

Features 3: Kristen Reid-Salomon – A leader among leaders

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Throughout your time at DePaul University, you will encounter various conversations about being a leader on campus as well as in your community. As we enter Black History Month, a month dedicated to the remembrance of important leaders and events in Black History, let us take a look at one leader who is contributing to tomorrow's Black History. This month *Onyx* is presenting a staff feature on Kristen Reid Salomon, the Program Coordinator of the Student Leadership Institute (SLI). You may have seen her around campus, but let me formally introduce you.

Salomon originally grew up on the south side of Chicago, in the Roseland Community, but moved to the south suburbs of Homewood at 14. She has since moved back to her south side roots, now in the South Shore/ Grand Crossing neighborhood. Upon graduating high school, Kristen attended the University of Illinois at Urbana – Champaign, where she majored in Community Health with a focus in Health Planning & Administration. After completing her undergraduate studies, she went on to study Higher Education Administration – College Student Affairs at Loyola University Chicago for her Master's degree.

When asked how she picked these areas of study, Salomon stated, “For undergrad, I thought I wanted to be a doctor but didn't want to major in any of the sciences, so this seemed like a natural fit. However, after failing my first Chemistry class, I decided to rethink my plan. I then thought about just being an administrator in the health care industry, which needs much reform. So that was my plan until I fell in love with being involved in campus life. I was a part of many clubs and organizations, including president of my Black Student Union, student government, and being an RA for 2 years.”

She continued, “After realizing I enjoyed being a part of student life more than studying the history of American health, I asked some of my supervisors what they went to graduate school for, and found out about Higher Education Administration—a way for me to stay in college and involved in campus life forever.”

It was during her graduate studies that Salomon first became introduced to DePaul University as an intern. “I interned at DePaul in 2006, both in Diversity Education with the MileWalkers, and then with SLI. I absolutely LOVED my experience here, and being at a place that was so mission-driven and committed to the common good. I also loved the students and staff I met and worked with—I always looked forward to coming to work. When my internships ended, I always said that if there was a way for me to get back to DePaul, I

would jump at the chance.” That opportunity arrived for her a couple of years later in the form of her current position as the Program Coordinator of SLI.

“I wanted to be somewhere that was unapologetic about who they were and was committed to teaching service and social justice are essential to our personal and social responsibilities to our communities. DePaul most definitely does that, and I couldn’t help but want to be a part of it.” DePaul has become another home for Salomon. She greatly enjoys working with the students in order to create positive social change and becoming the leaders for the next generation. DePaul University is the ideal place for a person like Salomon. “I love that we are right in the middle of the city, that we use the city as our campus, and that people engage in meaningful dialogues and discussions around social justice issues every day. In my office, there isn’t a day that goes by, we don’t talk about some kind of larger social issue or concern, or current event, and truly dialogue about it, and I love it.”

In her position as Program Coordinator of SLI, Salomon interacts with several student leaders and potential student leaders on a daily basis. She is involved with the students whom are a part of SLI’s Certificate of Leadership Development Program. When asked why developing leaders for tomorrow is important to her, Salomon proclaimed, “If someone didn’t help me to develop as a leader, I wouldn’t have found my true calling—working with students. It’s so important to help everyone realize we all have a greater purpose, and our own talents, skills, and passions can and should help meet the world’s greatest needs. That is our responsibility to our ancestors, our future generations, and ourselves. I consider it my responsibility to help students realize this.” She posits the questions, “If students don’t realize their leadership potential, how will we truly affect the best positive social change? How will they be able to go out into the world, armed with the knowledge, skills, and experiences needed, to help make things better- both now, and in the future?”

As we discussed the leaders of tomorrow, the interview transitioned to a discussion on students in connection with Black History Month. Kristen believes students should focus on three important factors during Black History Month: (1) learning something new about our culture by taking advantage of the many opportunities available to us; (2) reflecting on what our ancestors had to do and go through so we could be here today; (3) renewing our own sense of purpose to our people and upholding the legacies set forth by our ancestors. Kristen also shared a little insight on her favorite part of Black History Month. “Probably the beginning—which to me, starts with MLK day. It gives me such energy and hope when we start BHM and have excitement over the programs, celebrations, and triumphs we will be able to dialogue about and reflect on throughout the month. I also love singing our anthem, Lift Every Voice and Sing. The lyrics mean so much to me, and we rarely sing it outside of BHM, but music in general touches my soul.” Black History Month may mean something different to each and every one of us, but one thing is for sure, we are definitely connected to our past during this special month dedicated to our people.

As we concluded our interview, I asked Salomon for a little word of encouragement for Black students at DePaul as they journey through their undergraduate experience. Salomon had this to share with students; “Well, first to stay in school. I know college can be tough, but

we are here for a reason, and so many of our brothers and sisters cannot or will not have this opportunity, and we shouldn't take that lightly. Second, I would focus on how to make your mark on campus. Each of us has something special we can share with each other, and will make things better for the next generation of students—find that something and make our ancestors and future generations proud. I was speaking to a few students about what was and is most important to me, is for Harriet Tubman or Frederick Douglas, or Rosa Parks, or anyone who fought for our freedom and for our civil and human rights--I want them to look down on me, and be proud of what I am doing, and be proud of my contributions to our people and to our society. I want them to feel like I am upholding their legacy in my own way, and for them to know what they did meant something to me, and I am going to pay it forward.”