

SIUE Names Harris Vice Chancellor For Equity, Diversity And Inclusion

by Doug McIlhagga

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Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Chancellor Randy Pembroke has named Jessica Harris, PhD, as the University's first vice chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion (VCEDI) after a national search conducted by Dr. Cornell Thomas, SIU School of Dental Medicine (SDM) chief diversity officer, director of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and assistant dean for admissions and student services

The national search, which began in mid-October 2020, produced 46 applicants. "Thank you to our committee members who were committed to this search," Thomas said. "It was a complete team effort. We had an outstanding pool of applicants, and we are excited about the energized direction that SIUE is traveling."

"We are extremely excited about Dr. Harris serving as our inaugural vice chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion," Pembroke said. "There is much work to be done regarding SIUE diversity initiatives, and Jessica, with her academic and administrative experience at SIUE, is prepared to hit the ground running on day one."

Harris was named assistant provost for academic equity and inclusive excellence in the SIUE Office of the Provost in 2020 after serving as the interim assistant provost for the previous two years. An SIUE faculty member since 2011, Harris has served as an associate professor of historical studies in the SIUE College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and director of the interdisciplinary Black Studies program.

"I want to extend my sincere appreciation to Dr. Cornell Thomas and the members of the search committee for facilitating such a thoughtful search process," Harris said. "I am also grateful to Chancellor Pembroke for this honored opportunity to serve SIUE in this capacity."

"As I shared during my open forum presentation, my first task will be to work with stakeholders across the University to develop a comprehensive, multi-layered, integrative roadmap to clearly outline and define the next steps in our sojourn toward inclusive excellence. There is much work ahead, and I cannot do it alone. I am confident that if we dream together, and more importantly work together, SIUE will be well on its way to becoming a national model for equity and excellence in higher education."

Harris' work at SIUE has included a special assignment as a Provost Fellow for Diversity and Inclusion. In this role, she collaborated with faculty colleagues, undergraduate and graduate students, the Honors Program, the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Student Affairs to launch a pilot of Sustained Dialogue, a powerful five-stage social action model encouraging dialogue across differences, as a curricular and co-curricular program. She received the Faculty Humanitarian Award at SIUE's 2018 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Celebration.

The VCEDI will serve an integral role in two important current initiatives – the [Anti-Racism Task Force](#) (ARTF) and the [Higher Learning Commission](#) (HLC) Quality Initiative focusing on anti-racism. The VCEDI also will work closely with the [SIU System](#) and its new vice president for diversity, as well as the [Diversity Advisory Council](#) (DAC).

The VCEDI's direct responsibilities will include, but are not limited to:

- Lead the Office of Diversity and Inclusion
- Supervise and administer the offices of EOA/Title IX, Military and Veterans Services, and the Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion
- Work with equity advisors for staff searches and the Impact Academy for staff positions
- Through the Diversity Council, continue to advance the recently developed Diversity Strategic Plan and be responsible for SIUE's diversity goals
- Lead ongoing Anti-Racism Task Force efforts, including developing training and professional development opportunities, and implementing the recommendations from that group in coordination with the ongoing Higher Learning Commission Quality Initiative (QI)
- Coordinate the Institutional Diversity Leadership Team
- Chair the Bias Incident Response Team (BIRT)
- Participate in certain functions of the EOA/Title IX appeals processes in consultation with the EOA Director
- Provide guidance in the Strategic Hiring Initiative as it pertains to SIUE staff
- Assume responsibilities for anti-racism, equity, diversity, and inclusion programming, including growth of campus constituency groups

Harris participated in the 2017 Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) Institute, an intensive, residential leadership development program for female leaders across the United States. Additionally, in 2017, she was named to the Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions Inaugural Aspiring Leaders Forum and Mentoring Program.

Harris is an accomplished teacher and scholar of 20th century African American History, and a dedicated servant leader committed to student success and inclusive excellence. Harris received the competitive Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation's 2014-15 Career Enhancement Fellowship for Junior Faculty for her research on the contributions of Black women to the struggle for civil rights in Oakland, Calif. prior to World War II.

In 2011, Harris earned a doctorate in history from Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y. She also holds a master's from Cornell University and a bachelor's from Dillard University in New Orleans.

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#) provides students with a high-quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of nearly 13,000.