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# THE CENTER FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION'S FANTASTIC FIRST YEAR

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**By Hazel Denother**

Lindenwood University's Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) will celebrate its first-year anniversary in January. The Center is located in Evans Commons 3110, and its main goal is to promote equity, diversity, and inclusivity in the university community. The CDI has established a myriad of programs and exciting initiatives throughout its first year, and this young but mighty Lindenwood resource has much to be proud of in terms of its accomplishments on campus in 2020.

The Center was created by Dr. Shane Williamson, the former (and the university's first) chief diversity officer, as one of her Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Jennifer Spellazza was named the Coordinator for the CDI, and she organizes and runs many of the programs that the Center puts on. She states, "My office/workspace is the CDI, so my goal is to remain available and accessible so I can meet with all community members (students, staff, faculty—virtually and physically)."

Spellazza, who participates on the President's Equity & Inclusion Council in addition to her work in the CDI office, is a major proponent of the Center's values. She comments, "[Diversity and Inclusion] is important to me because of my social identities, diverse experiences, my community, as well as the policies, culture, and climate that the CDI's work influences—it is all around us and should be prioritized in all that we do." She goes on to remark, "As an ally [to marginalized populations], my goal is to use my privilege and position as the Coordinator of the CDI to create space for others who are less privileged than me and honor their identities and experiences. But [Diversity and Inclusion] work is for everyone; it does not discriminate." She stresses the importance of the CDI and encourages any interested parties to take part in Center activities.

The CDI offers many different diversity training programs for students, faculty, and staff. The Center hosts numerous implicit bias trainings throughout the semester, all of which were created by Spellazza and a committee of her Lindenwood colleagues. These educational trainings help participants become better community members and allies by teaching them to identify and combat harmful prejudices. The Center also offers Safe Zone training sessions, which educate people about LGBTQ+ identities and the adversity that this community faces. Spellazza, herself a Safe Zone facilitator, explains that "Safe Zone is an un-copywritten resource for free." Anyone can access the training

materials online to learn more about LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Spellazza believes that the training programs offered by the CDI beautifully complement many students' Lindenwood majors and minors. She emphasizes, however, that diversity training can be wonderful for *anyone* in the Lindenwood community to take part in simply for the experience, which fosters important personal growth for participants.



The CDI also promotes the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force, runs the Black Student Excellence and Enrichment Program, and assists Rev. Dr. Nichole Torbitzky in managing the university's **Little Free Pantry**. This semester, the Center worked on developing several new programs as well. Spellazza comments, "We created a modified version of the Keep It Real Board Game [a diversity training tool] called 'Keep It Real—Virtual Game Play.' I've offered ten 1-hour sessions this term to [first-year students], but I plan on opening up the sessions to all of campus since it is going well. Also, we are starting an Accessibility Roundtable, and the model will be applied to other marginalized communities to see if it would be a good proactive measure to open the dialogue of [Diversity and Inclusion] topics on campus for all stakeholders to have a voice, especially students."

Another major focus of the CDI is its diversity programming. Each semester, the Center hosts dialogues, panels, workshops, conferences, and events to help the Lindenwood community learn about, engage in, and celebrate diversity and inclusion. The Center often co-sponsors these events with other organizations and campus departments, and Spellazza hopes to have even more such collaboration in the future. She explains that the CDI is hoping to expand and strengthen their campus presence, and that "continuing to partner with other student organizations and campus departments is a big part of the process...so growing the CDI network, maintaining a DEI presence, and prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion is the plan."

The CDI's first birthday is fast-approaching, and Spellazza reflects on the Center's 2020 accomplishments: "The [Lindenwood] community has achieved so much, like scheduling DEI trainings and holding space for marginalized communities." She notes that she is "very happy, but it's only the beginning. There's so much more we can do!" The Center has had a wonderful first year, during which it has worked to initiate crucial dialogues, introduce fresh perspectives, build fruitful relationships, and foster a harmonious and healthy campus community. This has been an incredibly valuable resource for students, faculty, and staff, and it has blossomed into a tremendous campus facility that Lindenwood is lucky to have. The CDI will only grow and thrive from

here, continuing to improve the campus and make Lindenwood's already-close-knit community even stronger.