

Discovering Who You Are



Students and employees came together for the quarterly Students with Disabilities Luncheon, with guest speaker Sandra Bush, pictured at the podium (*far right*).

Sandra Bush (they/them) has psychogenic non-epileptic seizure (PNES), a diagnosis that changed their life and also pushed them on a personal journey of discovery.

Bush, a Clark graduate and now Clark employee, shared their story with Clark students, faculty, and staff at the fall term Students with Disabilities Luncheon on October 22. The free event is presented each term by Clark's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The purpose of the luncheons is to allow students and employees to hear inspiring stories, connect with faculty, meet new friends, consider different career paths, and identify community resources and potential mentors.

Bush spoke about how they learned to cope with their diagnosis and stop allowing society to define them.

“Society is going to always have something to say about your ability or lack of,” Bush said, and added, “Society doesn’t always get to make the rules.”

Reaching this conclusion was a journey after hearing negative bias from society and from family members when they were growing up. “I have a hard time loving myself as I am... I’m doing work to figure out what that means.”

Their seizures, which are triggered by emotional stress or typical stress, can be dangerous and cause Bush to get hurt. The exact triggers for Bush’s condition have evolved over time. They have worked hard on managing emotional triggers and have developed strategies like listening to music or watching a funny video. At the same time, the condition makes it challenging to work through stressful emotions.



Sandra Bush speaks at the student luncheon.

When Bush first started experiencing seizures, they were frightening and dangerous. Being a Black person experiencing medical issues also changed how Bush was treated. Bush shared

a story about an early seizure episode when they were alone at a mall and only had time to call their mother before falling to the ground and becoming unresponsive. When someone saw Bush on the mall floor, they made the racist assumption that Bush was on drugs and decided to kick Bush to see if they responded. The person stopped kicking only when Bush's mother screamed through the phone. Finally, someone called 911 to get Bush help.

For the record, Bush noted, that's not how you should treat someone having a reaction to drugs, either. They said, "People don't always respond best to something they don't understand."

Getting diagnosed required a lot of tests. Even after getting diagnosed, they experienced some challenging times. Bush spent their first week as a college freshman in the hospital.

Bush worked hard to understand how their disability does and does not limit them.

They advised: "Sit with it. Do research about your disability. What does it say you can and can't do? Test it."

Bush described their own process of trying smaller things—like starting with shorter walks—then working their way up. They also gained the courage to ignore the judgements of others and lean into interests and hobbies, like jewelry-making and rock hounding, that don't trigger their condition.

Bush offered the audience six questions to help them on their own journey of discovery:

1. Who are you?
2. What makes you *YOU*?
3. Who's holding power over you and why?
4. What do you need to let go of?
5. Do you respect and love yourself?
6. What does changing the narrative look like for you?



Left to right: Sandra Bush and Vanessa Neal.

Save the Date:

Next DEI luncheon – Students of Color Luncheon in the Penguin Union Building (PUB), room 161 on November 12 at Noon.

Connect with the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI):

- In-person: Diversity Center, Gaiser Hall 214
- Phone: 360-992-2292
- Email: diversity@clark.edu
- Website: www.clark.edu/cc/diversity

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