

It is my pleasure to introduce to you the recipient of the 2020 Distinguished Diversity Leadership Award. This award honors individuals with a demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion of underrepresented groups. The recipient of this award is a leader who embraces inclusive excellence as a model for institutional transformation and educational equity. This individual exhibits an unwavering commitment to equity, inclusion, and incorporating these values and principles into their day-to-day work.

**This year's recipient of the of the Distinguished Diversity Leadership Award is Michael Birchard, Associate Vice President of Equity and Inclusion at Dakota County Technical College and Inver Hills Community College.**

Michael is a product of Minnesota State, having received both bachelor's and master's degrees from St. Cloud State University. Even as a student, he demonstrated his commitment to diversity and inclusion in his work as part of the The Student Coalition Against Racism. He has continued to live out that calling in his various roles in in the system: as a TRIO Advisor and Diversity and Affirmative Action Officer, and since 2019, as the Associate Vice President of Equity and Inclusion at Inver Hills Community College and Dakota County Technical College.

As his colleagues noted in their nomination, in the short time he has been in his current role, he has made “vast, valued, and much needed” contributions to the community through his commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. For example, Michael designed monthly diversity and training sessions for each campus, and formed a BIPOC affinity group for employees at IHCC and DCTC to build community and cultivate leadership opportunities. Michael is an advocate on campus, and approaches his work with humility, creating space so that staff and faculty are partners in the work. Among his work on behalf of students, he has been a strong advocate for ensuring that our technology systems support students in identifying by their preferred name; he has advocated for the addition of foot washing stations on campus; and he has worked to publicly display all the flags that represent student populations.

As part of his work across the system, Michael was also one of the charter members of the Minnesota State Indigenous Men and Men of Color Workgroup that has focused on the recruitment and retention of Indigenous Men and Men of Color students and employees. After the murder of George Floyd, Michael worked with the Workgroup to organize two webinars: “I am George Floyd” and “I Still Can’t Breathe: A Call to Action.” The webinars exceeded Zoom capacity limits,

which spoke to the need for members of the community to gather, to grieve, and to take and advocate for meaningful action.

As his colleagues put it, “Our campuses and our system are better because of Michael’s leadership and hard work.” He loves the Minnesota State System enough to challenge its shortcomings and systemic inequities. As another group of colleagues said of him, “Anyone that truly knows Michael Birchard recognizes that he embodies the purpose and meaning of this award.”

**Congratulations to this year’s Distinguished Diversity Leadership Award recipient, Michael Birchard!**