Dr. Damon Williams Keynote Address

Introduction by Georj Lewis, Ph. D.

Georj Lewis, Ph.D.: [00:00:11] Good morning everyone. Thank you for your patience. It's so good to see all of you in the room. There's a few seats in the middle. So some of you who are moving around please, please, let your friends or students or faculty get to the space. Great.

Georj Lewis, Ph.D.: [00:00:30] It gives me pleasure to welcome you all this morning to this event that's going to kick off that university effort that will challenge us to be the best Georgia Southern that we can be. Currently we have approximately 27,000 individuals. Students, faculty and staff at this institution. We're from every state. From 102 nations around the world. We have different backgrounds. We like and we dislike different things. But I think we're all here to be successful in one way or another. Whether that success is graduating or performing your job better. I'm confident that we can be better together, than otherwise.

Georj Lewis, Ph.D.: [00:01:18] Today's speaker will help us continue the journey of getting better together. It won't be easy. It hasn't been easy, thus far. We've had some setbacks. But those setbacks don't represent our present. Those setbacks don't represent our destination. They represent temporary barriers for us to work through on our way to being the best Georgia Southern that we can be. By the way we had a football game last night. And I'm a person who who loves sports. And I sometimes, sometimes I relate them to real life. So we were 0 and 7, or 0 and 8 this time last year. Now we are 7 and 1 and in first place in the Sun Belt.

Georj Lewis, Ph.D.: [00:02:17] It is amazing what working together can change. So to students, special thanks for for being here. You're here because you want change and I commend you for that. Faculty and staff who are here today, thank you for being here as well. You are here because you want to support our students. To President Nickel and the leadership of this institution. Thank you for listening. Thank you for being here. Thank you for listening to the concerns of this community and taking action, by making diversity and inclusion a priority and inviting Dr. Williams here today.
**Georj Lewis, Ph.D.:** [00:02:59] Our speaker, and new family member over the next few months, is going to be Dr. Damon Williams. Dr Williams is a leader who is recognized as one of the nation's experts in strategic diversity leadership, youth development, corporate responsibility, educational achievement, social impact and organizational change. He's worked with more than 700 colleges and universities, Fortune 100 companies, foundations and government agencies. He has a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan and a master's degree and a bachelor's degree from Miami University. Not bad...He has served as an associate vice chancellor, vice provost, chief diversity officer. And he founded a division of diversity equity and educational attainment at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He's also served in similar roles at the University of Connecticut. If I read his entire bio, I will take up the remainder of his time to give the keynote today. But I am pleased to welcome my friend and colleague, who I met back in the 90s. And we're glad to have him here with us today. So let's give a warm Georgia Southern welcome to Dr. Damon Williams.

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.:** [00:04:39] Georgia Southern was good. Now it didn't say it in my bio, but I spent the last four years working at the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. Working with four million young people all across the world. I say again, Georgia Southern was good.

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.:** [00:04:57] It is absolutely my pleasure and privilege to be with you today. To be with you and to have a chance to be a part of the journey that you are on each and every day, towards this idea that we refer to as inclusive excellence. And asking the question, "How do we help? How do we make? How do we inspire? How do we lead our institutions to such a way that they are inclusive and excellent for each and every one of our students, our faculty and our staff which are citizens of your institution."

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.:** [00:05:34] The title of my talk today is "From Awareness to Action to Innovation. Empowering Leaders to Inclusive Excellence", because I believe, that I contend that in the 21st century there's a lot of awareness that diversity needs to be important. Indeed, I am certain that if I were to look across your campus today, even in the midst of what I know has been some painful moments over the last several days, and even months and some would say years. There are wonderful things that are happening regarding diversity and inclusion already. But the thing that I found that is so important for us in the 21st century, is not just to be aware, not just to be doing stuff. But
to be asking the question, "How do we innovate inside this work? how do we innovate?. How do we go from where we are here, to where we aspire to be over time?"

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:06:31]** And that's what I'm gonna talk about today. Now, I look around the room and I see several students in the room. I also see maybe some millennial staff members in the room too. I am @DAWPHD, for any of you who would like to continue the conversation in the social media world. And I am hash-tagging. I am always hash-tagging, Strategic Diversity Leadership and Inclusive Excellence.

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:06:56]** Now, for any of you in the room who puts forward a particularly compelling post, a particularly compelling meme, who captures the insights and ideas in just the right way. Then you can be the recipient of a signed copy of something that I know you've wanted for your leadership libraries. And that is a copy of Strategic Diversity Leadership and/or the Chief Diversity Officer. So again let's get after it in social. I'm @DAWPHD. and I'm hash-tagging Strategic Diversity Leadership and hash-tagging this idea of Inclusive Excellence.

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:07:32]** Now one of my favorite books is a publication authored by Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen, which asked this important question. What makes an innovator an innovator? Because what I found that's holding us back inside this work, is not that we're not talking about it. Indeed in some instances it's what we're doing is embracing the idea of innovation. So I want to offer a framework created by Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen. They authored a book titled *The Innovators DNA*. Now inside of that book they had done research talking to multiple different communities and audiences. They talk to innovators in higher ed. They talk to innovators in the K to 12 world. They talk to innovators in the social sector. They talked to innovators who are entrepreneurs. They talked to innovators who were at big box retail. They talked to innovators across every single walk of life. They said they talk to innovators in government. But I will take them at their word for it because I don't really believe it. Cause I don't think there's any innovation happening there. But they talked to innovators across sectors. Innovators.

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:08:39]** And see one of the things that is so true when you're engaged in primary research is oftentimes we think the primary research is about the most fancy statistics, or the most in-depth qualitative computerized analysis tools.
But great research begins with compelling questions. Indeed change begins with compelling questions. Innovation begins with compelling questions. And so they asked the question, "What makes an innovator an innovator?" And inside of that came up with an idea with a framework which I think is very apropos, very appropriate for the conversation that we have to have, not just today but over the next several weeks, the next several months, into the next several years, into the future here at Georgia Southern University. We have to ask what does it mean to innovate?

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:09:30] And so as they asked this question they came up with these five key themes that define the innovator. So let's have a thought activity. Each and every one of us here in the room today. And as I ask you this question. Ask yourself, are you innovating using this competency in where you live. No matter if you're someone who works in university housing. No matter if you're someone who works in government affairs. No matter if you're someone who's a faculty member. No matter if you're a first year student or you're a graduate student. Ask yourself as I identify this theme, if you are using this theme, this competency of leadership in your activities, in your engagement around diversity.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:10:11] Innovators are always asking the question. Why not? What can we do? Where do we go from here? Why do we seem to continue to have the same types of diversity flashpoints and crises in classrooms today that we had last year? That we had in the year before? Why can't we seem to close and accelerate different gaps that we see in graduation rates? Why can't we seem to diversify more in terms of our faculty? Why do individuals who are diverse in terms of their sexuality, diverse in terms of disability, diverse in terms of being first generation feel perhaps marginalized in the environment? Innovators are always asking the question, why not, how, what can we, what if? How do we go faster? What can we do? Innovators are begging the question.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:10:55] The second characteristic. Innovators are always looking for solutions wherever they can find them. Innovators know that to truly move an organization, to truly move a culture, to truly move an agenda. Then they've got to find solutions wherever they can find them. So innovators are constantly searching out what works and trying to reapply it where they see it. If there's something novel and unique
that's going on. And they see it operating over here. They're begging the question, could it work over there? Innovators are always searching and reapplying.

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:11:27]** Now this third... this third theme. This third theme that is essentially important, is that innovators know that innovation doesn't happen in a vacuum. It's not just this group over here doing stuff, and this group over here doing stuff, and this individuated doing stuff. But innovation happens at the intersection of thought partnership. It happens at the intersection of ideas. It happens at the intersection of academic and student affairs. It happens at the intersection of a racialized agenda, an economic agenda, a disability agenda, an agenda that may be multifaceted in so many different ways. And coming together, asking the question, "What does inclusion look like at Georgia Southern University now and into the future." Innovation only happens at the intersection of partnership.

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:12:15]** Now the fourth characteristic of innovation is that innovators, they have a bias towards action. They have a bias towards experimentation. They have a bias towards doing. They create. They start. They build. They launch. They do.

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:12:33]** And so as you sit here amongst us today, the couple hundred of you that are here today. Ask yourself, in what ways are you innovating by creating new initiatives, new ideas, new approaches to make this institution more inclusive. Because innovators are asking the question. Innovators are looking for solutions wherever they can find them. And innovators are launching and starting and building and doing. Because what I found is that innovators, true innovators, they don't just sit back and point the finger at someone else to say you fix it.

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:13:06]** Innovators walk into the space where there's challenge and innovators ask the question, what can I do to be a part of it. Even as we know that individuals that are presidents individuals that are deans, individuals that are full professors individuals, that are students, individuals that are part of our administrative support teams. Individuals who across our community are in different places and have different ways of leading impact. But the thing I found is that everybody can be a part of the business of leading change. Because it's as simple as asking yourself when you're using certain words and certain language in a classroom. Yes, that
maybe is protected by academic freedom. But begging is it the appropriate thing to do when you line up your academic freedom against your learning goals and objectives. Are there different pathways to get to that same outcome without using language that, yes is protected. But yet may be sensational and inflammatory and may hurt because words and ideas mean something.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:14:07] So innovators are asking these questions. Asking these questions. And they're experimenting with new approaches. They're experimenting with new approaches. See, innovators. Innovators know that when they find something that works, true innovators, they go big. They want to scale up an idea. They want to shout it from the mountaintops. This is a better way to do it. This is something that actually is making a real difference. Innovators, once they figure out something that's working, innovators, they then want to share the idea with others. They want to move the idea, they want to move the concept, they want to move the approach to others. Because they know that it's not just about talking about it, and it's not just about doing things that are small, but it's about doing things that scale.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:14:59] It's about creating opportunities perhaps for all first year students to go through an integrated learning experience that helps them to understand what it means to live and to lead in community. It's about creating learning and professional development contexts, not just for faculty members who want, that are already conscious too it, need to understand how to create an inclusive classroom environment.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:15:19] But how do we create learning opportunities and not require and tell folks to do it, but will create an expectation of what it means to be a citizen, to be an educator, to be a community member at Georgia Southern? That creates an expectation that individuals will go and will move in that direction that will participate, irrespective of whether or not someone told them to do it or not. Innovators. See, but there's something that I have found that is oftentimes...present if innovation is happening in the diversity and inclusion space that is not represented in these five key ideas.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:15:58] See, because the framework holds up for diversity and inclusion. But the rate limiting factor that oftentimes holds our ability to move our
institutions, move our environments forward, that rate limiting factor's this sixth characteristic that was not inside of the original framework offered by Dyer, Gregersen and Christiansen in their book *The Innovators DNA*. This sixth characteristic. And what I found is that this characteristic is present whether you're talking about a student who has the courage of their convictions to stand up and to make their voice heard, or it's a faculty member who maybe is in a search committee and they see bias happening because of the questions that are being posed to a candidate who maybe is a woman. Individuals who say, "You know what? I'm the dean and I have an ability to do this in my budget without asking anybody for permission." By being a student who says, "You know what? I know that we've got these tests and we have an approach that we use in our fraternity house to help us to level up and to be great in terms of taking tests. And I want to invite some that are not in our group to be a part of that conversation."

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.:** [00:17:09] There's always something that's present that's this sixth characteristic that holds us back on diversity and inclusion if it's not present. And it is the idea of leading with courage. The courage to step into difficult conversations. The courage to challenge privilege. The courage to be self-reflective. The courage to be humble. The courage to say, "I need to learn and to get better." Because the institution that is Georgia Southern in 2018 is not the institution that was Georgia Southern in 1980, in 1988 in 1998 and 2000.

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.:** [00:17:47] And to be the institution that perhaps we can be, requires me to do some things differently and it requires us to be courageous.... courageous. To have the difficult conversations of race. Courageous to have the difficult conversations of privilege. Courageous to have the conversations that center around multiple different identities. Courageous to allow individuals to be in a conversation even if they don't have all of the language. Courageous to allow white males to be a part of a conversation because we can't have a conversation of inclusion unless everybody finds a place in it. Courageous to allow individuals perhaps who are very conservative who have very different ways of thinking, to be a part of a conversation of inclusion. But understanding that it requires all of us to come together and not just engage in debate but to engage in dialogue. To engage in conversation. To engage in sharing. To engage in active listening. To lessen the social distance that may exist between us and others in order to move forward in a collective conversation. This idea of courageous leadership. This idea of innovators.
Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:19:04] Now I believe that our careers, I believe that our lives, particularly if you're an academic, they are defined by burning questions. But I believe that our lives and our careers even beyond the academic world, are defined by burning questions. There are several burning questions that have always defined my life, my career and my work. One of those questions is, so what is diversity in the 21st century, and why is it so important in what we refer to as a connection economy? Not an agrarian. Not an industrial. Not even a knowledge, but a connection economy.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:19:45] Help me out. I'm going to ask a little question. If you used an Uber, show me your hands. If you've ordered something from Amazon.com, show me your hands. If you have ever used an AirBnB, show me your hands. If you have ever sourced talent from an online human resource, human capital sourcing platform like Fiverr.com or Odesk.com, show me your hands.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:20:11] A handful have. Each and every one of those instances are part of this connection economy. And we are going to come back to this idea of connection. Because the world we live in today is that all the various different persons that make up an ecosystem, we're all connected. Commerce happens through connection. And that is incredibly important to this idea of diversity. And I will further clarify that concept as I move forward. How do we engage in a broad conversation of diversity and inclusion without losing sight of unique group needs?

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:20:42] See I'd like to talk about the big tick conversation of diversity and inclusion. I want to talk about disability and accessibility. I want to talk about economic access. I want to talk about racialized dynamics. I want to talk about transgender, LGBTQ dynamics. I want to talk about the incomplete utilization of women and engagement of women at all levels of leadership. I want to talk about the near crisis level conditions that we see in terms of males of color in this country being wiped out of our institutions and wiped out of society each and every day.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:21:13] But see, but too often what happens is individuals find themselves in tribalized dynamics. Where even those who are conscious and woke to a need to talk about and to engage an idea of diversity and inclusion, only do so in their own narrow ways. Narrow ways. Narrow ways. See I believe again to innovate
we've got to create the big tent of conversation. And yet at the same time being very specific as we engage different types of conversations. Not that all the issues are the same. Not that all the issues will be addressed in the same manner. But that all of the issues are important.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:21:46] What does it mean to lead strategically around these issues? Strategically. I am so tired of creating roles that don't have a position to be impactful and calling them Chief Diversity Officer. I'm so tired of plans that we create that don't have any accountability in them. That don't have any resources in them. That don't have any strategy in them. See, change management is always about this, going from where you are to another future state. And what lives between where you are and where you're going, the delta. That is where the strategy has to live.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:22:25] I have looked at research. Written about hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of diversity plans. But the question is how do you build a framework and build a plan and activate that plan with some accountability? Activate that plan with some incentives. Activate that plan with some leadership development, that's going to help folks to know how to teach in inclusive environments. Help students understand how to live in a community. Help us to level up and to get better.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:22:53] How do we embrace the realities of a changing student demographic. I refer to our students of today as the centennial generation, coming behind the millennials. Millennials born in the early '80s into the mid '90s. Centennials coming behind them. And they are not the millennials part duh....They are different. Spending as much as nine hours a day consuming digital content. Individuals who engage and use all the various platforms in different ways, with each of the platforms meaning something different. Facebook is a catalog of all your relationships. Twitter about real time communication interaction. Instagram about your faux best life. Snapchat about real conversations. With your real friends and your real community members. A centennial generation that if they didn't Snap it, they didn't Gram it, they didn't post it, it didn't happen. Because for them, documenting their lives in short form video or documenting their lives in picture or some other type of form is as natural as real. They are not digital native, they're digital intuitive. Because they have intuitively been engaging in this way from the first day. And so, therefore what's the content that's most sensational and most hawked. Content that's going to be sexy. Content that's
going to up their profile. Content that's going to get a like. Content that's going to get a forward. Content that's oftentimes diversity flashpoints. It's the world we live in. It's a gravity problem. It's no way to avoid it.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:24:42] And so what it does, is it creates an even greater responsibility for us to understand the implications of our actions when we use certain words in classrooms. The implications of our interactions when we're engaging with students and we're on the police, the law enforcement community. The expectation that lives with each and every one of us today 'cause we live in a world of no secrets. We live in a world of connection. We live in a world that even as we're becoming more connected, oftentimes we're becoming more tribal. And I mean tribal not in a good sense, but tribal oftentimes in a negative sense. As we're moving further and further and further and further and further and further away from a shared conversation. Red and blue states. Hawk and dove. Democrats and Republicans. Liberals and progressives. Conservatives. First take. All these various different.. different contexts in which we're not coming together and having dialogue. But we're constantly doing this. We're constantly doing this. We're constantly doing this. And I say this, none of us is perfect. Each and every one of us is grappling with our privilege in some way shape or form. Each and every one of us is hopefully trying to get better each and every day.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:26:02] The legendary Beverly Tatum. Dr. Beverly Tatum, the former president of Spelman University, who's also the author of Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria: and Other Conversations About Race. She was working with me in our leadership academy this summer. And she said this work is about the ABCs. It's about this idea of affirming identity. It's about this idea of building community. And it's about this idea of cultivating leaders. Leaders.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:26:31] See this is not about fixing anybody. This is not about creating a context where we're telling folks what to do. This is about helping folks understand how to respond to a shifting strategic context that we live in each and every day in this country, and indeed in this world. Because there's a perfect storm of dynamics that are impacting higher education in all sectors of organizational life. A perfect storm of factors. At the center of this storm is this idea how technology and social media connected us all. And there's a world of no secrets. See the hegemony. The diversity flashpoints. The unconscious bias. The micro aggressions. The
challenges, they've always happened. They've been in existence since time immemorial. Because none of our institutions were created with the idea of inclusion. They were oftentimes, and in many instances created with the idea of exclusion. And so the idea of including women. The idea of including individuals who are different along any number of different dimensions, is always about a process of change. Evolving culture. Evolving policies. And now there're no secrets.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:27:48] It's also a time of resurgence of activism, and I'll talk about that a bit more. The rise of the millennials and the centennial generation, The centennials, the most diverse generation in the history of our country. Most diverse in terms of nationality. Most diverse in terms of religion. Most diverse in terms of race and ethnicity.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:28:09] I spent the last four years at the Boys and Girls Clubs of America at the K through 12 level. We've already tipped to a majority, minority community particularly at the youngest age levels. Indeed one of the most powerful and pressing forces inside of this centennial generation is the diversity that they bring in terms of sexuality. They're the first group of out LGBTQIA identified teens in the history of this country. I was at Boys and Girls Club of America. and we start seeing these dynamics showing up in the national headquarters about four years ago. We will get phone calls from the club saying students, young people as early as sixth grade, seventh grade, were showing up saying this is who I am. I was born as Peter but I prefer to now be Paula because that's who I am. Showing up to clubs in California. They would call us and say, "National headquarters, this is what we're going to do as these students are showing up. This is our plan." The clubs in the east coast would say, "You know this is what we're thinking about national headquarters, what are your thoughts on that?" In the Midwest they call us up and say, "National headquarters, We have no idea what to do. They are showing up at our door. What do we do?" And the clubs from the south will call and say, "Yeah, they said it was coming. We told them they couldn't come."

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:29:34] The dynamics of diversity that require all of us to get better as leaders. To get better as leaders. The emergence of a global knowledge economy. This deck, this infographic. Many of my logos created by graphic designers in Pakistan. Animators in India. A global connected economy. Persistent societal and
educational inequities that have become more deep and more persistent than what we saw just a decade ago. Twenty years ago.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:30:09] An educational and business case for diversity, and I'll return to that case. And Trump-lash. Political and legal threats that sit just on the horizon. We see what's happening right now with the cases that are working their way through with Harvard and affirmative action and race conscious admissions policies. We saw the dynamics that played themselves out as Kavanaugh was appointed. We saw the dynamics that play out each and every day as President Trump is the first president, not just to run for election through social media, but the first president to govern through social media. And as a result, there is a consistent and powerful impression upon us, of his ideology upon us each and every day. Threats to DACA, Title IX. Race conscious admissions. All various different dynamics that are being impacted by this Trump-lash. And creating all of these contexts.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:31:09] I've been moving around the country. I'm very fortunate to be with you today. I'm very fortunate to have been with a lot of institutions. Indeed in September I was at Appalachian State. I guess I came to the right place today, huh? I was in App State in September. I love my folks up in Boone. You all handed them their hats yesterday. I was over in Europe, and I was lecturing Europe, and I came home. And it was my daughter, my wonderful daughter's birthday yesterday. She turned five. Warner-bear. I would have been at the game yesterday too, whooping it up. You know, cause I'm all about y'all. But we've been moving around the country with this inclusive excellence tour. Looking to empower leaders to drive inclusion. To hopefully produce more meaningful results and to create more powerful and inclusive communities.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:31:59] Hate crimes in our country are up as never before. They're up. And they've been on the rise since what we saw with the election of President Trump. I sat in my home and I saw the horror of what happened at the University of Virginia not too terribly long ago. Little over a year ago at this time. And I had tears in my eyes. I could not believe it. I had just made the decision to step away from what I was doing at Boys and Girls Clubs of America, and I was considering options and which pathway I was going to go, and what I was going to do next.
Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:32:32] And we went out we decided we were going to host a webinar. Because I felt like, if I was feeling some kind of way, I bet there were a number of other folks around the country are feeling some kind of way too. And we ended up having a couple thousand people show for that webinar. As we talked about several different themes that we're seeing. That we're seeing more and more racially charged theme parties and diversity flashpoint incidents that are happening on our campuses. That the alternative right and free speech and monument dynamics are playing themselves out in our institutions across the country, more and more and more. That many diverse groups are feeling these heightened senses of exclusion in institutions today. Because they feel as if there's been an open pathway has been allowed for individuals to say and to do anything. Campus activism and protest at an all-time-high. Leaders trying to manage the diversity crisis of the day, and at the same time trying to figure out how do we move forward proactively.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:33:35] The thing that I'm excited about is the opportunity to work with you, not just today, but to work with you over the next several months. To be engaged in listening sessions with me and my team. Coming out and trying to understand what's going on. To be engaging in the idea of strategy development and where do we go from here. To be a friend to this community as you're moving forward in a pathway, not in a one-time lecture or on-time visit. But to be a partner and to be a friend to this work moving forward. Because it's not just about diversity crisis reaction. It's about how do we respond proactively. And how do we move forward with an agenda such that we truly get some change and we truly feel and see things happening over time.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:34:16] And also too, these things that we see in terms of these policy dynamics that I mentioned before. This resurgence of activism across various different identity groups. The Never Again movement. The Black Lives Matter movement that many would say crystalized and kicked off this era. The #MeToo movement, which is shaking the foundation of organizations and institutions at all levels of our society. But yet still, individuals can be appointed as if it didn't matter.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:34:48] And see, that thing that I say is that the opportunity for us to lead is right before us today at Georgia Southern. But students as you, in particular, move beyond Georgia Southern. The opportunity is for you to lead for a
better tomorrow through the work that you do as educators. The work that you do as healthcare providers. The work that you do as business leaders. The work that you do as scientists, engineers and politicians. The work that you do as you move forward to become not just citizens of the state of Georgia, but to be global citizens in a connection economy. The challenge and the opportunity, even touching these dynamics, even touching our national pastime.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:35:33] Now I was sitting in my office. Now when you're at Boys and Girls Clubs of America, a lot will ask and say, "Dr. Williams why do you plan to step away from higher education to go work at Boys and Girls Clubs of America? Why did you go do this stuff? You had your books, you're working at Wisconsin, you're doing this great job." And I ended up having a chance to serve in one of the most amazing organizations that works with four million young people across the country, indeed across the world. Helping to empower those young people to go on to great futures. One of the things that means, is we have a lot of partners that help to fund that work that my office and our team would work with.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:36:06] I was sitting in my office on one particular day and the phone rang. And the conversation led me to have this example around this idea of a business case for diversity.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:36:15] (Sound of telephone ringing.) "Doc, we've got the NFL on line one. You want to take the call?".

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:36:24] "Yeah I want to take the call. It's the shield, come on now, don't play!".

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:36:26] I'm on the phone. "Yeah Dr. Williams we really would like to sit down and have a conversation. We've been thinking about partnerships and where we can go and really would like to talk with you all about how we could build out a new initiative that works."

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:36:42] Great. The NFL had partnered locally, but at a national level had not been as strongly partnered with the national organization. And so I said that would be fantastic. We look forward to meeting with you and having a
conversation. Then as we sat down, we started thinking about why now? In the fall of 2016. Why now? What's going on right now? And several dynamics became evident to us. 50 percent of our population doesn't play football, those are women, definitely at the National Football League level. Although they could. But they don't. What's the number one health related concern that exists with football? Concussions. And who makes 80 percent of all household decisions about their children? That's right. And so those same women that make all decisions, that don't play football. Nah, my son's not going to play concussion football. Unless you're the state of Georgia. You all get after it anyway. But youth football engagement is going down. Going down.

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.:** [00:37:46] Now what's the fastest growing racial or ethnic demographic in our country? A lot of people think it's Latino/Hispanic. The fastest growing racial ethnic demographic in our country right now is multi-racial/multi-ethnic. I refer to that as the Kardashian effect, don't play. Largest group growing the fastest, Latinos/Hispanic. And so within the Latino/Hispanic community and also the Asian community, which is growing very fast as well. Football is not oftentimes thought of as a brown ball with white rings. It's a white ball with black spots.

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.:** [00:38:23] And so here we had this business case for diversity. And as they began the conversation with us, it was very clearly said, we'd love to have a national initiative that would encourage more girls to play flag football and would give more Latino and Hispanic communities playing flag football. A business case for diversity. But a business case for diversity doesn't just live inside of what we've seen in terms of football.

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.:** [00:38:48] But how many of you saw this advertisement that actually was put forward by the clothier, H & M? Where a young black boy was depicted in a green hoodie with "coolest monkey in the jungle". And that was their national advertisement, in 2016. Or perhaps the Unilever–Dove commercial. Which featured a young black woman pulling back her dirty black skin, revealing the pristine clean alabaster white skin of the white woman underneath it. Illustrating a classic racialized trope that we've seen play out in soap commercials for generations.

**Damon Williams, Ph.D.:** [00:39:28] National, global advertisements. And there was brand pain that resulted as, as a result of it. Everybody thought that when Nike came
out with a new commercial that was championing the dynamics of Brother Kaepernick and what he is standing for. They thought it was gonna have a backlash for them. But what they realized that actually Nike sales were up. Brand strength was up. Because they were understanding the dynamics of a shifting populace in a shifting world, and they were getting it right. Or take what happened recently when they didn't get it right. Not too long ago. With Pepsi and Kendall Jenner. Where Kendall was able to quell the dynamics of a Black Lives Matter-like protest situation with a Pepsi can. Illustrating a tone deaf engagement of something that was very important. Did not get it right.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:40:23] At the time we were actually working on some new initiatives with the King Center and had meetings with Miss Bernice King, who's the daughter of Dr. King, and Miss Coretta Scott King. We had meetings with her talking about how we could introduce the philosophies of Dr. King to a new generation at the 50 year commemoration of his of his death. And so after that meeting, this situation happened about a week later. And it led Miss King to put the following tweet into the world, as I was following her.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:40:51] She said, "Oh if Daddy would have understood the power of a Pepsi, we would have been able to get the civil rights struggle solved so much faster."

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:40:59] Tone deaf dynamics. And there are different tone deaf dynamics that you can see play out multiple different ways. And see the reality of it is this. If we don't do more to educate our students to be leaders in this diverse and global world. That we're not setting them up for success. To be culturally relevant health care providers. To be culturally engaged teachers. To have an ability to look at the world from multiple different perspectives. To be able to engage in making culturally relevant decisions before the advertisement gives out.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:41:38] Indeed, I looked at the situation of the various different commercials that play themselves out. And individuals that are making these decisions, made probably as much as 200, 300, a half million dollars each, with agencies that were doing billable fees into the millions. And yet this is what happened? So this is what happens when we don't create a context in which we can engage these
issues in the classroom and outside the classroom, in the curriculum and in the co-curriculum, in high impact leadership experiences at our institutions.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:42:07] But the work that we have to do is not just about creating these experiences for our students. The work that we have to do is also asking the question, how do we engage in this work ourselves? Where is the professional development space and opportunity for our staff members? Where is the professional development space that's available for our faculty and our department chairs? Asking them the questions, how they could level up and get better in terms of this diverse and global world. This technologically savvy world. This world where these diversity flashpoints and challenges are all around us each and every day. And we can walk into those landmines each and every day. Each and every day, and cause harm. And have individuals feel as if they are students here at this great institution and yet feel as if they're catching H-E-L-L each and every day because they don't feel included. How do we create that space for that conversation to just get better?

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:42:57] Again it's not about re-educating. It's not about fixing broken individuals. It's not about any of those things. It's simply about leveling up as leaders in the world that we live in today. In this world of no secrets. See, too often institutions, I've found, they respond to diversity crisis moments like the cheetah, and not like the wolf. The cheetah will sit high on the plane in the Serengeti, waiting for a crisis moment to happen. Which in this instance is a little antelope or something running across. And they go tearing after that animal with an incredible burst of speed. And they are the fastest land mammal on the planet, And for 300 meters they go after this, and if they are successful, they take down their prey. If they're not, they go sit back on the Serengeti on the hill, and wait for the next opportunity to run.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:43:51] So that's what happens too often with our institutional diversity flashpoints that become institutional crisis moments, is we just sit back and wait for the next thing to happen, as opposed to moving forward in a more proactive strategic way. See, when you are intro... when you are... when medicines are introduced to us, and the doctor says, "You know, she's not reacting well to the treatment." That's not a good thing. But when you're introduced to a medicine or a protocol and they say, "You know what, she's responding well." Then that's a good thing.
Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:44:26] See, oftentimes, what we do is we react. We don't respond. So what I hope to do is to be a friend to your community over time, and help you to continue to get stronger and how to not just react, but hopefully how we can get really good about responding. And how do we move them forward in that way. And unfortunately, and I say this with a true sense of sincerity, unfortunately a response is oftentimes not going to be what we in a community of inclusion might want to happen. It oftentimes is not going to lead to someone being immediately removed from our environments. Or put on leave in our environments. Or expelled in our environments.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:45:01] Because the reality, is we have an aspirational vision of being inclusive. But we are nested in a political and a legal context, excuse me, a policy and a legal context that defines oftentimes, what we can and what we can't do. I wish we could do more. But oftentimes the reality of the policy and the legal context means that they have been stymying on us, particularly at public institutions. Private institutions are a little bit different. And every instance, every diversity crisis flashpoint moment that elevates, is not the same. They are all unique. Did it happen on campus? Did it happen off campus? Was it recorded? Was it not? Was alcohol involved? Was it not? Was hazing involved? Was it not? Did it happen in a way that there were witnesses to it? We have multiple documented perspectives on it? Did we not? What was said, what was not? Was it in a class, was it not? All of these different dynamics play out so there's literally 30, 40, 50 different variables that play themselves out to make a policy legal rendering on a context and a situation.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:46:12] And again, this is not what I would want it to be. This is what it is. Because the challenge that we have is that everything is happening in so many different ways, it's fast. and we're seeing that different dynamics that play themselves out. And we want action. We want things to happen differently. But there nested in this very complex and very Talmudic context that has to be unfurled.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:46:36] See, what I believe is more important than the punishment. I think what is more important is what we're doing to be proactive. What we're doing to create the educational moments before hand. What we're doing to create a clarity around the type of community beforehand. What we're doing to create a context and who we want to be, beforehand. And not just doing it in word, but following up the
word materially. Indeed, with commitments of resources. Commitments of attention. Commitments of new initiatives. And creating a context where things can happen in ways that are not cheetah-like and crisis-driven. And isolated efforts and a hundred things we do. And lack of coordination and a lack of point leadership. Is symbolic as sport. Simple and mechanistic. Small with no focus. Frenetic. To something that becomes more strategic in nature. That's connected and synchronized. That's collaborative. That has a vertical and lateral infrastructure. That's chief diversity officers and diversity point leaders.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:47:36] Let's define leadership that individuals at all levels of the organization can play a role in. That senior leadership that are engaged. That's symbolic and material support. That is innovative and creative. That we implement small things, but we do as scale as well. Such that we create opportunities where we can make the statement that after two years 98 percent of all of our faculty have gone through X Y and Z. Or we implemented X initiative, and all first year experience students are part of this integrated first year experience.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:48:07] But how do we do things at scale? And not just one time, but over time, creating multiple moments for folks to get to continue to level up and to get better. Oftentimes what happens in our institutions, it looks like this model. There's a crisis. There's internal, external stakeholder responses. There's protests and demands. There's a declaration of support. We put a planning group together. We deliberate, we discuss, we discuss and we deliberate. We develop the campus diversity plan. We want to improve the numbers. We want to diversity educate folks. We want to enhance the climate, we need a chief diversity officer to tell everybody what to do.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:48:45] These are the dynamics that play themselves out. And as I offer this, I'm not saying those aren't the right strategies. Indeed, those are part of the right strategy. But we see the trope play itself out over and over again. But yet, I don't see as much outcome and change that looks different because we've done these things.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:49:02] So the question is as we do those things, how do we innovate? Not just create a training program of unconscious bias. But help folks know what to do with the bias habits. And not just create a moment that's going to touch
10 percent of our faculty who already have a consciousness. But how do we create a context that we can say again over time, everybody went through it and we're going to continue to make this a part of our professional development. We're going to continue to make this a part of our accountability. We're going to continue to make it part of our human performance enhancement.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:49:31] Oftentimes there is an acceptance of a plan. There are delays in implementation. And then there's superficial outcomes. Versus something that is going to be rigorous and is going to be evolving over time. And that's tough. It's difficult. It is not easy to do. It is not easy to accomplish. Oftentimes I will go to different campuses and I will be confronted with the following question: We are struggling with campus diversity. We have a diversity plan but is it enough? How can we turn the corner? Where do we start? How can we make a difference? Can you tell us what to do? Can you help? Save us Obi Wan Williams. You're our only hope.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:50:08] I get confronted with this question often. And I say that there's no magic inclusive excellence pill. That the challenge that's before us is one that is incredibly steep and incredibly difficult. And we will want the success curve to look like the blue and the red of what we are doing. But the reality is it is probably going to look more like the green, or yellow. It is going to be tough. It's not going to be immediate oftentimes. It's going to take lots of folks being involved and really try to make this a part of the fabric of the institution, not just today but moving forward. Now there's oftentimes we feel these powerful forces of resistance that makes our work very difficult. Those powerful forces of resistance is because the work that we're trying to do is about culture movement. Culture movement.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:50:57] It's not just about doing this little thing over here and little thing over there. How do we evolve culture? This is a model that I like to use that was created by Edger Schein, the legendary organizational learning professor. Who talked about this idea of organizational cultures having multiple overlapping layers. At the outermost rim of culture is what he referred to as the geo-spatial dimension of culture.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:51:20] How many of you have seen the classic Spike Lee movie, "Do The Right Thing"? If you haven't seen "Do the Right Thing" go check it out.
It's classic. "Do the Right Thing". There's a classic scene inside that movie where young Spike Lee is in this pizzeria. The pizzeria is owned by an Italian-American family in Brooklyn. All the customers in the pizzeria are African-American, black, Latino/Hispanic. But the ownership is Italian-American. And all the pictures up on the wall are of Italian American icons. Sinatra, Dean Martin, icons. And so Spike asked a question, "Yo Sal. Why they ain't no pictures of no brothers up on the wall?" And what it was commenting to was the geo-spatial dynamics of our organizations. What it was commenting to were those geospatial dynamics. Do we have cutaway ramps that allow for individuals who travel and move by a wheelchair to access buildings? Do we have the type of touch-based technology that allow individuals who are visually impaired? Or other technologies that allow individuals who maybe are hard of hearing to be able to engage in our environment?

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:52:25] Those are often tied to geo-spatial dynamics. And as we come to the next level of culture, he says it's not just about the space, but it's also about what types of myths and traditions and symbols do we have. Is the lecture that I'm giving now today a part of a maybe new tradition of an inclusive excellence fall lecture? Or has it become a part of a new tradition where perhaps you create an award given to the individual at your institution who is doing incredible work around inclusive classrooms and inclusive pedagogies. And that individual always gives remarks at commencement as a part of a new tradition. See one of the things I often will say is what are the traditions that we have? And then ask the question how does diversity and inclusion inform those traditions? How does it inform those traditions and at the next level down our espoused values and beliefs. It's behavioral patterns and process. It's at the core of all cultures. And this is the most difficult part. Is the mental models and assumptions that we have, about this work.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:53:30] See, it's fairly easy to manipulate the outer rim of culture but at the innermost rim of culture is oftentimes very hard, incalcitrant. Difficult to move how we think about the world. "I just want this stuff to go away. Why do we have to keep talking about this diversity stuff. Those students of color are just too sensitive. They just need to toughen up. Mental models and assumptions, right?"

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:53:56] Mental models and assumptions. I want the chancellor and I want the president and I want the provost to make this go away. Make
racism, sexism, homophobia go away now. You said you are about inclusion. Assumptions. Mental models that are flawed. Because while the president, the provost, the dean, the vice president of student affairs will probably want to make all of these schisms go away. No human being has ever walked the earth could do it singly and by themselves. So how do we confront our mental models and assumptions to do better? Because that's how we evolved the culture of our institutions.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:54:29] Now I do consider myself to be Jedi. Like Sam Jackson. Strong and powerful and wise in the ways of the force. And in preparing to begin this journey with you I sought out the wise counsel of a mentor who has guided, stewarded at me for years. And this is what he shared with me.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:54:54] (In the voice of Obi Wan Kenobi.) "Strongest is the culture with this one. Colleges and universities are most resistant to change. Nebulous and multiple goals they have. Decentralized environments are prevalent. Shared governance, it confounds the greatest of leaders. Faculty and staff, they live long in the life of the campus. Conflicting ideas regarding diversity and excellence persist. Loosely coupled systems make the future difficult to see. Ritualistic and symbolic are their planning efforts. Not focused on real change and deep transformation. Difficult be the process of transforming culture. Difficult will be the process of implementing campus-wide diversity plans. Difficult, the process making excellence inclusive. Proceed with caution."

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:56:13] Questions. So we’re open for questions. As the microphones are getting set up. One of the things I'll say is this. The work that I'll be very privileged to have a chance to do with you over the next several months is really organized in three phases in between now and the end of the second semester.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:56:35] The first phase is a phase where I am engaging in broad thought leadership. So this lecture is kind of a thought leadership lecture. Time with different communities through the day. Engaged in burning question dialogue sessions. So these aren't workshops. These aren't presentations. These are intended to be dialogue sessions where I'll be answering questions and helping to bring meaning to maybe some of the things folks are seeing, experiencing some of the thoughts that they're having right now. What's thought leadership is kind of this first phase in
engagement. And I started that off with the President Nickel and the cabinet this morning. I will be engaged throughout the day and I'll be working on some on the other campuses as well. And also replicating this talk. So nobody tell none of my good stuff. You all got some friends at the other campuses.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:57:26] The second phase that we will go into is a phase of really listening and understanding. And so members of my team will come back and we'll be engaged in a number of listening sessions. And really trying to understand your point of view. Understand your lived experiences with the campus climate. Understand your thoughts and recommendations moving forward. And then from that and other types of activities that will probably happen as well. We will then generate a report that says these are the things we learned. And we will also offer forward a set of recommendations in terms of these are some of the ideas that we think will be important to move forward with.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:58:02] From there we will then move into kind of a third phase. In the third phase is where we would work with the community. And that has to be defined how we do that work. What would work to really help folks to level up and to get better and to understand how to move some of these things forward. Don't know exactly what that third phase will look like. That will be clarified in the journey.

Damon Williams, Ph.D.: [00:58:23] So the first phase is thought leadership. The second phase is research, reflection and recommendation. And in the third phase is capacity building, leveling up. And we'll be doing that over the next several months.