

## DIDiariesEp0\_Final\_v4\_mixdown.wav

**Speaker 1** [00:00:15] Hello and welcome to this episode of D&I Diaries, a podcast produced by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in the Biological Sciences Division at the University of Chicago. My name is Camilla Frost-Brewer, and I am one of the Program Managers for Diversity and Inclusion in the division, and I'll be one of your hosts for the show.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:33] And my name is Tobias Spears, and I will be your other host. And I serve as Assistant Dean of Diversity and Inclusion in the division. Through this podcast, Camilla and I hope to highlight and showcase diverse voices of everyday BSDers. We want to create a space to authentically and candidly share our DIY stories where we get to know one another outside of our professional roles. And finally, we hope to engage a coalition of listeners who value DEI and increase interest in DEI work and conversations across the BBC. So without further ado, let's begin the show. Hello, everyone. How are you doing? My name is Tobias Spears and I am so happy to be here. I serve as Assistant Dean for diversity and inclusion here in the Biological Sciences Division, and I'm so excited to be talking to you today to introduce to you our new podcast called DNI Diaries. And I am here with my colleague.

**Speaker 1** [00:01:39] Hello, folks. My name is Camilla Frost Brewer. And my pronouns are she her and I am one of the program managers for diversity and inclusion in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in the BSD.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:49] Yes, yes, yes, yes. So just to give you all some information, I am again Tobias Spears, and I want to give you a little bit of background information about me. I serve as assistant dean. I've been at the University of Chicago for around seven years. I started here in the office of LGBTQ Student Life, Lesbian, gay, bisexual, Queer Trans Students, and I am now in the Biological Sciences division. I'm from Brooklyn, New York, and I am a black gay man.

**Speaker 1** [00:02:22] Great. So this is Camilla again. And just a little bit of background about me. I'm originally from Oak Park, Illinois, but I spent about 12 years in the Southeast mopping around North Carolina and then in Atlanta for about four years. Similar to Tobias, I came to this work through LGBTQIA student services. So I worked in an office that served students, faculty and staff, and I'm coming to the BSD as a new staff member, and I've been here about three months. So this is really exciting to take on this podcast as one of my initial projects, and I just wanted to mention that diversity, equity and inclusion, you might hear us shorten it to DEI or D&I, but that's generally what we are talking about. Diversity, equity and inclusion impacts our lives kind of in every step that we take in our personal and professional life, which I think will be a through line of this podcast. So I wanted to move us into talking about why; why are we creating this podcast? So, Tobias, can you talk a little bit about where this idea for this podcast came from?

**Speaker 2** [00:03:33] Yes, I can. So, you know, one of the things I want to point out, right, because you and I are sitting here in the office, right? And we are new to this, right? We are on a journey ourselves creating a podcast on our own. Camila has done such great work getting us to this point. And we're going to ask you all as audience members to really have grace for us, right? Because we may not know all of the technical things. We are experts, of course, in everything else. We may not know all the technical things, so I just want to put that out there. But what's really interesting about this podcast, about this journey we're on is that the impetus for it came actually when I was working out in the gym.

So what I'll say is that one of the things I love about being here is working specifically with Dean Iris Ramiro. You'll hear us say Iris or Dr. Romero. She is our boss. She is the dean of the division in terms of diversity and inclusion. And she always pushes us to think about novel ideas, to think about different ways to bring diversity, equity and inclusion and belonging to our constituents, who include faculty, who include staff, who include, you know, the medical students, the PhD students, trainees, all of those groups. And so it's that time of year where a lot of the ideas are just flowing, or at least it was that time of year when I was in the gym over the summer. And so I was on the treadmill. I remember getting off and calling Iris and Tina and saying that, Oh my goodness, I have this idea. An idea for a podcast where we can talk to people in the division, people who are leaders, people who are not leaders, people who are beginning professionals. We're all leaders, right? But people who are beginning professionals, people who are intermediate, whatever. And we could talk to folks about what does diversity, equity and inclusion mean to them in their professional life, in their personal life? All of those things. And so really, this is an opportunity for us to just talk to people about what's going on, right? I feel like during the pandemic, we became detached in some ways. We weren't as focused on sort of physical community. We weren't focused on other types of community, too. And so I wanted to use this podcast to bring us back; to center us. And so that's why I think the idea for this podcast sort of happened in my head and why I'm excited to be sitting here with you.

**Speaker 1** [00:06:10] Yeah, Tobias, I think that's excellent. You know, we have wonderful, creative ideas and how do we make them come to fruition and how do we really highlight those diversity, equity and inclusion stories and experiences within the division to put kind of a human element to the work that we do? I love that. So we'll explain the podcast structure in a little bit, but most of our episodes, if not all of them, will be interviews with people in the division. We will have a set amount of questions, and I'm just going to read them to you so you get kind of a flavor of what we'll be chatting with some folks about. So the first one is tell us about the work you do at UChicago and a little bit about how you came to do this work. We're really hoping that people can talk about their academic journey, professional journey or growth, some of their interests and passions and more. The next question is how does diversity, equity and or inclusion connect to your work? How do you incorporate it or see it as integral to the work that you do? Next, we'll dig a little deeper and ask them, how does working on the South Side of Chicago, a community comprised of many black and brown people, influence your work, if at all?

**Speaker 2** [00:07:22] Yeah, absolutely.

**Speaker 1** [00:07:23] And what does it mean for you in your position to be situated in such a community? Next, we'll get into a little bit of a personal question of what is a moment or experience when you started to think differently about DEI, either personally or professionally. So really opening it up for people to tell us a story. And next, we'll ask, was there ever a time when you had to show allyship or camaraderie for someone else? What was that experience like? What did you learn or take away from that moment? And then we will kind of conclude the questions with, tell us a little bit about what it means for you to belong somewhere, either at work, in your community or somewhere else. What does it mean when you feel a sense of belonging? How do you show up in that space? We really wanted to highlight the sense of belonging and what it means for people in the division at different positional levels of different identities and show that we are a very diverse community and how we can make one another feel like we belong here. And then we'll conclude the podcast episode with asking our guests, what are some things that you would like the listeners to reflect on from what you've shared today? Is there anything else that may not have come up or a piece of advice, actionable item or takeaway you want to

leave our listeners with? So Tobias, hearing all of those questions, kind of how would you answer maybe one of them, two of them; what does it feel like for you to see these questions and think through them?

**Speaker 2** [00:08:52] Yeah, well, I think they're really thought provoking, so I'm excited about them. I'm excited to hear what people are going to say. But I also understand, you know, thinking about Bell Hooks, right. And a kind of inclusive pedagogical approach, right. Which is like you mentioned, where you sort of don't ask questions you're not going to answer, right. So, yeah, so how would I answer? And I think one of the questions I found really interesting here is this idea of when did you start to think differently about DEI? Right? And, you know, for me, I think as a black queer person, you know, it is sometimes assumed that I always think differently about DEI because I am minoritized just in my experience. But I would say that in addition to that, one of the moments for me, right, and it was a long moment, was really pursuing graduate study, right? Especially my master's degree in women's studies. And I think, you know, what happened in the classroom in women's studies is that I learned about feminism. I learned about what equity meant. I learned about what it meant to share space. I learned about what it meant to be quiet and to listen, right. I learned about what it meant to give opportunity to folks who sometimes don't have that opportunity by checking myself, by opening up space for people who don't have the same kind of social privileges I have. Like women, like femme folks, like trans people. And so I think for me, graduate school was a moment where I really learned to define what diversity, equity and inclusion meant. For me, diversity is always about the many people in the room. I think diversity just exists because it is the differences among us. And I think in a lot of ways we're all different. And so learning that, you know, diversity was a thing that just existed and this inclusion piece was the thing we had to do. We had to do something on purpose to make people feel like they belonged. And so for me, right, I always talk about inclusion using equity, equality, and liberation, because I think those are all types of inclusion. Equality, of course, is a type of inclusion where everyone gets the same thing. Equity is a type of inclusion where people get what they need, and liberation is the type of inclusion where things are not necessarily obstacles. And so I learned that in the Women's studies classroom. And so that's a moment. What about you, Camila? When did things sort of shift for you or any kind of moments for you?

**Speaker 1** [00:11:40] Yeah, I just really fast want to touch on your story, your experience of diversity, equity and inclusion, and going to graduate school and recognizing that there are things outside of yourself and that DEI is really about centering some of the most marginalized folks and listening to their experiences, supporting their causes and uplifting their struggles. So I think a moment when things kind of changed for me around diversity, equity and inclusion is when I went to college. So my undergraduate degree is from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Shout out, go Heels. I went there without ever having lived in the Southeast. I had only traveled to the South twice in my life. Once was for an admitted students day at UNC. So I was going there without any friends, no family members around. And I came from a town that was decently well-off, socioeconomically. And stepping into a university where, by law, 80% of all North Carolina state schools have to be in-state students. I was confronted for the first time with folks who maybe couldn't afford books or athletes who couldn't afford to eat but were on a full ride scholarship to a pretty prominent institution, right. So for me, a real shifting moment was around socioeconomic status at college when we are given the same environment, but we are not given the same resources, we are not given the same supports. And it's kind of touching on that equity versus equality versus liberation and kind of how they all work together or work against one another. So that's kind of when I started thinking differently and outside of my box of marginalized identities as a black queer woman of like, oh, there are other

identities out there. There are other people who exist, who are marginalized in different ways and in places that I hold privilege.

**Speaker 2** [00:13:57] Yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:13:57] And I felt like that was the real conversation-turner for me.

**Speaker 2** [00:14:02] So, Camila, another question I wanted to ponder on is this question about working on the South Side of Chicago and, you know, being in a place with so many black folks, so many folks of color, how does that influence our work, if at all? And also, what does it mean, right, for someone in my position to be situated in this community? And so I think a lot about my role as a cultural studies scholar, you know, and as someone interested in cultural studies, I get to be in a place where so much black history has happened and so much black history still feels alive. So much rich literature; Lorraine Hansberry, Margaret Burrows, Richard Wright, Gwendolyn Brooks, you know, the Chicago Black Renaissance. And it's also home to national tragedy, like being the birthplace of Emmett Till. So, you know, being on the South Side is a lot. You know, it also has a lot of LGBT history. You know, Geoffrey Hub, which is the oldest black gay bar on the South Side, but also, I think in the country. And Provident Hospital, where Dorian Miller always talks about a team of physicians, including black folks, you know, performing the first heart surgery there. So this is a neighborhood that is lively and rich in history. Living here in particular means I get to see what I call the myth of black pathology because I get to see black folks just existing in their own big and small ways. And I don't have to be some extraordinary subject, right? We don't have to be these extraordinary people. We can just be regular folks. And I think the South Side allows us to see that. So, for instance, me, I get to be a consummate professional and also someone who turns up to Beyonce and Migos, right? Rest in peace, take off. I feel like all the parts of me can exist here. And part of that, I think, is privilege and access. But there is another part of that as well, right. The South Side is also where systemic racism is on full display. The way we can see the results of what's in things like redlining and gentrification and displacement, it's a part of the world where those things become so vivid. And so I feel a sense of responsibility to not only be in the community, but also of the community. And I feel like the university is making similar strides through like arts in public life, the trauma center, the Ray Center, human rights work, work on gender and sexuality, the trans care clinic and OBGYN. And I think we have a ways to go, but I think we are on the right path as an institution. And in terms of the people and the work we do here.

**Speaker 1** [00:17:06] Absolutely. I wanted to touch on this question as well about working on the South Side, being from a suburb of Chicago. I had always heard of the University of Chicago and it was in a place that you didn't go at night time.

**Speaker 2** [00:17:23] Mm hmm.

**Speaker 1** [00:17:24] That is what we were told as children. And that was the perspective that I came back to this institution with. And I am so blessed to work with people who are really breaking down some of those

**Speaker 2** [00:17:38] Yeah

**Speaker 1** [00:17:39] assumptions and socialization that I was forced into. Yeah, almost. And working at UChicago, I've only been here about three months as a reminder.

**Speaker 2** [00:17:50] But have lived here in Chicago a longer time. So you have standing?

**Speaker 1** [00:17:55] I do. And I feel like in every conversation that I'm involved in, we are talking about how do we work with the community? How do we incorporate these experiences, systemic inequities? How do we combat some of the prejudices that exist? That is a constant conversation happening. I'm not going to say anywhere is perfect. But I do believe that the faculty, staff, students, trainees, everyone at UChicago is thinking about how to better work with and support the community. Yeah. And it's not from this kind of lens of, oh, we know best. Let us come in to the community and do what needs to be done and fix the problem. It's more of a conversation of let's hear about the historical relationship between these communities and UChicago. Let's work together to create solutions that are long lasting and sustainable. So I feel fortunate to work in a university that is centering the community that they are in. And I think, Tobias, you also touched on sense of belonging. That is huge. As a new staff member, I am always looking for those places. Yeah. What does it mean when I step into a room? How do I feel like I belong. It's some of the implicit and also explicit things that people do right. So if my voice is welcomed into the conversation, if people welcome me into the room as a new staff member, if they acknowledge that I might not have the knowledge necessary to fully participate but still incorporate me to the best of their abilities; stuff like that. I feel like that really matters for my sense of belonging if I see people who look like me. That's huge. So I don't know if you want to share any little tidbits about what does it look like when you feel like you belong? How do you show up?

**Speaker 2** [00:19:54] Mm hmm. That's a really good question. And I think one of the reasons why I appreciate President Ali Risotto is because of this emphasis on belonging right. And this idea that a college campus, a university campus is a place where people should be able to freely express themselves, but also feel a sense of belonging. For me, right, I sort of combine those two. And I think that a sense of belonging is when I'm in a place where I can be challenged and supported. If I could use some of the student affairs lingo because for me I am attracted to a college campus to being here because it is a space where learning is the fulcrum of everything that we do. And so to be able to be in a space where I can learn from folks, I can be challenged by folks, I can also challenge folks to me is like, you know, it's how I grew up in Brooklyn, right? Like, we had to have an argument for something. You know, this is why I like this. This isn't why I like that. But it's done in a way where we respect people. It's done in a way where we recognize that all playing fields are not level. And so sometimes I think a sense of belonging is when people recognize the truth about things like systemic racism, problems with class that we see all over the South Side. It's when we recognize that although education is supposed to be the great equalizer, not everyone steps onto this campus or to this division or even into our office with the same knowledge, the same value around knowledge. For me, a sense of belonging is recognizing all those people into the conversation. It is recognizing that there are many ways of knowing, right. Different types of epistemologies. And I don't want to use humanities words, but I will because I'm humanities scholar. I didn't say that, but I'm a humanities scholar even though I'm in the biological sciences. I am a humanities person, and so belonging is about creating as much space as possible for people to exist, for people to make mistakes, for people to apologize, for people to be celebrated. Yeah, that that's what it means. So, like, for instance, sometimes I go into the dean's office to get Lacroix. Lacroix Lacroix, whatever. LACROIX Right. Going into the Deeds office to get a lacroix. And, you know, seeing Miss Sane, right, who's the executive assistant to Dean Anderson or seeing other folks there, and they say, How are you doing? You know what's been going on? Here's some candy. And then I get to the end of the office near the refrigerator, and then Miss Pat and I start talking about the realities of like racism and the

realities of people perceive crime. Right. It's like we're in the middle of the dean's office. Right. And we're having these conversations, you know, inviting people to celebrate LGBTQ pride in June, and then also being able to talk to folks like Tom Fisher, who wrote *The Emergency*, right, which is a book that sort of chronicles his experience as an emergency room physician clinician during the height of the COVID pandemic and being able to listen to this black man talk about his experiences and being supported by then Dean Ken Polansky, in that endeavor. To me, that's what it means to belong when you know, we can make a case for additional resources, when we could go into Iris's office and she's playing records and we're just like, okay, you know, like it's just it's a space where learning happens, but learning happens in these different ways. So for me, that's what it means to belong. I'm extroverted. I talk a lot. I have a lot of energy. I bounce around and people support me in that and I love that. And that's what makes me feel like I belong.

**Speaker 1** [00:23:48] Thank you. That I don't know if I'd call it a summation, but that is a perfect example of how belonging is so critical to who we are and being able to live as our whole authentic selves at work and outside of work. Because we exist outside of work; we do, we do. And I think just from the brief conversation we've had today, we want to say that your stories matter, your experiences matter, chronicling what you have been through, what you have experienced, almost as if you are writing in a diary is important, and we are hoping to shed some light on some of those stories and experiences that relate to diversity, equity and inclusion.

**Speaker 2** [00:24:31] Yeah, and you know what I'll add, Camila, is that diversity, equity and inclusion isn't just like a thing that is only for black folks. It's not a thing that's only for women. It's not a thing that's only for people who are underrepresented. It's also for people who live and exists and experience identities that are in the majority. It's also about helping people be vulnerable. It's also about listening to the stories of people as they change, as they have these awakenings, as they're concertizing around different things. And so that is what I'm also looking forward to, right? Because I think everyone has a story of how something impacted them, right? I think everyone has a story about how they were made to feel included. And I think we should do things to highlight those stories. And of course, I think being in the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, right, we are going to focus on those people who are often left out, those people who are often of color, black femme folks, trans folks. We're going to try to bring those voices, but we're also going to bring the voices of people who exist, another spaces who also have stories to tell that we'd like to hear. So, yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:25:49] Yeah. And I think kind of the takeaway from that is that systems of oppression affect us all and impact us all. How are we interacting with those systems? What are we doing to maybe push back, maybe how do we benefit, how do we not benefit, and how do we grow from there and how do we grow as a community? So absolutely. Thank you, Tobias, for going a little bit into some of these questions for our Episode zero for our listeners. So thinking about this podcast. We really wanted to start it off by publishing an episode once a month. We are hoping to interview some folks in the division that people are excited to hear from, and we encourage you to subscribe to our podcast on your favorite podcast platform so you can be notified immediately when a new episode becomes available.

**Speaker 2** [00:26:39] Yes, the structure of our conversations will be similar to what they are now, which is going into people's offices, maybe a bookstore, wherever we can get quiet and talking to folks, interviewing them, listening to people, talking about the world, talking about how people experience things. So it'll be interview format. And like you

mentioned, we are going to be releasing an episode once a month and talking to some people that we oftentimes don't get to hear and experience, especially on a personal level. And so I know that one of the things I have appreciated about working with you is your diligence around creating things that keep us on track. And so there is a one pager and there's going to be a website, and all of that will have information about the release date, who will be talking to and any kind of special announcements we'd like people to see, like where they could listen to the podcast, those sorts of things.

**Speaker 1** [00:27:38] So make sure to stay connected with us in the way that works for you. We do have a website. Please, please, please visit our Web site. You can also follow us on social media. We have a Twitter account as well as an Instagram account. And then, of course, will be on the podcast platforms that you listen to podcasts through. And then finally, we do have an office listserv that you can sign up for through our website, where you will get updates on some events that might be happening; podcasts, release schedule, who are interviewing information, maybe about books that we suggest reading things of that nature. So please stay in contact with us. And as we close out this episode zero of our podcast. Thank you, Tobias.

**Speaker 2** [00:28:25] Thank you, Camila.

**Speaker 1** [00:28:25] For being with me in this conversation. We will be your co-hosts, your dedicated co-hosts going forward. Thank you so much for tuning into our Episode zero. And we can't wait to meet with you again and begin our journey of uncovering truths and shedding light on how diversity, equity and inclusion impacts our lives. Until then, remember to grab your own diary and start to craft and cultivate your own stories. And maybe one day you can be a guest with us.

**Speaker 2** [00:28:56] Yes. Thank you so much for listening. And we'll see you next month. Over and out.

**Speaker 1** [00:29:02] Have a great day.