

Honesty, Transparency And Tough Love

New Sr. VP for student life offers all three

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Kenneth Holmes recently joined UNH as the senior vice provost for student life. He comes to us from Howard University where he was vice president for student affairs. As he settled into campus and the first weeks of classes, he took time to talk with UNH Today about his new role.

You have been involved in student affairs at other universities, most recently Howard University in Washington, D.C. Why UNH?

With all the opportunities that were made available to me, UNH just felt right. In reviewing the job description, I like that the position was a senior vice provost. We are all here to support the university's academic mission. Working with the provost and other educational leaders allows me to better serve students both in and outside the classroom.

What is the most valuable thing you have learned during your years working with students?

Students can truly make your work life more comfortable if you genuinely listen to them.

When we listen to students, they tell what they need to be successful, and when they know you are listening and are working on programs and services to make their lives better on campus, they will give you grace! And when possible, they will assist. With resources, I love what I do.

Tell me what you've gleaned to be key to what students need most from someone holding your position.

As I mentioned before, to be a good listener, advocacy and support, guidance, honesty and transparency and tough love.

What might surprise people about you?

I enjoy cooking (Southern cuisine); I have lived in nine states (to move up, sometimes you must move on) and was a student leader around social justice.

In pursuit of your undergraduate degree at Mercer University, were you aware of the dean of students/student affairs officer? If so, did that experience influence your career path?

Yes. It did; I was in the prepharmacy.

What made you want to work so closely with students?

It started when I was a student leader working in the office of Student Activities at Mercer University.

I'm sure you've faced challenges many times in your career. What do anticipate the biggest challenge might be at UNH?

Honestly, it is getting to know students during this pandemic. I can be 'out and about' but much of that is online. I am at my best when I am up close and in person with students and my colleagues without a face mask. The other challenge will be working with the UNH community to build an inclusive society (DEI) as we develop a healthy student life plan.

You are featured in a video talking to students about the coronavirus and their responsibility for keeping UNH open. Based on your close contact with students, are you confident or concerned?

I am both.

I must say, overall, I am pleased that most of our students, faculty and staff understand that we must wear face masks, appropriately distance, stay current with their COVID-19 testing and avoid large gatherings. I am appreciative of the student leaders working with us to support our efforts to remain compliant. I am confident that if this continues within the student body, we will make it to the end of the semester. My concern is those that do not follow the UNH COVID-19 rules.

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STUDENTS



University of New Hampshire

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