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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Xavier University of Louisiana Names Dr. Cirecie West-Olatunji as the Director of Xavier’s Center for Equity, Justice, and the Human Spirit

New Orleans, La- Cirecie West-Olatunji, Ph.D., has been named the new Director of Xavier University of Louisiana’s Center for Equity, Justice, and the Human Spirit (CEJHS). As the new Director of the CEJHS, Dr. West-Olatunji will lead initiatives in pursuit of CEJHS’ mission that is to engage, support, and promote innovative thinking across disciplines regarding race, class, and systemic inequities. With faith, this mission will do justice toward a better understanding of issues impacting modern societies and vexing the human spirit.

With over four decades of experience in higher education and seeking social justice across various fields, Dr. West-Olatunji began her time at Xavier in 1998 as an Assistant Professor and Director of Xavier’s Counseling Program. Although she left Louisiana in 2002, she never forgot the Crescent City and sense of community she felt at Xavier. In 2015, Dr. West-Olatunji returned and is the Melba Fortuné Martinez Endowed Professor in the counselor education program and director of the Center for Traumatic Stress Research at Xavier. From 2017-2021, she concurrently acted as the editor-in-chief for the Journal for Multicultural Counseling and Development. In 2018, Dr. West-Olatunji was recognized as an American Counseling Association (ACA) Fellow.

“We are tremendously excited to welcome Dr. Olatunji as the new director of Xavier’s Center for Equity, Justice, and the human spirit,” said **Xavier’s Senior Vice President and Provost Anne McCall**. “Her experience and guidance will be crucial in further elevating the Center as an example of community-driven change in pursuit of social justice.”

The CEJHS was founded in August 2018 as a vital space for scholarly research and community-driven systems change. The first of its kind at an HBCU, the Center develops programming to shift oppressive policies and practices in education, criminal justice, and environmental sustainability. It serves as a place for research, teaching, community engagement, and debate on issues related to race-based inequities, social identity production, and power relations embedded in our intellectual programs and across academic disciplines in pursuit of eliminating political, social, and systemic inequities within systems and institutions.

Dr. West-Olatunji previously served as the president of the ACA and the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD). She has initiated several clinical research projects that focus on culture-centered community collaborations designed to address issues rooted in systemic oppression,

such as transgenerational trauma and traumatic stress in the United States. Dr. West- Olatunji has commissioned and conducted numerous research initiatives under the auspices of the National Science Foundation, ACA Foundation, Kellogg Foundation, federal Witness Assistance Program, Spencer Foundation, American Educational Research Association, and African American Success Foundation.

“I want the Center to be a beacon for critical discussions about issues that confront our society, and that impact on our campus, our city, our country, and even globally,” said **Dr. West-Olatunji**. “It would be great to bring people together for dialogue, difficult dialogue, by transforming our experiences, acknowledging our history, and charting a future that is very inclusive. It is a great place for faculty to engage in innovative teaching strategies that integrate teaching and instruction to social justice and social action transformation for the lives of New Orleans citizens for the larger national community and the larger diaspora.”

Her multiple publications include two co-authored books, numerous book chapters, and over 60 articles in peer-reviewed journals. In addition to national presentations, Dr. West-Olatunji has delivered research papers in Eastern and Western Europe, the Pacific Rim, Africa, and the Americas. Additionally, she provided consultation in a PBS initiative to create a children’s television show focusing on diversity through KCET-TV in Los Angeles, CA (“Puzzle Place”). Dr. West-Olatunji provided consultation to the Center for American Education in Singapore and the Buraku Liberation Organization in Japan to enhance their early childhood and counseling initiatives.

“[The Center] is a very inclusive ideal, a tangible place that makes Xavier much more visible globally and nationally as a leader in social justice teaching,” said Dr. West-Olatunji. “That’s who we are, but people might not know it. The center will be a convergence point for people who want to be transformative in their teaching, in their research, and in their social action.”

Dr. West-Olatunji earned her bachelor’s degree from Dartmouth College and both her master’s and Ph.D. from the University of New Orleans.



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About Xavier University of Louisiana

Being America's only historically Black and Catholic University is only the first among many distinctions that have set Xavier University of Louisiana apart for more than nine decades. Despite its relatively small size, Xavier is a nationally recognized leader in STEM and the health sciences, producing more African American students who graduate from medical schools each year than any other university in the United States. Its College of Pharmacy is among the top producers of African American pharmacists.

Its liberal arts-based programs in such areas as art, business, education, psychology, and political science – as well as recent additions in bioinformatics, data science, neuroscience, crime and social justice, and jazz studies – offer students an unbeatable combination of traditional classroom study, hands-on research, service-learning opportunities, and life experiences. The winning Xavier formula to provide students with a well-balanced curriculum and an environment that nurtures their intellect and feeds their souls.

For more information about Xavier University of Louisiana, visit us online at www.xula.edu or follow us on Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter @XULA1925. To book interviews and/or to speak with our experts in the field of pharmacy, education, premed, public health, science, technology, math, business, English, communications, and the arts, contact Chelsea Cunningham at (504) 520-5425 or ccunnin@xula.edu.