

LaShun McGhee- Personal Statement

It was at my first conference, “Legal Issues in Higher Education” in Burlington, Vermont that I knew I had made the right decision to transition from behavioral health to higher education. I was in the room with several hundred professionals and various professions, which I didn’t have a full understanding of- namely, Student Affairs. During the five day conference, I observed many participants and listened attentively in the various sessions attended. What I slowly came to realize is, I had transitioned to a field, not so different than what I had left; there were truly more similarities than differences. I would later learn, the importance of getting College Leadership to understand, embrace and buy into those similarities.

My transition to higher education was a personal and strategic professional goal. At the onset, I had planned to expand my professional career by applying transferrable skills in a different profession. I started out providing support, improving and implement programs. As a result, our campus now has: a multi-functioning Dean of Students Office- with visibility, advocacy, and support rather than just from a punitive lens; including a Behavioral Intervention Team, Title IX Coordinator, Deputy Title IX Coordinators, and more. That was nearly seven years ago and my newly created position has definitely evolved to more progressive responsibilities. It informally transitioned to a mix of job classifications; supportive, professional and executive at times.

This progressive responsibility has led to my qualifications as the Title IX Officer at San Jose State University. One of those responsibilities involved helping to monitor compliance; inclusive of knowledge, interpretation, consultation and dissemination of the various statutes. I help track and log such incidents and inform the Dean of any risks and deadlines. I am one of two staff persons on campus to keep abreast of such Acts, including the additional Illinois state requirements of Preventing Sexual Assault in Higher Education. While I do not have experience in the California State University (CSU) system, or knowledge of all CSU Executive Orders, I am skilled with my current workplace Executive Orders, which seem similar in nature. In addition, Title IX, Violence Against Women’s Act (VAWA) and the Reauthorization, Clery, ADA/504, HEA, Title IV and Title VII and several other intersecting laws is required of all institutions; I would bring this universal information to the San Jose State University (SJSU) seamlessly.

I thrive in grassroots and newly developing environments, and many of my professional and volunteer experiences started as such; where I have implemented, maintained or improved initiatives. Specifically, in my current role, I helped our former Dean/Title Coordinator initiate Title IX campus culture change, long before it became a mainstream topic. For example, the work has evolved into identifying the appropriate Title IX Coordinator, many inaugural programs and prevention education. I help train and educate students and employees about Title IX, and other areas, including responsible employee training, awareness programming and workshops for students and currently researching technology and evidenced- based programs for student-wide training. I also developed and currently revising a Title IX Guide for administrators and investigators. This will be used to share information, training purposes and protocol.

Although I have yet to attain my Master's Degree, I have completed all of my course work and at the half-way point with my thesis. While having an earned Master's degree will add credibility and academic prestige, it is not the distinguishing factor to set me apart from other applicants; it's my versed experience and active soft skills, along with my understanding of various models: cognitive behavioral and disease model, public health, student development and restorative justice resolution practices. In addition, my ability to serve and advocate for students, provide consultation for staff and faculty, and maintain the university's compliance while creating amicable resolutions for all parties involved. This requires tact, foresight, impartiality, strong communication and relationship building, and zeal-all of which; I not only have, but use regularly.

To conclude, my leap to transition careers has proven beneficial; I have expanded my experience which prepared me to work for an institution such as yours. I also understand how key areas, such as Title IX, require buy-in from key decision makers to maintain its effectiveness and promote culture change. And yes, while we are still having conversations with Leadership about the relevance and importance of our work, we've made great leg way. While there's more work to be done, and conversations to be had, I can tell you this; our Office will have a seat at the table! More importantly, with my contributions, our campus community now knows how to reach us for Title IX, discrimination and others concerns. I would also expect to build, cultivate and maintain an inclusive, safe and welcoming culture at SJSU.