

# THE FORUM

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## Westminster junior seeks to provide education, resources for communities of color

Brendan Sudberry, October 16, 2020

Utah is among the least diverse states in the country, ranking #42 in a study from WalletHub for 2019. Roughly 78% of the population is white.

Jenessa Jimoh, a junior at Westminster College, said she noticed this lack of diversity across the state – seeking conversations to uncover unconscious biases. After speaking with friends, Jimoh realized these conversations were largely absent.

In response, Jimoh created D.I.V.A. in December 2019 as a multicultural womxn-led organization. The organization seeks to educate, bring awareness and create a safe space for people of diverse backgrounds to share their stories and broaden their perspectives.

D.I.V.A. – which stands for diversity, inclusion, values, action – seeks to facilitate monthly meetings on topics such as mental health, unconscious biases, solidarity

with the Black community, and LGBTQ+ rights. It also focuses on advocacy, studying habits, how to prepare for college and financial management.

Saydi Anderson, a Westminster sophomore majoring in political science and Latin American studies, said she attended D.I.V.A.'s August webinar, "Black Wealth Matters: A Webinar on Financial Literacy."

Jenessa Jimoh, a junior at Westminster College, founded D.I.V.A. (Diversity Inclusion Values Action) in December 2019. D.I.V.A. is a womxn-led, multicultural organization seeking to educate, bring awareness and create a safe space where people of diverse backgrounds can share their stories and broaden their life perspectives. (Brendan Sudberry)

"I loved the platform: Diversity Inclusion Values Action and felt it was a great opportunity for me to learn more about other cultures and how to better support and recognize others," Anderson said. "I plan to stay involved in D.I.V.A. and attend meetings so that I can become more culturally aware and learn valuable life skills."

Jimoh receives support from the Dumke Center for Civic Engagement's Merritt Take Action grant to assist in funding her projects with D.I.V.A.

The Merritt Take Action grant provides Westminster students with the opportunity to design and implement long-term projects with community partners that positively impact the local community.

"The Take Action grant is a win-win for both the student and the community partner," said Julie Tille, director of the Dumke Center for Civic Engagement. "The community partner has the ability to collaborate with the student for an entire academic year and therefore has the time to work hand in hand with them and really work on meaningful projects."

The Forum sat down with Jimoh to learn more about D.I.V.A. and the resources it provides to Utah communities of color. Some answers have been lightly edited for conciseness and clarity.

Q: What does D.I.V.A. stand for?

A: D.I.V.A. stands for diversity, inclusion, values, action.

Q: Can you explain a little bit about what each of those mean and why you included them in the organization's name?

A: Diversity is just appreciating the different cultures we have here in Utah. Inclusion is making sure we create inclusive environments for [diverse identities] and that everyone is welcome to share their stories.

Values can actually be looked at in two ways. We can look at a value as something

#### STARTING MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9:

- Statewide mask mandate in all public places when within six-feet of individuals outside of your immediate household.
- All social gathers limited to immediate household members until Nov. 23.
- All extracurricular school activities cancelled with the exception of college football games and high school playoffs and championships, with social distancing enforced.
- Students at all public and private colleges and universities will be required to receive weekly COVID-19 testing.
- The Utah National Guard will be deployed to provide additional resources to slow the spread of COVID-19.

For additional information, visit [coronavirus.utah.gov](https://coronavirus.utah.gov).

that you hold morally important and also the action of valuing something, which leads to the action. Which means actually putting those inclusivity– those moral values into action to create places where people of color here in Utah feel comfortable.

Q: What is D.I.V.A.?

A: D.I.V.A. is a womxn-led, multicultural organization. With that being said, our meetings aren't just for womxn. It's womxn-led because we need more representation in positions of influence, but we do have meetings that are led by men as well.

Q: What is D.I.V.A.'s mission and purpose?

A: D.I.V.A.'s mission and purpose is to educate, bring awareness, and create a safe space where people of diverse backgrounds can share their stories and broaden their life perspectives.

Q: When and why did you start D.I.V.A.?

A: I started D.I.V.A. [in December of 2019]. The reason I started D.I.V.A., as I'm sure you know, is because the diversity statistics in our state are very low, especially for the Black community.

I've had conversations with my friends all over the valley about systemic oppression, gerrymandering, voter registration laws, uncovering unconscious bias and they were like, "I wish I could have more conversations like these." Because we don't really have conversations like these in standard K-12 education.

So I [created] something where we can actually have these conversations. We can come together as a group of people with differences and talk about these things that aren't talked about in just normal, everyday conversations.

Q: What kinds of programming or events does D.I.V.A. put on?

A: The formatting that D.I.V.A. uses currently is we do webinars through Zoom. We've had about 40 attendees every single event so it's been great.

For our next meeting, hopefully, we can get in-person at an auditorium that seats 160 people so with social distancing we should get at least 70 people there. That's going to be on "Know Your Rights."

We're going to have a great criminal justice attorney, Kate Conyers, come and speak at that one and basically just educate everyone on racial discrimination, racial profiling and what the correct things to say when you get into that position are.

D.I.V.A. is also working on doing a big giveaway right now, collaborating with locally, Black-owned businesses, as well as just any local business in Utah.

We're going to have around \$500 worth of products and I'm really hoping to be able to spread more awareness about those businesses and to also bring in a big [following for D.I.V.A.] for that next meeting. I think that is such an important topic and I really, really want to get a lot of people there.

Q: What do you hope to see for D.I.V.A. in the long run and how do you see the organization growing over time?

A: My ultimate, long-term goal for D.I.V.A. [is that] I would love if we could have a community center for people of color.

Lack of access is one of the biggest things people of color struggle with so having a center that they can just focus on and inform them about what they are not going to get through educations that are funded through their school districts and laws that are funded there – they can have a center that has their back.

Q: How can people get connected with D.I.V.A.?

A: You can find D.I.V.A. @diva\_slc on Instagram as well as divasl123@gmail.com. I'm working on getting together a website, but I'm really looking forward to connecting with some more Westminster students.