

Date: September 2023

Featuring: Crystal Riles

How did you first become involved with TACAC?

I first became involved in TACAC as a new admission professional in 2013. I had just transitioned from the other side of the desk, as a College Advisor in McAllen. I was registered to attend ACCL at St. Edward's to learn all things admission and recruitment, to get me ready to be a "road warrior" in the fall.

What inspired you to pursue a career in your field and what do you enjoy about your career choice?

I recently transitioned from my role as Assistant Director of Recruitment to the Director of Community & Culture at the Bush School of Government & Public Service. My transition was inspired by my desire to not only support students through their college journey but also support faculty and staff in the work they do. There are so many things I enjoy about my career, but being actively involved in the community here to impact the overall climate of this college and ensure that everyone in this place has the resources needed to be the most successful brings me joy daily.

How has being a TACAC member been beneficial to you and your career?

Being a TACAC member has been beneficial to me by building my confidence in what I do, growing my network to continuously push me to be better and just helping me find my passion. It has been beneficial to my career by crafting my skillset through all the professional development opportunities and expanding my work experience to be marketable in so many ways. I will be forever grateful to TACAC for giving me such a strong foundation from the beginning of my career in admissions.

What are some current projects or initiatives that you are working on that you are excited about?

One project I am so excited about is building a Community Pantry for students within our college. After multiple conversations with faculty and staff, we came to the realization that some students within our community are experiencing food insecurities, so with the help of some amazing folks, we are going through the process to open an official Community Pantry to serve our students more readily. Another ongoing project I have is Strategic Action Planning. To advocate for students, staff, and faculty, I must understand who they are, what resources they need and what their goal is. By meeting with all these populations regularly, it allows me to clearly define where we are and what steps we should take to get to where we want to be!

How have you seen your field change over time?

From the time I started in admissions, it was always a priority for me to serve historically marginalized populations, to ensure they know what resources are available and the possibilities that exist for them in higher education. I know what it is like to have so many questions about college, be afraid because you don't see people who look like you in spaces and experience barriers that have the potential to derail your entire plan, so I made sure to become a part of the solution for these students. Over time, and more recently, even speaking about equity, inclusion, and climate has become taboo and these words have been weaponized. It's disheartening to see how state legislation has responded to the important and impactful work that exists in these realms, pushing us decades back in the progress that we made for historically marginalized populations in education. I do have faith that this is just a momentary setback, and we will push through these barriers as we have for years.

What advice would you give to someone just starting out in your field?

Focus on your “why” and get to work! There may be days that you are swamped with tasks, overwhelmed by the need for support, or saddened by an experience that was shared with you from a student. There are also just as many days where a student will share their excitement about passing a tough class, getting that internship that they could only dream of or just a heartfelt thank you for being there. Every day will bring a new challenge but know that every day you do this work, you are changing lives in such a positive way. Keep up the good work!

What do you see as the future of your field?

I hope to see a future where all university campuses prioritize support and resources to serve all populations in an equitable way. I envision leadership actively doing the work to create an inclusive campus environment that focuses on the success of everyone within the community. Given where we are now, this would be a huge change for the better, but I know that time will come. I will continue working as hard as I can to see it.

How do you stay motivated and focused on your goals?

I stay motivated and focused on my goals by reminding myself of my “why” and centering my passion in all that I do. My passion has intersected with my profession, and I am so grateful that I get to live it daily. My passion is to help people succeed in whatever is important to them. When I refer to my “why,” I am talking about the reason behind the work that I do. My “why” is because I would not have made it to where I am now without having a strong community to support me, so I vow to always be that support for others through their journey in higher education. In every major milestone in my educational career, there has been a naysayer and/or barrier that presented itself to push me off course. I am blessed to say that there was also a steadfast community around me that pushed me even harder to keep moving forward. My family, friends, advisors, colleagues and classmates poured into me to exceed my goals and still do to this day. Dr. Riles loading!