

Dr. Judy Alston named Interim Director of DEI

BELLA PACINELLI
Features Editor

Ashland University administration has announced that Dr. Judy Alston will serve as the Interim Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Alston, an AU graduate professor of leadership studies, has been with the university since 2007.

The decision to make her interim director was a no-brainer, Vice President of Student Affairs Robert Pool, said.

“She’s been involved in DEI research, speaking and teaching for many years,” he said. “She’s already blazed a trail for her opportunity at AU.”

Pool quickly noticed that Alston was prepared and eager to start a discussion about black injustices after the events of civil unrest during the summer months.

“She was on a lot of the town hall meeting calls with students, faculty and staff of color talking about what AU is doing and what we can do better,” Pool said. “She was willing to step up and help, so she was a natural choice for this position.”

For Alston, the opportunity to serve as Interim Director of DEI felt like the right thing.

“I’m glad that the timing was what it was and that I was able to step forward and walk the talk that I have espoused my entire life,” she said. “The moment called and I said yes.”

One way Alston hopes to use her position of power is by getting the word out and advertising that this resource is available on campus.

“I want to be getting other people to talk about who we are and to be

excited about the possibilities of diversity, equity and inclusion, and what that can really mean for the entire campus community,” she said.

Alston has made it her goal to increase understanding of what diversity, equity and inclusion are by expanding upon the foundation that has already been established.

She believes that genuine understanding and love is important, not only for Ashland, but for the world.

“While we may look different and come from different backgrounds with different experiences, the one thing that we have in common is we’re human,” Alston said. “We need to be more respectful of one another’s ideas, actions and identities.”

The main job of the Director of DEI, is to help carry out AU’s mission of being welcoming to students, faculty and staff from all walks of life, Pool said.

The purpose of this position is to give a voice to the underrepresented populations on campus, whether that be those facing racial inequality, financial strain, or struggling with sexual identity.

“For them coming to college face-to-face, and in some cases online, the layers of difficulty are much greater,” Pool said. “It behooves the university to take additional steps to better understand what these students may need.”

Administration is in the process of putting together a national search to fulfill the position of Director of DEI long-term. If the search is successful, this person will take over for Alston in the summer of 2021.

Until then, Alston is up for the challenge of creating a more inclusive and understanding AU.



SUBMITTED BY: JUDY ALSTON

In 2010, Alston became the first Black woman to be promoted to Full Professor in the history of AU.

“I’ve seen change and I know that there’s a lot of things we need to work on, but you can’t do it all at one time,” she said. “Just starting in a small place and trying to get the understanding across campus matters.”

Gov. Dewine unveils “Investing in Ohio Initiative”



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Mayor Matt Miller connects with the Salvation Army.

LEWIS MARKHAM
Reporter

As part of the Coronavirus relief program, Governor Mike Dewine has proposed a 1 billion dollar plan that would help Ohio’s economy recover from the pandemic.

In March of 2020, Ashland, Ohio was a growing small city with numerous businesses beginning to expand. But without warning, Covid-19 swept across the nation, shutting down schools, corporations, and small businesses. Many people lost the progress that was gained in the previous months, as they did not have enough money to stay open after the shutdown.

“This is bridge money. We’re not out of this epidemic yet,” Dewine announced on Feb. 1, in the biennial Executive Budget for Ohio for Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023 report. “We don’t know what the future will bring. But this additional money will keep more people working as we move forward.”

Though this plan pertains to the entire state of Ohio, the question then turns to Ashland and how

this money will help the community.

Ashland Mayor Matt Miller had enlightening proposals about where the money would go.

“I think our tax dollars are always best spent at the local level,” Miller said. “We will be able to find a way to utilize the money that is brought in to aid our local businesses.”

This money would not be the first aid that was used to help small businesses during the pandemic. Last year, the Cares Act gave Ashland \$200,000 to provide small grants to help businesses stay afloat during these troubling times.

“We gave out forty, \$5,000 individual grants for businesses,” Miller said. “Many of these businesses used the money to pay off mortgages and leases while their businesses were shut down.”

The handling of the Cares Act money would be an indication on where the spending would go, but as for now there are no details on how much money Ashland will receive. The proposed plan is still in its beginning stages, so it is possible that the plan will not be

finished completely until the end of June.

According to Cleveland.com, there would be no tax increase in the bill, but car registration would increase by ten dollars as well as an additional two dollars for the state’s auto title fee. This increase in money is to aid the State Highway Patrol.

“The virus has continued to shock us, and continued to surprise us,” Dewine said. “We have to be prepared in case something comes up that is unforeseen and that we have to hunker down again.”

Miller emphasized the financial impact the pandemic has had to Ashland business, but is optimistic for the future.

“We all have worked so hard to revitalize our downtown and mainstreet,” Miller said. “The shutdown was very traumatic for our businesses.”

With the newly proposed bill from Governor Dewine, the possibility of coming out of the pandemic stronger than before is a sentiment Miller holds.

Theatre program’s numbered days produce hardships

ALAYNA ROSS
Reporter

In July of 2020, the Ashland University Board of Trustees voted for the continuation and enhancement of 31 programs, the realignment of two programs, and the sunseting of another 20 programs, including the theatre program.

The board’s vote comes after meeting with the 16-member task force, and reviews of the recommendations by the board’s Academic Affairs, Finance and Facilities Joint Committee and later by its Executive Committee.

According to the Ashland University News Center, the task force began its discussion on April 9, 2020, to review data on all undergraduate academic programs. The data included consideration of market attractiveness, fit with the University’s mission and revenue margins, the number of new student deposits for programs, five-year history of majors and degrees awarded, revenue generated and the costs to deliver those credit hours.

The sunseting process involves the elimination of various faculty and staff positions, limited resources for already enrolled students, and closed enrollment for new students entering the program.

The positions that were cut within the theatre department included, Sean Parker, Assistant Professor, who did not have his contract renewed for 2020-2021. While Justin Bilewicz, Costume Manager, David Steinmetz, Technical Director of the Hugo Young Theatre, and Tricia Applegate, Coordinator of the Performing Arts, Events, and Publicity were all laid off permanently.

The news of the demise of the theatre department took many by surprise, despite the ruling coming from the Board of Trustees, AU Task Force, and AU President Campo; who received his Ph.D. in English with an emphasis in Drama and his Bachelor of Arts

Degree in Theater from the University of Nevada in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Dr. Thomas Reed, chair of the theatre and music departments, is happy that the theatre department has been able to continue to educate and produce productions amidst the sunseting process.

“We are proud that despite the loss of one faculty position and three staff positions, and despite pandemic restrictions, we successfully and safely produced two live theatre productions in fall 2020 and are producing one virtual production in spring 2021,” Reed said. “We hope to receive sufficient resources to continue theatre productions and the theatre minor after sunseting.”

The theatre department at AU was able to produce “The Odd Couple,” a production that was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and “Twelfth Night” in the fall of 2020. Most recently, “The Theory of Relativity,” which was live-streamed as a virtual performance, finished off the 2021 season.

Although the department has still been able to produce theatre productions throughout the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters, there has been a strain on the students that will be some of the last theatre graduates from AU.

Katie Snell, a sophomore musical theatre major, explains that the theatre department at AU is surviving, but only just and is leaving theatre students feeling as though they cannot receive a proper education.

“As a theatre major, the sunseting of the major and the extensive budget cuts have left us feeling completely unsupported by the university,” Snell said. “With several staff positions being completely eradicated it actually makes it much harder on the students and the remaining faculty.”

With fewer staff members in the theatre program, the shows are still being produced and the students are still engaging with each new performance.