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Otterbein Office of Social Justice & Activism
Otterbein University, osja@otterbein.edu

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EQUITY & INCLUSION MATTERS

Otterbein's Office of Equity and Inclusion: Making the Invisible Visible



Otterbein Joins with Westerville Community to Launch Racial Equity Organization

Community members and organizations, including Otterbein University and other key stakeholders in the greater Westerville area, have come together to commit to doing the important work necessary to defeat racism in the community in response to the tragic events of police brutality in 2020.

Along with incidents across the country, two recent police shootings of unarmed Black men in Central Ohio have brought the focus on racism in policing closer to home.

"Work for racial equity cannot happen in silos. There are lots of organizations like Otterbein doing important work, but we will be able to accomplish so much more together," said Otterbein President John Comerford.

A founding group that includes the City of Westerville, MLK Legacy Project, Otterbein, Westerville Area Chamber of Commerce, Westerville City Schools, Westerville Public Library, and more, is launching a new non-profit organization, WeRise, in the greater Westerville community to actively fight racism in the community. A 30-member "launch team" is overseeing the initial development of the organization, as well as hiring a community chief diversity officer.

Otterbein community members involved in the creation of this new organization include:

- Jefferson Blackburn-Smith, vice president for enrollment management and marketing.
- John Comerford, Ph.D., president.
- Desmond Fernandez, student and community engagement organizer.
- James E. Prysock III, director of social justice and activism.
- Timothy Wotring, student.

CALENDAR

Sundays, 7-8 p.m.

Women's, Gender and Sexuality Resource Center virtual support hours, via Zoom (otterbein.edu/wgss/resource-center)

Feb. 25, 7-8:30 p.m.

Let's Get Humble: Using Cultural Humility in Diverse Work Spaces virtual session (otterbein.edu/gradlecture)

March 16, 4-5 p.m.

Being Your Authentic Self: diversity and inclusion in the workplace (otterbein.joinhandshake.com)

March 18-21

"Into a Lamplit Room: The Songs of Kurt Weill" theatre production (otterbein.edu/drama)

April 26

Lavendar Graduation (time TBA), Alum Creek Park Amphitheatre

April 30, 5:30 p.m.

Noble Transitions, Alum Creek Amphitheatre

INST Course Helps Stonewall Columbus Tell Their Stories

INST 3010: Telling Community Stories for the Common Good explored the relationship between journalists and communities, the concept of civic journalism, and how to promote a community and “restore it,” using techniques common to public relations.

One group of students worked with Stonewall Columbus, Central Ohio’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ+) community organization. Students interviewed Stonewall employees, volunteers and other members of the LGBTQ+ community about the history of the organization, as well as broader topics that affected the community as a whole.

“We worked primarily to connect the history of Stonewall with our current times and the challenges we are facing,” said student group member Gwen Hughes ’22. “We were able to show connections between the COVID-19 pandemic and the beginning of the AIDS crises in the 1980s. Groups like these have the right to tell their stories like everyone else, and we wanted to facilitate that important work as best we could.”

Work that the students were able to do will be turned into Stonewall social media posts, website content, promotional materials and more. Learn more about Stonewall at StonewallColumbus.org.



**STONEWALL
COLUMBUS**



Activism on Campus

A group of Otterbein students gather to join the Westerville Black Lives Matter protest on June 3, 2020. The event drew almost 1000 Westerville community residents. The march went through campus on as the crowd made their way to the Alum Creek Park Amphitheatre.

from the **DIRECTOR**

Greetings Cardinals,

Like most of the world at this time, as we face the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic and its impact on our daily lives, we have struggled with feelings of despair, fear and helplessness on occasion. Some of you have also experienced changes to your livelihood and relationships. I've personally taken some steps to help restore my sanity.

Hope

Hope symbolizes that we have something to fight for or aim toward. Without it, our thoughts, words and actions have no foundation. There have been many difficult times in my life when I was operating on empty, but hope enabled me to survive. It is a powerful tool we can utilize throughout this crisis and any other to help carry us through.

Support

Who is in our support system? Do we make time for each other? Though social limitations may change the way we interact with our system, it doesn't mean that we should abandon communication. We need each other more than ever. I found myself connecting with people I haven't spoken to in years. Not because of any conflict, but because we hadn't made time for each other within our busy schedules. Suddenly, we found ourselves reminiscing on good times and picking up where we left off years ago.

Self-Care

A battery cannot power something without a charge. When that charge is drained, so is the power. If we don't recharge our batteries, we can't be the

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Desmond Fernandez '21 Receives Community Honor at MLK Celebration



Desmond Fernandez '21.

Desmond Fernandez, a senior BFA acting major at Otterbein, was honored with the Alston Award at Leadership Westerville's 16th annual Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration on Jan. 18, 2021. The award recognizes a member of the Westerville community that has embodied and lived out the ideals of Dr. King.

The Alton Award is named in honor of Miriam Alston and the group of slaves she freed who traveled to the Westerville area in 1859. The recipients of the annual award exemplify the characteristics demonstrated by Dr. King (tolerant, respectful, kind, brave, and tenacious), have respect for the differences in others around them, and take action when they see an injustice.

"I've been a part of this community for so long — it's my lifeline for success and happiness," Fernandez said. "This is my time to be a part of this mission to better our community and make it even more diverse and more inclusive."

His activism grew as a student until the summer of 2020, when he stepped up to organize protests and celebrations supporting Black Lives Matter. On June 3, 2020, Fernandez led a group through Otterbein's campus and ended with a sit-in with speakers at the courthouse in Uptown Westerville.

What he thought was going to be maybe 50 people turned out to be almost 1,000 protestors.

Fernandez' award nominator wrote: "A tireless organizer, Desmond has taken on the events and heartbreaks of 2020 as opportunities to both raise awareness that our country and our communities need racial justice. He shows us all how to stand in and for racial and social justice while loving our neighbors, even if they don't value and live the same things we do."

Student Organization Spotlight: Otterbein Deaf Culture Club

Otterbein Deaf Culture Club (ODCC) focuses on creating awareness of deaf culture through service to the community. We aim to connect our Otterbein community to the deaf community by doing various events. To participate in ODCC, knowledge about American Sign Language or the deaf community is not needed; we welcome anyone with any type of background. Upcoming events include donation drop boxes for masks and travel-sized hand sanitizer to donate these items to Columbus Colony, a community of elderly deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing individuals. Donations will be accepted from Feb. 8-March 15, at drop boxes located in several residence halls and the Commuter Lounge in the basement of Towers Hall. ODCC will also be co-hosting an event to interact with deaf students in education as hearing teachers with the Otterbein Student Education Association.



Contact Zoe Conley conley1@otterbein.edu for more information and events.



MLK Day of Service Project Goes DIY

Just because we are in the middle of a pandemic does not mean service work goes by the wayside.

The Center for Community Engagement's (CCE) annual Pack-the-Mac & More event took on a different look for 2021. This event is held to honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and normally consists of students working together to create backpacks full of food non-perishable meals and other treats for kids in Central Ohio. However, this year, the CCE made Do-It-Yourself Service Packs students could pick-up from three campus locations to complete on their own and returned by Feb. 1.

Kits this year included creating a clay "desk pet" and writing out a postcard to brighten their day. The finished kits will be added to a pantry pack for the children that includes Easy Mac macaroni and cheese and other snacks. Finished kits were then dropped off at both the CCE and Promise House and then sent to The Worthington Resource Center and Food Pantry.



from the **DIRECTOR** *cont.*

best professors, administrators and students we can be. Which means the things that we are responsible for can have marginal results. Do you have a way to recharge your battery? Certainly, some of us have more flexibility than others. However, can we all say that we take 10, 20 or 30 minutes a day doing something that energizes us? I have found myself prioritizing things in my life a little differently. I say "no" to people more than ever before. Sometimes, we glorify being busy and only getting three hours of sleep. We do so to a fault that inevitably results in burnout and results that are not our best. Take care of the necessities and leave room to develop and heal yourself. That way, when it's time for you to pour into the lives of others, you have something left for you as well. Say "yes" to yourself more.

If you are having trouble connecting with people or managing your day to day, please reach out to me at jprysock@otterbein.edu. I will make sure you get connected to someone who can help you along your journey.



I hope that you find some encouragement and motivation in these words. Stay safe. Stay aware. Take care of each other. Go Cards!

JAMES Prysock

Executive Director
Office of Social Justice and Activism