TaJuan Wilson, Ed.D., joins as Georgia Southern’s first Associate Vice President for Inclusive Excellence

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As Georgia Southern University’s first Associate Vice President for Inclusive Excellence, TaJuan Wilson, Ed.D., looks to accomplish an expansive list of goals with enthusiasm and an open ear.

Enlisted to bolster the University’s efforts to develop a more inclusive culture, Wilson is partnering with faculty, staff, students and the community to initiate, define and implement the institution’s inclusive excellence initiatives, policies and programs.

His first move is to listen.

“My primary goal as I begin my time at Georgia Southern University to spend more time listening than talking,” Wilson said. “Right now I’m trying to meet as many people as possible and learn. I’m really enjoying the opportunity to engage in thoughtful conversations about the experiences of students, faculty and staff here at Georgia Southern University.”

Initially, he planned a series of listening sessions for students, faculty, staff and the community across all three campuses with the help of University Marketing and Communications. However, as the University closed to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, listening sessions were replaced with an online survey (https://georgiasouthern.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/preview/SV_b1S5IApFqtS4TTn?Q_SurveyVersionID=current&Q_CHL=preview), which was sent out last week and will remain open for the next month. Wilson has already received hundreds of responses and hopes many more will participate in the ever-evolving conversation around inclusive excellence.

“We’ve said that as an institution, we want to be a model for inclusive excellence, and our next step is to provide clarity around what that really means,” Wilson posed. “Our goal is to have a comprehensive plan that drives us forward with a specific strategy that allows us to accomplish this important work that fosters a shared vision coupled with measurable outcomes and accountability. We’ll be addressing things like faculty, staff and student recruitment, retention and advancement, training and intercultural education, and the implementation of strong, genuine, and consistently communicated culturally inclusive practices that reinforce our strategic plan. Thinking about how we recruit our faculty is really important. What is equally important is how we retain and advance students, faculty and staff at Georgia Southern University.”

Wilson was pleased to learn that the University’s SGA leaders and faculty senate have been working together on a joint resolution regarding diverse faculty hiring.

“This is a necessary first step to firm up our commitment to the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion so that we may achieve inclusive excellence,” Wilson said.

Feedback from the survey will be presented to President Kyle Marrero and the President’s Diversity Advisory Council, who will work together to produce an Inclusive Excellence Action Plan this summer. Virtual meetings for the group will begin on April 23.
“By June, our goal is to have a tangible plan developed that can be released to the campus community that builds on our University Strategic Plan: People. Purpose. Action. Growing Ourselves to Grow Others, in which we have identified Inclusive Excellence as pillar three,” Wilson said, “We really want to take pillar three and give it some real meaning and accountability.”

Wilson said student success and how it relates to inclusive excellence is at the core of the equity plan.

“There’s direct synergy in our strategic plan because student success, of course, is our first pillar,” Wilson said. “And then when you get down to pillar three, there is inclusive excellence. So how do we connect those dots to tell our story and demonstrate that in order to achieve inclusive excellence, diversity, equity, and inclusion must be at the heart of everything we do- that’s the goal.”

Alignment between faculty and staff training and cultural consciousness, the understanding that we all have an ongoing obligation to engage in the work of diversity, equity and inclusion, said Wilson, is also a key objective.

“We’re never truly culturally competent, if you will, right?” Wilson posed. “Things are ever-changing and we must be adaptable and committed lifelong learners. How we actually engage in this work and embed it in a way that becomes a part of the very fabric of who we are as an institution is the key.”

Reporting and transparency, unity and shared values are the two other components of the strategic plan that will help to continue to define Georgia Southern as an institution. Priority for Wilson is moving words on a sheet of paper to action and accountability, and he feels confident he can accomplish this with broad support from across the University.

“It’s really important to me that we have buy-in at the highest levels of the institution,” said Wilson. “Of course, we know that President Marrero is all-in. The President’s Cabinet is all-in as well. That’s really important for members of our learning community to know.”

Active participation from campus members is also incredibly important.

“I will not be successful, and more importantly, we will not be successful as an institution unless students, faculty, and staff are actively engaged in the process,” he said. “That process, for now, involves actively engaging in the survey, campus programming around Inclusive Excellence, and committee work as we begin developing our inaugural Inclusive Excellence Action Plan. It’s going to be important for people to let their voices be heard and to show up when called upon.”

In return, he promises to be someone who’s going to be present, puts the needs of students first and cultivates a spirit of excellence around how we engage with students, faculty and staff who possess underrepresented identities as well as allies.

“I want people to know that this work belongs to each of us,” Wilson said. “I’m not going to be successful operating in a silo, and I don’t plan to. It’s really going to require us learning to be comfortable being uncomfortable and real commitment to continue our momentum. I want our community to assume good intentions as we navigate this work together as an institution because in the end, we will all be better because of our engagement in Inclusive Excellence. My goal is to provide educational opportunities that foster this spirit and to ensure we’re taking care of our Georgia Southern University family. I want every member of our learning community to be accepted, understood, and celebrated for who they are and the unique qualities they bring to our University environment.”
Follow Wilson on Twitter at @eaglenationcdo for information and updates from the Office of Inclusive Excellence.

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