learning/opportunities](#).



**USC** Race and  
Equity Center

## Fostering and Sustaining Inclusive Classrooms for Students of Color

*East Tennessee Higher Education  
Regional Alliance*



**Thursday, August 24  
1pm-3pm EDT**

**Toby Jenkins, Ph.D.** serves as Interim Associate Dean of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in the Graduate School at the University of South Carolina. She is also a tenured Associate Professor of Higher Education in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies within the College of Education.

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



**Janice Levasseur,  
Assistant Director,  
Center for Academic  
Achievement**

*I believe the purpose of the Office of Equity and Inclusion is to champion ETSU as a brave and safe learning space for everyone. By providing opportunities for the community to come together to learn, develop awareness, share experiences, and practice genuine care and acceptance of one another, ETSU truly can be a place where all people are treated with dignity and respect, and diversity of people and thought is respected.*

*Diversity to me is the practice of being accepting of all people regardless of characteristics (immutable or not). I, myself, am of mixed ethnic background and from a two-religion household. I feel blessed to have grown up in an area where I regularly interacted with people of all ethnicities and participated in many cultural and religious activities. I have viewed people as just people and have always been able to find a way to connect with everyone I meet. As I went through school, learned more, and had first-hand experiences with diversity, I was able to develop a further appreciation of the differences that make people not just people but individuals. That is why I value diversity. I love getting to know people for who they are,*

*their backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs. I work to make all who I meet and regularly interact with feel they can be their true selves around me. I hope by modeling this behavior, others will do the same.*

*When I think of diversity, equity, and inclusion work, it is easy to feel overwhelmed. I often wonder where my place in this work is. I want to feel safe engaging in respectful dialog around difficult topics. I want to feel safe in my physical environment. I want to not be looked down upon for my beliefs and what makes me who I am. I always say that my power here is oh so small but in my work as the Assistant Director of the Center for Academic Achievement, I have the tremendous responsibility and privilege of supervising many para-professional educators (student tutors, SI Leaders, and Academic Coaches). As such, quoting my own diversity and inclusion statement, I am committed to creating safe and inclusive learning spaces both inside and outside the classroom that nurture curiosity, honor diverse thoughts and expressions, and celebrate the unique contributions of all. It is only in an environment that embraces diversity that we can learn from each other, grow, and empower our sense of purpose. I am dedicated to continuous learning and self-reflection and work to implement learned practices to foster positive change, close achievement gaps, and establish places where students experience a true sense of belonging and authentic care.*

*Thank you for the opportunity for me to share.*

*~ Janice Levasseur*

**Office of Equity and Inclusion**  
109 Burgin E. Dossett Hall  
P.O. Box 70705  
Johnson City, TN 37614  
P 423-439-4445  
F 423-439-4543

**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).