NEWS | POSTED FEBRUARY 6, 2023

Member Spotlight: Dr. Seanna Leath

Assistant Professor, Washington University in St. Louis

AUTHOR

Dr. Seanna Leath

Assistant Professor
Washington University in St. Louis
https://twitter.com/SeannaLeathPhD
Faculty Page

Why did you decide to choose Developmental Science as a course of study or career?

My reason for choosing the field isn't the same reason that I'm still in this field. I started out wanting to focus on 'how to improve' academic outcomes among Black children (and thinking about it from the perspective that we need to improve something about Black children themselves, rather than the harmful schooling systems that block their blessings & disrupt their natural curiosity). Now, I appreciate developmental science as a field because I love studying health and wellness as a journey (rather than a destination), and I think Black folks have something unique and universal to offer us in thinking about human development.

Do you have a mentor who has been instrumental in your career?

So many mentors. There isn't enough space to honestly fill this in. Drs. Tabbye Chavous, Robert Sellers, Stephanie Rowley, Eric Hurley, Sheretta Butler-Barnes have been the GOATs. Then there are my peer mentors, right? Like Drs. Lauren Mims, Chauncey Smith, Latisha Ross, Bridget Cheeks, and Johari Harris - the folks who have helped me feel sane and seen these last few years as I get my feet on the tenure track. I can't actually name everyone to be honest. They've provided instrumental support - feedback on manuscripts and grant applications, letters of recommendation for opportunities, as well as emotional support when I'm doubting just about any and everything about being in academia. They keep me grounded, and they help make sure that I'm staying true to who I am.

What advice would you give to a Graduate student beginning their Ph.D. studies in Developmental Science or related?

Find your folks. Know that this Ph.D. is only one part of you who are and make sure that you don't lose sight of all of the other beautiful and important things that matter to you. Your work matters. Don't let anyone tell you different and make sure that you're not only finding or seeking validation from external sources. Get ready to write, and rewrite, and rewrite again. Aim for progress - not perfection. Finally, you matter - just because you exist - not because of what you produce.

We will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the SRCD Black Caucus at the SRCD 2023 Biennial Meeting. What are you most looking forward to at the Biennial this year?

BEING with folks. I was able to talk my lab out for the first time in 2022, and it was so amazing to share space with these incredible scholars that I'd been getting to know virtually for the past two years. There was something about occupying space with my students - in-person - that made my role as their mentor that much more concrete. I haven't been doing much conference travel, so getting to be in these spaces with folks again will likely feel brand new and exciting. Also, aren't we focusing on Black joy at this Biennial? I don't think it could get any better than that!

What are some of your hobbies?

Is eating a hobby? I honestly love some good food (I used to think I loved cooking, but actually, I just love eating). I love exercising (hiking, jogging - but not too fast, lifting weights that aren't too heavy, and yoga). I literally carry a book with me everywhere I go, "just in case" I can sneak in some reading time.

Visit the

BLACK CAUCUS WEBSITE

to learn about benefits, networking opportunities, and more!