

## Acceptance Address Kimberly Johnson:

There are so many wonderful leaders across campus who also deserve this award. I am humbled at the people who took the time to nominate me along with the support I've received from the UO Senate.

I'm involved in many leadership roles on campus, but it is a special honor to hear some nominations were from a working group on the Success and Retention of African American Students and Advisors. This work in many ways was a microcosm of the complexity of access and support in higher education.

Over fifteen years of experience in student success, retention, and advising, I've often had to explain the value and importance in not only the work we do in our field, but the reasons behind it.

Things like why students need the guidance. The support. The information. The connection to campus. A space for exploration and decision making.

This challenge often stems from the nature of who works in Higher Education—those of us who have succeeded. So it's often difficult to think about those students who don't or aren't managing their experiences in the way we remember, or maybe were never even aware of certain challenges or gaps within a University system.

As a UO Grad, who grew up in Eugene, I could easily take my experiences and build programs based on my own story or consider how I faced challenges, but still graduated in 4 years—debt free with the help of the UMAS (DES now) Scholarship.

But if I did that, I'd be neglecting to recognize that 60% of my 1997 entering cohort didn't graduate in 4 years, or the 70% of Black students / 50% in 6 years. And of course, the 50% who left the University all together. Or maybe how my experience could have been even better with just a few changes.

Those gaps in Higher Education are what inform my work when I think about how can WE as an institution help students maximize their potential and ensure a path for success?

I want to thank all my family and extended family for their support, my **heart family** of my husband Kevin, children Joelle and Westley—you are so given when work is challenging.

I want to thank my **work family** where we strive to provide students more than a transaction, but a part of a shaping a transformative experience. An office that for many years had meet to meet the needs of students, many times in moments of crisis, many times with limited staff. A group of people who've grown to be a cohesive team, committed to developing the type of advising community and environment students can thrive in. A team that welcomes my pushing them daily to how we can work better, build collaborative relationships, develop big ideas, expand our services, have a footprint across campus, and establish holistic advising relationships with students.

I learn every day from our team and am so grateful to have colleagues that treat each other with respect. A team like this is the true measure of leadership and the most important factor in high achieving offices--one that is inspired and motivated to do better than the day before, each and every day. So thank you to Lori Manson, our Associate Director, who really deserves this leadership award and someone who I couldn't do my work without. To Arturo, Tami, Melina, Paige, Ted, Stephanie, Rebecca, Bil, Cynthia, Karla, Dulce, Megan, Kris, Tom, Tad, Jerry, Erin, our Peer Advisors and Student Workers.

Thank you to my co-chair in the Retention and Completion committee, a wonderful colleague, Grant Schoonover Director of PathWay Oregon who's been a great partner in thinking creatively about student success.

Thank you to Vice Provost Lisa Freinkel who has supported me and given me the room to develop our team, and allow their expertise to take leadership in their daily work. And of course the colleagues I've collaborated with across Committees, the UGS Division, Residence Life, CAS, Dean of Students, Equity and Inclusion, Orientations and the Registrar, and of course so many units I hope to extend more collaborations as we launch the SSC Advising Platform over the next year.

Lastly, I want to commemorate the recognition of this award to one community in particular, who I think represent the theme the UO campus developed with the video WHAT IF. Something we showed to every new student this past year. Some words from this campaign include:

*...IF is about unrelenting desire. To find out who we are, what makes the world tick, and how we can embrace our diversity and work together to solve problems. To make things in Oregon, America, the world – better. For everyone.*

*IF is the energy that fuels everything at the University of Oregon, drives discovery, and makes Ducks, Ducks.*

The UO students this past year who I think embody WHAT IF are the members of the Black Student Task Force. I think if they were to make their own version of this UO campaign, they would say:

*IF is the disruption of the status quo to make change in positive ways, to break out of routine of simple answers and solutions.*

*IF is the way we question the way things have always been.*

*The idea of what kind of University we want this to be.*

*To ask: What IF we needed more. What IF we dared to **Demand**.*

So thank you to the entire BSTF Task Force for letting me enter your community of people who want to find solutions and believe the University, that others on campus, can... should... must... be a part of these issues. Thank you to Dr. Yvette Alex Assensoh and President Schill for

engaging in working groups to address these students concerns and meeting with them as the campus moves through the process. And to the BSTF students I've grown to know and admire (and for that I am very grateful): Denisa, Dayja, Jaleel, Kena, Shaniece, Diamonte, Ashley and of course the other BSTF and student leaders who I didn't get a chance to meet with, others who joined, supported, discussed, debated, and allowed the focus to be on BSTF Demands and how that will provide a legacy of student leadership in action on the UO campus. We are reflections of our students and how we treat and interact with them is a reflection of ourselves.

To the staff and faculty who also made the time and effort to be responsive and productive—committing not only to now, but the future. To those that have always been working toward these goals, and the many who will be continuing to seek ways to provide an academic environment where all our students can thrive.

Thank you.