WHO WE ARE

Belmont has nearly 8,500 students from every state and 36 countries. And while the University has seen increased diverse student and employee demographics in recent years, Belmont is continuing to work on becoming a more diverse and inclusive community by focusing on recruitment, engagement and retention strategies.

Belmont’s “Welcome Home” initiative was established by senior leadership to support the University’s goal of becoming increasingly more diverse and broadly reflective of local and global communities. The Welcome Home Diversity Council, made up of faculty, staff and students from across campus, meets regularly to support Belmont’s diversity and inclusion initiatives and serve in an advisory capacity to senior leadership.

Belmont's definition of diversity is as follows: We are all created in the image of God, living as Christ’s body on earth with respect to differences that include, but are not limited to, ethnicity, gender identity, race and sexual orientation. The institutional definition of diversity at Belmont is consistent with our mission to engage and transform the world with disciplined intelligence, courage and faith. Our words and actions toward everyone must be embodied with respect, dignity and compassion.
Belmont University celebrated Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day with a series of events as part of its 23rd annual MLK Commemorative Program, a campus-wide celebration of the life and work of Dr. King. Programming was focused on Dr. King’s belief in a sense of oneness – one nation, one people, one dream.

The week’s activities began with a keynote address delivered by Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, the first female Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Other events included the annual MLK Day of Service and Candlelight Vigil.
Belmont hosted Sodexo’s Global Diversity Officer and Senior Vice President of Corporate Responsibility Dr. Rohini Anand for a special session focused on “Diversity and Inclusion: A Critical Business Imperative.”

She detailed Sodexo initiatives and the results they have produced, and she highlighted workforce trends, as well as the importance of diversity throughout higher education.

Metro Council’s Annual Minority Caucus Reception on campus featured many noted guests, including Nashville Mayor David Briley, Vice-Mayor Jim Shulman and Police Chief Steve Anderson. Keynote speaker Rodney Strong, chairman and CEO of Griffin and Strong, PC in Atlanta, GA currently serves as the principle for projects dealing with public policy consulting. Strong conducted a disparity study for the Metro Nashville government that looked at the status of Metro utilizing female- and minority-owned companies.
Belmont and Sodexo partnered to co-host the Foresight is 20/20 summit to build a vision for diversity, inclusion and equity. Keynote speaker Dr. Lorelle Espinosa, vice president for research with ACE, shared, "You can’t lead on equality or advance racial equity if you don’t know how to talk about race. And if we don’t talk about these realities, we can’t close the gaps.”

The Nashville Area Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (NAHCC) marked the beginning of Hispanic Heritage Month at a leaders' breakfast roundtable hosted by Belmont.
Diversity Week 2019 kicked off with a Chapel presentation on “Diversity in Christ” from Dr. Christina Edmondson, dean for intercultural student development at Calvin College, and a student panel representing various identities within the LGBTQIA+ community, which emphasized the importance of listening well to narratives other than one’s own, leading with kindness and standing up for minority communities and voices as keys to making progress in a frequently fragmented world.

Spoken word poet Amena Brown spoke on campus, sharing faith-inspired perspectives on topics ranging from understanding one’s roots to celebrating women of color to imagining Jesus’ thoughts on social media.

Also, as part of Diversity Week, the Gabhart Student Center hosted the Ability Exhibit, a traveling exhibit designed to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities through respect for others, comfort during interactions, and awareness of disability issues.
“Minding the Gap: A Diversity in Entertainment Symposium” featured a variety of guest speakers discussing a wide range of topics related to issues of inclusion in music, entertainment and media.

Symposium organizer Dr. Cheryl Slay Carr, associate dean of the Curb College of Entertainment and Music Business, said, “This was an incredible day of dialogue with industry partners across Nashville. It’s the first time the Curb College has hosted this event or anything like it, and addressing such a wide swath of issues with a receptive audience while expanding our connection with the Nashville entertainment community was very gratifying.”

“There’s a synergy that’s created when people are brought together in the same room to discuss something vital,” Carr continued. “This is an important take-away for our students, the idea of networking with purpose, to create mutual benefit and enrich our industry. Light bulbs went off for some of us, thinking about the many possibilities ahead!”
In 2019, the university initiated the next step in ongoing campus conversations about diversity and inclusions by inviting the community to participate in the next campus-wide programming from the Belmont State of Mind – inclusion.

Faculty and staff participated in 45 Diversity and Inclusion workshops, and student leaders participated in Belmont State of Mind diversity training.

The interactive sessions were developed by members of the Welcome Home Diversity Council and were facilitated by a team of faculty and staff members.

Dr. Gary Hunter also held a series of nearly 30 "Real Talks" throughout the year for students, faculty and staff to engage in a "real talk" regarding diversity and inclusion efforts on Belmont's campus, as well as the chance to discuss important issues honestly and authentically.
In April, the Department of Social Work awarded the first DeEbony Groves Diversity Scholarship to Hayden MacMath, a sophomore social work major. The scholarship, renamed in May 2018 in honor of late student DeEbony Groves, is awarded to a social work student who “values diversity, upholds the spirit of inclusion and allied-ship.”

Dr. Sabrina Sullenberger, professor and chair of the Department of Social Work, spoke about the legacy Groves left at Belmont. “She shaped us because she was a part of our community,” she said, continuing to explain that diversity, inclusion and social justice were characteristics important to Groves.

In honor of Dr. Fannie Hewlett, Belmont’s first African American graduate, the University created the Dr. Fannie Hewlett Leadership Award in 2016. 2019 recipients were LeAndrea Wallace (undergraduate) and Caleb Darensbourg (graduate).
Belmont is committed to creating and supporting a diverse and inclusive community for students, staff and faculty by continuing to provide training and professional development opportunities. We recognize that personal and professional growth in this area is not a “one size fits all” endeavor. In 2020, Belmont is asking all employees to choose professional development activities from a series of options. Selections include choosing to attend an event on campus, listening to a suggested podcast or choosing to watch a selected TED Talk. After engaging in an activity, participants will complete a brief reflection.

Diversity Week 2020 is scheduled for September 20-25 with the theme of Civil Discourse.

The Welcome Home Diversity Council is excited to continue this conversation as we live into our mission of being a Christian community that empowers men and women of diverse backgrounds to engage and transform the world with disciplined intelligence, compassion, courage and faith.