

Challenging Limitations



Left to right: Vanessa Neal, Dr. Terry Brown, peer mentors Addie Kuria and Elina Bui, and Dr. Karin Edwards.

Vice President of Instruction Dr. William “Terry” Brown shared his story with Clark students, faculty, and staff at the Fall Student of Color Luncheon on November 12 in PUB 161.

The free event is presented each term by Clark’s Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Multicultural Student Affairs. The purpose of the student 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.

Dr. Brown began by saying, “Today I have the opportunity to address the most important people here at Clark College—our students.”

Then he spoke directly to the students, weaving his personal stories into his narrative as a Black man growing up in Florida at the beginning of desegregation. He challenged

societal norms, earning a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and then a doctorate.

Dr. Brown said, "Never underestimate what students can achieve."

He talked about how during the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, and how students were instrumental in bringing about societal change.

"When I look around this room, I see people who are fully capable of changing the world," he added, "I am convinced that when capable, talented people are supported, there's no limit to what they can achieve."

He challenged students: "Nobody does anything really important by themselves. Surround yourself with people who will help you become successful."

Decide who you want to be:

- **Conceive your vision** of yourself as a fully functioning human being.
- **Choose** – There's power in choice: what you choose to be, where you choose to go, who you choose to spend time with. Not choosing is also a choice.
- **Commit** to where you're going and what you're doing.
- **Challenge** limitations, especially if they are self-imposed.

Dr. Brown told students: "Challenge your own limitations. Sometimes the biggest obstacles are the limitations we put on ourselves. To students of color, there are enough limitations out there. Don't put limitations on yourself."

He added, "People challenged my intellect, my competence, my identity, even my personhood."

Here are some of the questions people have asked him:

- “Who the hell do you think you are?”
- “Why are you here?”
- “You’re too black.”
- “You’re too white.”

Dr. Brown said, “For the person of color, there will always be some challenge to your personhood. Take time every day to affirm your personhood. Your strengths. Your weaknesses. Where you come from. Where you’re going. This is a fight for our personhood.”

He spoke about the importance of finishing what we start: “Completing a task gives you a record of your accomplishment. You look back on what you’ve already done. That can be your guide to go forward.”

He charged the students to have the courage to conceive their vision of who they are and who they want to be, then to commit to their vision and achieve their vision. “It takes courage to see this through to the end.”

Dr. Brown concluded with a quote from author Marianne Williamson: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?”

Read a story [here](#) about Dr. Brown’s Penguin Talks presentation at Vancouver Community Library.

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