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DEI newsletter highlights Black History Month

By Brianna Wallen
News Editor

Each year, February unfolds like a canvas filled with history and hope as Black History Month invites the campus to reflect on legacy, resilience and the lasting impact of excellence.

Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Sergio Pérez released the 2026 diversity, equity and inclusion newsletter on Feb. 2 with a message that frames Black History Month as both a moment of reflection and a reminder of the university's continued commitment to equity and belonging.

"As we enter a new term, one marked by both change and possibility, I invite us to reflect on how we live out Southern's social justice principles of dignity, compassion, kindness, civility and respect," Pérez said.

Pérez emphasized the university's DEI efforts remain the root of the institution, despite ongoing national changes.

"Our DEI efforts continue to evolve within a shifting national landscape, yet what remains constant is the commitment, humanity and care I witness across our campus every day," Pérez said.

This commitment and unwavering support continues to shine as the university celebrates the legacy of Black excellence.

Reflecting on the origins of Black History Month, the newsletter references Carter G. Woodson, the founder of the Association for the Study of African Life and History.

"Affectionately known as the 'Father of Black History,' he worked to institutionalize the stories and successes of many in the Black community and members of the African



PHOTO | BRIANNA WALLEN

The Multicultural Center on the second floor of the Adanti Student Center that hosts events celebrating Black History Month on Monday, Feb. 9.

diaspora in the United States," Pérez stated in the newsletter.

For sociology major Ryan Phillips, a junior and member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc., Woodson's legacy holds personal meaning.

"As a member of a Black Greek organization, I feel honored knowing that a member of my fraternity, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, is the one who started it all," Phillips said. "Originally known as Negro History Week, Dr. Carter G. Woodson allowed us to celebrate being Black."

The newsletter highlights that history was shaped by powerful Black voices, entrepreneurs and leaders.

"He is not alone in this work though, as Black women, Black queer folks and Black trans people have been at the forefront of cultural change, activism and imagination; often without receiving the credit they deserve,"

Pérez stated in the newsletter.

Since Black voices and achievements are often written out of history, Phillips said that Black History Month is a time to shine light on those hidden chapters.

"All the achievements that people with our skin color have made and all the struggles we have been through are never forgotten because year after year we celebrate them," Phillips said.

Phillips said he hopes people in the community open their eyes to contributions that many Black figures have created.

"There's a lot of things that you might have never known were made by someone with the same skin color as me," Phillips said.

Phillips said he hopes this time of reflection allows individuals to learn about the deep history that is rooted in this nation.

"You're living in one

of the greatest creations made by Black people," Phillips said.



Beyond the celebration, both the newsletter and student voices emphasize

Sociology major Ryan Phillips, a junior, and Mike Downing Jr. and Myles Cheatham, graduates, representing Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. in front of Morehouse College on Jan. 31.

education as a crucial element to Black History Month.

Whether it is following the African American History Library Guide or researching The Mary & Eliza Freeman Center, Pérez calls on the campus community to attend upcoming events and to take advantage of resources to educate themselves.

As Black History Month continues, Pérez invites the campus to remain connected and reflective.

"I welcome conversations, questions and collaboration around DEI, belonging, access and student success," Pérez said. "My door is open, as I know our work is strongest when we do it together."

For Phillips, this month is an opportunity for him to embrace his own identity and pride.

"I love being Black," Phillips said. "I hope I'm born Black in every lifetime."

Workforce program achieves regional recognition

By Brianna Wallen
News Editor

The university is making waves in workforce development by equipping young adults with the skills and experience that are essential for the workforce.

The Office of Workforce and Lifelong Learning, in partnership with The WorkPlace, a regional workforce development board, has recently been recognized for creating opportunities that allow students to gain the skills they need to succeed in both their education and careers.

"This collaboration has been recognized with the 2026 UPCEA New England Regional Program Award, which honors exemplary and innovative programming that expands access for learners and demonstrates regional impact," according to the press release from Jason Edwards, the social media and communications coordinator on Jan. 23.

UPCEA is an American nonprofit that helps adults access professional, online and continuing higher



PHOTO | SCSU WEBSITE

The university's Office of Workforce and Lifelong Learning

education programs.

Since opening its doors in 2023, OWLL has been empowering learners with hands-on workforce training and affordable professional development programs.

These courses can sharpen each students' skills and create pathways to undergraduate and graduate credit-level certificate programs.

According to the university's website: "These programs empower lifelong learners to stay relevant in their

industry, advance their careers, expand future job prospects and increase their long-term earning power with minimal time commitment and cost."

Through hands-on training, career guidance and pathways to in-demand fields, OWLL is opening doors for students by building confidence not only in themselves but also in the community around them.

"The OWLL-WorkPlace collaboration directly addresses these challenges by serving individuals

who often face barriers to accessing traditional education and career pathways," the press release noted.

Whether it is through career-related courses, training or AI-supported tools that connect students with jobs, they are building the skills and support they need to take a step into their careers.

"By integrating employer-aligned training, wraparound support, and credit-bearing pathways, the program advances UPCEA's mission of

expanding access and demonstrates the power of collaboration across institutions and systems," the press release stated.

By combining higher education with workforce training, the partnership offers programs that help young adults ages 18 to 24, especially those out of school or work, prepare for high-demand careers in technology, business and emerging fields.

A 2024 labor market study commissioned by The Community Foundation for Greater New

Haven and The Valley Community Foundation, in partnership with Blakely Consulting, found that Connecticut has more than 60,000 unfilled jobs.

These vacant spots are due to many workers lacking the skills needed for these positions.

With southern Connecticut facing workforce challenges, this program helps to bridge the gap.

"Graduates are entering high-paying technical fields, helping to close workforce gaps while elevating their own socioeconomic stability," the press release stated.

Programs like this showcase how preparing the next generation with essential skills and opportunities can foster growth in the local community.

"Together, OWLL and The WorkPlace have created a dynamic partnership that redefines how higher education can engage with workforce systems to expand opportunity, strengthen regional economies and support lifelong learning," the press release concluded.