



Akron Story Circles Project

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In March 2019, twenty-eight people agreed to recount their stories as female, LGBTQ, and/or African American employees at The University of Akron. Drawing from administration, faculty, and staff, this group included younger people and retirees with five decades at the University. Their accounts were recorded and transcribed. These are highlights from a small selection of the stories that were told.

I've been here a long time. When I came, there were hopeful spots. But when I look now, the hope is just gone. I look at all the decisions being made, and I think, when you say

to a young person that you can excel, but then I look at the University and say, who's in administration that looks like these students? No presidents, no vice presidents, no provost, no associate provost. The full faculty? You can count the number of African American full professors on the campus on one hand. We have no African American distinguished professors. It was beyond sad. I was just so frustrated and disappointed because I am putting in effort because I value the University, but is the University valuing what I'm trying to do?

At a faculty meeting, one colleague mentioned that when she first met me, she was really afraid of me. After working with me for a couple of years, she lost that fear. A couple of our colleagues chimed in and said they had the same experience.

So, once upon a time I was sitting in the department chair's office to talk about my teaching load for the next semester. She informed me I was not going to be allowed to teach a class I wanted to teach. The chair said, "You don't have the course work," and I argued I did have the course work in my doctoral program. And so we went back and forth.

Then during our conversation, all of a sudden, she stopped when someone came in. My back was to the door, so I could not see the person who came into the office. They had a conversation, and part of the conversation from the chair's perspective was she said, "everything is okay, nothing has

happened. I am fine, and I will get ahold of you after we finish our conversation.” While she was saying that, I really wanted to turn around and look at who was standing behind me.

The person standing behind me was never introduced to me and finally left. We continued the conversation. It really bothered me, the sense I got was that the chair felt unsafe with me in the office. And this is a person they pre-arranged to look in and see if I was behaving. The connotation behind choosing those words, “was I behaving?” is something I do want to stress.

My department was asked by the dean to propose a plan for how we could become more distinctive in our programming. I had suggested the plan that we settled on, so when we met with the dean and were asked for our ideas, I spoke up first. When I finished, he looked a little perplexed and shook a hand in the air as if trying to brush my words away. “No, no, no,” he said. “I don’t see how that will be effective. Are there any other ideas?” A male colleague caught my eye and then raised his hand and restated what I had suggested as if it was a new and different idea. “Ah,” said the dean, “now that is something I think we can work with.”

A student made some comments [in class] about how it would be appropriate for someone to outright kill someone if they met them and took them home from like a bar and discovered that they were transgender and hadn’t disclosed that. He thought that it was totally permissible to do that. He just

looked at me and said, “Well, you know I’m pretty anti-gay.” On the one hand, I was offended because I like to think that when I walk in a room, sprinkles and unicorns come out. And so did he not know who I am? I went home, and I just thought, how do you deal with a student who just tells you that they hate you for who you are, or who they don’t even know you to be but you know you are?