



# Brandeis University

The Heller School for Social Policy and Management

## Associate Dean of Diversity Equity and Inclusion (AD DEI) Month 1

I am honored to be a member of this inquisitive, ingenious community.

During my first month as AD DEI within the Heller community, while on a “listening tour,” someone passed me a napkin. Written on the napkin were various notes, but in the center they had jotted down the name Audre Lorde.

I couldn't help but go back and reread Lorde's collected work of poetry. One in particular, “The Seventh Sense”, resonated with my experiences during these first weeks at Heller.

“Women  
who build nations  
learn  
to love  
men  
who build nations  
learn  
to love  
children  
building sand castles  
by the rising sea”

My friends and I debated the poem's meaning. The words made sense but meant something different to each of us. There's a wonderful on-line description capturing the essence of the poem as “reminding us of our collective human spirit, striving to grow together”. That is what I have learned in the first few weeks at Heller. This is a community bound together under either the concept of studying the equity gap or advancing “Knowledge for social justice”. These words mean something different to each of us as either studying or ‘*building sand castles by the rising sea*’. Here I imagine the rising sea as the current political climate, defining moments of our times, and Heller as the microcosm of the nation, either studying or building something that can withstand these challenging times. Perhaps this is the greatest undercurrent at Heller, studying data, issues and/or activism.

“Bridge the silos” was a resounding request for community. I have heard frustrations balanced against unyielding optimism and enthusiasm for what we could build together. There are voices of frustration, desirous of expedited action and change, balanced against alienation. Here again, was Audre Lorde:

“There is a timbre of voice  
that comes from not being heard  
and knowing / you are not being  
heard / noticed only  
by others / not heard  
for the same reason.”



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My 'listening tour' compiles a mosaic of voices, some frustrated, others content, and those with answers matched by those with questions. The more I listen to the various voices in the community the more I hear of efforts made over the last year to bridge the diversity, equity, and belonging divide. There are students who are developing new working groups (e.g., Black Graduate Student Association, Disabilities Working Group, and more). There are faculty creating workshops to support the development of more diverse syllabi, staff working on on-boarding, engagement and human relations ideas in an effort to build a stronger community. Many of these efforts have been on-going for years.

So at the end of month 1 of being the Heller AD DEI, I will work to build on the progress that has been made, and embrace the researchers objectively analyzing data as well as the voices demanding change. All of this can only be done as a community, listening to each other and working together.

The Heller strength is the multidimensional environment we find ourselves in and will harness to improve the institutional context, diversity, and overall climate (perceptual and behavioral) at the school.

There is no such thing as a  
single issue struggle because we  
do not live single-issue lives.

Audre Lorde

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I encourage you all to [visit my page on the Heller website](#), where I will continue to post regular updates, blogs, and resources.

Best Wishes!

Maria Madison

Associate Dean for Diversity Equity and Inclusion