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ArchiveRWU Professor to Lead Regional Effort to Increase Diversity and Equity Among Higher Education Faculty

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BRISTOL, R.I. – Race and gender expert Kamille Gentles-Peart, associate professor of communication and media studies at Roger Williams University, was appointed a fellowship by the [New England Board of Higher Education](#) (NEBHE) to lead a regional effort aimed at increasing faculty diversity, inclusion and equity initiatives in higher education.

As NEBHE Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Fellows, Gentles-Peart will co-lead the initiative with Tatiana Cruz, an assistant professor of history at Lesley University. They will provide the vision and leadership to develop a regional strategy that expands research, programming and policy work that advances faculty equity and inclusion.

Currently, more than one-third of America's college students are people of color. Yet, only about 5 percent of college faculty are African-American, about 3 percent are Hispanic and about 1 percent are Native American.

“The appointment is an honor. I am excited to partner with Dr. Cruz to help redress racial disparities among faculty in New England,” said Gentles-Peart. “We are committed to advancing justice-centered, institutional cultures, practices and policies that support and uplift faculty of color.”

[Gentles-Peart's work](#) centers Black women and the ways in which they negotiate and decolonize beauty and body politics in African diasporas. She is the author of *Romance With Voluptuousness: Caribbean Women and Thick Bodies in the U.S.* (University of Nebraska Press). She is presenting a virtual discussion, "[Black Women, Thick Bodies, and Anti-Black Racism in America](#)," at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, March 3, as part of RWU's [Hidden Truths series](#).

At RWU, she co-designed the [Diversity and Inclusion Fellows program](#), a year-long program and an intensive summer institute for faculty on equity and inclusion, and has been an active participant in creating the university's [Equity Action Plan](#) and bringing equity work into the classroom.

In other equity work, she was the recipient of an Andrew Mellon grant to participate in the Council of Independent College's (CIC) institute for diversity and inclusion. She also co-founded the Collaborative for the Research on Black Women and Girls, a research working group aiming to change existing narratives about Black women and girls in the African Diaspora. A frequent commentator on diversity issues, Gentles-Peart earned a bachelor's degree in media communication from the City University of New York (CUNY), a doctorate in mass communication and a

graduate teaching certificate in gender studies from the University of Michigan.

“Expanding faculty diversity is a necessary condition for achieving equitable attainment outcomes for students of color, truly inclusive institutions and highest-quality learning for all,” said NEBHE President and CEO Michael K. Thomas. “As NEBHE works to expand its leadership on these critical issues, the contributions of Dr. Gentles-Peart and Dr. Cruz will be essential.”