

2021 Black Issues Conference Proposal

Title: Relax, Relate, Release!

Abstract: Inspired by *A Different World* (a late 80s/early 90s sitcom that explored the experiences of students at a historically black college in Virginia), this session will explore the famous concept that Whitley Gilbert's therapist introduced in one of the episodes. Thirty years later, this advice is still relevant for college students, especially considering the impact of the current pandemic, continued racial injustice, and stress of college courses and involvement. In order to handle the weight of these challenges, it's important to relax (practice self-care), relate (identify and lean on your people), and release (find outlets to let go of stress). Attendees will receive practical tools/skills for maintaining their overall wellbeing.

Learning Outcomes: Participants will leave with tangible resources for future reference, including: intentional and effective self-care practices, ways to connect and build community with other Black people on campus and in Knoxville, and examples of creative outlets to use to release pent-up stress.

Relationship to Theme: When I saw that this year's conference theme was "manifesting hope, health, and healing," I immediately thought about this scene from *A Different World*. It's one of my favorite shows because of the fact that the topics discussed are just as relevant to Black young adults as they were back in the 80s and 90s. "Relax, relate, release" is a phrase that's stuck with me since I first saw the scene with Whitley and her therapist because it's a simple, but memorable, way to remind yourself how to best prioritize your mental health in the midst of stress.

Presenter Bio: Cierra Burnett is the Leadership Coordinator in the JCLS and was born and raised in Memphis, TN. In her role, she oversees the Ignite program, the Clifton M. Jones Leadership Workshops and LeaderShape Institute. She loves the opportunity to pour into students and help them see their leadership potential. Cierra is passionate about creating space for the voices of students of color and other marginalized identities within leadership education.

Cierra received a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies from the University of Memphis, and a Master of Arts in Higher Education with a specialization in Student Affairs at Louisiana State University where her scholarship focused on the experiences of Black students and student mothers at PWIs.

She is a dog mom to Prince and loves hot wings, Beyoncé, and learning TikTok dances!