

RODNEY SMITH NAMED NEW VP TO LEAD INCLUSIVITY EFFORTS

Sept. 10, 2020

William Jewell College

William Jewell College announces Dr. Rodney Smith has been appointed to the newly created position of Vice President for Access and Engagement and will lead the College's intensive inclusivity efforts, which include such strategies as supporting the recruitment and retention of students, faculty and staff of color and forging meaningful relationships with communities of color in Kansas City and beyond.

"I'm excited about this new position because the possibilities are endless. I see myself as the 'chief hope officer' and look forward to extending Jewell's footprint and visibility. For me, that's hopeful," Smith said. "I aim to create a community where students can come together and create an environment that supports personalized learning, empowers critical thinking and fosters a sense of belonging — on our campus and beyond."

Smith adds that access and belongingness are reinforced by Jewell's tuition recast initiative. Beginning fall 2021, Jewell's "Opportunity without Barriers" tuition recast plan includes a new tuition price of \$18,360 (before aid), significantly reducing the current tuition sticker price of \$33,500. In addition to removing the financial barrier, the college has already taken other steps of promoting intensive inclusivity, such as:

- Moving to a holistic admission process, eliminating standardized testing as a requirement for acceptance.
- The creation of an advisory board comprised of students, faculty, staff and alumni to offer a variety of perspectives and provide insights on inclusivity efforts on campus and beyond.
- Designing a summer bridge program which helps students who come from different backgrounds navigate the transition from high school to college, with the ultimate goal of thriving in a college experience.
- Offering more access grants and scholarships, such as the Shape the Future Grant which is earmarked for students of color and underrepresented students who hope to serve and change society.

"We believe in fostering an environment that is inclusive and welcoming," said Dr. Elizabeth MacLeod Walls, president of William Jewell College. "Our team has been thoughtfully and intentionally working to ensure an inclusive environment that reverberates throughout the campus and beyond. This includes the hiring of Dr. Rodney Smith. And with his leadership, William Jewell is committed to creating opportunities without barriers for students, faculty and staff."

William Jewell has seen recent enrollment growth up 3% in total enrollment this year and up 12% in the fall 2020 class. The entering class is the most diverse class in Jewell's history at 31% students of color. Prior to joining the college's leadership team, Smith worked with Jewell in a consulting capacity through Sophic Solutions, LLC, a change management consulting firm he co-founded with his wife and business partner, Stephenie K. Smith. As part of their consulting services, they assisted with Jewell's inclusivity initiative.

In the education arena, Smith most recently served in the International Center for Supplemental Instruction at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, where he continues as an adjunct professor. He worked at Belmont University in Nashville, Tenn., as associate director of annual giving and special gifts; Fisk University in Nashville as director of admissions and recruitment; at Clark Atlanta University in Georgia as admissions counselor/recruiter; and at Morris Brown in Atlanta, also in admissions.

Smith obtained his bachelor's degree at Morris Brown College, a historically black college in Atlanta, majoring in fine arts with a concentration in architecture. He earned a master and doctor of education, both from Tennessee State University.