

# Dr. Reneé T. Watson

HIGHER EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL

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**Strategic higher education professional** with extensive experience in student affairs leadership, strategic planning, and diversity and inclusion initiatives. Expert at formulating and implementing comprehensive programs that promote student engagement, well-being, and academic achievement, while effectively collaborating with faculty, staff, and community partners to develop innovative solutions. Proficient at leading cross-functional teams, managing substantial budgets, and presenting actionable insights to senior leadership to contribute to the attainment of institutional goals and objectives. Experienced educator with a solid foundation in curriculum development and assessment, dedicated to enhancing academic experiences for diverse student groups and preparing future leaders in higher education.

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Higher Education Administration • Student Affairs Leadership • Strategic Planning • Diversity & Inclusion Initiatives  
Student Retention & Recruitment • Budget Management • Crisis Management • Stakeholder Relations  
Policy Development • Leadership Development • Program Development • Teaching & Curriculum Development  
Change Management • Ethical Decision-Making • Community Engagement • Team Leadership & Collaboration

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## Career Highlights

- Formulated a three-year plan to address a \$6M deficit for Residence Life and achieved savings of \$475K for Auxiliary Services and Residence Life departments by using data to illustrate low return on investment.
- Preserved jobs and avoided layoffs despite budget cuts, revenue losses, and reductions in state funds due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the Student Life unit benefiting from \$8M in COVID-19 Relief Funding.
- Created COVID-19 protocols for university closure and the return to campus, collaborating with the university-wide Incident Management Team for the Fall 2021-Spring 2022 academic year.
- Efficiently restructured a large campus unit with 130 administrative, faculty, and classified employees to attain Top Tier status by 2025.
- Secured resource development for grants and in-kind services totaling over \$500K to support unaccompanied homeless youth.
- Co-founded the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Anti-Black Racism Taskforce to promote safety, equity, and inclusion for faculty, staff, and students at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.
- Served as Vice-Chair of the inaugural Public Safety Board to enhance relationships and communication between campus communities and University Police Services.

## Leadership Experience

### Interim Dean for Student Engagement – Luther College

September 9, 2024- present

- Advises the provost on all strategic matters concerning the Student Engagement unit.
- Presides on the Deans Council offering guidance, planning, and solutions for integrating academic affairs and the student experience.
- Develops college-wide retention efforts to increase degree completion and job placement post-graduation.
- Implements student belonging initiatives to celebrate diversity and increase cultural competency.
- Advises the President's Senior Leadership Council on higher education trends, threats impacting student learning, and opportunities for improving student well-being.

### Vice President for Student Affairs – Central Michigan University

August 2022 – April 2024

- Directed the services and programs under Student Affairs to achieve strategic goals.
- Teamed up with faculty and staff to develop initiatives including the Welcome Center for international students, First-Gen Central, and policy audits.
- Supervised the CMU Cares Team to support students of concern.
- Joined forces with Auxiliary Services to manage Residence Life operations.
- Implemented best practices to enhance student success and retention.
- Acted as a direct liaison to students, parents, and community members.
- Presented quarterly reports and briefings to the Board of Trustees on Student Affairs issues.
- Worked with senior leaders across the campus to devise the 2023-2028 Strategic Plan, including assessment metrics.
- Coordinated with the City of Mount Pleasant to strengthen town-gown relations.
- Boosted the number of gifts by donors and alumni through Annual Giving campaigns with the Office of Advancement.

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- Formulated communication strategy plans with the University Communications team to highlight academic affairs deadlines, crisis response, and university closures.
- Revamped the Take Care CMU initiative to promote student well-being.
- Successfully established early voting polling stations on campus for the 2024 Presidential election.
- Launched an initiative to offer transitional housing for newly arriving international students on campus.
- Earned selection by NASPA and the Suder Foundation to join the First Gen Forward cohort.

## **Associate Vice President for Student Life – University of Nevada, Las Vegas** November 2018 – July 2022

- Collaborated with the Student Affairs Vice President's Council to provide divisional leadership and processes for long-range and strategic planning.
- Led the senior leadership team of director-level and higher professionals.
- Represented the Vice President on university-wide committees to oversee divisional committees and create advisory committees for Campus Life.
- Managed multiple budgets, budgetary planning, and fiscal management.
- Carried out informal and formal assessments of progress toward goals, program and service evaluations, and accreditation preparation.
- Updated the Vice President, Vice President's Cabinet, police services, and others as necessary.

## **Associate Dean of Students – Illinois State University** April 2016 – November 2018

- Supervised multiple units, including Diversity Advocacy, the Students' Attorney, Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution, and Off-Campus Services.
- Partnered with department heads to develop and implement strategic diversity and inclusion plans for the Dean of Students Office.
- Teamed up with department heads to create a student retention and completion strategy aimed at increasing overall completion rates and closing gaps for underrepresented students.
- Enhanced campus efforts to boost diversity and inclusion in recruitment, hiring, and decision-making for campus leadership, faculty, and staff through collaboration with the Campus Climate Task Force.
- Created and implemented best-practice mentoring plans and strategies tailored to the needs of diverse campus groups of faculty and staff in collaboration with relevant campus departments.
- Participated in the cultural competency committee to enhance professional development for all employees.
- Supported the Dean of Students in promoting strategies and programs for student satisfaction and success.
- Aided the Dean of Students in developing short- and long-range visions for the department.
- Collaborated with the Student Affairs Council and other departments to achieve school objectives.
- Oversaw supervision, performance evaluation, and professional development for employees.
- Contributed to the Critical Incident Response Team duty rotation.
- Handled unit budgets, reconciling contracts, and purchase orders.
- Performed research and assessment on student satisfaction and university trends.
- Obtained emergency funding for students with financial need through the Charles Schwab Corporation.
- Created a Critical Threat/Incident Response Plan to equip department heads and senior unit leaders with protocols for managing on-campus crises.

## **Dean of Students – University of Pikeville** July 2014 – March 2016

- Led the development and execution of programs and services to address the co-curricular needs of the student body.
- Guided the Student Government Association to develop programs that facilitated student involvement in the governance process.
- Created campus-wide initiatives to increase student retention and persistence.
- Performed student satisfaction assessments of all programs and services within the department to achieve outcomes.
- Acted as the Chief Judicial/Title IX Hearing Officer to handle student misconduct.
- Participated in the Executive Cabinet Office of the President.

### Earlier Career:

**Director of Residence Life** – Kentucky State University (2011 – 2014)

**Student Conduct Specialist | Hall Coordinator** – University of Texas at Austin (2010 – 2011)

## Teaching Experience

**Instructor**, Leadership Development Seminar – University of Nevada, Las Vegas–College of Education 2020

- Instructed and assessed student learning in the Master of Higher Education Administration Department.
- Acted as a Graduate School Faculty Member to enhance academic engagement.
- Developed course curriculum to improve educational outcomes.

**Instructor**, Comparative Higher Education – Illinois State University–College of Education 2018

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- Designated a final paper to examine higher education practices from an international perspective.
- Delivered feedback and graded assignments for written work and discussion board postings.
- Employed comparative higher education as a theoretical lens for understanding education abroad.
- Distributed class readings and assigned individual and group work to explore contemporary issues in international higher education systems, including governance, finance, academic affairs, access, and student affairs.

## **Instructor**, Higher Education Planning – Illinois State University–College of Education; College of Education 2017 – 2018

- Directed students to conduct an environmental scan.
- Familiarized students with various components and models for higher education planning.
- Offered weekly feedback to students through online postings, guided class discussions, and arranged for invited guest speakers.

## **Instructor**, Project Rebound – Illinois State University–College of Education 2016 – 2018

- Conducted office hours to meet with students and address their academic needs in the group cluster.
- Facilitated the development and refinement of academic goals.
- Guided undeclared students in exploring major options.
- Provided weekly motivation to enhance student success and program completion.
- Explored strategies to help students on academic probation overcome common challenges.

## **Co-Instructor**, College Students and Their Cultures – Illinois State University–College of Education; College of Education 2017

- Designated an environmental research study to identify important safe spaces for students on campus.
- Delivered feedback to students on their ethnographic research projects.
- Applied student development theory to shape the understanding of the student experience.
- Distributed readings and guided class discussions on the lived experiences of marginalized students in higher education.

## **Instructor**, LINC – University College 2016 – 2017

- Supported students in their transition to the university.
- Delivered individualized instruction in a small seminar setting.
- Familiarized students with university resources.
- Created exercises for students to explore potential majors and career goals.
- Shared test-taking strategies, critical thinking skills, and time management exercises with students.

## **Instructor**, Success 101 – University College 2016 – 2017

- Developed lessons to enhance academic skills for first-year freshmen, such as taking notes, studying for exams, time management, and reading comprehension.
- Designated projects to connect students with campus resources.
- Arranged personalized academic coaching to help students stay on track.
- Facilitated opportunities for students to participate in events, such as the Send-Off Dinner, Human Library, and Festival Illinois State University.

## Education

- **Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership** – Northern Kentucky University
- **Master of Education: Adult and Higher Education Administration** – University of Missouri at Saint Louis
- **Bachelor of General Studies: African and African American Studies** – University of Kansas

## Presentations

- Invited Speaker (2023). Multicultural Visit Day; Central Michigan University
- Invited Keynote Speaker (2023). Martin Luther King, Jr. Peace Brunch; Central Michigan University
- Invited Keynote Speaker (2023). Multicultural Graduation Celebratory; Central Michigan University
- Invited Keynote Speaker (2022). IMPACT; Central Michigan University
- Invited Speaker (2022). SOAR Awards; Central Michigan University
- Presenter (2018). Advocating for Transgender and Non-Gender Conforming Students in Campus Spaces; Student Affairs Conference. Illinois State University
- Presenter (2018). "Supporting Muslim International Students: Politics, Religion, and Campus Support," Student Affairs Conference. Illinois State University
- Presenter (2017). Self -Advocacy on a College Campus 101; First Star, Illinois State University
- Panelist (2017). "Campus Climate Task force: Faculty and Staff Experiences," Illinois State University
- Invited Keynote Speaker (2017). "Umoja: Black Graduation Celebration: From a Mighty Stock We Come," Illinois State University
- Panelist (2017). "Educating Illinois: Student Retention," Illinois State University
- Presenter (2017). "Transfer Day: Family Session" Illinois State University
- Presenter (2017). "Creating a Social Justice Model for the Workplace," Chicago Teachers School Pipeline

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- Presenter (2017). "Culturally Response Campus Community Conference: How to Create a Socially Just Workplace, " Illinois State University
- Presenter (2016). "Preview: New Student Orientation Parent Session," Illinois State University
- Presenter (2016). "Navigating the Mentoring Process," Mentoring and Academic Success Achievement Initiative (M.A.S.A.I)
- Presenter (2014). "Welcoming TRIO Students," (2014-2016), TRIO Program, University of Pikeville
- Presenter (2014). "Student Body Town Hall Meeting"; Office of Student Services, University of Pikeville
- Presenter (2014). Open House... Office of Residence Life, Kentucky State University

## Professional Affiliations

- National Association of Student Affairs Practitioners Voting Delegate
- VPSA Institute National Association of Student Affairs Practitioners
- AVPSA Institute National Association of Student Affairs Practitioners
- Educational Advisory Board
- Michigan Association of Schools and Universities
- Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated

## Committee Experience

- 2023-2028 CMU Strategic Planning Committee, Central Michigan University
- Retention Task Force, Central Michigan University
- Capital Planning Steering Committee, Central Michigan University
- Justice Impacted Taskforce, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Southern Command Public Safety Advisory Board, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Hope & UNLV Fostering Scholars Advisory Board, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Founder, Minority-Serving Institution Task Force, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Top Tier Student Achievement Committee. University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Supporting Our Students Emergency Award Fund, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Student Issues and Awareness Committee, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Culturally Responsive Campus Community Conference, Illinois State University
- International Student Experience, Illinois State University
- Leadershape, 2017, Illinois State University
- Leadership Initiative, 2016-2017, Illinois State University
- Critical Incident Response Team, Illinois State University
- Student Affairs Council, Illinois State University
- Admissions, Retention, and Scholarship Committee, University of Pikeville
- Executive Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences, University of Pikeville
- Open House and New Student Orientation, Kentucky State University
- Behavioral Threat Assessment Team, University of Texas at Austin
- Student Staff Selection Chair, University of Texas at Austin
- South Western Association of Colleges and Housing Officials, University of Texas at Austin
- Resident Assistant Training Committee, University of Texas at Austin

## Assessment

- Administered survey to over 700 undergraduate students to gauge how do students at CMU experience student life both on and off campus
- Launched National Association for Collegiate College Campuses to determine racial stressors experience between students of color and nonwhite undergraduate students attending the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Spring 2020
- Retained National Association of Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education to conduct external review for Campus Life unit, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2019
- Conducted climate assessment with licensed counselor collaboratively designed to assess broad issues of diversity and inclusion. University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2019
- Completed a study on the attitudes and perceptions of inclusion among marginalized and non-marginalized students at Illinois State University Homecoming, Illinois State University, Spring 2016
- Examined student attitudes involved in the student conduct process, Illinois State University, 2016
- A Phenomenological Study of Effective Service-Learning Practices Dissertation, Northern Kentucky University, 2016

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## Awards & Honors

- Promoting Diversity Star Award Nominee, Illinois State University (2016)
- Innovative Program Star Award Nominee, Illinois State University (2016)
- Leadership Kentucky Nominee, University of Pikeville (2015)
- New Student Services Employee of the Year, University of Pikeville (2015)
- Outstanding Graduate Student, University of Missouri at Saint Louis (2006)

## Technical Skills

Microsoft Office Applications (Access, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook) | Workday | Blackboard