

149. Mortissa Harvey: Fair and Equitable

Gavin Kelly

Hey, everybody you're listening to Beyond 1894, this is the official podcast of Louisiana Tech University. My name is Gavin Kelly from the Office of University Communications, and our guest for this episode is Mortissa Harvey. She is the Director of Title Nine Compliance here at Louisiana Tech University, and she had kind of a short elevator ride down from a few floors up to be with us here today. Mortissa, thank you for joining us.

Mortissa Harvey

You're welcome. Happy to be here.

Gavin Kelly

So when I when I talk to all of our guests, I we kind of start from the start, and I ask them to take us back to the beginning and talk about where they're from, where they grew up, and how they figured out about their academic passions and what their career moves have been like. I think for you, we're going to flip it a little bit. I mentioned to you before we started recording how the nature of your job is kind of on everybody's mind a little bit this time of year, because annual training is something that all of our employees have to take part in. And, you know, being aware of the title, nine rules and regulations and kind of the circumstances around how you're supposed to operate as an employee within those guidelines is something that's a big part of that annual training. So talk to me a little bit about your job, kind of the day in and day out, sure, but kind of the overall nature and what the responsibilities of your job is as a title nine Director here at Louisiana Tech.

Mortissa Harvey

Well, I can probably go on and on, but so title that is the federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in education programming and activities, and so basically, with that, I am responsible for making sure that the institution is in compliance with the federal law. Now, what does that mean, making sure that any reports that come through our office, making sure that they are resolved in a fair and equitable manner, in addition to that, responsible for education, for education prevention, all the trainings, just kind of making sure that all of those things are happening, case management, all of that is involved. So oftentimes, people are kind of like, well, like, what do you really do? What do you really do? I do a whole lot. Yeah, yeah. So, you know, I try to meet with, like, all of our athletic teams. I do other trainings on the sides with the departments, and so it's kind of an ongoing education and training piece for the entire campus community, because we want to make sure that we have a safe environment here where students feel comfortable. They feel comfortable reporting. And so just kind of making sure that the information is out there, that our office is being seen, so there is quite compliance reporting. And so, you know, I have to make sure that all that information is compiled into reports that goes to the system office, the Board of Regents, and oftentimes that information is actually posted to on the website. So people may not know that, but it's there. And so it's just kind of, I tell people all time, I'm a one woman show, but you know, I have a lot of support around campus, and so being able to work across departments and get that assistance has been really, really great. And I feel like the campus community

has been really on board with supporting the office and supporting our students, and so it's just, it's a lot, yeah, when it comes to compliance, so I can't go, like, step by step of all the things that I'm responsible for. But when we talk about training, and you brought up training, want to make sure that everybody gets their training done. And oftentimes I get these Why do we have to do this? Why? You know, and I have to tell them that it's not

Gavin Kelly
me, right?

Mortissa Harvey

You know, the law says that you have to do these things, and so especially when they are watching the videos. But I feel like that the more one on one trainings that I do, that it's so much better, and oftentimes I think faculty, staff and even students prefer that watching the videos, even though they have to to kind of check the box. But I also feel like people are able to ask questions and all of those things when we are doing one on one, one on one trainings. And when I talked about, you know, the equity piece and the sex discrimination piece, we also oversee the sexual harassment. So when we think about sex discrimination, it's not just the gender equity piece, we also have the sexual harassment. Piece, and so my office is also responsible for all of those reports that that come, I think going back historically, when we're thinking about Title Nine, most people tend to tie it to athletics, but it didn't start that way with with athletics. It kind of started because women were not having those opportunities in the educational field when it comes to STEM type programs, and not getting those positions when it may be as a research or, you know, a scientist, or all of those things. And so that's kind of where we're we're kind of looking where it all started, and then, you know, later it rolled into athletics. And I always have to talk about our Lady textures.

Gavin Kelly
Of course,

Mortissa Harvey

we're thinking about Title Nine. And you know, Our Lady text, it like right off that title nine being signed into law in 1972 in the 1980 80, I can't remember what year, but they won the first like they won the first NCAA championship. And so, you know, that's really something to be proud of. But think of thinking about the impact that title nine had on making that happen, you know, or being a part, you know, of that so, but it's a lot and so, but I've been able to manage with the help of so many people across the institution. So, and I appreciate that

Gavin Kelly

lovely, lovely, and also, too, if you're listening and you do happen to be a Louisiana Tech faculty or staff member, or a GA slash student worker, somebody who has annual training due around this time of year, you've gotten to the end of May, so get on it.

Mortissa Harvey

That's right. Chances are you probably are

Gavin Kelly

pushing it off, but the sooner, the better. Let me ask you this. So I think, you know, it's easy to think of somebody who works in a position like yours, where there's reporting involved, that it might be easy for somebody to look at not your role, but maybe your office and the nature of your job as kind of being, you know, it's law enforcement in a way around here, and so how do you kind of frame the nature of your job and get campus and the campus community to rely on, on your office as more of a resource and a good thing and a place for guidance, as opposed to, like, a shady place that slap somebody on the wrist. And you know what I mean, like, how are you? How are you not the big baddie, and how are you, you know, a resource to be, to be utilized.

Mortissa Harvey

I think that comes with building relationships and building trust. And so that comes from communication, you know, being able to communicate with individuals,

Gavin Kelly

yeah,

Mortissa Harvey

across the board, being seen. So making sure that we're getting out, that the office is being seen. And not only that, I think about consistency, being consistent when things are coming from my office or when reports are made, and so making sure that we are being consistent in how we are handling things. But I think the biggest thing for me has been the building the relationships, and I've done that by going to different departments and having conversations with individuals, and not so much because most people like, Oh, if I don't report, you know, if this is going to happen, I'm going to lose my job. But I'm always that person that you can come to me or whatever it is so I know that you're supposed to be reporting, and people don't always know what they should and should not report, right? And I am open to, let's have a conversation, you know, and then let's kind of talk about it, and nothing is off limits when it comes to having those conversations. And let me assist you, because I feel like in this role, I don't want faculty and staff to feel like they have to make a determination as to what it is and where it's going to go.

Gavin Kelly

Yeah,

Mortissa Harvey

let me do that. And so just having those conversations and building the relationships with individuals, I go and I attend events. You know when departments are having when the colleges, different colleges, are having events, athletics, even for our students, I support them. Like, if they had Miss Harvey, we're having this, I'll be there, yeah, if it's, you know, SGA, if it's Junior board, whatever the organization. So I want to be, you know, my face seen around campus. And so, you know, oftentimes I see students walking across campus and they be like, Hey, Miss Title Nine lady, I'll take that, yeah, because they know who I am, so I'll take that,

Gavin Kelly

yeah, that's again, it's, it's, you know, you don't, it's sensitive topics are involved in your job every day, and you don't want someone to be scared of. Of you know, being able to come to you with something when the time comes, or of you know, being so scared to operate in their own job that they're worried that your office is gonna have to come down on them some way. So I think, you know, like you said, being visible and building relationships is a good part of that. Yeah. So thanks for that. Let's talk about you a little bit more. Let's talk about how somebody ends up in Title Nine compliance. And let's, let's go back to the start from you like I promised we do.

Mortissa Harvey

Oh my

Gavin Kelly

gosh, that's probably gonna take the rest of the rest of our time talking about how this all started. Let's so where are you from? Let's tell me first about where you're from. I'm guessing you're from Louisiana.

Mortissa Harvey

I am

Gavin Kelly

small town Louisiana,

Mortissa Harvey

small, very small,

Gavin Kelly

right? Let's get

Mortissa Harvey

into it. So I am from a small town called bonita, Louisiana. It is north of Bastrop which is kind of it's kind of close to the line of Arkansas and Morehouse parish. And so that's where I grew up. Went to high school in marouge, Louisiana, and after graduation, I actually went to Spelman College, which is all girls school in Atlanta, and then the next year, I transferred, and I came to tech. So Tech has kind of always been on the radar, because my uncle is a Tech graduate. Okay, you know, he's an architect. He graduated architecture program like 80, early 80s. And so when I decided to move back home, it really wasn't a question as to where I was gonna go, because I felt like it was kind of a tradition, like, you know, a family, family tradition. And so I ended up back at Tech. I thought I was going to be an engineer, like, that was my goal. So I graduated valedictorian of my class. Mind you, we only had like 70 or 80 students, but I was valedictorian of my class, and I just knew I was going to be an engineer. My uncle was an architect, my cousin was a mechanical engineer. I was like, Yeah, this is going to be it. Took that calculus class, and I was like, I don't know if this is for me, you know. I don't know what it is, yeah, but so I really didn't have a clue as to what I really wanted to do. It was just kind of following, trying to follow in the footsteps of others. And one our family friend gave me an opportunity to work at the sheriff's office, part time in Bastrop as as a as a as a jailer, and I think that's where I found my passion for criminal justice. And so I was like, Yeah, this is what I want to do. Tech didn't have a criminal justice

program, but Grambling did, and we had that the I can't remember, like, IFC, where they had this, this plan where you could take classes over at Grambling. So I took a few criminal justice classes over there, took my sociology classes here, and I found my thing. I was like this, this is gonna be it for me, is so I went on. I graduated from Tech in 95 and went back to Atlanta, Georgia, got my master's degree in criminal justice. Worked for Fulton County Sheriff's Department as a deputy sheriff. Went on to transfer to be a court support supervisor for Fulton County Superior Court, and I worked with juveniles that were being tried as adults, really, really, really tough, tough thing to deal with. And so I did that for several years, and then I was like, Man, how can I make an impact, like a better impact? Because I just really, can I catch this before it gets too far? And so I started teaching. And so the high school, one of the high schools there had a criminal justice program in their career technical education department. So I started teaching Criminal Justice at the high school, and fell in love with education and helping students and kind of having that student success, yeah, and so I went on from there, I was like, Okay, what's next? I think I want to be able to do higher ed. And so I left there, and I went to the technical college. And so most of my higher, not most my higher education experience started at Atlanta Technical College. And so I was a criminal justice program chair, created, built this, this program from the ground up, and had one of the top programs and the number of students, and it just kind of have gone from there. So when I had the opportunity to deal with Student Affairs side, so I've done a lot of academic affairs, and I was like, Okay, I'm kind of interested in student affairs. And so I spoke to the dean of students at Atlanta tech. Like, Hey, will you be my mentor? And so he was like, Absolutely, I got something for you to do in addition to your job duties that you're not going to get paid for,

Gavin Kelly

right? Of course.

Mortissa Harvey

And so I ended up being the the chair for the Student Conduct hearings. And so I was like, I can do this. I can do this. And so. So with hearing those cases and with my Criminal Justice background, I was like, okay, maybe I could find my, you know, area student conduct or something like that. And then the title nine position came open for Louisiana Tech. And I was like, Huh? I know I can do this. And it gave me an opportunity to come back home, because my mom is still in bonita, and so I was like, I'm gonna apply. I'm gonna apply. And here I here I am. And I would have to say that most people know Justin, our legal counsel here, he was like, if this young lady from bonita, Louisiana has done these things and we need, we could bring her, you know, back home. And so I'm just really happy to have the opportunity to be able to serve our students, you know, at an institution that that I attended. And you know, I feel like I did not experience all Louisiana Tech had the offer during my time here, being back now, I appreciate it so much more, so much more. And, you know, just thinking about the family atmosphere that's here. But in addition to that, I tell people all the time, I said, the number of individuals who have graduated from tech and stay here and work, to me, is a testament to the culture, the family that you know, and so it's just being back here in has pretty much been kind of like a full circle moment. Never thought, I never thought I'd be back here, and here I am, and I am enjoying it. Well,

Gavin Kelly

good. I mean, I think I think I speak for everyone when I say we're happy to have you and we're happy you're around, but let's talk a little bit. So I mean, I get that it was a no brainer, in the sense of being

able to come home a place that you were familiar with, but leaving a place where you built something, and I know you said you can that your role kind of changed while you were there, but also leaving a place where you had been teaching and things like that. Talk to me about kind of what that was like, because I know that. I'm sure there's part of you that still wishes that there were aspects of those jobs that were still with you today. But talk about what it was like to kind of build something there and then leave it behind, to come to Louisiana

Mortissa Harvey

Tech. Well, that was tough. I say not tough. I think I was kind of excited to be able to come back home. My son had graduated from high school in 2020, and, yeah, I've built all of these friendships, but I was also in a doctoral program at the time, and I was like, Okay, how am I going to navigate that, being able to kind of progress and move up and advance, you know, look at some new opportunities. And so I started to think about what that would look like. And so not that I was so not wanting to leave,

Gavin Kelly

but

Mortissa Harvey

I also had to think about my career and what that would look like, and I felt like this opportunity was the best next step to be able to accomplish, you know, some of my some of my goals. And so I did that. And like, I've been here. This is my fifth year here. I actually did finish that doctoral program back in December of last year. Congratulations. Thank you. So I did that, but, but, yeah, I mean, it was bittersweet to be, you know, to leave that behind. But I also felt like this gives me an opportunity to give something to a new set of students. So I gave, you know, I gave that to those individuals, to those students, and so now it gives me an opportunity to try to make a greater impact on other group of students.

Gavin Kelly

You know, we talked about kind of, how you've handled yourself and your role, and what you hope people view the title nine office as, but let's feed off that a little bit more. And you said you've been here five years, right? Yes, so in those five years, you know, how have you seen, how have you hoped, I guess, that you've influenced the culture of the office here that you do you see in Louisiana Tech, and how do you hope that your role has grown over these five years? You know, what do you think the difference is from five years ago to now, in terms of the way you've operated here at Tech,

Mortissa Harvey

five years ago to now, I think that the office was not as visible. And I think that not because of individuals not doing anything, it was individuals doing it part time in addition to other full time duties. And so. And then now having a designated person to do that, it provides an opportunity to make the office more visible. And so when I first came in, you know, just trying to get those things established, I came in in the process. Process of the state of Louisiana implementing their power based violence policy. And so just having to be a part of,

Gavin Kelly

yeah,

Mortissa Harvey

create or making sure, trying to define what that would look like on campus. And so providing those trainings, in addition to that, students are getting more education and prevention, and so the office is being seen. And with the office being seen, students feel like they have a voice and someone to see when something happens. And so I think that, you know, people tend to like, oh, having lots of reports is a bad thing. No, I think that. And when I say having lots of reports, that doesn't necessarily mean that that happens, because a lot of things get reported. They're not nowhere near title that or anything like that. But students feel comfortable because they see somebody, and now I have somebody that I can come and talk to and talk things through whatever the experiences may be. So I think just just the visibility over the five years that I've been here and students being able to come and get support as needed,

Gavin Kelly

yeah, feeding off that question a little bit more. And last question before we let you go talk to me about you personally over maybe over the last five years too, here being back at Louisiana Tech, but also thinking about mortissa from bonita. Mortissa, the Louisiana Tech student, versus mortis, a now kind of what have you seen, growth wise, over yourself, over the course of your career?

Mortissa Harvey

Definitely a more mature mortissa, more selfless. I guess you know mortissa, I find myself being more available, service oriented, compared to the younger mortesa. And so just that growth overall, when it comes to the level of maturity, of course, I felt like over the years, my leadership skills have definitely, definitely developed from the little small town, you know, markets, because I had all of these goals,

Gavin Kelly

right,

Mortissa Harvey

leaving little small town bonita. And so I feel like that. I've made a few people proud. And so just just the level of growth, when it comes to my level of maturity, my leadership skills, and just my overall way of thinking, I think, has just truly gone,

Gavin Kelly

yeah, and, you know, sometimes, you know, it's funny, you mentioned graduating with 7080, kids. I know that all too well. But even smaller, I graduated with like 2526 kids. So sometimes, you know, you come from a small town where you see the same, you know, 5060, people growing up your whole life. But then even somewhere like rust and is a big enough place to expand your horizons sometimes. But, I mean, you've spent a lot of time in Atlanta and but being able to, like you said, full circle moment, bring it all back home.

Mortissa Harvey

Absolutely

Gavin Kelly

Take your talents to the place that helped raise you.

Mortissa Harvey

Absolutely So

Gavin Kelly

again, thank you for that. Thank you for walking me through your sort of personal and professional history there. Thank you for making time for us during a busy end of the year.

Mortissa Harvey

You're welcome.

Gavin Kelly

everybody's eye in the start of summer, that's right, but got to get your annual training done first, right?

Mortissa Harvey

Please do please get it done.

Gavin Kelly

Thank you mortissa And Go Dogs,

Mortissa Harvey

you're welcome. Have a good one.

Gavin Kelly

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