

Dr. Charlene Portee delivered the second Lynda D. Woodruff Lecture on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Physical Therapy on June 17, 2021 in honor of Juneteenth. Dr. Portee's lecture, titled "The Road to Success: Are We Ready to Change Direction?", examined historical, current, and future approaches for advancing DEI in the physical therapy profession. Dr. Portee specifically looked at the efforts of PT professional associations and educational programs in contributing to DEI. Of interest to myself as a DPT student was the examination of DPT programs.

According to Dr. Portee, PT programs have historically supported DEI by creating pipeline programs, developing strategies for recruitment and retention of underrepresented minority (URM) students, and providing academic and financial support to enrolled URM students. Additionally, PT programs have increased funding for URM faculty, thus supporting DEI in higher education leadership.

Looking critically at UNC's DPT program, I can see attempts to implement these DEI efforts. Specifically, I think UNC does a good job at offering academic and financial support to URM students. While I do not know for sure that scholarships are being offered to URM students, it is clear that many scholarships are oriented toward supporting URM students. Additionally, UNC's student lead PT association is interested in developing recruitment opportunities for students at HBCUs, though I am unaware of any specific pipeline or recruitment strategies in place by UNC DPT as an institution.

To conclude her lecture, Dr. Portee provided practical objectives for future DEI efforts. Dr. Portee noted, and I agree, that DEI efforts need to begin on an institutional level for widespread change to occur. While most objectives were specific to improving DEI within the APTA and other professional organizations, I think that these objectives could also be applied to higher education. The first objective Dr. Portee provided was to "have open conversations with those who can influence change, starting with DEI training and cultural humility education." Further objectives included that organizations should "actively work toward ending social injustice and institutional racism" and "develop and implement DEI policies and procedures that would result in long-term systemic changes."

I think it is important that the leadership in UNC's DPT program become more transparent about DEI efforts at an institutional level, as these efforts are the ones that will drive change within our profession. I believe that UNC should improve on facilitating structured conversations between faculty and current/prospective students surrounding current and future institutional DEI initiatives. As a student, I would appreciate knowing the specific steps that UNC DPT is taking to improve DEI in our program, aside from asking students to engage in more independent DEI experiences. While I believe that it is important for individual students to commit themselves to learning about and engaging with DEI efforts, I think it is far more important that institutions like UNC initiate DEI efforts and share their engagement with students. I look forward to engaging in more DEI efforts as a third-year student, and hopefully learning more about what UNC as an institution is doing to drive change for the future of our profession.