

The Maverick Minute: Cecil Hicks, Jr.

Description:

In this Maverick Minute, Chancellor Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., chats with Cecil Hicks, Jr., about his first three months as Associate Vice Chancellor of Diversity, Equity, Access & Inclusion.

Transcript:

Hello. I'm Jeff Gold, and thanks so much for joining us today on this very special Maverick Minute. My guest today is Mr. Cecil Hicks, and Cecil is our Associate Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, Access and Inclusion – a long title, Cecil.

And as we sit here today and record this – by the way, approximately just over 6 feet apart, which I'm proud to say. And, by the way, UNO and Nebraska mask up whenever you can and whenever you need to.

It's almost exactly three months since your first official day. Now I know you've been involved in this area of access and inclusion for a very very long time, but now, looking at 90 days, what have your reflections been? I know you've been talking about 'think globally, act locally,' which I love that concept, but what have you been hearing and let's share with our audience some of your initial reflections.

You bet, and first of all, thank you, Chancellor, for this invitation to talk about it. And, I tell you what, these 90 days have gone by pretty fast.

Pretty fast.

And it'd be an understatement to say every day is a challenge, every day is something different, but you know, in these 90 days, I tell you what, I have been really inspired to observe our UNO community just how excited and intrigued they are about this whole space about diversity, equity, access and inclusion. You know, they're working really hard despite these challenging times to create environments that are welcoming for all folks around here, which is pretty impressive.

I know you've been meeting with just countless parts of the organization because you and I speak very frequently, and I provide you with updates from things I'm hearing, and you share as well. But, pick one area – whether it's race and ethnicity, gender, age, rural/urban, some of our first-generation programs – I mean, what has been most impressive to you?

It's just been an abundance of impressive programs. I'll tell you one that I want to highlight that's just kicking off, but it's super impressive, is the Equity and Inclusion

Certificate Program. It's a cohort program that's about 24 months long, and it has different representation of faculty and staff. They're going to go through pretty much a two-year process and program where they're going to talk about cultural dialogues, talk about microaggressions, just really cover an expansive topic. That kicked off last week and already getting rave reviews, so very exciting. That's one of many type of programs that are going on right now.

You know, I was really so pleased when I saw the final version of President Carter's 5-year strategic plan that not only did he address this whole area of inclusion and diversity and equity and certainly access to students, Nebraskans, and others, but he specifically called out this area of bias, which I think is so important to focus on because, I think, if we're all honest with ourselves, we all have biases, right?

That's right. That's absolutely right.

I mean, we – I don't want to say we're born with them – but we acquire them pretty quickly, and it takes a lot to recognize what they are.

I totally agree, and sometimes folks – most of the time people are not intentionally doing something that where they feel is malicious –

Let's hope not.

Right? But, at the same time, it might have the same impact, you know, regardless of intentional or unintentional. So, it's important to recognize those and how do I deal with it and handle it. So, I'm really excited to know that we have lots of classes around microaggressions that are being offered through the Center for Faculty Excellence that are open to really everyone that's a part of UNO, which is pretty exciting.

You know, having done quite a few of those workshops myself, I can tell you I found them just incredibly instructive and helpful, and allows you to reflect on some of the things you say and do that that are, you know, may or may not be even related to a subconscious bias, but certainly form this stream of microaggressions, which are interpreted in so many different ways.

Absolutely, and I think what's neat is it also starts with a conversation, and that's another observation I've made over the last 90 days, is just how much people want to converse, and know that hey, I may make a mistake in saying something I might say, but I can talk about it and I can learn from that. And I find that very inspiring, and hearing from some of the population that maybe considered marginalized communities just how important it is to communicate and check in. And, quite honestly, people are tired and weary, but they're encouraged. Encouraged that us as UNO and the whole institution are focusing on things like bringing in talent and how to retain talent and create an environment that's welcoming, and that's –

And creating equity for that talent.

That's absolutely right.

Which is really very important as well.

You know, I'm so proud if you look at the incoming class of students, whether they're transfers or first-time full-time students, undergraduate or graduate, we have exceeded all of our historic diversity in every possible respect. And that's exciting, and then, you know, I've learned from Senior Vice Chancellor [Sacha] Kopp, as you probably know as well, that the incoming group of faculty members that we have recruited this year are also incredibly diverse from both a gender perspective, a racial and ethnic and other background perspective as well. So, it gives me a great deal of pride that we're moving in the right direction. But, as you say, much work to do in the future.

And I've had an opportunity to talk to several of those folks who are part of that class and I tell you what – they're excited to be here. And we're excited to have them, so I think that they're going to enjoy UNO, enjoy Nebraska, and I just appreciate and look forward to working more with that group.

Well, I just want to take this opportunity to thank you personally for your willingness to take on these challenges. I know none of them are easy, but it's got to be a front and center focus for all of us, and I know it is here at UNO and widely across the NU System.

I appreciate your support, Chancellor.

Well, thanks for being with me today. And thank you for being with us today on this very special Maverick Minute.

Mask up!

Mask up!