

It Is All About Access: An Interview with Susan Charles, Ph.D., “Architect” of the Upcoming Master of Arts Degree in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Leadership

Over the last few years, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) jobs have emerged as the hot new career track. But what exactly does a DEI officer do? And what do you need to know in order to become a DEI professional?

NDNU is addressing these questions with the development of a Master of Arts program in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Leadership, and down the road, a graduate certificate geared toward professional development in these areas. These efforts are being spearheaded by Susan Charles, Ph.D., a beloved faculty member in the School of Education, who also oversees two other education graduate programs - an MA in Administration and an MA in Education and Curriculum. The program is funded through the Title V Part B PPOHA grant.

“DEI careers should be based upon a common foundation of knowledge and applied experience,” says Susan. “Too often people are placed in DEI positions without truly understanding the intricacies of the job at hand. And that goes for the employers as well.” The new master’s degree program will help create a foundational body of knowledge and depth to address critical issues of justice and equity in the workplace and beyond.

The master’s program will be a 30-unit, 2-year interdisciplinary degree covering such topics as Race and Social Justice, Foundations of DEI and Leadership, Identity Safety and Stereotype Threat, Human Resources Management, and Conflict Management. Since students from all three NDNU graduate schools are eligible to participate, elective courses more closely aligned with their professional interests will be offered. Candidates will also complete a capstone project.

Down the line, Susan hopes the new master’s program will eventually lead into a doctorate to add to the research in these fields. “DEI is a complex issue,” says Susan, “but the only way to create change is to be educated in these areas, which require close examination and frank, honest discussions.” The MA in DEI and Leadership will encourage dialogue on difficult topics.

When asked about what drives her interest in social justice and diversity issues, Susan replied, “Social justice is not just my interest nor passion, it is who I am.” She emphasized that she is not alone in her efforts at the university, and pointed to the Sisters’ Hallmarks, “They are simply all about justice. Here at NDNU, social justice is not just a flavor of the month; it’s the real deal. We are constantly weighing in on fairness and justness throughout our educational programs.”

Originally from the Caribbean, Susan has had a long career in education here in the Bay Area. She worked in the Palo Alto Unified School District for 28 years. She held counseling positions at Gunn High School, Palo Alto High School, and Jane Lathrop Stanford Middle School, including Head of Guidance and Dean of Students at Gunn; District Counselor, and Principal at Ohlone Elementary School. Susan joined NDNU six years ago.

For more information about the Master of Arts in DEI Leadership, please contact Susan at scharles@ndnu.edu.