



University  
of Windsor

# EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, & DECOLONIZATION NEWSLETTER



## *EDID in the 519* Campus Newsletter

Volume II • Issue III • December 2023

Visit the VP  
People,  
Equity, &  
Inclusion  
Website

Welcome to the December issue!

### **Create. Centre. Celebrate.**

This newsletter strives to build a culture that reflects the diversity of the University of Windsor and our surrounding Windsor-Essex community. It centres bold, unapologetic, and forthright stories of excellence, advocacy, challenge, and change that impact our community and inspire a more equitable and just world.



If we do not capture these stories, no one else will. They will not be heard or seen. With this newsletter, we seek to create an expansive space where EDI issues are centred and celebrated. These stories tell us how far we have come and the potential of where we can grow as a community.

This issue covers important historical markers and campus-wide events related to EDI initiatives, including the inaugural Black Alumni Weekend at the University of Windsor. You can also find articles on the IDeA Competition, The Celebration of Nations, University Launches Its First Employee Mental Health Strategy, and EDID Week as well as Faculty and Staff features on the new Superintendent of the Special Constable Service and the new Director of the Department of Interdisciplinary and Critical Studies.

Read the Welcome Statement from the [VP, People, Equity, & Inclusion](#).

## Celebrating Inclusive Excellence

### University of Windsor Celebrates Inaugural Black Alumni Weekend with Style and Substance

(Back in Black: Bringing Together a Legacy of Diversity and Inclusion)

The University of Windsor celebrated its rich legacy during its annual Alumni Week. This year's festivities were particularly special with the inaugural University of Windsor Black Alumni Weekend.

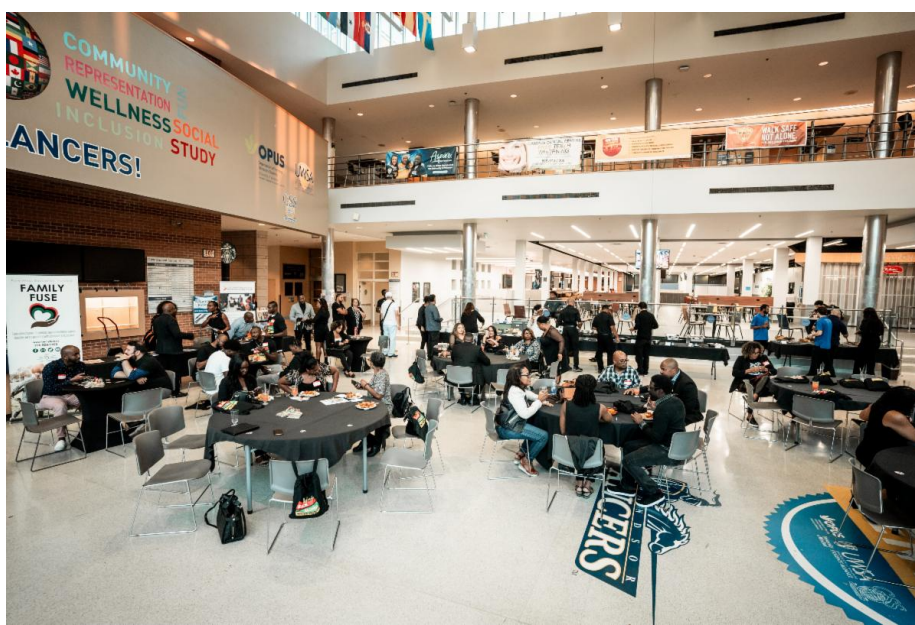
With the leadership of Marium Tolson-Murty, Director of Anti-Racism Organizational Change in the Office of the Vice-President, People, Equity, and Inclusion, and a key member of the UWindsor Black Alumni and Planning Committee, the Black Alumni Weekend was a historical milestone for the University.



#### A Weekend of Unity and Celebration

From the 22nd to the 24th of September, the University of Windsor campus was the site of a vibrant celebration. Each day offered a unique experience to all who participated. Kicking off the weekend was the 'Back in Black Networking Mixer' on Friday, with guests arriving in their finest black attire. The CAW Student Centre commons became the hub of connection, where University volunteers warmly welcomed guests.

More than just a reunion, this event provided a networking platform and valuable resources, including representatives from BPNACanada and Family Fuse Canada offering entrepreneurial mentorship and guidance on navigating the Canadian education system. Guests received commemorative t-shirts, draw string bags, and pens featuring UWindsor Black Alumni branding as souvenirs of the weekend.



## Inspirational Speeches and Delectable Delights

Dwania McLarty-Peele hosted the evening's proceedings, and Marium Tolson-Murty welcomed guests before Dr. Clinton Beckford, Vice-President, People, Equity, & Inclusion, delivered an empowering speech. He highlighted the positive impact of action plans and initiatives, emphasizing the surge in students, faculty, and staff from diverse Black cultural backgrounds. Dr. Beckford acknowledged that there is still much work ahead and reaffirmed the commitment to making UWindsor even more inclusive and welcoming for the Black community.



Guests enjoyed fruits, savoury patties, succulent shrimp, tantalizing kebab skewers, and the beloved fried ripe plantains. This culinary array paid homage to a rich tapestry of cultures. Following the dinner buffet, guests found themselves engaging in conversations and networking across the room.



The resounding sentiment as attendees left the venue was one of joy and fulfillment. Many openly expressed their gratitude for this wonderful initiative. The inaugural Black Alumni Weekend was a resounding success, underscoring the institution's commitment to fostering a sense of belonging and support among its valued alumni.

- Samuel Ehikhuenmen

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## “Black to the Future” Summit hosted by the University of Windsor Black Alumni Group

As part of the University of Windsor’s inaugural Black Alumni Weekend 2023, UWindsor hosted a panel focused on being Black at the University of Windsor to kick off day two of the festivities. The gathering took place on Saturday, September 23, 2023, at the Odette School of Business, and featured distinguished speakers and panelists with ties to the University of Windsor who shared valuable insights and perspectives on a variety of important topics.

The event kicked off with a warm welcome from Marium Tolson-Murty, followed by President and Vice-Chancellor Robert Gordon who emphasized the University's unwavering commitment to diversity and inclusion, laying the groundwork for meaningful discussions. Dr. Clinton Beckford then took the stage, delivering an impactful speech that underlined his office’s role in shaping an inclusive environment within the institution. Marium Tolson-Murty introduced essential documents such as the Aspire Strategic Plan, the Executive Summary of the Anti-Black Racism Task Force Report, and the Black Alumni Consultation Report, demonstrating the University's dedication to addressing the issues facing Black members of the campus community.

Camille Armour Ross, a Senior Development Officer at the Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, served as the panel discussion's moderator, featuring a diverse and accomplished group:

- Dr. Clinton Beckford, Vice-President, People, Equity, and Inclusion emphasized inclusivity and shared responsibility, highlighting the importance of leadership and collective effort.
- Dr. Kemi Anazodo, Assistant Professor at the Odette School of Business and Director of The Cube: Indigenous and Black Talent Incubator, discussed mentorship and

community support.

- Kaitlyn Ellsworth, Black Student Support Coordinator, highlighted the significance of support and representation for Black students.
- Dr. Richard Douglass-Chin, Professor in the Department of Women's & Gender Studies shared his journey as a Black trans man and advocated for addressing struggles within Black communities in embracing queer identities.
- Dr. Shetina Jones, Associate Vice-President, Student Experience, shared her authentic experience and the importance of authentic support.
- Samalia Williams, a Dual JD Student at Windsor Law, emphasized the importance of diversity among educators.



Dr. Douglass-Chin also highlighted the impact of the University of Windsor's Anti-Black Racism Task Force recommendations, acknowledging progress made and the need for ongoing support. Dr. Beckford stressed the importance of resources to bridge the gap between the University's vision and support provided, urging immediate action, and Dr. Anazodo focused on the role of The CUBE in providing a safe space and support for Indigenous and Black students, encouraging community involvement.

Dr. Beckford encouraged Black Alumni to contribute to initiatives that support Black students, emphasizing the importance of their participation in creating a conducive environment, and the other panelists echoed his sentiment of optimism and the power of the Black community to drive positive change on campus.

Participants also discussed their experiences during their time at the University of Windsor and the need to support and connect with alumni, especially those with businesses who can contribute to the University. The panelists also acknowledged the need for more representation of Black men in such discussions, emphasizing the importance of their voices and experiences.



Closing the event, Marium Tolson-Murty expressed her gratitude and encouraged attendees to continue discussions, network, and enjoy the remaining Black Alumni Weekend events, including a tailgate party, a football game, and the evening event at Saila Vibes Caribbean Restaurant. Attendees left inspired and motivated to work together in creating a more inclusive and empowering educational environment at the University of Windsor.

- *Samuel Ehikhuenmen*

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# IDeA UWINDSOR

## IDeA Competition Opens Fall 2023

The Innovative Designs for Enhancing Accessibility (IDeA) Competition is a student contest designed to engage creative minds in developing inclusive, innovative, cost-effective, and practical ideas to address accessibility-related barriers. Students can participate either as a group or through individual submissions, with a chance to win up to \$500 (to be applied to the student's UWinCard). Projects developed as part of a course are also eligible. The competition opened on October 2, 2023, and closes on February 2, 2024. For more details, visit the [OHREA initiatives webpage](#).

The 2023 Competition saw numerous impressive submissions. Congratulations to the first-place winners, Medha Muppala and Kiran Prasad Puthan, graduate students in the School of Computer Science. Their idea, AccessEase, is an AI-assisted document accessibility solution. This software utilizes natural language processing and machine learning algorithms to automatically scan and analyze documents for accessibility issues, such as poor colour contrast or font size. It then makes necessary adjustments to enhance accessibility for users with disabilities. We look forward to the creative ideas our students will submit this year!

- OHREA

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**University Launches Its First Employee Mental Health Strategy**



While workplaces can and should be a source of positivity, providing purpose, financial security, a sense of identity, and social connections, they also have the potential to be sources of stress that can negatively impact mental health and well-being. To promote, protect and support employee mental health, the Office of the Vice-President, People, Equity, and Inclusion launched on October 24, 2023 the University of Windsor Employee Mental Health Strategy (EMHS). This strategy provides a roadmap to promote mental health and well-being, minimize workplace risks to mental health, support employees throughout the mental health continuum, and build a psychologically safe workplace culture.

The development of the EMHS is one of the key actions emerging from the Employee Engagement Survey (2022) and a foundational commitment of the *Aspire: Together for Tomorrow Strategic Plan (2023)*. The University's Strategic Plan highlights "Prioritizing People" as one of the key institutional values. It states our commitment to becoming an institution that consistently operates from a place of care, compassion, respect, humility, and empathy.

The strategy was led and developed by the [Employee Mental Health Steering Committee](#), comprised of faculty and staff with knowledge, passion, and commitment to mental health. To move from strategy to action, the [EMHS Implementation Working Group](#) has been established, co-led by Dr. Kyle Brykman, Assistant Professor, Odette School of Business and Marcela Ciampa, Director, Organizational and Leadership Development.

The October launch was followed by a more formal launch event on November 20, 2023. This event was an opportunity for faculty and staff to come together and engage in conversation about mental health. Over 120 employees attended the event. The feedback gathered through the discussions will guide the strategy implementation.

For more information, please visit the [Employee Mental Health Strategy website](#).

## Faculty and Staff Feature

### Meet Michael Akpata: A UWindsor Alum Who Makes a Difference



Michael Akpata is a UWindsor alum who has had a diverse and impressive career. Akpata is the new superintendent of the University of Windsor's Special Constable Service, the deputy mayor of LaSalle, a veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces, a former police officer, and a community leader.



Akpata graduated from UWindsor in 1989 with a degree in political science. He then joined the Windsor Police Service, where he served for 21 years in investigations. He also served as a Canadian infantry reservist for 26 years and deployed to Afghanistan in 2007. He was a recipient of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal 2014. In 2015, he moved into the technology field and joined IBM Canada as the team leader in public safety software. Akpata also ran and was elected as a councillor in LaSalle, where he currently serves as the deputy mayor. He is dedicated to serving the public and working collectively with various resident interests. In November 2023, he was named the superintendent of UWindsor's Special Constable Service, formerly the Campus Community Police. Akpata brings extensive knowledge and leadership in policing, investigation, and public safety to his new role.

Apart from his public service, Akpata is also an accomplished community leader and an advocate for various causes. He has collaborated with different community groups and charities over the past 20 years and is also a public speaker who has shared his valuable insights with various organizations. He is also an advocate for seniors and veterans, a husband, a father, a grandfather, a musician, a poet, and a writer. Akpata's two published books are a memoir titled *My Life in a Nutshell* and a poetry collection titled *Words from the Heart*, and he is working on a third book, a novel titled *The Last Stand*. A fan of sports, Akpata especially enjoys hockey and baseball. Akpata has served his country, his community, and his alma mater with passion, professionalism, and purpose, inspiring many people with his story, his wisdom, and his generosity.

UWindsor is proud to have Akpata as an alum, and the new superintendent of the Special Constable Service.

For more information, please visit the [Public Affairs Website](#).

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**Meet Dr. Natalie Delia,**

## New Director of the Department of ICS

We are pleased to announce that Dr. Natalie Delia has been appointed as the acting director of the Department of Interdisciplinary and Critical Studies (ICS) for a one-year term starting January 1, 2024. Dr. Delia is an associate professor of Criminology and the founding director of the Black Studies Institute. She is also the co-editor of the [Journal of Critical Race, Indigeneity, and Decolonization](#) (JCRID).



Dr. Delia is a leading scholar in the fields of critical criminology, migration, race and ethnicity, and feminist criminology. She has published extensively on topics such as human trafficking, mass incarceration, felon disenfranchisement, controlling images of immigrants, and displacement and resettlement. She has also received several grants and awards for her research and teaching excellence.

Dr. Delia has been instrumental in the creation and development of the ICS department, which was approved by the University of Windsor Senate in November 2022. The ICS department aims to propel growth in Women's and Gender Studies, Latin American Studies, Disability Studies, Labour Studies, and Black Studies programs as it finds new ways to shape higher education in Windsor-Essex. The ICS department also seeks to incorporate the needs, perspectives, and histories that are vibrantly represented in our diverse community.

As the acting director of the ICS department, Dr. Delia will provide academic and administrative leadership, foster interdisciplinary collaboration, and promote EDID values and practices. She will also oversee the launch of the ICS department in 2024 and the implementation of its strategic plan and vision.

Congratulations to Dr. Delia on her appointment and wishing her success in her new role.

For more information, please visit the [Daily News](#).

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## Upcoming Events

### Celebrating Black History Month 2024



We are thrilled to invite you to join us for the momentous kick-off of Black History Black Futures Month at the University of Windsor! As we celebrate our rich history and look towards a future filled with hope, progress, and unity, we cordially invite you to be a part of the Flag-Raising Ceremony on February 1st, 2024.

- *Black History Black Futures Working Group*

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## **The Celebration of Nations**

The Celebration of Nations is an annual event at the University that showcases the rich cultural diversity within the University's wider Windsor-Essex County community. It is an opportunity to promote awareness around multicultural values while celebrating the differences that enrich our campus culture. The Celebration of Nations encourages students to learn about other cultures and to celebrate their heritage as well.



University of Windsor

# Celebration of Nations

The World at Your Doorstep

The celebration is scheduled for the second week of March and features a variety of performances, demonstrations, and displays of food, dance, dress, music, and education.

Students, faculty, and staff are invited to participate in the event through the following:

- Performance (singing, dancing, playing a musical instrument, etc.)
- Display booth (highlighting information, facts, traditional artifacts, food, etc.)
- Representing a flag (during the flag parade)
- More!

The heart of the event lies in its performers, playing a pivotal role in engaging the audience. If you or your group wish to participate, [apply to complete the online registration survey](#). The deadline to register is Jan. 10, 2024.

For more information about the event, please visit the following social media outlets:

- [Website](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Instagram](#)

Note that these social media outlets will be updated periodically as the event day approaches. If you have any questions, please contact [ohrea@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ohrea@uwindsor.ca) or ext. 3400.

- OHREA

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## EDID Week: March 2024

In 2022, the Office of the Vice-President Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (now Office of the Vice-President People, Equity, and Inclusion) held the inaugural UWindsor Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization (EDID) Week, with events exploring Indigenization, remembrance of the victims of transatlantic slavery, resistance and the Underground Railroad, accessibility awareness, sexual violence prevention, 2SLGBTQQIA+ rights, and the ways that historic and ongoing marginalizations intersect.

The third annual EDID Week begins on March 15, 2024, and continues through the following week. This event aims to sustain efforts in challenging oppression while acknowledging the ongoing and future work required to build a more just campus, community, and world.

For more information, please visit the [EDID Week Page](#) or contact [vppei@uwindsor.ca](mailto:vppei@uwindsor.ca).

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## Season's Greetings

As we wrap up our final newsletter of 2023, we would like to wish all our readers a joyous festive season and a new year brimming with hope, unity, and continued progress. Happy Holidays!

- Office of VP PE&I

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**Have ideas for stories? We'd love to hear from you about people, initiatives, or events we can highlight for future issues. Submit your submissions here**

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**CONTACT US**

We foster a community of inclusion where traditionally silenced stories are centred and celebrated at the University of Windsor and in the Windsor-Essex community.

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