

Embodying King's ideals through education

Segue • SIUE

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Each year, the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville community looks forward to honoring the life and legacy of civil rights leader, minister and activist Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

SIUE will salute the leader's teachings, principles and unforgettable history and recognize the humanitarian efforts of students, faculty, staff and community members at its annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration Luncheon, which will be held on Wednesday, Jan. 17 in the Morris University Center Meridian Ballroom.

On this week's episode of Segue to air at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Jan. 14, SIUE's premier radio show that discusses the ideas and issues on campus and beyond on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound, SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke, PhD, interviews the event's featured speaker, Shonta Smith, EdD, associate professor of elementary, early and special education at Southeast Missouri State University (SEMO).

A St. Louis native, Smith was awarded a bachelor's in education from Harris Stowe State University, a master's of education in counseling from the University of Missouri-St. Louis and a doctorate in educational leadership from Saint Louis University. Smith's career in education spans more than 25 years.

Beginning as an elementary and middle school teacher, Smith ventured into the world of educational consulting and later became a principal in the St. Louis Public Schools system. Her firm, Dr. Shonta Smith International, offers coaching and development for educators, corporate training, youth membership development, as well as community engagement planning and implementation.

"I'm extremely excited for you to speak at our annual Dr. Martin Luther King celebration. This year's theme is 'Intelligence Plus Character—That is the True Meaning of Education,'" Pembroke says. "That comes from Dr. King's letter, 'The Purpose of Education.' What does that theme mean to you and did it help shape what you wanted to speak about that day?"

"When we think about Dr. King, his whole essence resonated as greatness," Smith replies. "He passed on a legacy for us to continue. He had a purpose, was focused, and was very driven and passionate about the things he was doing.

"As a university, your driving force is to ensure that students aren't just going to school to get a degree, but you're making sure they are able to apply what they have learned. SIUE is focused on developing well-rounded individuals who are prepared to go in whatever path they decide to take."

"Whenever you get an assignment, or accept a challenge to come to speak for clients, how do you go about doing that, framing your discussion, and thinking about the elements you want to address?" Pembroke inquires.

"When I work with individuals, I make sure I have a full understanding of what they would like me to speak about and how I am going to make sure my speech resonates with the audience," Smith says. "I want to make

sure I fully understand your mission, vision and purpose for the program and ensure that the audience is listening to something with substance.

“The audience may just see me one time, and we may never cross paths again. So, I want to make sure I’m giving the audience something that will help them continue on their journey in alignment with their mission, goals and expectations.”

When Smith isn’t hosting seminars on executive coaching, educational and youth leadership development or community engagement, she works to guide young educators along their college journeys at SEMO.

“As educators, what should we do to keep new teachers moving forward in their careers?” Pembroke asks.

“We need to continue to help teachers become the best they can possibly be,” she said. “Allow teachers to actually teach, to open the lives of our children, so they can explore and see what life has to offer them. I always tell new teachers to do what is in the best interest for the student and for them to live a life of substance, not only for the nine months they have them in the classroom, but also to help them to prepare for the rest of their lives.”

“SIUE’s values include citizenship, excellence, inclusion, integrity and wisdom. I believe all of those aspects relate to Dr. King’s teachings and efforts for civil rights,” Pembroke says. “How do you think higher education institutions can promote and continue Dr. King’s legacy?”

“We should continue doing the work to prepare our students to be their best, whatever path they decide to take,” she said. “We can prepare them, ensure they know how to interact and engage with different types of people, think globally, and have a vision to work with everyone and treat all they encounter with dignity and respect, including themselves.”

The entirety of Pembroke’s conversation with Smith will air at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Jan. 14, on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound.

By Madelaine Gerard, SIUE Marketing and Communications