

OBIE FORD III

Pronouns: He/Him/His

Collective Pronouns: We/Us/Our

Obie Ford III is Associate Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer at Washington State University Vancouver. Located in the homeland of Chinookan and Taidnapam peoples, and the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, WSU Vancouver is a land grant and R1 university within the WSU system, including campuses at Pullman, Everett, Global, Spokane and Tri-Cities. As Associate Vice Chancellor, Ford provides strategic and proactive leadership for Goal 4 of the WSU Vancouver strategic plan to bridge, integrate, and significantly expand equity, diversity, inclusion, belonging, and justice initiatives across the university. Ford reports to the Chancellor of WSU Vancouver, is a member of the Chancellor's executive cabinet, and works collaboratively with students, faculty, staff, and administration to ensure equitable opportunities and outcomes for all student populations; infuse equity-mindedness throughout the fabric of the campus structure; and build and maintain a safe and welcoming environment where all students, staff, and faculty have the opportunity to thrive.

Representation and visibility matter. An action-oriented, collaborative, and visionary leader, Ford has broadly increased diversity of faculty, staff, and students at WSU Vancouver. He creates space and invitation for the campus community to foster a culture of equity-mindedness, cultural responsiveness, and inclusive excellence. Ford partnered with Academic Affairs and Human Resource Services to infuse equity throughout the search process. Results from faculty, staff, and administration searches over the past 3 years show effectiveness in this effort. In 2019-2020, faculty of color accounted for 50% of new faculty hires at WSU Vancouver. Also in 2020, the Chancellor's Cabinet and the Academic Leadership Council (campus deans) experienced a 50% increase in representation of leaders who identify as Black, Brown, Indigenous, and People of Color, respectively.

Ford established the Building a Community of Equity (BaCE) professional development program at WSU Vancouver which provides theoretical and practical frameworks, antiracist resources, and culturally responsive tools to challenge the status quo of systemic inequities and suffuse all forms of equity, including racial equity, throughout university policies, processes, practices, and pedagogies at WSU Vancouver and throughout the WSU system. This includes workshops on equity in the search process for faculty and staff. Since its 2018 inception, more than 60% of faculty and staff (including academic leadership, facilities management, campus police, and the Chancellor's cabinet) have participated in BaCE.

Ford takes a data-informed approach to disrupt and eliminate student inequities by ensuring all students, specifically historically underrepresented student populations, have access to resources and opportunities to succeed including Native American, Pacific Islander, Indigenous, and Black students. He established the Equity of Student Outcomes Council (ESOC) to examine parity and disparity in access, opportunities, and outcomes across student demographics, including the intersections of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, and ability. ESOC developed the THRIVE program, which achieved a retention rate of 85% for first-year students of the program compared to a 60% retention rate of first-year students not enrolled in the program.

Ford initiated a triad partnership between ESOC, Student Success Council and Enrollment Management Council. Strategies of the councils achieved a 50% enrollment increase of freshman applications from students of underrepresented racial populations from 2015 – 2020; reached freshman graduation equivalence for the first time across student racial demographics in 2020; and maintained equivalence of transfer graduation rates for Black, Brown, Native American, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, Asian, and White students for 4 out of the last 5 years. The strategies implemented by ESOC were the greatest driver of enrollment growth at WSU Vancouver over the past 5 years.

In 2017, Ford established the Office of Equity and Diversity at WSU Vancouver and the SPACE framework of pillars (Support, Partnership, Assessment and Accountability, Communication, Education). Ford's leadership team includes the Campus Director of Equity Education and Programming; Campus Director of Faculty Equity and Outreach; and Campus Director of Native American Affairs. The Accessibility Council and the Council on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion as well as the respective chairs of each council, also report to Ford.

He works in close partnership with the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Enrollment to provide leadership and support to the Center for Intercultural Learning and Affirmation, Cougar Food Pantry, Veterans Services,

Student Wellness Center (including Accessibility Services), African Student Union and Cougar Pride LGBTQ+ Programs. He also works in very close collaboration with the WSU Office of Compliance and Civil Rights. In 2014, Ford founded the Wilson Inclusion, Diversity and Equity (WIDE) Office and framework at Warren Wilson College. He was a faculty member in the College of Education at Warren Wilson and simultaneously served an appointment as a faculty research fellow at the University of North Carolina Asheville.

Ford is devoted to amplifying voices and centering needs of students, staff, and faculty from historically underrepresented populations. He makes room for all members of the campus community to lean-in to this work and equips them with tools and resources to activate their advocacy for equity. He builds high levels of trust and credibility with internal and external constituencies. He adheres to the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) standards of professional practice. Under Ford's leadership, WSU Vancouver received national recognition as the recipient of the 2019 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award. In 2020, his partnership with Native American Affairs at WSU Pullman and Vancouver resulted in receiving the USDA New Beginnings Tribal Students Grant (\$250K). In 2021, his consultancy on the HHMI grant proposal on Southwest Washington Regional Alliance for Inclusive Science Education (RAISE) received funding (\$1M).

Love of a critical nature is at the foundation of Ford's innovative, optimistic, and strategic equity leadership. He is dedicated to leading, welcoming, and partnering with students, staff, faculty, and external partners to dismantle the status quo of inequitable social power and privilege; and building infrastructures for equity, antiracism, diversity, inclusion, belonging and justice that assist in evolving and transforming policies, processes, practices, pedagogies, and people. He is committed to actualizing equity-mindedness, cultural responsiveness, and inclusive excellence across campuses and communities.