

# Human Resources & Payroll NEWSLETTER



## Celebrating Black History Month

Black History Month is a celebration of achievements by African Americans, and a time for recognizing their contributions in U.S. history. What began as a week event in 1909 to coincide with Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln's birthdays in February, has grown to encompass the entire month thanks in large part to the 1960s civil rights movement and a growing awareness of Black identity.

According to this article on the [History.com webpage](#), the Black History Month 2022 theme, "[Black Health and Wellness](#)," explores "the legacy of not only Black scholars and medical practitioners in Western medicine, but also other ways of knowing (e.g., birthworkers, doulas, midwives, naturopaths, herbalists, etc.) throughout the African Diaspora. The 2022 theme considers activities, rituals and initiatives that Black communities have done to be well."

As we focus on the theme of "Black Health and Wellness," we honor Dr. Rebecca Davis Lee Crumpler, MD, for her exceptional career as the first Black woman to receive a medical degree. This article on the [AdventistHealth web page](#) highlights her remarkable career, resilience, and passion to help her community.

Human Resources sat down and conducted a special interview with the College of Arts and Sciences first black female Dean Camellia Moses Okpodu, (pronounced Oak-poe-dew). We thank her for her time and candid answers to our questions. Read on for excerpts from our interview with Dr. Okpodu.



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## February 2022

### IMPORTANT DATES

- February - Black History Month
- February - Heart Health Awareness Month
- 2/16/22 - Salaried monthly payroll transactions due
- 2/18/22 - Hourly biweekly payroll transactions due
- 2/22/22 - New Employee Orientation
- 2/21 & 2/28 - School of Culture, Gender & Social Justice highlights [Black History Month events](#)
- 3/31/22 - Performance Evaluations due

### HEALTH & WELLNESS

Did you know that heart disease is the leading cause of death in Wyoming? Let's take an active role in our health this month! Here's how.

#### Attend a blood draw at Wyoming Health Fairs.

High blood pressure and high cholesterol are two of the most powerful risk factors for heart disease. Get your two free annual blood draws at Wyoming Health Fairs. Free testing is available to state Cigna participants only.

[Schedule your appointment today!](#)

#### Attend a heart health webinar every Tuesday throughout February, 12-1 pm.

Watch presentations to educate yourself about heart disease, nutrition, exercise, and stress management. Register here: [WyomingonWellness.org](https://WyomingonWellness.org). All recordings will be available on the same registration page shortly after the presentations. Attendees have a chance to win a \$25 gift card. Watch recordings by March 11 to be eligible for the gift card drawing.

**Get active in the Daily Burn**, where you can get free virtual workouts anywhere anytime! Click to request your free [Daily Burn code](#).

Let's keep your heart healthy in February. Email questions to [WyomingHealthLife@cigna.com](mailto:WyomingHealthLife@cigna.com).

*Be well Cowboys and Cowgirls!*



UW

Human Resources

# *EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT - DEAN CAMELLIA MOSES OKPODU*

## *COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES*

***Q: Tell us about yourself and what you do at the University of Wyoming.***

A: When asked about myself, I always start with who I am and not what I do. I am the mother of three daughters and one grandson. Born in the Portsmouth Naval Hospital in Virginia, raised by a combination of my mom, my aunt and uncle, who were both school teachers, I was always encouraged to go after things, living an uninhibited childhood. A favorite childhood pastime was naming all the trees by their popular and scientific names. This upbringing has created the trajectory of my life by not seeing limitations but possibilities. This led me to my role here at the university as the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. I arrived in July of 2021 and have worked with my colleagues to forge the vision of a new college, that academic leadership along with the board of trustees have proposed. I will not only be the first African American to be the Dean of the College of A&S, but also the founding Dean of a new College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

***Q: Tell us about your journey in higher education.***

A: I did not take a straight line, and earlier on did not have a desire to be in a leadership role. Other people have said I would make a good department chair, Dean or a Provost or President. Those things that others have seen in me have encouraged me to move to the next level. I often joke that I've done every job in an institution except to be the Provost or the President. I started as an undergraduate working in the lab in the work study program. I remember working as a work study for a Zoologist doing research on roaches and grasshoppers. Being from the Carolinas, we call roaches palmetto bugs and they will fly straight at you, so I'm deathly afraid of them. The grasshoppers didn't bother me, but I had to quit due to the roaches. My next job was doing research.

Due to not having the money and financial aid issues, I went to North Carolina University because it was affordable. I was good at science, and being from a rural community everyone expects you to go to med school, but decided that was not a career for me. When I found out that you can do science and get paid, and I could go to grad school, I thought that is a win-win. I started a job as a Post Doc in 1992 but went back to finish my PhD in 1994. I found out about Hampton University an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). I will always have a love of Hampton. I had a wonderful Dean and have modeled myself after Johynne Jones. She was always supportive of junior faculty to do what they needed to do to be successful. This is how I see my role here as being a conduit. It's very painful when people don't see your motivation, so that is why it is so important to have clear objectives.

***Q: What are you passionate about in your career and higher education?***

A: I'm still passionate about research and am not ready to give it up. I've made a lot of sacrifices for my children, I had an opportunity once to go to an Ivy League school, which would have been a wonderful opportunity. I decided not to do that because my girls were in elementary school, and needed to do what was best for them.

I'm looking at ways to improve our enterprise and how we do research here at UW. We need to make sure we can retain good people. I would like for us to be the best at what we do. I'm passionate about learning. I'm passionate about students. As a single parent, I often felt like I had to rob Peter to pay Paul, to pay for my three daughter's education. I don't take it very well when faculty don't do right by the students. Students should come and get what they've paid for, so they can be discoverers of new information for a lifetime, not just the role while they are here. We are changing lives every day. Education seems to be getting more elitist with access, so I'm concerned about inclusion and diversity, providing access to people who may be disenfranchised. I work on projects to bring more talent, recruit new students for other units at the university. I know that it's not my job, but I figure if I can recruit good students here, then we'll have good students here. It becomes a rising tide, lifts all boats so it will trickle down to all of us. I don't just recruit for A&S, I've recruited for the rodeo to get a world champion rodeo student here. I'm passionate about widening our borders, bringing in more diverse people, and diverse ideas. It helps our students because it is the world they are going to inherit, and the world that I hope they will create here in Wyoming.

***Q: As the first black female Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, what are you most excited about as the institution moves forward?***

A: I'm excited that I get to help forge a vision of what it is that we can become. I've recently listened to Michelle Obama's book, "Becoming". We have to decide what we want to become, so I'm excited for what that looks like. When recently attending an energy meeting, I asked them if anyone had thought about the ethical, legal, and social implications of all this new technology that allows us to integrate other people across the university not just the engineers and scientists. We need to see the psychology. We need to look at environmental justice. We need to be aware of the history, the cultural implications, and what it means to the people.

When I applied to the university, someone asked why I would come to the University of Wyoming. But why wouldn't I? We have the #1 Geology program in the country, and at the time I had a grant that I wanted to diversify in that area. UW is very well known for the performance areas, so why wouldn't I want to be associated with something good. If I'd known about the University of Wyoming a long time ago, I would have suggested that my daughter come to school here. The environmental studies programs we have are very good.



**Q: We are celebrating Black History Month. What is the significance of Black history as we celebrate the month to you from your perspective?**

A: I was taught at a very early age the importance of knowing your own history, it's foundational to who you are as a person. I'm learning more through Ancestry.com that your history is vast.

For a long time people who are of African descent in America were not allowed to know the history. I think that conversation is coming around now with the revitalization of what should be in the history books. Black History Month started out as Negro History Week by Carter G. Woodson in the early 1900s. He was a Harvard educated gentleman born in New Canton Virginia, went to Harvard, got a PhD, and realized that our narrative wasn't being told. He came up with an idea of Negro History Week. He went around to all the HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) and challenged them to teach these young people about their own history, so they could be proud of what they had contributed to America. Around 1976 under Gerald Ford it was changed to Black History Month. February was chosen because it was the birth month for Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. For me to have the benefit of the prodigy of the Dr. Martin Luther King legacy, I was taught as a kid that people will judge me by my behaviors and what I do, and that the limitations that I have in the world are the ones that I place upon myself. People outside of myself can put limits, but they can't limit you. To me Black History Month is 365 every day, but it's also American history. It's not a history that we should be ashamed of, it happened. I think often times people are embarrassed that they may have had some family members that participated in the enterprise of slavery. What our founding fathers did, was how things were done then, it's not that it was right; but, we know better now we should do better now. But to ignore that history does all of us a detriment.

When I lead people I say to keep hope alive, I didn't get that from Jesse Jackson, to me it means you are your grandparents hope, you are the hope of people who knew that you would come and rise up and live out the great dream that we have in this country. You have to keep hope alive because the next generation is depending on it. I see Black History Month as instrumental to all of our development as human beings, to recognize that yes we didn't do everything right, but we have an opportunity in the future to do better. Sometimes you seem invisible, and you have to realize that it's not what people call you, it's more important what you answer to. Black History Month to me is everyone's history, it's a shared history that we shouldn't back away from. It's a history that speaks to the fabric of this country that in five generations we've gone from the cotton fields to the White House. I don't know of too many other countries where people who are not born into a certain class have been afforded that. It doesn't mean it's an easy road, it doesn't mean that you won't have people who hate you just because, that is not your problem. I think Black History Month is an important time for all of us, a time to take pause.

**Q: What else would you like to share?**

A: I see every opportunity as an opportunity to grow, and an opportunity to do what's best. What's most important is the legacy that we leave behind. As Kamala Harris said, "I might be the first but I won't be the last"...Dean that you have of color. I'd like people to see people for who they are, and not what color they are.



*Dr. Rebecca Davis Lee Crumpler, MD was the first African American female physician in the United States.*

**AS A HIRING MANAGER OR SUPERVISOR ARE YOU COMPLIANT WITH FEDERAL LAW?**



**The Form I-9**, which verifies the identity and work authorization of all individuals working within the U.S., appears simple enough. However, it is estimated that at *least 50% of all I-9 documents contain errors.*

As a consequence, the DHS, DOJ, DOL, and ICE, has recently implemented a strategic mission to aggressively conduct routine I-9 audits and penalize organizations in violation.

- ▶ On January 6, 2022, R & SL, Inc. was found liable for an excess of 1,400 Form I-9 violations and was assessed a \$1.5 million penalty.
- ▶ Watch this short YouTube video on "[Why Compliance Matters.](#)"

UW requires that Form I-9s must be completed on or before the official start date of a new hire to verify identity and employment eligibility. Late I-9 documents constitute a substantive violation and monetary fines have increased by 96% (\*additional penalties have involved rescinded federal contracts and other government benefits).

**WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW AS A SUPERVISOR AT UW? ICE, continually targets and pursues criminal action against all those complicit in organizational hiring processes. Therefore, please take Federal Laws seriously because as the UW Employee Handbook states, "Employees are expected to perform the essential duties and responsibilities of their positions" (UW 2017, p. 7).**

- » [UW New Employee Resources](#)
- » [UW Hiring Toolkit](#)
- » [I-9 Compliance FAQs: Everything You Need to Know](#)

**The HR PD SERIES in March 2022 will focus on Employee Development. Just in time for your UW Performance Evaluations.**