



Stevie Baker-Watson
DePauw University
Associate Vice President for Student Wellness & Theodore Katula Director of Athletics and Recreational Sports

In April, I attended the NCAA Inclusion Forum in Indianapolis. The theme, "Power of Proximity," resonated with me more than I anticipated as I reflected on the past several years and how my work looks and feels. Today, how I accomplish my work is just different. At the foundation, my best work is built on relationships and in-person engagement where my interactions with others can be transformational and not simply transactional.

I can't remember exactly when I became a MOAA member, but I do remember why ... I was seeking to be with other professionals who believed the path to innovation and greatness was walked by individuals who have different experiences. By listening to and learning from those who had different experiences, we had the opportunity to grow, be curious and foster change. I made a conscious decision to lean into MOAA and be part of the movement that champions diverse individuals, sets an example of inclusionary practices, strives for innovation and celebrates the people who serve as role models to the next generation of professionals.

My relationship with MOAA and my fellow members has been transformative. Since first attending the MOAA Symposium in 2015, I find myself falling head over heels into the work of MOAA, most notably the annual MOAA Symposium. Each year, the Symposium celebrates the work of our NCAA member institutions and conferences through the NCAA/MOAA Award for Diversity and Inclusion and provides programming for professionals across the career continuum. We learn from those that have recently ascended to "The Chair" and bring together the next generation of leaders through our "Overtime" programming. Programming at the MOAA Symposium reaches everyone in our membership and the larger NACDA community.

The annual MOAA Symposium demonstrates the power of proximity and transformative relationships as participants gather to seek knowledge and strengthen relationships. Incoming MOAA President Renae Myles Payne, director of athletics at Fort Valley State University, says, "I became an active member of MOAA in 2008 and have attended the MOAA Symposium ever since. The feeling you get when you walk into a room of 100+ people who get you and foundationally have the same 'why' as you, is unmatched. That feeling cannot be duplicated via Zoom. Being at the MOAA Symposium is the definition of synergy, and I look forward to that interaction every year."

Therno Diallo, associate director of facilities and events at Rutgers University, attends the

Symposium to network and learn from the best in college sports. "MOAA provides a safe, diverse, and inclusive space for folks to come together, share ideas, and provide opportunities for growth and development. This organization has played a significant role in my growth both personally and professionally. Simply put, the Symposium is truly a vibe ... and it's the place to be during the NACDA & Affiliates Convention."

The annual MOAA Symposium is "the" place to be at the annual NACDA & Affiliates Convention and is the only NACDA Affiliate Association spanning all professional roles in college athletics. Building on the power of proximity, forget the "all-lobby" team, be a part of the "all-MOAA" team and lean into an organization that is transformational both personally and professionally.



Orianna Shillow
Florida Atlantic University
Director of Women's Basketball Operations
2020 McLendon Scholar

Becoming a recipient of the McLendon Foundation Postgraduate Scholarship in June 2020 was the turning point in my career. It wasn't just financial assistance that I received during my final year at the University of Memphis, but it's also the catalyst that set me off on my professional journey.

As I reflect on my experiences with the McLendon Foundation, I am filled with a sense of gratitude. Our monthly professional development calls were instrumental in connecting us with key leaders in the world of sports, including athletics directors and executives. Participating in these calls was crucial to my understanding of the many opportunities available within sports. As part of

the cohort, we had the incredible opportunity to serve as team ambassadors at the 2021 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament. Being in the "bubble" was an unforgettable experience, and it was rewarding to see our hard work pay off as we interacted with elite basketball programs, athletics directors, and NCAA staff members. Furthermore, I gained a group of peers and mentors who genuinely care about my personal and professional growth.

Sports has always been my passion, and it has given me some of the best experiences in life. I have been fortunate to work at the University of Memphis, the BIG EAST Conference, and now at Florida Atlantic University (FAU) as the director of women's basketball operations, where I have had the privilege of collaborating alongside incredible people who have helped me grow. As the sports industry continues to reach zenith milestones, I am eager to expand my knowledge and gain new perspectives. My ultimate goal is to serve as a commissioner or key executive who creates positive impact. I also hope to be a resource and provide opportunities to others who look like me, as I believe that finding fulfillment in our work is

truly rewarding. As I advance in my career, my goal is to lead fearlessly and be a reflection of those who have invested in me along the way.

As a first-generation college student, I am incredibly fortunate to have been given so many incredible opportunities through the McLendon Foundation. The Foundation holds a special place in my heart, and I am grateful for everything it has done for me. As I continue to pursue my passion for sports, it is my hope that I will be able to embody the same values that Coach John McLendon stood for - integrity, education, leadership and mentorship. I am honored to have been selected to participate in something that is much bigger than myself, and I will always be grateful to the McLendon Foundation for the continued support and guidance.