

Dr. Narketta Sparkman-Key (Dr. Key) – Biography

Dr. Narketta Sparkman-Key, widely known as Dr. Key, is a distinguished scholar, higher education leader, and advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, she developed a passion for serving others from an early age. This passion led her to pursue a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Madonna University, followed by a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from the University of Michigan-Dearborn. Committed to advancing her expertise, she earned a Doctor of Philosophy in Human Services, specializing in Social and Community Services, from Capella University. Additionally, she has completed post-graduate certificates in college teaching and global health, further expanding her academic and professional competencies.

With over a decade of experience in higher education, Dr. Key has taught courses in equity leadership, sociology, psychology, counseling, and human services. Beyond her teaching, she has served in key leadership roles, influencing faculty development, student success, and institutional strategy. She has actively contributed to several national organizations, including serving as a mentor for the ACE Virginia Network, a leader in the ACE Shared Equity Leadership Circle, and a member of the media committee for the National Association for Diversity Officers in Higher Education. She has also served on the editorial board of the *Journal of Trauma Studies*, the advisory board for the Faculty Women of Color in the Academy Conference, and as a reviewer for the Council for Standards in Human Services Education. Dr. Key currently serves as Vice President for Academic Wellness on the board of the Star Scholar Network, where she hosted the inaugural Academic Wellness Ambassador Conference in Nepal, certifying scholars in mindfulness and meditation. She also serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Belonging*. Additionally, she is a certified parent educator through the Virginia Supreme Court and holds the Human Services Board-Certified Practitioner (HS-BCP) designation.

Previously, Dr. Key was Vice Provost for Strategic Initiatives and Global Affairs and a tenured professor at James Madison University (JMU). In this role, she played a pivotal role in strategic planning, student success initiatives, internationalization, and inclusive excellence. Her leadership responsibilities included oversight of the Center for Global Engagement, Title IX adjudication, institutional climate studies, strategic planning, inclusive hiring practices, faculty recruitment and retention, and financial sustainability initiatives. During her tenure, she successfully onboarded a new executive director, launched a faculty recruitment program, streamlined accountability practices, and led evaluation processes designed to ensure the institution's long-term sustainability.

Prior to JMU, Dr. Key served as a tenured Associate Professor of Counseling and Human Services at Old Dominion University (ODU), where she held multiple leadership positions, including Human Services Undergraduate Program Director, Assistant Department Chair of Counseling and Human Services, Chair of Counseling and Human Services, and the inaugural

Academic Affairs Director of Faculty Diversity and Retention. As Academic Affairs Director of Faculty Diversity and Retention, she led institution-wide efforts to enhance faculty recruitment, retention, and professional development. She designed and implemented several strategic initiatives, including a faculty inclusion training program, an academic leadership development program, the “Excite the Dream” initiative, and the “Provost Initiative for Retention of Underrepresented Faculty.” Her efforts strengthened institutional policies, increased faculty diversity, and fostered a more inclusive academic environment.

Dr. Key has consistently championed initiatives that promote inclusive excellence. At ODU, she co-founded the Diversity Center and Diversity Lab within the College of Education, utilizing virtual reality simulations to uncover unconscious bias and improve cultural competence among faculty. She also established the university’s first diversity advisory committee, uniting institutions and organizations committed to advancing equity in higher education. She has led impactful programs that facilitate dialogue on critical diversity, equity, and inclusion topics, including Diverse Conversations, Virtual Watch Party, Mentoring Monday, and Virtual Café. Her leadership in these initiatives has brought together scholars, experts, and practitioners to foster meaningful conversations on race, equity, and inclusion. One of her most notable contributions was her interview with Nikole Hannah-Jones on the 1619 Project, which provided an opportunity for faculty and students to engage in deep discussions on historical and systemic inequities. Additionally, she launched an institution-wide initiative to support faculty in adopting culturally competent pedagogical practices, reinforcing the university’s commitment to inclusive teaching and learning.

Dr. Key’s research focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion, the professional identity of human services practitioners, and advancing support for vulnerable populations. Her research sheds light on barriers to equity in higher education and strategies for fostering faculty and student success. She is particularly known for her work on Black women’s experiences in academia, advocating for career ownership and professional empowerment. Her global impact extends beyond academia. She has worked internationally with at-risk families and pregnant teens, and her TEDx talk, The Silver Dollar Approach to Preventing Black Adolescent Suicide, has reached and influenced thousands worldwide.

Dr. Key has conducted global research, study abroad programs, and international presentations in Costa Rica, Jamaica, Canada, Germany, Nepal, and Ireland. Her expertise in faculty and student engagement, academic wellness, and international education has been recognized on a global scale.

Her commitment to higher education, diversity, and community engagement has been honored through numerous prestigious awards, including the Star Scholar Global Network Presidential Award of Service and Excellence, Virginia Business’s recognition as one of the “Top 100 People to Meet,” the YWCA Mary Helen Thomas Racial Justice Award, the YWCA Woman of

Distinction in Research and the Sciences, Inside Business News's "Top 40 Under 40 in Hampton Roads," and recognition as a Women in Business honoree. She has also received the Urban League of Hampton Roads Martin Luther King Community Leader Award, the ODU President Broderick Award for Diversity and Inclusion, the ODU Provost Award for Undergraduate Mentorship, and the Kate Broderick Educational Accessibility Award.

Dr. Key remains dedicated to advancing inclusive excellence, faculty and student success, and global engagement. Through her leadership, research, and advocacy, she continues to transform institutions, create equitable opportunities, and empower individuals across higher education and beyond.