The Kentucky Association of Blacks in Higher Education (KABHE) 32nd Annual Conference was held at the Marriott East Hotel in Louisville, Kentucky, from April 12-14, 2015. The purpose of the Kentucky Association of Blacks in Higher Education (KABHE) Conference is to promote the advancement of African Americans in Higher Education within the Commonwealth of Kentucky. The theme of this year’s conference “Re-examining the G.A.P.S: Gaining Access for Professional Success” provided conference participants with practical strategies for navigating the higher education terrain as people of color.

Dr. Tim Findley’s session “Diversity Is a Fact; Inclusion is a Leader” stressed the fact that organizations are uniquely positioned to enhance their productivity by building better relationships and engaging all its members. As a system director for Diversity and Inclusion at Norton Healthcare, Dr. Finley brought to the discussion his business background in highlighting the danger of flocking, monoculturalism, unconscious filtering, and favoritism as signals of a disconnected organization. He pointed out that these disconnecting behaviors can be addressed through enhanced networking, cultural sensitivity trainings, and impartiality by building a shared understanding of the core values and mission of the organization. Dr. Sherwood Thompson’s session on “The Experiences of African American Administrators and Faculty on College and University Campus” enabled members to share stories of the challenges confronting faculty of color at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). As an administrator and faculty in a predominantly white institution of higher education, Dr. Thompson brought to the discussion insights on coping and survival strategies based on empirical research and lived experiences. Dr. Cassandra Smith’s session on “Black Faculty in Higher Education: Are they an Endangered Species” highlighted the struggle for black faculty with regards to promotion and tenure issues at institutions of higher learning. Using evidence from current research and participant accounts, Dr. Smith showed the glaring gaps in the number of black faculty on PWIs. Lack of support, alienation, and isolation were discussed as some of the reasons for black departure from academe. Dr. Roger Cleveland and Ms. Tracey Folden-Stewart’s “Cultural Taxation” detailed the unspoken workload and expectations that faculty and staff of color experience on a day-to-day basis and its implications on the economic and academic mobility of the “black taxed” workforce at PWIs. They challenged the participants to promote awareness and intervention measures in order to create a more conducive and inclusive work environment for people of color.

Overall, the annual KABHE Conference stands to benefit Eastern Kentucky University through its focus on helping Kentucky institutions of higher education in the recruitment, retention, and development of African American faculty. This year’s focus on “Re-Examining the G.A.P.S.: Gaining Access for Professional Success” was a great platform to network, learn, and grow. I would like to thank the Eastern Kentucky University’ Diversity Office for sponsoring this event.

Dr. Iddah Otieno