

Dr. Narketta Sparkman-Key, better known as Dr. Key, was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. From a young age, she has been drawn to helping others in various capacities. She had the opportunity to further develop this passion at Madonna University, where she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology. This degree led her to receive her Master of Arts degree in Liberal Studies from the University of Michigan-Dearborn. To no surprise, she still desired to grow more in the field she is passionate about. Thus, she received her Doctor of Philosophy degree in Human Services, with a focus on Social and Community Services, from Capella University. Since receiving her Doctorate, she expanded her expertise by earning post-graduate certificates in college teaching and global health. Her commitment to education led her into over a decade of experience in academia, teaching equity leadership, sociology, psychology, counseling, and human services courses. Aside from her direct role in academia, she is currently a mentor for the ACE Virginia Network, an ACE Shared Equity Leadership Circle leader, serves on the media committee of the National Association for Diversity Officers in Higher Education, is on the Editorial Board for the Journal of Trauma Studies, is on the advisory board for Faculty Women of Color in the Academy Conference, is a reviewer for the Council for Standards in Human Services Education, and is a certified parent educator through the Virginia Supreme Court. She also holds the HS-BCP (Human Services Board-Certified Practitioner) designation.

Dr. Key is a full tenured professor in the College of Education and Vice Provost for Strategic Initiatives and Global Affairs at James Madison University (JMU) in Harrisonburg, Virginia. She has built an intentional agenda with a focus on strategic planning, student success, internationalization, streamlining resources, the creation of inclusive communities, and developing and maintaining equitable practices. Her remarkable portfolio includes Center for Global Engagement, Title IX Adjudication, misconduct, climate study, strategic planning, inclusive hiring practices, assessment of faculty experience, and recruitment and retention, all of which are extremely important to her. Her undeniable aspiration to strategically promote diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives is evident in all she does at James Madison University.

Prior to her arrival at JMU, Dr. Key was a tenured Associate Professor of Counseling and Human Services at Old Dominion University (ODU) in Norfolk, Virginia. Over her tenure, she served in several leadership roles: Human Services Undergraduate Program Director, Assistant Department Chair of Counseling and Human Services, and Chair of Counseling and Human Services. She also held the inaugural position of Academic Affairs Director of Faculty Diversity and Retention at Old Dominion University. This position made it apparent that additional training would be advantageous to her many roles. Thus, she has been trained in diversity, equity and inclusion best practices, shared equity leadership, and standards of professional practice for diversity officers in higher education. Under her leadership, she leveraged existing resources, created new partnerships, and developed programming focused on recruiting and retaining diverse faculty. To further these initiatives, she established universal messaging, meaningful visions, intentional goals, and widespread branding that promoted a more welcoming and inclusive environment. Again, her passion for incessantly promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as prioritizing anti-racist practices, shines in all that she does. She utilized university data, climate data, policies, and practices to determine gaps and create programs focused on recruitment and retention. She developed a certificate training program to provide diversity and inclusion-related training opportunities to teaching and research faculty. Relatedly, she collaborated with colleagues to create and sustain an academic leadership development program. In addition, she developed programs to attract and retain diverse faculty, such as “Excite the Dream” and the “Provost Initiative for Retention of Underrepresented Faculty”.

She also engaged in countless other endeavors while at ODU, such as being the co-founder of the diversity center and diversity lab located within the College of Education. In this context, Dr. Key used virtual reality simulations to uncover unconscious bias and develop more culturally competent skills among teaching and research faculty. Upon engaging in these simulations, she saw it as necessary to

form the first diversity advisory committee within her institution, which brought together universities and organizations who were dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion. In this capacity, she utilized programs including “Diverse Conversations,” “Virtual Watch Party,” “Mentoring Monday,” and “Virtual Café,” to have safe and open discussions about some of the most difficult topics to promote inclusion. To increase the effectiveness of these programs, she brought in experts to share in the dialogue. One of her most notable interviews was with Nikole Hannah-Jones on the 1619 Project. To take this a step further, she launched an initiative to support faculty in embracing culturally competent pedagogical practices. She knew this was an important step to fostering a truly inclusive and equitable environment for all students.

Research is also extremely important to Dr. Key. Her research agenda prioritizes addressing barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Her research also focuses on further defining the professional identity of human services practitioners & delineating practice with vulnerable populations. Dr. Key relentlessly exposes the experiences of Black women in academia and promotes strategies for Black women to thrive, which she believes is rooted in career ownership. She also wholeheartedly believes in the empowerment of vulnerable populations, evidenced through her research, international work with pregnant teens, and efforts to support at-risk families. In fact, she has given a TEDx talk on Black youth suicide titled, “The Silver Dollar Approach to Preventing Black Adolescent Suicide”. This notable TEDx talk has since reached and impacted thousands.

Her work has afforded her boundless opportunities to travel the world, develop and lead study abroad programs, and speak to diverse populations in locations including Costa Rica, Jamaica, Canada, Germany, and Ireland. Her commitment to the field and to educating her students has earned recognition by the National Organization of Human Services and by former students, who nominated her as their “Most Inspiring Faculty”. At ODU, she was awarded the Darden College of Education Community Service Award and the Kate Broderick Educational Accessibility Award. Dr. Key also received the President Broderick Award for Diversity and Inclusion and the Provost Award for Undergraduate Mentorship. Not to mention, she was recognized for her international efforts by the University of West Indies and ODU’s Darden College of Education and Professional Studies. In addition, she has consistently received community recognition for her honorable efforts. Virginia Business recently listed her as one of the top 100 people to meet in 2022, due to her DEI work within her institution and community. The YWCA awarded her the Mary Helen Thomas Racial Justice Award in 2021 and the 2019 Woman of Distinction recognition in Research and the Sciences. Inside Business News, recognized her as one of the “Top 40 Under 40 in Hampton Roads” (2016) and Women in Business (2019). Further, she was recognized for her community-engaged work with students by the Urban League of Hampton Roads, who presented her with the Martin Luther King Community Leader award. These awards were a result of Dr. Key’s strong and prodigious passion for helping others and her robust interest in the advocacy, education, and empowerment of vulnerable populations. Though she has received countless awards and recognitions for her commitment in the field, she will continue to strive to make a difference in all that she does.