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[HOME](#) › [FEATURED](#) › UNCG WELCOMES NEW OIE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR,
VICTORIA WALTERS

UNCG Welcomes New OIE Assistant Director, Victoria Walters

BY [CAROLINIANWEB](#) on [MARCH 9, 2021](#) · (1)

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Last month, the Office of Intercultural Engagement completed its search for an Assistant Director to head the Kaleidoscope Peer Educator Program, Spartans in Dialogue, Community Dialogues, House of Privilege and Tunnel of Oppression.

The OIE found Victoria Walters; a book-lover with a penchant for social justice education. Being in a student-facing office, they agreed to an interview where they could introduce themselves to UNCG.

*This interview has been edited for
length and clarity.*

**For my first question, I have
something light to get to know you —
what's your favorite book?**

So, this is a really big question because I am a voracious reader and I have been my whole life. I work at Barnes &

Noble every year during Christmas time because I love books. Okay, so, a favorite book of all time that I will read over and over again is Jhumpa Lahiri's "The Namesake."

That, for me, was such a pivotal book to read because it's all about finding yourself and understanding that systemic racism affects your view of yourself and your family. It shows all the ways that assimilation is pushed upon people of color.

It's about this little Indian boy who decides that he's going to go by an American name instead of his given name, and the reason for that is because he doesn't want people to assume things about him. But, it goes on his journey to understanding how internalized racism is.

I read that book for the first time my freshman year of college, and for me I went through a lot of the same struggles and journeys. It was like, okay wait, this is not just a me problem! Other people are experiencing this.

So, I read that book once a year every year. I hope everyone has the opportunity to address their own biases that they hold towards themselves, right? I think sometimes we focus a lot on how we are causing harm to others, which is really important obviously, but understanding how these systems of oppression are causing harm to ourselves from ourselves is important too.

You said you've been here for three weeks now, how have those weeks been?

I have had so much fun in my job already! For me, I'm a very relationship-centered person so I'm happy to be in a job that is not only student-facing but also primarily student-focused. I have a really interesting start here because I'm starting during a pandemic when no one is really on campus.



PC: Victoria Walters

I'm very much used to people always being in-and-around my office in order to build relationships. So, if someone comes into OIE to have their lunch or whatever I hear the little bell go off I'll like jump up out of my office and talk to them for a while. I've been able to do that with a lot of students and janitorial staff which is really nice.

I want us to always be gracious and thankful for our custodial staff because they're truly the people who are keeping the lights on, okay! Their stories are often amazing too so it's important to me to get to know them.

What are you most excited to do as an Assistant Director?

I'm very excited to do Spartans in Dialogue. I think having intentional conversations that we build upon every week with a cohort really changes how we're able to engage each other and challenge ourselves. I love the process of doing that.

That's one of my fondest memories of undergrad, is going through sustained dialogue and being able to have those conversations. Seeing those lightbulbs going off for folks, and the relationships that are built when you allow yourself to be vulnerable and to grow.

To really acknowledge that all truths can exist, it's beautiful and I love that! As a relationship-centered person I'm all about interconnectedness. I want to allow folks to capitalize on being in a college space where you can be around so many different interests and skillsets.

This entire week I've been working on new curriculum for Spartans in Dialogue. I want to give space for each group to explore and dive into what are colloquially known in the higher ed world as the "Big Eight" identities, which are race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, religion/spirituality, ability and age.

What's it like to be in a programming position during a pandemic?

I think it has brought to the forefront conversations that were being had behind closed doors or sort of insular pockets in understanding the gravity of medical and environmental racism.

Understanding that food deserts one-hundred percent affect the livelihood of folks as well as increase health disparity. Right? It really has highlighted bolded italicized and underlined the flaws in our healthcare and political systems.

Being able to have those conversations at the forefront has been a little easier programmatically now because people are realizing this. The reality of how our entire world has stopped — that's not something you can walk away from.

I think that it's my responsibility to provide spaces for us to engage with and talk about how there's no such thing as going back to normal. Also, realizing that 'normal' wasn't all that great for everyone anyway.

What does that new normal look like for minoritized folks and people who are multi-marginalized? It's a moment — for us to be able to imagine a future we deserve, and I want people to take that seriously.

I think, maybe, the most popular programs you're in charge of are House of Privilege and Tunnel of Oppression. What are you excited about bringing to them?

There are things that I'm excited about. However, I cannot talk about those things at this moment.

Okay! I look forward to seeing what those surprises are. You have your master's and you've worked at some other universities. Is there anything from your previous schools that you're hoping to bring to UNCG?

I think anytime you're going to a new institution it's a time of learning and figuring out what's the culture here, how do I fit in here, what are the roles here and what are the expectations? As well as, what do students here need? How are those needs being fulfilled by the community on and off-campus? Are students responding to specific programs? All the institutions I've worked at or matriculated at have all been very different places.

I make a point not to immediately compare them because the purpose of these institutions are so different. Who they're serving and geographically what is needed are huge factors. I can say, coming to UNCG, I am very excited about the openness here to create new things.

I have an amazing staff; I think that everyone at OIE is so personable and we all want to help students learn. I've found the OIE to be a very collaborative space and I love that. I'm excited to build off it. There are things I've implemented at past institutions I'm looking forward to bringing here.

It's been awesome talking to you today, I have a final question for you. In your three weeks here, what's been the best part of the job?

Definitely the people. I think that UNCG has a ton of traditions everywhere, and I like how that builds a campus identity. It's also been really wonderful to exist fully as a fat black queer femme and do so in a way that is authentic. It allows me to show up for my students and have amazing conversations already.