

Dear Award Committee,

Without question, I nominate Dr. Paula Parks for the Stanback-Stroud Diversity Award. I confidently attest that there is no more deserving candidate. Dr. Parks has been instrumental in diversity conversations, policies, procedures, and cultural changes at Bakersfield College. Her leadership measurably improves campus climate, supportive implementation equity structures, student engagement and success, and so much more. I have enjoyed working with Paula both as a professor and as her direct supervisor. I served as her Dean of Instruction for four years and worked with her as a professor and senate member for an additional ten years. While many people work towards the goals outlined in this award, few have the perseverance and discipline of mind to ensure structures are in place to facilitate tangible outcomes that last. Dr. Parks has transformed possibilities for students at our college, and I could not be prouder to nominate her.

Dr. Parks is a dedicated and respected English professor. She has been honored by NAACP as an educator of the year, received a community service award from the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc, was inducted in the CSUB Alumni Hall of Fame, and so much more. However, her awards and honors are not why she deserves this award. She is a transformative leader who guides with humility, compassion, perseverance, and intelligence. She is kind in her approach, but she is fierce in her dedication. From outreach to graduation, Dr. Parks is there for students, through her Umoja program, which she started in 2015, and a half dozen other interventions.

As an active member in her department and faculty academic senate, Dr. Parks contributes to curriculum planning and implementation that is responsive and inclusive of diverse student needs and interests. Her participation in the various senate topics over the last year helped ensure an equity document that supports our students was approved. It is important to note that unlike many academic senates across California, ours has not been as readily accepting of diversity and equity perspectives, motivations, or processes. As such, her participation was not one of the "speaking to the choir." It was, in fact, very often a brave and emotionally draining engagement. Her willingness to speak up and provide real solutions has provided our college with a more inclusive and equitable working and learning environment. She also serves on our Equity Senate committee and ensures ongoing communication with community partners.

Dr. Park's creative and innovative approaches to integrating inclusivity in faculty and staff development or classroom activities is wildly applauded. Her Umoja students are over four times more likely to graduate or transfer within four years than Black/African American students who are not exposed to the Umoja curriculum and approach. She provides clubs, community engagement opportunities, training for faculty, curriculum support for educators, peer mentoring sessions, one-on-one help, invited lectures, field trips, and future planning counseling.

While I was her dean, I watched her accelerated composition course do amazing things with student success and retention. Her Black/African American success rates were double what they had been before her Umoja program. Her methods afforded students who would typically

have to take two or more remedial classes before getting to a transfer-level class, to pass transfer levels within one year. She is not an easy teacher; most would say she is more rigorous than most. She achieved gains in student success and retention with a unique mixture all her own. By scaffolding, using unique supplemental instruction methods, embedded writing center experts, peer mentors, ensuring a sense of community through student engagement opportunities and ongoing best practice conversations, Dr. Parks created a culturally relevant curriculum.

While many have dedicated time to their courses, not everyone takes the time to invest in others. Every month, Dr. Parks trained educators in the philosophy of acceleration and teaching strategies based on her research and expertise that keeps diversity and equity in mind. While many will lead a program, not everyone dedicates their moment to it like Dr. Parks does. While many people care about inclusion, diversity, and success rates, few take the time to do more than talk about how things should be. Dr. Parks makes equity, diversity, and success rates more than words; she makes them real and makes a difference every single day.

Sincerely,


Andrea Thorson
Professor of Communication
Bakersfield College

Dear Committee,

My name is Alexis Brown and I am a sophomore here at Bakersfield College. I'm a peer mentor for the Umoja program, vice president for the Umoja club, and also a part of the Umoja Employment Prep Academy. I met Dr. Parks the summer of 2019 when I came to register for classes. I was having trouble navigating my way around campus because I was fresh out of high school. I came up to Bakersfield College for a freshman orientation and was recommended to apply for Umoja classes. I had no idea how to register for them, so my mom told me to call Dr. Parks for help. To my luck, she answered the phone and stayed on the line with me for over an hour to make sure I got everything I needed. From that moment forward, I knew she would be someone who made an impact on my life.

Being in Umoja has given me the opportunity to come out of my shell and turn some of my weaknesses into strengths. I've been on quite a few educational trips through the program that have allowed me to expand my social skills, provided me with wisdom and knowledge, and has drawn me closer to the person I want to become. I've also been granted the opportunity to speak on a couple of panels regarding issues that minorities face on campus and in the world. Umoja has so many things to offer African American/Black students. The program provides culture-based classes, book loaners, village, indabas, mentors, community, unconditional support, and so much more. Coming into college was quite the challenge for me because I had no idea what I wanted to do in college, what career I wanted to pursue, or what I wanted for my future. In Umoja, there are 18 practices. My favorite ones are two of the heartbeat practices which are "Intentional and Deliberate" and "Ethic of Love". Everything in Umoja is done with purpose and out of love. It's a community that gives us students the ability to be vulnerable and express ourselves, our passion, and our voices without being judged or ridiculed.

Over these past couple of years, Dr. Parks has played multiple roles in my life. A professor, a mentor, a support system, and an advocate for her students. She is one of the main reasons that I have come this far in my educational journey. The multiple opportunities that she has granted me have made me more confident and outspoken. To have someone like Dr. Parks in your life is to cherish them. I am forever grateful to have crossed paths with her. Two things that I'll forever love about Dr. Parks is that she is always camera-ready and she is always looking for ways to support her students.



With love,
Alexis Brown

1. Describe your efforts to create an inclusive and supportive campus climate.

I was part of the leadership team of the African American Initiatives. Through that involvement, the College president asked me to participate in planning and implementing the College's response to the George Floyd murder as a Juneteenth Celebration. I wrote two pieces for the College's website as well as recorded a video on how we got to this point. I also wrote a piece for our local newspaper sharing my experiences and the need for understanding. I was featured in one of our library-sponsored discussions on diversity in education. Later that year, I was invited to be part of the campus leaders' presentations on diversity, and equity. I brought in two of my students to be interviewed as part of sharing how professors create inclusive class environments and how they've experienced an unwelcoming campus climate. I have been a member of our Equal Opportunity and Diversity Advisory Committee. Last year, the group drafted four basic equity commitments, and I was part of the reviewing, revising, and presenting to Academic Senate, where some members questioned the fairness of or need for a statement on equity/diversity. I spoke out at several Senate meetings, encouraged my students to be involved in writing statements, and as a Senator, made the motion to vote when the commitments were at risk of being tabled. They were adopted.

(222 words)

2. What effective teaching and learning strategies have you implemented?

I create a culturally relevant curriculum even if I have to put together my own custom anthology that includes authors that represent a variety of perspectives and cultures. Strategies I use in my Umoja classes include an integration of African and African-American values. Umoja means unity in Swahili. The Umoja program is designed for African-American students and includes "practices" that support best practices in teaching students of color. I start every class with a discussion on an African proverb, such as "Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable" that encourage community building and accountability to each other. This ancient wisdom is always applicable. I also infuse wisdom from Ma'at, such as truth and reciprocity, and the Nguzo Saba principles, such as collective work and responsibility. This wisdom guides behaviors, infuses cultural pride, and motivates students. I use collaborative learning techniques, group work, peer editing, and group projects. Students study together outside of class and create a group chat to stay in touch and encourage each other. Another strategy is call and response, similar to what's used in the Black Church. I will say part of the sentence and they will fill it in the rest. Or I'll check in with "you with me?" or "that make sense?" and they'll respond. I use that to engage, connect, and encourage participation.

(217 words)

3. Describe activities that have facilitated student access, retention, and success.

I created an accelerated composition course with scaffolding, support through a supplemental instruction program I created the same year, use of the affective domain, and the use of a culturally relevant curriculum. The first year of the course, I met with the professors involved monthly and trained them in the philosophy of acceleration and teaching strategies. My dissertation showed that the success rates of the accelerated course mirrored those of the developmental course two levels below except that passing the accelerated course allowed students to move to the college-level course not to another developmental course. Then I created the Umoja program in 2015. In terms of course completion, data shows that Umoja students in the accelerated course were twice as likely to pass than Black students not taking the course with me. In fall 2019, Black students who took English 1aL with me in Umoja passed at an 8% higher rate than Black students who took the same course with another instructor the same semester. Data from a recent longitudinal study show that students in the 2015, 2016, and 2017 cohorts (the first three cohorts) were 4.2 times more likely to graduate or transfer within four years than Black students who were not exposed to the Umoja curriculum for one semester.

(212 words)

4. Describe activities that have fostered student engagement in campus life.

I've increased the level of student engagement with students in the Umoja program. In the third year of the program I guided students to form the Umoja Club and serve as advisor. Through a leadership course I developed, I trained the Club leaders on navigating the college, working in small groups, and using Robert's Rules of Order. As a student organization, the Club has representatives on the Office of Student Life's leadership team. This participation plugged them into the larger workings of the College, which few African-American students had been involved. The Club has put on an annual Black History Month Conference and other events to which students across the campus are invited. I've also increased their engagement on campus through on-campus work. In partnering with the Writing Center and Outreach, Umoja has placed students in on-campus jobs that help the departments connect with students of color, help students feel more connected with the College, and gives them time to work on Umoja activities. Last year, one of those students was honored as Student Worker of the Year. A partnership with our Nursing Department allowed Umoja students interested in nursing to interview nurses in the field, current nursing students, to participate in the Skills Lab, and to attend lectures.

(209 words)

Dear Regina Stanback-Stroud Diversity Award Committee,

It is with great pleasure and honor that the Bakersfield College Academic Senate approves the nomination of Dr. Paula Parks for the Regina Stanback-Stroud Diversity Award. Our nominee has been very committed to serving and empowering students from diverse backgrounds and experiences for the past 20 years. She is the founder and current faculty leader of our college's Umoja African-American Success Through Excellence and Persistence (Umoja ASTEP) that integrates effective teaching and learning strategies, support services and African-American culture. The courses and learning communities under Umoja directly speak to the lived experience and needs of our African-American students. Umoja focuses on educating the whole student — body, mind and spirit. African and African-American histories and voices are intentionally acknowledged and are woven into the learning experience. Students enrolled in this program are able to reap the benefits of taking courses with a focus on African-American culture, academic excellence celebrations, college visits, and mentorship from a community or faculty staff member with expertise in their desired field of study. Because of our nominee's passion and expertise, Umoja has produced dramatic improvements in student access, retention and success of our African-American students to the point that equity gaps are now very nearly closed. Umoja is described in more detail at [college home]/student/aai/umoja . She has been the key faculty leader in our college's African American Initiatives described at [college home]/aai and in our annual Juneteenth Celebrations as well as conferences we've held during Black History Month.

Our nominee has served for many years as an English department Senator on the Academic Senate and is currently the Academic Senate Secretary. She has also served on our Curriculum Committee and our Equal Opportunity Diversity Advisory Committee, as part of her work to create an inclusive and supportive campus climate. She was featured in a recent all-college communication from the College President's office that I'll quote (with redaction):

[Our nominee] is an English professor and Umoja leader who was recently selected for the [local CSU] Hall of Fame. [Our nominee] has been teaching at [our college] for 20 years and has been involved in numerous student success initiatives. Notably, she started the Umoja program in 2015, which has been instrumental in the increase in Black student success. In 2016, she was also named Educator of the Year by [our city's] chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). We are proud and fortunate to have [our nominee] involved in several of [our college's] campus-wide committees and involved in our innovative equity driven work.

Our nominee created a Career Preparation Academy for Umoja students interested in nursing. Phase I was a partnership with our Nursing Program, our local hospital group, a business owner, and a leadership coach. It involved students learning their leadership styles, meeting with nurses in various specialties, crafting their resume, practicing interviewing techniques, and exploring the experiences of Black medical professionals. Phase II was a partnership with our Nursing Program, which included Umoja students observing nursing students in the skills and simulation labs. She wrote grants, which allowed students to earn scholarships in both phases.

The program gives students insights into this very competitive field in which African Americans are underrepresented.

Our nominee served as a panelist at the Fall 2020 National Black Student Leadership Summit that is sponsored by the Florida African American Student Association. We believe that our nominee is an excellent model of a faculty member who works tirelessly to promote student success. Thank you for your consideration of our nominee for the Regina Stanback-Stroud Diversity Award.

Nick Strobel
Bakersfield College Academic Senate President

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