

RISE AND REPRESENT: BLACK EXCELLENCE AT WAUBONSEE

What do you do at Waubonsee?

I help students succeed in college by making sure they know where to get help and don't feel lost. I oversee programs that offer extra guidance, tutoring, and coaching so students can handle tough classes, stay organized, and keep moving toward finishing their degree.

What inspired you to work in higher education or choose Waubonsee?

As a first-generation student and a woman of color, I know how confusing college can feel. That's what inspired me to work in education, to help students find their way and know they belong. I chose Waubonsee because I've seen students achieve real success here, both while they're in school and long after they leave.

Where did you attend college or training?

Chicago, IL BS and MS University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; MA, MAE Concordia University, Chicago; Ed.D. Aurora University.

What activities, organizations, or interests were you involved in during college or earlier in life?

Musical Theater, Delta Xi Phi Multicultural Sorority, Inc; National Assn. of Black Journalist; NAACP; BSU.

What is a fun fact about you?

I love Dave Matthews Band concerts; Love to Travel. Favorite place was Cuba.

What does Black History Month or Black Excellence mean to you?

Black Excellence means seeing the strength, brilliance, and resilience of Black people reflected and celebrated. Black History Month matters to me because it honors our history, affirms our presence, and reminds me of the responsibility to uplift and create opportunities for those who come after us.



Dr. Chassie M. Sherretz *(She/Her)*
Director of Student Academic Support

“You belong here, exactly as you are. Your background, your voice, and your experiences are strengths, not barriers. Don’t be afraid to ask for help, take up space, and believe in what you’re capable of. Because your success matters, and there are people here who want to support you every step of the way.”

- Dr. Chassie Sherretz



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What do you do at Waubonsee?

Install, Repair, and maintain telephone system.

What inspired you to work in higher education or choose Waubonsee?

Continuing my career after retirement from AT&T and thoroughly engaging Data & Voice Networks.

Where did you attend college or training?

Waubonsee Community College; Microtrain Technologies.

What activities, organizations, or interests were you involved in during college or earlier in life?

My interests centered around Biblical studies; music industry (DJ); network technology.

What is a fun fact about you?

Music Entertainment (DJ); Writer; traveled to many parts of the world; AT&T (26 years).

What does Black History Month mean to you?

Black History month is a time of reflection, education, and motivation to continue on a path of achieving equality; the pursuit of excellence with regard to God, family, and the improvement of social awareness and position in life.



Ken Collier
Voice System Supervisor

Develop a relationship with God; set goals in your life for success in society; don't be ashamed to study your heritage to find out who you are; contemplate how your existence can promote change while accentuating the need for advancement thoughtfully helping others.

- Ken Collier



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What do you do at Waubonsee?

Think of the Dean of Teaching and Learning as the person who helps ensure that classes are taught effectively and that students are truly learning. My role includes supporting faculty by introducing new teaching strategies and providing professional development opportunities to help improve teaching and student engagement.

What inspired you to work in higher education or choose Waubonsee?

My inspiration to work in higher education crystallized during a STEM Day volunteer experience at a local elementary school. While leading science experiments with K-4 students, I asked the class what they thought my job was. After a few guesses, someone finally asked if I was a scientist - and I proudly said yes. We spent the session exploring microscopes, changing colors, and making science come alive. As I packed up, a third-grade African American girl tugged on my lab coat and asked, "You a scientist?" When I said yes, she followed with, "But you a girl... and you Black." Her words stopped me cold.

Where did you attend college or training?

Shelton State Community College, Stillman College (Bachelor of Science: Biology) and The University of Alabama (Masters and PhD Biology).

What activities, organizations, or interests were you involved in during college or earlier in life?

Trivia Team, Howard Hughes Scholar, LSAMPS Scholar, TRIO, Upward Bound/Full-Time Job.

What is a fun fact about you?

I'm a self-proclaimed foodie who loves to cook, and I've had the opportunity to serve as a Fulbright Specialist in the Czech Republic, where I focused on diversity in STEM and using meta cognition as a tool to support underrepresented students. People are often most surprised to learn that I've been married for 34 years - and that I'm also a Rolling Stones fan.

What does Black Excellence mean to you?

Black Excellence means turning brilliance into impact - thriving, leading, and lifting others while doing it unapologetically.



Dr. Rosianna R. Gray *(She/Her)*
Dean for Teaching and Learning

You belong here. Not because someone let you in, not because you're "lucky," but because you earned your place. Your presence in this space is already a quiet act of power. Know that Community college is not a detour, it's a launchpad! You are building something solid, step by step, often while carrying responsibilities others don't see. That doesn't make your path smaller; it makes your resilience bigger. GO AND BE GREAT, BEAUTIFUL AND EXTRAORDINARY SIMPLY BECAUSE YOU CAN!

- Dr. Ro Gray



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What do you do at Waubonsee?

Here at Waubonsee I help students become strong critical thinkers and better writers. I encourage students to always express themselves and to value their own opinions. I support my students as they build the confidence to succeed in their college careers.

What inspired you to work in higher education or choose Waubonsee?

I work in higher education because I thoroughly enjoy sharing my love for writing and literature with others. I love being able to help students build and grow as thinkers and communicators. Waubonsee is the perfect place for me because of its close-knit community and welcoming environment.

Where did you attend college or training?

Saginaw Valley State University and Wayne State University.

What activities, organizations, or interests were you involved in during college or earlier in life?

In college I was the founder of EXPRESSIONS Poetry Club, I am Member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, INC., member of the Organization of Black Unity, mentor in the Saginaw Great Lakes Bay Region Mentor Program.

What is a fun fact about you?

I am a part of the planner community. I love all things stationary especially stickers. I also enjoy making mixed media collages. One thing people are surprised to learn about me is that I published two volumes of poetry during my senior year of high school, "Welcome to my Soul" and "Bleeding Emotions."

What does Black Excellence mean to you?

Black Excellence is about being a positive role model and using my position to uplift others. It means showing students what is possible, pushing beyond limitations, and contributing to progress not just for oneself, but for the collective.



Tacarra L. Ford *(She/Her)*
Instructor of English

**You belong in every space
you enter, and your voice and
experiences are valuable.
Know that you matter and your
presence has purpose.**

- Tacarra Ford



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What do you do at Waubonsee?

My role at WCC is to support students, faculty, and staff in the business and social science disciplines. I help create learning experiences that open doors to careers, leadership, and other opportunities, while making sure every student feels seen, supported, and have the resources and tools they need to be successful.

What inspired you to work in higher education or choose Waubonsee?

Working in higher education, especially at WCC, is inspiring because it allows me to witness daily transformations through learning, often at critical moments when access and opportunity change everything.

Where did you attend college or training?

Southern Illinois University - Carbondale.

What activities, organizations, or interests were you involved in during college or earlier in life?

Proud member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.

What is a fun fact about you?

Before WCC I worked in the field of healthcare as a Diagnostic Medical Sonographer (Ultrasound Technologist).

What does Black Excellence mean to you?

Black Excellence means showing up with purpose, resilience, and joy while honoring our history and creating new pathways forward. It is leadership rooted in community and affirming for students that their dreams are valid, powerful, and achievable.



Dr. Tamekia Smith *(She/Her)*
Dean for Business and Social Science

**You are powerful, capable,
and worthy of every
opportunity you're working
toward. Keep going, your
dreams matter, and your
excellence is needed
in this world.**

- Dr. Tamekia Smith



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What do you do at Waubonsee?

As a project manager, I plan, organize, and guide project initiatives that support the college's mission, of improving student success, launching new programs, implementing systems, meeting accreditation requirements, and improving internal processes.

What inspired you to work in higher education or choose Waubonsee?

I was inspired to work in higher education because of the people who supported me when I was a struggling college student. After flunking out of a university and believing I would never complete my education due to a lack of institutional support, I enrolled at another college on academic probation and, with the right guidance and encouragement, turned things around and graduated within 18 months with a 3.2 GPA.

Where did you attend college or training?

Roosevelt University, BA and Northeastern Illinois M.Ed.

What activities or interests are you involved in?

In my free time, I work as a dance instructor, specializing in tap dance.

What is a fun fact about you?

I love dancing all genres - especially tap - and enjoy everything from Blazing Saddles and James Bond to pop and EDM music, with concerts ranging from Stevie Wonder to Dua Lipa and Coldplay. I'm a big sports fan (Go Bears, Bulls, Cubs - and any team my kids play on), have recently traveled to Colombia and several Caribbean islands, previously served as Youth and Family Director at the Oswego YMCA, and surprise many people by having served in the Illinois Army National Guard.

What does Black History Month or Black Excellence mean to you?

Black History Month and Black Excellence represent resilience, progress, and possibility by honoring the achievements of Black individuals who have succeeded despite systemic barriers. To me, Black Excellence is not only about extraordinary accomplishments, but also perseverance, growth, and being visible in spaces where representation has been limited, while creating pathways for those who follow. Black History Month serves as both a reflection on how far we've come and a reminder to uplift stories that inspire future generations to believe in their potential.



Shellee McCullum *(She/Her)*
Institutional Effectiveness Project Manager

**NEVER GIVE UP! You have all the
power to be successful.**

Trust that you can, and you will!

- Shellee McCullum



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What do you do at Waubonsee?

As a Health Information Technology (HIT) Instructor I teach students how healthcare and technology work together to manage patient information safely and accurately.

What inspired you to work in higher education or choose Waubonsee?

What inspired me to work in higher education was the opportunity to support students on the same academic journey I went through. Being able to support and inspire students towards their goals is the most rewarding experience.

Where did you attend college or training?

Empire State College, Suny Polytechnic Institute, Hartwick College, Onondaga Community College.

What activities, organizations, or interests were you involved in during college or earlier in life?

During my college career I participated in Hartwick College's Sisters of Dignity and Brother of Liberty (SOSU/BU) community service-based organization as well as the Harriet Tubman Mentoring Project. During my time at Onondaga Community College, I participated in the Health Information Technology Club.

What is a fun fact about you?

My favorite hobby is amigurumi crochet, a Japanese art form of crocheting that involves crocheting stuffed animals. I grew up a military brat and was born in Juneau, Alaska and I have lived in Michigan, Hawaii, Connecticut, Virginia and New York.

What does Black Excellence mean to you?

Black Excellence to me means honoring your roots and your ancestors by excelling in everything that you do.



M'Kaila Clark *(She/Her)*
Instructor of Health Information Technology

“You are strong. You are important, and when you reach for the stars, you can grab one.”

- M'Kaila Clark



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What do you do at Waubonsee?

As the Assistant Provost of Workforce Development, I lead the team and oversee strategic initiatives that help students and learners build skills and access real career opportunities. I oversee programs that are short-term (credentials), college pathways (degrees and certificates), adult education, small-business development (entrepreneurship) and support, and hands-on work experiences. My role is to bring the right people together including students, employers, educators, and partners, to connect people, skills, and opportunities in ways that help individuals and communities grow and thrive.

What inspired you to work in higher education or choose Waubonsee?

I was inspired to work in higher education because of how it transformed my life and the wonderful people who impacted me. So, I intentionally chose higher education to do for others what many did for me. There is no greater work, because education is power to not just impact students' lives, but the ripple of impact changes individuals, families, communities and the world. I want to be a part of the change and do so every day with the passion and purpose that the moment requires.

Where did you attend college or training?

Benedictine University.

What activities or organizations were you involved in during college or earlier in life?

Pan-African Student and Youth Movement, African American Student Union, Gospel Choir, and a student leader as a Resident Assistant (RA).

What is a fun fact about you?

I enjoy watching basketball and football; So far I have been to 31 states with the goals of visiting all 50; I am passionate about my family; I am currently pursuing a doctorate in leadership with an emphasis in higher education.

What does Black History Month mean to you?

I am black history. I am my ancestors wildest dreams. I am because they were. I honor their sacrifice. I will always show up in places and spaces unapologetically grounded in my roots. I recognize that black excellence is the culture, and that the mainstream history books and what is taught in schools does not even begin to address our ingenuity and journey of persistence and resilience. Black history is not just the month of February, it is American History.



Ne'Keisha Stepney *(She/Her)*
Assistant Provost of Workforce Development

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

- Nelson Mandela

“We may encounter defeats, but we must not be defeated.”

- Maya Angelou

“If they do not give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.”

- Shirley Chisholm

“The time is always right to do what is right.”

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Simply put, know the assignment and go about all that you do big or small showing up in reverence to those who persevered for you to have the opportunities you have by living and being your ancestors' wildest dreams.

- Ne'Keisha Stepney



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What do you do at Waubonsee?

I provide leadership for academic and student services and support. My goal is to make sure that students receive a high-quality educational experience.

What inspired you to work in higher education or choose Waubonsee?

I begin teaching at a community college in Chicago and I fell in love with teaching, and working to help students reach their goals. I choose Waubonsee because I believe I can make a difference here.

Where did you attend college or training?

Loyola University - Chicago.

What is a fun fact about you?

I have a deep love for music - especially jazz, R&B, and the soulful sounds of the 1970s - and I once checked Earth, Wind & Fire off my concert bucket list. I'm a big basketball fan, and thanks to my husband patiently explaining the rules, I've also grown to enjoy football. Before coming to WCC, I worked as a faculty member, dean, and vice provost at several colleges across the Chicagoland area - though people are often surprised to learn that I'm also a dental hygienist. I've had the opportunity to visit a variety of places over the years and love exploring new environments. Outside of work, I'm driven by passions that keep me energized, curious, and always learning.

What does Black History Month mean to you?

Black History Month gives us the opportunity to celebrate our ancestors, honoring them for all that they have done despite the numerous challenges they faced.



Dr. Kimberly Chavis *(She/Her)*
*Waubonsee Provost and Vice President of
Teaching, Learning, and Student Success*

**Its never too late to be who
you might have been.
Never give up, reach out to
someone when you need help.
I want every student to realize
their dreams and goals.**

- Dr. Kimberly Chavis



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