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## **University of Wisconsin-Madison Vice-Provost and Chief Diversity Officer Damon Williams wins Prestigious National Diversity Leadership Award**

**March 25, 2013 (Madison, Wis.)** – The University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Vice Provost and Chief Diversity Officer Damon A. Williams, Ph.D., has been chosen as this year’s recipient of the Inclusive Excellence Award for Leadership by the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE). He was officially honored at NADOHE’s National Convention in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday, March 5.

The NADOHE Inclusive Excellence Individual Leadership Award recognizes leaders who have made outstanding contributions to research, administration, practice, advocacy and/or policy and whose work informs and advances understanding of diversity and inclusive excellence in higher education. Vice Provost Williams’ leadership at the institutional, state, national and global levels, includes building strategic partnerships to enhance STEM initiatives and school partnerships; advancing influential and guiding research on chief diversity officers, and his efforts to strengthen the connection between diversity and academic excellence in the academy with AACU, were some of the many reasons he was selected to receive this year's award, according to Christine Stanley, Chair, NADOHE Inclusive Excellence Awards Committee.

"It's an honor to be recognized by my peers and is truly a reflection of the diligence and institutional commitment of my colleagues at UW-Madison, and elsewhere, who remain focused on creating campus communities that are inclusive and excellent for all," Dr. Williams said. "I am humbled to have this recognition and motivated to do even more, particularly as we move forward with our newest campus-wide diversity strategic plan at UW-Madison."

Serving as an vice provost and the chief diversity officer for the University of Wisconsin-Madison for the past five years, Vice Provost Williams has formed the university’s first division specifically dedicated to strategic diversity initiatives, the Division of Diversity, Equity and Educational Achievement. This division encompasses nearly 80 full-time employees, key innovative and successful nationally-recognized diversity recruitment, retention and talent-development programs in the nation, including the largest partner contingency of the Posse Foundation. UW-Madison is the only institutional partner to host scholars from four urban areas – Los Angeles, Chicago and Washington, D.C., along with STEM-focused scholars from New York City.

Wade Fetzer, a longtime Posse Foundation partner and the Wisconsin alumni who led UW-Madison to become the first public institution to partner with Posse, said this is “a wonderful award for Damon and well deserved. He is having a big impact on our Posse program at Wisconsin.”

The impact of Vice Provost Williams’ leadership on campus could be felt shortly after his arrival, said Alexandra Adams, M.D., Ph.D., Faculty Director of the UW Collaborative Center for Health. He reached out to improve the performance of these highly regarded programs by supplementing the Center’s National Institute on Health’s primary funding for Minority Health and Health Disparities.

“Dr. Damon Williams has been a critically important and supportive colleague to the UW Collaborative Center for Health Equity (CCHE) since he arrived to campus in 2008, Adams said. “He assisted with our 2008 application to the National Institutes of Health for support to establish a Center of Excellence in Minority Health and Health Disparities in

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Wisconsin. This NIH funding, in turn, has been critical to the successful programs of the UW Collaborative Center for Health Equity (CCHE), a key research and education/training resource of the Institute for Clinical and Translational Research at UW.”

Vice Provost Williams serves as a member of the CCHE Advisory Board, functioning as a key liaison between the central and west (health sciences) campuses to advance shared initiatives in diversity programming and the successful recruitment and matriculation of diverse UW Scholars. He also has been a consistent supporter of and contributor to CCHEs annual Health Equity Leadership Institute, a research ‘boot camp’ offered on campus focused on increasing the number of investigators, particularly minority investigators, engaged in health disparities/health equity research who are competing for tenure track positions and interested in achieving independent funding through the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other federal agencies. Finally, Williams co-sponsors the center’s annual Indigenous Health and Wellness Day, a 3-day program every spring, co-sponsored with Madison College, for 7th-11th grade American Indian students to visit campus from Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan to learn about pathways to college and careers in health and wellness fields.

UW-Madison Afro-American Studies Professor Michael Thornton, who was on the search committee that brought Williams to campus, said it has been gratifying to see expectations that Williams would use scholarship as the foundation to understanding how to make a difference and bringing about the transformation Madison needed.

“This is a fundamental aspect of this award,” Thornton said. “His receiving it denotes that his peers see his work as having made outstanding contributions to, among other things, research, administration, practice, advocacy and policy which informs and advances understanding of diversity and inclusive excellence. It is not enough that he might have brought change, but for transformational change. On the ground, he has reorganized units into a division to make them more efficient, and better protect them from our detractors who argue that diversity is passé. He has transformed and reclaimed resources either absent from the diversity for so long or never here in the first place, during one of the worst economic periods in our history. He has broadened the reach of his office to include almost all the important constituents on campus; and is moving to include all of them. Transformation means marked change, inserting new genetic material into a cell. We are very different since his arrival.”

Overall, Williams has added immeasurably to the university’s understanding of how diversity works, what obstacles lay in its way on a large college campus, Thornton added.

“He has created a blueprint for those who wish to see how things work, but also how they should work. The work is innovative, useable, and ultimately speaks to his passion of doing what good scholarship should be -- more than words and ideas shared with colleagues and students,” Thornton said. “Indeed his award is in large part because this work combines the best of what our minds and hearts have to offer: how we use forethought and research to help transform our world. I am one who is very glad Dr. Damon Williams came into our world.”

Dr. Damon Williams has been a significant partner during the first two years of the implementation of the Beyond the Game initiative (BTG), said University of Wisconsin Athletic Director Barry Alvarez. BTG was implemented to strengthen the post-graduation trajectories for UW-Madison student-athletes. The program confronts the challenges student-athletes face when their eligibility ends and they haven't identified viable careers options other than professional sports.

“Dr. Williams has provided unwavering support to the BTG program as the Department of Intercollegiate Athletes strives to graduate and retain student-athletes and assist in student-athlete development through the Beyond the Game initiative,” Alvarez said. “BTG is a collaboration of many campus constituencies and Dr. Williams' office provides significant financial contributions. Additionally, Dr. Williams is a member of the BTG advisory board, promotes the BTG program nationally and is a guest lecturer in one of the curriculum courses.”

“Dr. Williams is someone that I consider as a transformational leader that cares about the inclusion and well-being of children and families,” said Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County, emphasizing that William’s diversity leadership extends beyond the UW-Madison campus. “I have called on him for multiple projects and he has always been there to deliver for our kids at the Boys & Girls Club. Thank you, Dr. Williams for your commitment to children, your commitment to diversity and inclusion and for being a trailblazer for those who will follow your footsteps.”

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As a mentor, Williams is invaluable as a role model, resource and point of reference for students who are serious about becoming tomorrow's leaders, said Steven Olikara, a recent UW-Madison graduate.

"Dr. Williams is an extraordinary leader, scholar, educator, and mentor with rare ability to navigate the complex challenges of a large public institution, Olikara said. "He skillfully combines his exemplary scholarship in diversity and leadership with energetic, on-the-ground practice as an administrator to achieve excellence. I am very grateful for his inspiration and mentoring. Dr. Williams was the first senior administrator to believe in my potential as a first-semester freshman on campus, and since then, he has helped me thrive as a student leader and young professional. Since graduating, I have participated in a fellowship at the World Bank and co-founded two national nonprofits focused on millennials in political leadership. Dr. Williams has advised me through the entrepreneurial process, as I strive to be a better organizational and intellectual leader in this area. I am honored and privileged to call Dr. Williams a dear friend and mentor."

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