

The background of the cover is a photograph of Dr. Damon Williams, a Black man with short dark hair, smiling and wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and red tie. He is standing in front of a large, classical-style university building with white columns and a red banner featuring a white 'W'.

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THE KALEIDOSCOPE KEEPER

University of Wisconsin-Madison's
Dr. Damon Williams redefining role
of 21st-century chief diversity officer.

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A DIVERSITY VISIONARY

Damon Williams shines as sought-after expert on issues surrounding higher ed inclusion.

By Susan Smith

Today's chief diversity officer could be tomorrow's university president, says Dr. Damon Williams.

"The officer has to be able to sit in the room and offer some value and know more than diversity to be successful," says Williams, vice provost and chief diversity officer at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "The experience is grooming for presidential leadership." Williams oversees UW-Madison's Division of Diversity, Equity and Educational

Achievement.

As head of a diversity division with an eight-figure budget at Wisconsin's flagship state university, Williams oversees four academic campus-wide programs and university-wide diversity initiatives. And he's also conducted landmark research on the subject of strategic diversity leadership.

Chief diversity officers have become more prevalent at universities and in corporations as the nation's demographics have changed, U.S. global competitiveness

has waned and courts and lawmakers have challenged affirmative action and diversity policies. Yet the role of the chief diversity officer in this new 21st century landscape is still evolving. The position is unevenly integrated into university-wide pursuits of educational excellence and efforts to prepare students for a multicultural workforce and a global economy.

In the fall, Stylus Publishing will publish two books by Williams that are intended to help universities better define the position and create the structures to

Left: Dr. Damon Williams is the vice provost and chief diversity officer at UW-Madison.

support sustainable diversity: *The Chief Diversity Officer: Strategy, Structure and Change Management*, co-written with Dr. Katrina Wade-Golden, assistant director of the Office of Academic and Multicultural Initiatives at the University of Michigan; and *Strategic Diversity Leadership: Inspiring Change and Transformation in Higher Education*. The volumes build on Williams' research in the areas of diversity and inclusion and attempt to answer a fundamental question: "How do you lead on these issues?"

The demographic shift has intensified the pressure to improve access to higher education for groups that have been historically underrepresented and for first-generation college students.

At 40, Williams is widely considered an expert in the field of diversity in higher education. He conducted one of the first surveys of chief diversity officers, and in 2008, he co-authored a university primer on the subject with Wade-Golden. Williams has worked with the American Association of Colleges and Universities, the American Council on Education (ACE) and the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) and has advised universities on diversity matters. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan Center for the Study of Higher and Post-Secondary Education, where he focused on organizational behavior and management.

"He is truly considered to be one of the foremost experts on diversity within higher education," says Dr. Diana Cordova, assistant vice president of leadership programs at ACE, the nation's largest higher education policy organization. Williams is a member of ACE's Commission on Inclusion, among a few members who aren't university presidents.

His training in organizational behavior allows him to "combine research and practice in new and innovative ways," Cordova says.

The Wisconsin way

At UW-Madison, Williams manages 100 full-time employees in his division, which oversees programs that serve ethnic and racially diverse students and first-generation students, in addition to working with all members of the university community.

Many of the programs in his division focus on increasing the number of "tar-

geted undergraduate minority students" (African-Americans, American Indians, Hispanics and Southeast Asians) enrolled on campus. From 2002 to 2011, the number of these undergraduate students rose from about 6 percent to 9.9 percent. In graduate programs, the number rose from about 5 percent to more than 8 percent. Those numbers are out of the approximately 42,595 students at the university. Williams says the gains can be attributed to the efforts of programs in his division, as well as those through the office of undergraduate admissions and schools and colleges campus-wide.

The structure of Williams' position reflects best practices for chief diversity officers. He is part of the university's senior leadership team, giving him the ability to infuse diversity in key conversations, and he controls discretionary resources he can use to create partnerships on and off campus. But Williams explains that the diversity effort is a "shared responsibility," not the work of one person, office or division.

Diversity has been part of the university's planning process since 1988, when UW-Madison implemented the Madison Plan. And since coming to Wisconsin from the University of Connecticut-Storrs in 2008, Williams has championed an "assessment lens" for the diversity programs, which run the gamut from recruitment of minority students to alumni engagement strategies.

The university houses a singular set of programs. The nationally recognized Posse Foundation sends teams, or posses, of urban youth to sponsoring universities. The schools provide full scholarships. UW-Madison is the largest Posse partner in the nation, drawing kids from four cities. The university also created the nation's only hip-hop urban arts learning program, which recruits nontraditional students from across the country.

In partnership with the Madison and Milwaukee school districts and Wisconsin's tribal nations, the diversity division runs an intensive college-preparatory program for minority and low-income children. Founded in 1998, the Precollege Enhancement Opportunity Program for Learning Excellence, or PEOPLE, doesn't guarantee admission to UW-Madison, but it gives students the academic skills to become competitive candidates. Since it was founded in 1998, it has worked with 1,200 students, 350 of whom received full-tuition scholarships. The program has a 71 percent

six-year college graduation rate.

The wave of the future

Williams' work has great applications for medical schools, says Dr. Marc Nivet, chief diversity officer for the AAMC. Earlier this year, the AAMC commissioned Williams to write a monograph stemming from a meeting of chief diversity officers in hospitals, academia and medical environments. Williams attended the gathering to report on what they were doing in their organizations as well as future directions. The monograph will be published in the fall.

"In academic medicine, we, like higher education, are sort of reimagining the role of the chief diversity officer and moving away from having a silo or separate office of a person who is responsible for minority affairs," says Nivet. "We are moving toward a more integrated approach that is core to ensuring that we have more diversity and also have inclusive environments. ... The connection to Damon is that he's been writing about this and thinking about this, and he is doing it as a practitioner."

This year, Williams also helped the University of Tennessee with its strategic development and inclusion plan. The central focus was on how to make diversity central to how the university "will move forward," says Theotis Robinson Jr., vice president for equity and diversity at UT. The university grappled with specific issues such as faculty diversification and diversifying mid-level and senior staff hires, and establishing structures that hold people accountable for meeting diversity goals. One result of Williams' consultation is an accountability system that starts with the president of the UT system and "goes right on down the ladder," Robinson says.

This fall, in conjunction with the release of his book on strategic diversity leadership, Williams will conduct a webinar for ACE and write a presidential briefing on the topic.

His books come at an opportune time: The U.S. Supreme Court will consider *Fisher v. Texas* in its next term, beginning in October. The closely watched case involving the University of Texas will determine whether race can be considered as a factor in holistic admissions. "It's very wrenching for the nation to be again in this moment," Williams says.

"Irrespective of the decision, the viability of our nation is the ability to engage issues of access." ■