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### Diversity In Action: An In-Depth Look at How The University Of Missouri-Kansas City Developed An Institutionalized Approach To Implementing Its Diversity In Action Strategic Initiatives

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# **Diversity In Action: An In-Depth Look at How The University Of Missouri-Kansas City Developed An Institutionalized Approach To Implementing Its Diversity In Action Strategic Initiatives**

## **Abstract**

*As colleges and universities across the country affirm or reaffirm their commitment to educate people from all walks of life, it is critical that they are prepared to effectively serve and educate all students regardless of race, gender, nationality, age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or disability. As programs related to affirmative action continue to remain under fire and uncertain, institutions will need to develop their own conscious that will allow them to be able to successfully nurture and develop the leaders of tomorrow. Hence, the University of Missouri-Kansas City has developed seven strategic initiatives that are referred to as, "Diversity In Action. "*

**Joe Seabrooks** ,. Director, Minority Student Affairs, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, MO

## **Linda Carter**

Director, Access Programs, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, MO

This presentation explores in-depth how the University of Missouri-Kansas City developed and implemented a comprehensive approach to embrace diversity. Like many predominately White institutions, the University of Missouri-Kansas City over the years developed a negative reputation within the community in which it serves. For a long time, UMKC was perceived as an institution for people of color to avoid, particularly within the Hispanic/Latino and African American communities. This reputation grew over the years primarily because a significant number of University employees, students, and alumni of color were extremely vocal about the inequitable and unfriendly treatment they received.

As colleges and universities across the country affirm or reaffirm their commitment to educate people from all walks of life, it is critical that they are prepared to effectively serve and educate all students regardless of race, gender, nationality, age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or disability. As programs related to affirmative action continue to remain under fire and uncertain, institutions will need to develop their own conscious that will allow them to be able to successfully nurture and develop the leaders of tomorrow. Hence, the University of Missouri-Kansas City has developed seven strategic initiatives that are referred to as, "Diversity In Action." The intent of the programs are to: *Live our core value of diversity, inclusiveness, and respect,. having a campus culture where diversity, access and equity are welcomed, supported and promoted.*

Diversity is a term that has been widely defined by institutions of higher education over the years.

Therefore, it was extremely important that UMKC developed its own diversity statement. This statement became the nucleus for everything that UMKC developed as it relates to diversity. The diversity statement is as follows:

*We create a positive environment by recognizing and acknowledging personal biases and being responsible for positive change.*

The success of the "Diversity In Action" strategic initiatives is crucial for UMKC as an institution to become a campus that is committed to live its core value of Diversity, Inclusiveness and Respect.

Currently, as a result of UMKC's institutional transformation process, diversity has become a high priority. This presentation will illustrate how UMKC developed its strategic plan and implementation strategy, and the product of that labor.

#### General Outcomes and Techniques

.This presentation will open with a diversity exercise that will help expose some of the biases that we *all* harbor (20 Minutes)

.There will be a power point presentation that will illustrate how UMKC developed its Diversity In Action program. In addition, there will be an in-depth description of the seven projects that emerged from that process (45 minutes)

.This session will close with a question and answer period (10 Minutes) Session Outcomes

.The outcomes of this presentation are as follows:

.Help the participants realize that no matter how open we believe that we are to diversity, we all harbor biases that affect how we treat people and deliver service.

.Share a diversity model that has been implemented at a Predominately White Institution.

.Share the ideas that were developed at UMKC in regards to diversity.

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#### Presenters

Originally from Atlanta, Georgia Dr. Seabrooks arrived at the University of Missouri- Kansas City in 1989 as a student athlete. After he completed his athletic eligibility and his bachelor's degree in psychology, he went on to earn a masters degree and educational specialist degree both in higher education administration, and soon thereafter completed his Interdisciplinary PhD in Urban Leadership and Policy Studies and Education all from UMKC. In 2001 as Director of Minority Student Affairs, Dr. Seabrooks emerged as the leader of UMKC's campus wide diversity

strategic initiatives. The success of the "Diversity In Action" strategic initiatives is crucial for UMKC as an institution to become a campus that is committed to live its core value of Diversity, Inclusiveness and Respect. The intent of these initiatives are to set the "New Standards in Higher Education" regarding diversity.

Overcoming barriers to higher education and identifying new roles and expectations of Kansas City's higher education institution is a passion of Linda J. Carter. She served as the first director of the University of Missouri-Kansas City Center for Academic Development Project First/UPWARD BOUND program, a federally funded TRIO program for almost 12 years. During her leadership Project First achieved its goals of providing an academic rich, culturally empowering, and intellectually stimulating foundation for the program participants. The program, under her leadership, received local and state acclaim. Ms. Carter is a first generation college graduate and remains connected to the community of low-income first generation college graduates by continuing to advocate for inclusion in higher education by writing grants that provide life option bridges and developing future-oriented strategic leadership models.

Ms. Carter is a member of the Diversity-In-Action team and takes a leadership role in providing a platform of understanding of how UMKC vision would be impaired if no planning for diversity is included and implemented in the vision, goals, and objective of the university.

