

# Northwestern

# BLACK PROFESSIONALS NETWORK



## Our Mission and Values

*The Northwestern University Black Professionals Network strives to build community through our shared experiences to foster open dialogue, leadership, and mentorship that will improve the Northwestern Black professional experience.*

## Message from the Chairs



### Hello BPN Members,

We hope this newsletter finds you doing well. As you read the information in this newsletter, we hope you had a chance to participate in some of the activities the BPN Steering Committee has provided you in 2023. We enjoyed seeing you at the dialogue sessions, the Juneteenth event, the Journey Narratives, and events to celebrate staff. Our inaugural book club event was a hit and will be coming to you every quarter. Overall, we trust that the events and activities we have brought you were engaging and inspiring.

As we enter February, 'Our History Month,' please plan on participating in the upcoming BPN Black History Month dialogue sessions.

Sincerely,  
Toni M. Montgomery

*"Our unity is our strength, and our diversity is our power." Kamala Harris*

## BPN Spotlight 2023: Retirements

### Debra A. Blade

Debra Ann Blade's journey at Northwestern University started before she entered as a first-year student in 1975. Debra retired after 44 years. We celebrated her with lunch and fellowship at the Black House. [Learn more about Debra.](#)



### Kathleen Bethel

After 41 years of service, beloved African American studies librarian Kathleen Bethel retired. Kathleen dedicated her career to uplifting the voices and stories of Black people worldwide, all while consulting and supporting generations of scholars. [Learn more about Kathleen's incredible career.](#)



### Toni Marie Montgomery

As Northwestern's first African American dean and the first female dean of its music school, Montgomery has launched a host of initiatives that have increased the Bienen School's visibility and enhanced its status as one of the nation's top music schools. [Read more about Toni-Marie's journey at Northwestern.](#)



## BPN Spotlight 2023: Achievements

### Serena Simpson

IT Communications Specialist and BPN steering committee member Serena Simpson was awarded the 2022 Northwestern IT Employee Excellence Award this past February for her contributions to several high-profile projects and collaboration across the department. [Read more about the award.](#)





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### Toni Montgomery NVP Northwestern's Valuable Personnel

NUSAC will highlight a staff member each term from the Gratitude Wall by spotlighting them in our newsletter and honoring them with a small token of appreciation and recognition. [Read more about fall's spotlight.](#)



## BPN Spotlight 2023: Celebrations



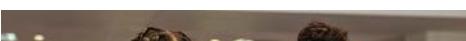
### Northwestern Staff Service Recognition

President Michael Schill, Vice President for Human Resources and Chief Human Resources Officer Lorraine Goffe, Provost Kathleen Hagerty, and Executive Vice President Craig Johnson honored staff members who reached their milestone service anniversaries, ranging from 25 to 50 years at Northwestern. [Read the event recap.](#)

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### BPN Celebrates Service Luncheon

The inaugural luncheon celebration of the Black Professionals staff at Northwestern University marked significant milestones, with members commemorating 15 years or more of dedicated service to the institution. This thriving network of BPN members, comprised of accomplished individuals, represents a rich tapestry of experiences, expertise, and contributions. Congratulations to the NU Black Professionals for their years of impactful service and enduring dedication.







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## BPN Juneteenth Celebration at the Black House

The name Juneteenth, a combination of the words "June" and "19th," honors the day in 1865 when Union troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, freeing the last slaves in the former Confederacy. Since 1866, many black Americans have celebrated the holiday as America's true independence day, marking the end of slavery. [Read the Northwestern Now feature.](#)



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## NUBAA Homecoming

Our members celebrated their Purple Pride during Homecoming and Reunion weekend in October 2023.

[Check out pictures from this year's events.](#)

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## BPN Celebrates Debra A. Blade's Retirement

In December 2023, we joyfully celebrated the remarkable 44-year career of Debra A. Blade, who recently embarked on a well-deserved retirement from Northwestern University. Debra's journey with our institution has been a testament to dedication, passion, and numerous contributions to our students, faculty, and staff.

Joined by the BPN community, we shared a delightful lunch and fellowship, creating a warm atmosphere as we celebrated Debra and wished her well for the exciting chapters that lie ahead in retirement





## BPN 2023: Journey Narratives



### **Debra Ann Blade**

Her journey at Northwestern University, starting in 1975, reflects the history of higher education. It involves facing inequitable challenges, encountering special people, and experiencing loss and sacrifice, all of which lead to lessons in love and perseverance.



### **Allison Porterfield-Woods**

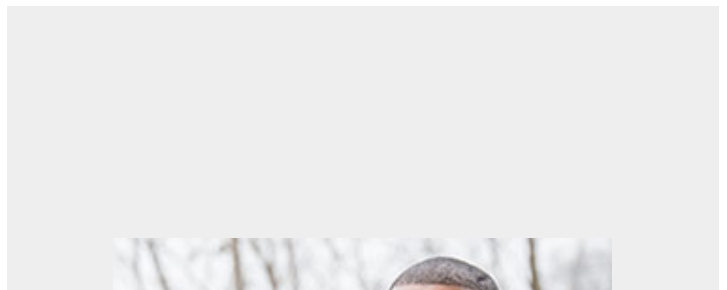
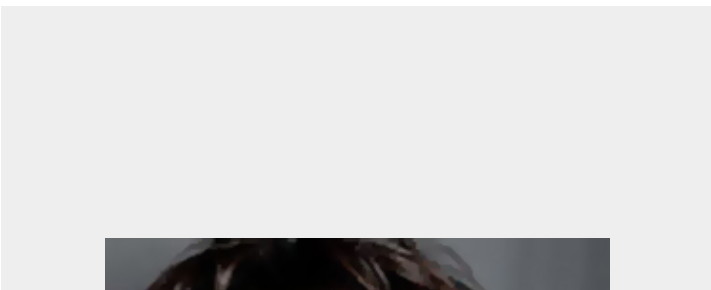
Director of Enterprise Systems at Northwestern IT, returned 11 years ago, initially managing HR systems. Over 5 years, she transitioned to finance and research administration systems before her current director role. With a background in technology at various corporations, Allison is also an ANUW mentor and a leader in Northwestern IT's DEI group.



### **Steven M. Adams**

Northwestern University's Librarian for Graduate and Postdoctoral Initiatives, managing outreach and collection development and serving as a faculty mentor for Posse Scholars. He is also the Board Chair of the Black Metropolis Research Consortium, supporting archival collections on African-American culture and history in Chicago.

## BPN 2023: Dialogue Series







**Ellen Burton** presented two in 2023:

- Executive Coaching: Resilience as Our Most Powerful Legacy
- Inclusive leadership for black professionals.

[More About Ellen](#)



BPN hosted a conversation with **Alvin Tillery**. Alvin shared his views on today's climate of social movements, race, ethnicity, and politics.

[More About Alvin](#)



**Njoki Kamau** facilitated a session with BPN members. Njoki works at the Northwestern Women's Center as Associate Director. She discussed a coaching session program that consists of five free sessions for NU employees.

[More About Njoki](#)



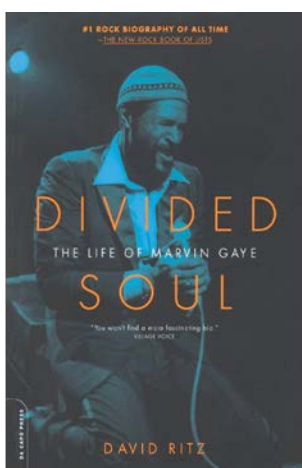
**Walter J. Crawford** facilitated a dialogue session that provided tools for building better health, financial wealth, spiritual guidance, relationships, community support, and work/career balance.

[More About Walter](#)



## The Vanishing Half

On November 8, we met to discuss the novel *"The Vanishing Half"* by Brit Bennett. This session was facilitated by LynToya Pate, Northwestern School of Law.



## Divided Soul: The Life of Marvin Gaye

All are invited to join us on **Wednesday, March 13**, at Noon to discuss the book *Divided Soul: The Life of Marvin Gaye* by David Ritz. The session will be facilitated by Monica L. Lewers, Northwestern Medicine Research Administrator.

[RSVP Information](#)

## Upcoming Events!

### January's Journey Narrative

**Lisa G. Williams**, an award-winning diversity strategist and former civil rights litigator, serves as the inaugural Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Northwestern University's Alumni Relations and Development. With over a decade of experience launching diversity programs in Illinois, Lisa collaborates with ARD staff on a comprehensive plan. A former Assistant Attorney General, she has presented diversity webinars and is recognized in national publications.



The 2024 Black History Month national theme is African Americans and the Arts, or the “Black Arts Movement.” There will be several dialogue sessions to engage our BPN members this February. This series of dialogues will share ideologies or thoughts about black self-determination, political beliefs, and African American culture with BPN members.

Our virtual programming schedule will include topics such as:

- The Politics of Racial Equity and the 2024 Elections
- Self-Determination
- Integrating the Arts to Support Your Well-being
- African American Culture
- And more



The Zoom links will be sent to you via Outlook. The dialogue sessions are held in a safe space, so we ask that you do not share the link.

## In The News



**The Program of African Studies**, part of the Office for Research at Northwestern University, is one of its many centers dedicated to conducting research with a global impact.

<https://africanstudies.northwestern.edu/>

**Leon Ford's Story.** Leon Ford, a survivor of police brutality, social activist, non-profit leader, and member of the Forbes 30 under 30 2023 class, was on campus in November. Alvin Tillery hosted a conversation with Leon. <https://healamericamovement.org/blog/leon-fords-story/>

**Claudine Gay**, double standards. What are we to make of it?

<https://poetsandquants.com/2024/01/13/harvards-appalling-double-standard-claudine-gay-vs-francesco-gino/>

**Robin Means Coleman** steps down from Northwestern roles.

<https://news.northwestern.edu/stories/2023/11/robin-means-coleman-to-step-down-from-northwestern-roles/>

Willard Evans '77, '81 MBA has made several gifts—including a bequest in his estate plan—to support the Archivist for the Black Experience Fund. The inaugural archivist for this initiative is **Charla**



support the Archivist for the Black Experience Fund. The inaugural archivist for this initiative is **Chana Wilson**.

<https://giftplanning.northwestern.edu/meet-our-donors/willard-evans?>

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## Share your news, achievements, and celebrations!

Your BPN steering committee wants to celebrate all the exciting accomplishments happening across our community. Have a service anniversary coming? Have you achieved a major milestone? Share your good news with us!

[Submit Your News](#)

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