

Professor Jean Morrison, University Provost and Chief Academic Officer

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TO: Boston University Faculty and Staff

FROM: Jean Morrison, University Provost and Chief Academic Officer

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DATE: December 16, 2021

SUBJECT: Vice President and Associate Provost for Community & Inclusion Crystal Williams to Become President of Rhode Island School of Design

I write to announce that Crystal Williams, vice president and associate provost for community and inclusion and professor of English in the College of Arts & Sciences, has accepted an offer to become president of Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). I know I speak for our entire community in acknowledging the tremendous work Crystal has done over the last four years at Boston University, developing a world-class infrastructure and range of efforts that promote, support, and advance an institutional culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Since arriving in October 2017 as BU's inaugural associate provost for diversity and inclusion, Crystal has built a strong team and established several important initiatives. From the Target of Opportunity Hiring Program and the University Scholars Program, to the new LGBTQIA+ Center for Faculty and Staff and the Faculty & Staff Community Networks, each initiative was designed to help recruit and advance a more diverse faculty and to promote needed, often difficult conversations across the University around equity and belonging. Crystal's talent for helping manage complex and challenging situations related to race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic differences have been invaluable in moving BU forward. She has consistently produced programming that not only addresses the issues facing us, but also helps to initiate structural change. A key piece of this was her leadership in organizing BU's widely praised and attended Day of Collective Engagement: Racism and Antiracism, Our Realities and Our Roles in June 2020 following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis police custody.

In summer 2020, Crystal was promoted to vice president and associate provost for community and inclusion – a designation that reflected her excellent work and the growth of her portfolio to include the newly established Newbury Center for first-generation students, the organization of our living learning communities, and Organizational Development & Learning. She has also played a leadership role in the implementation of two essential pillars of our 2030 strategic plan – *Diversity, Equity & Inclusion* and *Community – Big Yet Small* – laying important foundations for our institutional progress and growth.

Crystal arrived at BU from Bates College, where she'd served since 2013 as associate vice president for strategic initiatives, professor of English, and a senior advisor to the president, developing programs and strategies that resulted in increased diversity and engagement across the campus. She was previously a Reed College faculty member and the inaugural dean for institutional diversity (2000-2013). An award-winning poet, she has authored four books and received several artistic fellowships, grants, and commissions. She holds a BA from New York University and an MFA from Cornell University.

As Crystal prepares to take on a new leadership role at RISD, the University she leaves is stronger, more diverse, and more inclusive for her efforts. She will be leaving BU in mid-January 2022. I will consult with Crystal's team in the coming days to hear from them about how they envision their efforts going forward. We will launch a national search to identify a new leader after the start of the new year. In the meantime, please join President Brown and me in thanking Crystal for her many important contributions to Boston University over the last four years and offering her our heartfelt congratulations as she moves forward into this exciting new opportunity.

Cc: Robert A. Brown
Provost's Cabinet