Holly Riffe

Current NKU Position
Professor of Social Work, Director of Social Justice Studies, College of Health and Human Services

Biographical Statement (350-word maximum)

I was awarded a doctorate in Social Work from Ohio State University in 1995. Joining the tenure track faculty at NKU in 2001, I earned the rank of professor in 2009 and was awarded the Frank Sinton Milburn award in 2017. Social work is one of the only professions which lists social justice, advocacy, and a strict ethical code within our national code of ethics. Frankly, it’s one of the few places in the academy where I feel at home teaching clinical courses and ethics, yet my passion truly lights up when I help to introduce students to social justice concepts and empower them to understand the role of compassion, empathy, and forgiveness in social justice.

My clinical and research interests include a focus on marginalized communities from small townships struggling with introducing viable HIV prevention technologies in South Africa. Further, I have worked to determine the health needs of new immigrant and refugee communities in the US. My curiosity and excitement are peaked by trying to understand the insoluble problems by pulling apart the layers bit by bit and designing policies with colleagues to address the needs of every unique individual and community. For example, as South Africa ended apartheid and welcomed Nelson Mandela as the first democratically elected leader by a majority of all the citizens, my social work colleagues struggled with trying to understand how to explain and prevent HIV/AIDS with people in villages and townships who had every reason not to trust the information that came through official channels. Imagine being infected with a virus that takes root immediately yet may not cause death for a decade. Then, if you live in an environment where your community has been brutalized and you have been separated from your family through official government actions, it is easy to see how deadly misinformation can blossom.
I have served on Faculty Senate, Peer Review and Hearing committees, and Professional Concerns committee. I chaired the diversity committee for the College of Education and was the inaugural chair of the College Health and Human Services Equity Council.

**Why I want to serve as Faculty Advocate** (350-word maximum)

I have been on both sides of the path as a marginalized faculty member and as a member of a committee who hears the challenges many faculty face. As a peer hearing/review member, I watch my colleagues (and I) struggle with the language of the handbook where the only clear statement is that the faculty has 10 days to submit their documents. Sometimes it is unclear exactly to which committee the “plaintiff” should address their grievances. The processes that avoid official Faculty Senate Committees are equally as vague so neither faculty nor staff can be assured that their voices will be heard by their administrators or by Human Resources and related personnel. That leaves many of us to consider options such as living with employment in toxic environments, hiring external legal counsel, or leaving NKU. I have lost many colleagues and friends because of this lack of professional employment processes.

I accepted the nomination for Faculty Advocate, with some consideration, so that I can advocate for the traditionally unheard voices on campus. My hope is to work with the Faculty Senate executive team and its designees to create procedures that support faculty going forward. I want our colleagues to remain at NKU.

**Webpage** (an optional link to a webpage maintained by the candidate)