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University of South Florida St. Petersburg, Office of University Advancement.

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USFSP Hires New Campus Diversity Officer

Cecil Howard joined USF St. Petersburg (USFSP) as the new Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) in November. Howard comes from Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania, where he served as the executive director of Social Equity. In this new role, he will partner with students, faculty, staff and institutional committees and serve as a liaison to community partners regarding initiatives and advances in diversity and inclusion at USFSP.

"Seeing as this is an inaugural full-time position, I saw it as an opportunity to come in and help shape the vision and culture of the institution, and shape the direction of the office," said Howard, whose daughter recently graduated from USF. "Typically, in this arena of diversity and inclusion, you go into an environment where the culture has already been set. I knew that wouldn't be the case here and that was intriguing to me."

"We are pleased that Cecil has accepted our offer to serve in this capacity," said Regional Chancellor Sophia Wisniewska. "The creation of the Campus Diversity Officer role marks an important milestone in the implementation of our Vision 2020 Strategic Plan and our efforts to reinforce our core values around inclusion."

As CDO, Howard will intersect with all areas of the institution, including Academic Affairs, Human Resources, Student Affairs, and Enrollment Management. He will chair the Chancellor's Advisory Diversity and Inclusion Committee (CADIC) and serve as a liaison to USF System Diversity officers.

"Some of the biggest issues we see on college campuses these days tend to center around race, religion, and gender or sexual identity," said Howard. "The more we can be open and talk about them—particularly race—the more we will be able to deal with them. I just believe in being candid. Don't make things into issues."

Howard already has made it a point to speak with USFSP students, staff, faculty, and administrators as part of what he refers to as a "Listening Tour." He said these conversations help to inform his perspective about where the university is headed and where it has been with regard to issues of diversity.

"I think the number one way to build credibility is to let people know I want to listen to what it is they have to say," said Howard. "Once you build credibility, you start to build trust. And once you establish credibility and trust, next comes the buy-in, which is what we're going to need from everybody if we truly want to hold ourselves to be the most diverse and inclusive university around."

Howard says he hopes to interact with students regularly and not just when issues arise, often eating lunch outside or at the University Student Center to make himself more approachable.

"You want students to know you're someone they can talk to, and I always try to say 'hi' when I pass them," he said. "You want students to see you. You don't want them to just see you passing by them and thinking, 'Who is that stiff cat?' From that point, once they become familiar with you, then you can really start communicating."

A native of Florida, Howard grew up in Miami and worked as director of the City of Gainesville's Office of Equal Opportunity from 2009 until early 2015. In that position, he contributed to the University of Florida's diversity action plan. He also previously served on the State of Florida Commission on Human Relations.

Howard received a law degree from the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University and a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Florida State University. He is an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission certified investigator.
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