Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Melvin Pascall 03/21

This month's DEI Faculty and Staff Spotlight features Dr. Melvin Pascall who is a professor in the Department of Food Science and Technology (FST). Dr. Pascall currently serves as a member of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee in FST. He has also served on the CFAES DEI Committee from 2015 to 2017 and the Promotion and Tenure (P&T) Committee at the departmental level where he was the Procedure Oversight Designee (POD) during 2018.

Why is engaging in diversity, equity, and inclusion, important to your work?

The ability to interact amicably with students, faculty, and staff is essential to the success of my job at OSU. My interactions with students are in the areas of teaching and advising. Successful teachers are keenly aware of the necessity to create an atmosphere of learning in the classroom. To accomplish this, the onus is on the teacher to demonstrate a caring temperament towards the students since such an attitude promotes a feeling of empathy and acceptance. Students who experience this relationship develop confidence in their professor, and this significantly increases the student’s success potential. This relationship is essential irrespective of the color, race, ethnicity, gender, academic standing, rank, religious belief, sexual orientation, origin, disability, socio-economic status or prior experiences of the students. All students (diversity) should feel that the playing-field in the class is equal (equity) for their success, and everyone should feel that he/she has the same chance to succeed as has everyone else (inclusion). Thus, it is essential for me as a faculty member and lecturer in my classes, that I take full responsibility for the creation of this atmosphere. A failure to do this means that I am a misanthropist to my calling. Too many lives are at stake for me to develop an attitude that does not incorporate these virtues. At the end of the day, my satisfaction comes from my ability to train students to become productive citizens who will graduate with skills that could be used to advance society and make this world a better place for us all.

How do you contribute to DEI work within CFAES and or the greater university or community?

Currently, I serve as a member of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee in the Department of Food Science and Technology at OSU. To my knowledge, this is the first time that this committee was formulated. I also served on the College of Food Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) DEI Committee from 2015 to 2017. After earning tenure at OSU in 2008, I have served on the Promotion and Tenure (P&T) Committee at the departmental level and was the Procedure Oversight Designee (POD) during the year 2018. During the years 2017, 2018 and 2019, I served on the P&T
Committee in CFAES. In keeping with my deep belief that everyone should be treated equally and be given a chance to succeed, I was vigilant about promoting an atmosphere of fairness in my evaluations of the candidates’ dossiers that came up for review. At the same time, I was also mindful to ensure that the university’s rules relating to promotion and tenure were followed, since these rules are designed to ensure fairness while evaluating the scholarship of all candidates. At the university level, I also served on the Committee on Judiciary Affairs, Committee on Academic Freedom and Responsibility (CAFR), Hearing Committee, and Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM). These four committees are charged with the responsibility of evaluating the conduct of students and the rights and privileges of faculty members at OSU.

The Committee on Judiciary Affairs adjudicates on charges brought against students who are alleged to have broken the university’s code of conduct and subsequently threatened the safety of individuals on campus. In the case of COAM, the committee adjudicates on charges brought against students who are alleged to have indulged in acts of academic misconduct. During the approximately 5 years that I served on each of these committees, I reviewed cases brought against students from all ethnic groups, race, color, gender, academic standing, and country of origin. My service on these committees gave me the opportunity to exercise an unbiased judgement, a high degree of fairness, and equity in coming to conclusions in keeping within the university’s rules. What I also considered was the fact that decisions of these committees had the potential to negatively or positively affect the careers of the individuals involved. For example, a student who is dismissed from the university may never complete tertiary education or may receive a grade for a course that may affect the trajectory of future educational pursuits. At the same time, the integrity of the university must be considered while deciding the outcome of each case. Also, a disciplinary action could be redemptive to a delinquent student.

While serving on the Hearing Committee and CAFR, some of the issues that came up for review involved evaluations of negative decisions taken by the Office of Academic Affairs against faculty who came up for tenure and promotion. Other issues sometimes involved disciplinary actions, removal of privileges initially granted to a faculty member, reduction in enumeration, etc. My appointment to serve in each committee lasted 3 years. For each case that I was asked to review, my approach was similar to the value judgments I made for students, because a faculty member denied tenure is subsequently dismissed from the university. In judging such cases, I also considered the fact that an unproductive faculty member is a liability to the university. However, it is my belief that it is incumbent upon me to be consistent with my conviction to exercise fairness in judgement, and to use the same level playing field irrespective of any of the previously mentioned categories of differences, while still keeping within the university’s rules.

Most notably, I also served as a mentor to students of color at OSU. Since 2006, I have supported the SROP program and have recruited 5 minority students from Tuskegee,
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Universidad Del Este, Penn State, and Alabama A&M Universities. Additionally, I have recruited 22 graduate minority students from underrepresented groups to my laboratory and collaborated with faculty from the Departments of Chemical Engineering, Material Science Engineering, Chemistry, Veterinary Medicine, Pharmacy, Medicine, English, African American and African Studies, and The Office of Diversity and Inclusion. I have also visited K-12 schools in Columbus to recruit minority students to OSU (e.g. Welcome Center High, Woodward Park Middle, and Columbus Adventist Academy, FCI, and Worthington Adventist Academy).

Outside of OSU, in 2007, I was invited by Major Coleman of Columbus to serve on a Sister City Committee and was charged to recommend a sister city from the country of Ghana. This activity was designed to encourage cultural collaboration between the City of Columbus and that of an African country. From 2005 to 2010 I also served on the Board of Directors for the Columbus African American Alzheimer’s Association. This Institution was involved in promoting the welfare of African Americans who were stricken with Alzheimer’s Disease.

How did your career path lead to this type of advocacy work?
As a child, I was brought up in a religious home where my siblings and I were frequently told to speak the truth and to treat other with respect and dignity. As an adult, I have kept these virtues as my guiding principles. When I came to OSU in 2002, I brought these principles with me.

What do you see as strengths within CFAES related to DEI?
My personal observations are that Dean Cress is committed to DEI within CFAES. During one of her recent addresses to the college-wide community, she commented on her desire to reduce the gender imbalance in employees within the college. I believe this is commendable for an administrator who has recently joined OSU.

In what areas would you like to see growth within our college related to DEI?
I believe a greater effort is needed to recruit and retain more faculty, staff and students of color and from all ethnicities. This should be initiated by evaluating data from an audit of hiring and retention practices within the college so that this issue could be approached judiciously.

What advice do you have for other faculty or staff who are interested in getting involved in DEI work?
I would encourage other faculty and staff to get involved in promoting the culture of DEI within our college. Success in doing this begins with each of us as individuals. Each faculty and staff member should ask him/herself, “What am I doing to improve a culture
of inclusive excellence?” If interested in getting involved in DEI work, I suggest attending DEI workshops, lectures, seminars, and other activities that provide exposure to important issues such as implicit bias, and an opportunity to listen to and interact with many different persons. Volunteering for DEI related activities on campus could be a good starting point. Most of all, seek to enhance an attitude of fairness and acceptance of all peoples. Speak out against instances of unfairness. Finally, treat others in a way that they would like to be treated.