

Call to Action – DU Diversity Summit 2014

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I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts about Diversity Summit and encourage continued action. I am an assistant professor of higher education in the Morgridge College of Education. In my role I am privileged to work along-side communities of color, particularly Latina/o communities, to pursue equitable educational opportunities and address systemic inequities. The values of inclusive excellence are embedded in the research that I do and in the courses that I teach. Because of this, am excited to reflect on issues of social justice and inclusive excellence with you.

I ask you to reflect on what today has meant for you. Is it simply an opportunity to check off your diversity goals for the year? Attended Diversity Summit, check. I ask you reflect on how and why it must become deeper than that.

I ask you think about how Inclusive Excellence becomes more than just a symbolic representation of the University of Denver. I ask you to think about how Inclusive Excellence is part of our daily actions, because otherwise, it is tossed aside as merely a noble gesture.

I challenge you to think about how we can move Inclusive Excellence beyond the confines of particular offices, people, courses, or departments. I challenge you to take it beyond the confines of a three-day summit.

The events of the Diversity Summit have equipped us with the tools to do just that.

Yesterday evening's showing of American Promise reminded us that educational inequities, especially those layered with issues of race, gender, and socioeconomic status, are pervasive in our educational systems. I hope that the documentary forced you think about why we must work towards a system that offers all students culturally relevant opportunities to shape their educational paths, a system that builds hope and confidence in students rather than stripping it away, a system that highlights the strengths of diverse communities rather than further stratifying opportunities.

This morning Dr. Marybeth Gasman challenged us to find the counter-stories within traditional historical narratives. She challenged us to acknowledge the power that we have, to put our fears aside, and to use that power for something beyond ourselves – to live for something bigger.

Dr. Gasman was followed by incredible workshops, many of which were led by our own students. It is inspiring indeed to think that some of our greatest change agents and assets are right here at DU.

Finally, we were reminded at lunch by Dr. Ramona Beltran and Mr Otto Braided Hair that we must remember and honor the Native peoples impacted by the Sand Creek Massacre. But beyond the impact on Native people, we must also recognize the interconnectedness among all things and that we are also impacted by the actions that took place 150 years ago and the actions that continue to take place today. Dr. Beltran reinforced that we all need to heal.

Tomorrow's Day of Action continues with providing elementary students and their families with early college information because we know developing college knowledge can never begin too soon. Because we know, the future of DU will continue to flourish by embracing the diverse communities surrounding our institutional walls.

I want to leave you with Margaret Montoya's "blessing" – she calls it a prayer-lite – reflective of the tenets of Critical Race Theory and particularly Latina/o Critical Race Theory. I've modified it slightly for this occasion and offer you, "A social justice blessing."

May you be blessed with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that you will live deep in your heart.

May you be blessed with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people and the earth so that you will work for justice, equity, and peace.

May you be blessed with tears to shed for those who suffer so you will reach out your hands to comfort them and change their pain into joy.

And may you be blessed with the foolishness to think that you can make a difference in the world, so you can do the things which others say cannot be done.

So I ask you – what foolishness will you get into attempting to make a difference? How will you commit and what will you commit to? The Diversity Summit is more than just a day to talk about inclusive excellence and diversity, it is an opportunity to engage in something bigger than yourself, to make a commitment each day to pursuing the ideals of inclusive excellence.

Thank you.