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Transcript for “in STEM” series, Episode 12: Diversity and Inclusion in STEM with Dr. Brian Chad Starks
Released May 20, 2019

All 0:15

[Intro music]

Welcome to STEMculture/Podcast!

Dani 0:19

Oh, I fucked up! [Laughter]

Zach 0:23

Alright, we have an intro

Dani 0:24

You guy's, it's really warm in here!

Will 0:26

Welcome to stem culture podcast with your hosts,

Brooke 0:31

Brooke

Will 0:32

And Will.

Today we're talking with Dr. Brian Chad Starks. Dr. Starks is a criminologist who received his PhD from the University of Delaware and 2002. He's currently an Associate Director of the NASA Delaware space Grant Consortium, where he works to improve the representation of minority students in STEM. Dr. Starks is the founder and CEO of BCS and Associates consulting firm, which has a social justice focus. Dr. Starks has received awards from the University of Delaware and the NAACP, for his work to enhance

STEM diversity. In this episode, we will discuss his life and education, how his perspective on STEM has evolved over the years. And what he's doing today.

Brooke 1:24

This episode goes out to all the people who want to see diversity and inclusion in STEM.

Will 1:31

Yeah, good things.

Brooke 1:33

all good things. So Will, you've known Dr. Starks for a while now haven't you?

Will 1:39

Yes, you will hear me refer to him as Chad, we met in a very informal setting, we actually met playing basketball University of Delaware.

And from like, 2008, to 2012, probably. And for me, that was, that was a really great experience. Because

you know, if you've never been around a university, you might not know that. You know,

there are a lot of people that play basketball, and so little communities sort of form. And I was lucky enough to meet a whole group of really interesting guys that I probably wouldn't have met otherwise.

And Chad was

a charismatic and vocal leader of that community, you know, he sort of

set the tone for a lot of the younger guys in terms of sportsmanship and, you know, respect for some of the older dudes that would play with us which, you know,

there was a guy who was a Emeritus math professor who was in his mid 70s, who played regularly, you know, probably once a week with us. So it was a really diverse, really interesting group of people.

And I didn't know when I first met Chad, that he was PhD student, but, you know, eventually we became close enough friends that I learned about his work. And so having made that connection now, I'm lucky enough to be able to, to call in the Air Force here and, you know, have a really

talented guest on our podcasts.

Brooke 3:30

Very cool. Very cool. Well, I am excited to hear from Chad.

Will 3:34

Yeah. So that interview is coming up and we hope you enjoy it.

Hello, Dr. Brian Chad Starks. I'm accustomed to just calling you Chad. Is that alright with you?

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 3:48

That's fine. That's fine.

Will 3:50

Also with us today is my co host, Brooke.

Brooke 3:53

Hello.

Will 3:54

So Chad, I wonder if you would tell us in your life before you got involved in STEM, what was your feeling about STEM and why? And specifically, what kinds of experiences led you to that impression of the STEM fields?

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 4:12

Well, it is a this is interesting, when I was thinking about these, this opportunity, I had to trace my intrigue all the way back to being a a lad in Columbia, South Carolina. And even though it's you know, we'd love to refer to my city is the metro it's not a large metropolitan area but you know, the concrete jungle as we call it.

I spent some time and playing in the woods a lot which is interest collecting rocks

you know, the whole lady bugs digging in dirt selling bottles for \$5 you know, collecting bottles and selling them back and creating a little club and going into the to the trails and [incomprehensible] membership money. And I didn't know it at the time, but I had this this intrigue in rocks and plants and dirt and that was kind of like the entry I got to my intrigue for STEM. But as I traveled through high school and was fortunate to take some, I guess advanced courses I my teachers were

my teachers were very supportive about my ability I guess to be a little bit intelligent, and I didn't recognize it then. But um, I taken enough High School credits to where they need to take them any courses as a senior and I stopped after my chemistry after chemistry my junior year and I really stop applying myself with them.

But I went to Wofford College in 1990 to be a computer science major. And Will I know you don't even know that story. But uh, interestingly enough,

Will 6:10

I never heard about this chapter at all.

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 6:12

Yeah, interestingly enough.

I got my first F at Wofford college in calculus. And that, of course, changed the whole trajectory. I lost the confidence. Of course, I think it had a great deal of just being a freshman in a new environment being away from home. There was some exclusive in this that happened

for me that, you know,

I can relate to is probably being an African American student athlete at that time and not really being comfortable. Enter into certain faculty members office to talk about homework that I didn't understand. I really want to prove that I wasn't a quote unquote, you know, dumb jock. And I kind of tried to do it on my own and didn't ask for any help. Even though tutors are available at Wofford, I will admit that I didn't reach out to get any help. So I failed the calculus course that year, took it over and summer and got to B to get that grade replacements, make sure I could play some football, right eligibility wise. But I made a decision after that, after that failure, in math that maybe that, you know, maybe computer science wasn't for me. And that was where I left it. I even took chemistry, my freshman year, instead of taking the general ed astronomy that the rest of my teammates, were taking I took the chemistry course because you know, I was smart in high school.

And I got a D in that course. So this was the first time I probably had, I know it was the the first time I felt Of course and and know the first time I had an F and D and that was my first semester. So I think that introduction to STEM started as a kid and I kind of got off track when, when it got tough. And when I didn't get the affirmation from grades that are that I belong and didn't really have anyone to say, hey, this happens to a lot of freshmen and here's some tools or some tactics to take in it, you know, you can keep fighting for it. So, as was the sociology

Will 8:29

that I had never heard that story before. And that's, I mean, I do think that you're the only person that that was in that kind of a position that they came in as a student athlete and

sort of got confronted by, you know, this new environment, and initially didn't fare so well and then didn't have anybody to say, you know, don't Don't be so hard on yourself right away.

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 8:59

No, it was it was a couple of my teammates as well as some basketball players that face some of the same challenges.

I don't know if I said but I tend to Wofford college and Wofford had a 3-2 computer science program that had I guess, Woffard, it was like the sister school to Georgia Tech. And Will as you know me, I'm, you know me, I dream big. I dream big and you know, getting to Woffard, was an opportunity to continue my education, by financial means of playing football. But I'm, I expected to go there for three years and finished my last two years in Atlanta, Georgia, Georgia Tech, earning a computer science degree. And I didn't know how to, I really didn't know how to reach out and say I needed some help. I had been cultivated as a youngin' and I would say to you know, you go ahead and you got to make

things happen on your own. So me and some of my teammates used to say in the room, my roommate, who's a who's an attorney now

used to used to wake up in the middle of the night, the claiming to have nightmares about his biology professor.

So it was like a campus thing that you know, Wofford, it was very hard. You know, like I took my first multiple choice exam in graduate school.

I fear blue.

Brooke 10:24

Wow.

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 10:24

Yeah, I feel blue books now as,

is I will try this box. Yes, even in a bookstore. But I do think there was some structural components that we like, I do think there was a lack of cultural competency for us at Wofford, and, you know, just some of those things where, you know, I don't think we were up to par in those lanes.

Will 10:49

What do you mean, what do you mean by that, that the structure that Wofford had in place to support student athletes, or black student athletes wasn't good enough?

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 11:01

I'm definitely black student athletes. You know,

there was no faces, you know, there were no, there were no cultural bonds being established outside of the coaches. And in the city of Spartanburg, you know, we would often walk through them mall because I was fortunate enough to go to college with some local kids from Spartanburg, and we were where they would take us to the mall just to get exposure in the city. And a lot of, I can never forget this older, African American female this black lady walked up and she was like, Huh, they still using our babies to play football over there, huh? And I was like, What? What? Hey, I'm smart, they told me I was smart. What are you talking about? Like, I deserve to get to be over here. So of course, that brought some intrigue and some questions. I mean, I knew was predominantly a white institution. But when you sit in that classroom, and you know, you taking those 16, 17 hours, and you don't see any for me, your faces standing in front of you given instruction. And if you don't know that you supposed to go to office hours, and introduce yourself and debunk stereotypes that are attached to your racial identity, as well as your athletic and scholastic identity, it can be a little bit overwhelming. So you figure out ways to cope. And usually, you cope with those that are going through the same situations which

you know, struggle, love is real, but they don't have any more insight about navigating, navigating the space either. So, you know, we we built great bonds, and we all have great relationships today. And it's,

you know, decently comical because we made it through in four years. But that started the impetus to really start saying, Hey, there must be some different conversations to have a more inclusive environment. So yeah.

Will 13:05

I think I think there's a big conversation that needs to be had here about how people get to college and what the emphasis is, once they get there, because I think most people would agree that starting out Computer Science program, as a freshman in college is a pretty, pretty overwhelming experience by itself, much less trying to do that and be a collegiate athlete. Time.

Brooke 13:37

Yeah,

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 13:37

yes.

Will 13:38

Um,

and

Brooke 13:39

yeah, the demands that you have, it's not just your classes. It's what the coaches demands are as well.

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 13:47

Definitely,

Will 13:47

I can only imagine.

Brooke 13:49

So we're wondering how you ended up pursuing a stem PhD, when you moved over to Sociology?

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 13:58

a stem PhD?

Yes. I don't have a stem PhD. My PhD is in criminology.

Brooke 14:06

Okay. Okay.

Will 14:07

Isn't that a social science?

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 14:09

Yeah, it's a social science. And this them were doesn't acknowledge the social sciences yet. I'm fighting for that conversations. There's a divide between the hard sciences and what we call the soft sciences. So that's something that is always. Go ahead. I'm sorry.

Brooke 14:27

Well, I had my degree is in anthropology. And I would have to side with you on that the amount of science I did, to get my degree was just as much as a biology student. And yet, it's considered a soft science,

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 14:44

exactly.

Brooke 14:46

but you're, you're working with large data sets. So you know, and taking a lot of the same classes,

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 14:53

right. And we're doing quality research fortunate enough to go to University of Delaware, I'm, and I'm being trained by some of the best in my field, theoretical frameworks. I'm not really sure why we keep you know, well I am sure, you know, we categorize everything in this country. So we got, we got the use measures to separate even ourselves from each other. So we can create a hierarchy. Something that I learned in my doctorate studies about, you know, where the value is, we most often invest. And the STEM folks are used to called the the real, and the hard sciences where, you know, amazing enough where we're dealing with human behavior and people

is actually called the soft sciences. So, right, yeah, Brooke. Woohoo for us right/

Brooke 15:46

Yeah, exactly.

Will 15:47

Well, you know, I mean,

I think I've managed to stumble into another philosophical question that we maybe don't want to get into, but it for what it's worth. I think that, that the thing that makes something Sciences is the way you do it, not the subject. So if you are using a systematic, systematic methodology, and controlling for error and using statistics to draw inferences about things, you know, and doing surveys, I mean, I

probably don't know enough about criminology to,

to speak in detail about the the methods that you all use, but I I, my base assumption is that it's every bit as much as science as certainly biology is. And, you know, the only thing that that that's notably different in its essence is that the stuff that you all study is more complicated.

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 16:56

Yeah.

Will 16:57

It's probably worth noting, also, that mean,

I think 100 years ago, or 200 years ago, biology was considered a soft science.

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 17:08

Right.

Will 17:09

And so, you know, I think hopefully, things like people's attitudes are going to be changing about that.

Brooke 17:18

Well, what what pushed you to continue on your studies into a PhD or a graduate program?

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 17:28

Being a bail bondsman?

Brooke 17:31

Okay,

Will 17:32

That sounds like another story.

Brooke 17:35

Yeah. I'm intrigued.

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 17:37

Mass incarceration. I became a bail bondsman in 1999, after earning a master's degree in criminal justice, and a master certificate in alcohol and drug studies. And the war on drugs was, you know, my life, my family, my community.

My race, ethnicity, it was it was everywhere, and uncles and uncles, and cousins and friends due to structure and equality I made decisions to participate in the economic system that was illegal.

So I wanted to open the floodgates, and the floodgates being jails and I became a bail bondsman. And it took me maybe seven minutes to write my name on a legal document to get someone out of jail. And I enjoyed that power, I enjoyed that privilege. And I was gonna save, my family, my community, my race and the world

by being a bail bondsman. And Will this is a part of my story. So I would give you a part of it from my book.

But you know, thankfully,

and being a scholar and a activist, as well, as a business owner,

I had the epiphany of my role in a system of oppression against

poor minority and most often male people at that time, that I was taking advantage of the most vulnerable people at the most vulnerable time. And I was a part of system that was financially profiting from injustice, from arrest all the way to adjudication. And I decided that, that's not what I was supposed to be doing.

So after six and a half years, I decided to close my company and become a part of the conversation. And I wanted to be in the room with the people that were making the decisions about this criminal justice phase. And I found a program at the University of Delaware that was going to give me the best training to theoretically understand why systems like this exists and how to address those issues.

So I left, closed my business in June of 2006. And I started the PhD program in criminology at the University of Delaware that late August.

And I came in to understand how stories have been written about my community, my family. And I even wrote my dissertation entitled a bail of two cities, doing a comparative analysis of Atlanta and Philadelphia's bail system as an ethnographer.

So I did mixed methods approach, again, back to that science word, had to show the world that I could do statistics and quantitative analysis. But I also know the stories and the value of being in a room with people that are going through this system and the consequences of continuously continuously being mistreated

by legislation and decision makers and courtroom personnel. So I want to capture those stories as well. So that's what I wrote my dissertation on. And that's why I went to get a PhD.

Will 21:03

That sounds like a better reason than a lot of us have. I just want to I just went to go get my PhD because I like learning stuff. [Dr. Starks Laughing]

So much less socially conscious or admirable, in my opinion.

So when when you got there,

at University of Delaware, in the criminology PhD program, what was your experience, like

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 21:30

\$10,373 out of my pocket,

yeah.

Standard as the exams,

no juice baby, didn't do well on the GRE. But here's where you know, that system of oppression afforded me some opportunities, and my family, you know, I'm a father.

So my daughter way was able to have a different childhood and different lifestyle and livelihood than I which we all want, right. But I was I had to pay for my first semester.

So another the story about, you know, how I came up to Delaware and how I got into the program, I paid for visit to come up myself and, and sat with about 13 faculty members to, to put my face and my identity in front of them.

So they wouldn't know that I was serious about being a PhD student. And I'm fortunate enough, they gave me a chance. And I pay for that first semester, with hopes. And I can say a little bit of confidence that that's okay to say that, uh, that I was going to get offered an opportunity to be a research assistant, at the center off alcohol and drug studies or a TA, but I really wanted to learn how to do research. And by the third week, into that semester,

I got an opportunity and was informed probably two weeks later, that I will be given a research assistant position at the center CDAS, as we call it at the Center for Drug and alcohol studies. And it was great. I mean, you know,

I came in and I was about the work, you know, much smaller apartment because my lifestyle changed and no cable. Will, as you know, I'm a sports connoisseur, I like to call myself and I used to reward myself to go watch college football

on Saturdays and Sundays, if I did all my readings and my work by Saturday morning at 11:30.

So it was that first year was, was about keeping my head down. And showing respect for a new environment, you know, assumptions can get us out into trouble. And I came into build relationships, I'm a relationship type person. I'm gonna give everyone a shot, I'm hoping that you give me one. And I built a number of substantive relationships to create a good foundation for me in that first year. So my first year was good, I got a lot of love from my faculty, a lot of love from the community in Delaware. And being a research assistant gave me tons of opportunities to, to be in spaces where I had intrigue from the community to prisons to work on were professors, they had a different perspective, other than just, you know, learning the theory, we want to do some more applied stuff at the center. So it was good earlier on.

Brooke 24:27

Did it maintain that way throughout your PhD?

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 24:33
Oh, Brooke. Oh, Brooke. No.

I'm a critical criminologist, which means that I study systems.

And as time goes on, you know, you can start seeing where there's some gaps in the substantive relationships and the system with force one's hand to choose that.

So of course, you know, there was some some challenges, I'm going to challenge. And there was some conversations that needed to be had, most often they were they were appreciated, respected and responded to.

And, you know, there were some relationships that were lost, because of those challenges. But you know, when you train me, you know,

as a,

as we say, you know, I'm not going to be a student forever, at least we hope not. And so I just took the training that I got and I, you know, and became much more, I was always conscious of been conscious for a while.

But you add that to that formal, doctoral training with critical thinking and research skills, and being able to analyze information and data,

I began to challenge and do some pushback in some of those spaces. So yeah.

I mean, the disproportionate representation was the huge thing, I can go ahead and say it. And a lot of the faculty members, and I mean, good hearted people. Just, would you know sometimes,

being white in academia doesn't allow you to see what you don't see. And when you don't see people of color, in your faculty members, he just assume that this should be the norm, and can understand the value of why

any race or ethnicity struggles, so I'm only having one perspective to look through the lens of what crime and what criminology is. And

Brooke 26:40
right,

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 26:40

I brought that to the forefront, I'm saying, you know, we need to have more people of color talking about the issues that we're writing and talking about,

especially when the majority of those people are people of color that have been incarcerated, and everyone will benefit if we can get some of those perspectives, we are going to do research differently, when it comes to some of the same topics.

And I said, I thought we're build two boxes here, right? Like the more access to information and resources, it would make me a better candidate on the job market, but it's gonna make me a better scholar. And I'm going to carry your name, your confirmation bias identity of being a PhD from the University of Delaware. So don't limit my exposure, as well as my colleagues.

Brooke 27:26

Right.

Will 27:30

So did they So you said that those challenges to the sort of way things were in the culture of your department, were met with a mixed reception?

Have you seen any change in the representation in that department since your time there?

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 27:57

You know I didn't leave no stone unturned Will while I was there. So, me and two of the faculty members, there was a incident about a black faculty member, actually the top ethnographer in the country was coming in.

And I was invited to a lunch and I question, why was I being invited? Because he was black. And I made the statement that they've been white faculty members coming to campus, and no one has invited me to go to lunch.

And of course, that, you know, here's that critical thinking, right is like, Oh, no, it's not that. And then I said, Okay, if it's not that then have all the people of color been invited to go to lunch or dinner to meet with him.

And I said, I will go if they get an invitation, and we get 20 minutes to sit with him by ourselves. And that was rejected. And the quote was, "I don't want to separate the department". And this gentleman is a colleauge.

And I challenge them a great deal there. I have the utmost respect for him and his research and his work. And I told him to look down the hallway, the department is already separated.

And he said, so he wrote the chair a letter. I'm in an email and included me about our conversation. And she called me and she said, Brian, do you want my car, my credit card, my office, this is a great idea. So we took advantage of that.

And that person and I, he became a mentor. For me, I ended up being invited to his campus to give a presentation on my dissertation work. And we're talking about an Ivy League institution. For a kid that

was in the woods at one point, you know, digging up rocks and burying 3 and \$4. And not knowing what direction life was going to take him.

But we also, me and two colleagues, who I greatly appreciate, we decided that we were going to work together and I made the

leap and said we need to get more on campus. So I started was called now the minority mentor lecture series.

And it is a lecture series that brings in people of color to present their work either sociologists, a criminologist so that everyone can have exposure to them.

But it also is an opportunity for minority students to spend some downtime, go to dinner with them to be able to ask some of the questions that white faculty can't ask about what is it gonna be like on the job market for me how much this race play into it? What I have access to national data says to be able to further my career to get tenure become a full professor,

how does funding work do I need to go to six conferences? What about my presentations? Have you been able to get any grants? Do you think race has anything to do with any of this? There's a reason why there's disproportionate representation.

It's not because people color lack the ability to graduate in doctoral programs. So that is a program you can look it up, they use it as on their website, they're still inviting these faculty members in. And what we did was we wanted to make sure that these faculties of color got treated great as well, right?

Because they have gone through some tough times. And getting into that space. And everyone isn't comfortable calling this stuff out. I can remember the first person, the first faculty that we brought in, she pulled me to the side and she said, Brian,

who are you?

And after South Carolina, and I was like, Ma'am, She was like, Don't ma'am me. She was like, first of all, they aren't many programs that are doing stuff like this.

And she said, a baby you a graduate student, you not supposed to be speaking out against racial injustice as a graduate student. And here's where being naive, comes in handy.

I didn't know I was supposed to be quiet. I didn't know I'm supposed to take hush money as Dr. King says right? Eventually, silence is betrayal. So I didn't know any better.

And I believe that I some good hearted and some goodwill faculty members that maybe just hadn't thought about it the way I thought about it. So I'm thinking that it is an opportunity for me to show that I got some weight to toss around. And is academia conversation as well have you thought about this great idea.

So we got some funding, and we take them to the best restaurants and we put them up in the nicest hotel, we offer an honorarium. And we also offer a session the following morning, they come and give a department wide talk.

But we also invite the graduate students to come to a research focused session, right? Again, we don't want to marginalize any student that could build a relationship with a scholar that could give them an opportunity. Right?

So the white students get to come black students, Hispanic, anyone else all graduate students that have the same research interest, you come the next morning, you sit, you talk, you build relationships, and then the remainder of the day for lunch, is where the minority students used to go and get some of that social time to be able to say, hey, kick back, and, you know, kind of build a relationship.

Will 33:43

I think,

I think I, I really identify when you said you are a relationship person. And I feel very much the same way. And it's hard for me to imagine what it would be like to, to start a program where everybody was visibly different than me in some way.

Or culturally different than me in some way.

Yeah, so I, I think I can, the way you're describing it, at least start to understand what that might be like. But it's certainly I think, useful for people to hear that. Could you tell me again, tell us again, what the name of that the program you were just talking about was pay

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 34:31

is the minority mentor lecture series, and is sponsored by the Department of Sociology and criminology. I mean, it's a great way that we were able to get support, you know, bring into black American Studies program. I mean, it's a campus thing, man, once you get past the initial challenges of thinking differently, and reducing the fear,

I met, you know, you just build better better relationships between departments, better relationships on campus, you know, so we start inviting outside people to come in and say, Hey, here's an opportunity. And then you start seeing, you know,

Brooke 35:05

Definitely the birth of good science right there.

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 35:05

familiar faces and different faces and in different disciplines in the room. And, you know, you started shaking hands. And next thing, you know, people that wouldn't have a conversation of standing around

eating cheese, eating grapes, eating crackers together and setting up a meeting to have coffee the next week, and maybe do an interdisciplinary research paper, but again, you know, it's relationships.

Right. Right. Which I'm pretty sure we're going to talk about on one of these programs about how we're doing it in STEM now. So you know,

Brooke 35:47
yeah.

Will 35:48
Well, that is a compelling story. And I'm sure that it has led to some interesting things. Since you finished there. So would you tell us a little bit about what you've been doing since you finished your PhD at University of Delaware?

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 36:07
I took a position as assistant professor at Delaware State University in the fall of 2012.

And I accepted a position with

Delaware space grant.

And it was late fall 2012, or the beginning of January 2013.

I left Delaware State in

2015 to take a position at Lynchburg college now the University of Lynchburg, in Lynchburg Virginia as an assistant professor of criminology there. And then the following year 2016 is when I started my consulting firm BCS and Associates INC.

And I left higher ed after two years at Lynchburg College to do my consultant firm full time. And I have been doing diversity and inclusion training and workshops and speeches, keynotes with law enforcement, government officials, school system, school districts,

finance firms, investment firms, non-profit organizations, conversations with pastors, church leaders.

Who else I'm missing another entity.

And I mean, I've been traveling to different space grant

states, Wisconsin, Oregon, Virginia, doing training working to increase the under representation, minorities and space grant in STEM.

I've been having some fun.

I've been putting on my my activists and scholar hat. Of course, I've been writing still. So I do have some publications.

So yeah thats some of the things that I've been doing since I got the PhD.

Will 38:20

So you've mentioned that you're that you're writing a book? Do you have any idea of when we might be able to see that at our local bookseller?

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 38:30

My deadline is April 30th. And, yeah,

yeah.

They go those big, you know, dreaming big, right? putting pressure on myself, I'm a point guard Will

Will 38:43

I didn't mean to put any additional pressure on you, I'm just excited to see it.

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 38:48

I'm finally

actually getting the writing courage to turn my dissertation into a book.

I am very

disappointed in myself that I have not published more on bail. And all the great data that I have, I have video clips, I've interviewed people in the system working with the system in Philadelphia in Atlanta.

And I haven't done anything with it except for let it collect dust. And if you know, bail is a huge topic now. And I knew it would be, I started my company in 1999. And I've been doing research since 2006. And the bails are "John Go Camp" [transcriber could not find name] may he rest in peace was a professor at Temple, where I actually did a job talk and was almost offered, offered a position there.

And life comes my future scholars life comes. And certain things take priority over the writing. And I didn't get a chance to put my book, my dissertation into a book. And so now I'm doing it. So it's a very aggressive date is my colleagues have told me, but some of its written already in the dissertation is just really, you know, sitting down and focusing in and turn it into something

that, you know, policymakers and academics and you know, also activism, nonprofit organizations that they want to end this old cash bail system.

will be able to hopefully use as a guide or as a tool. So

Will 40:32

maybe even just concerned citizens?

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 40:36

Yes. I hope so. I hope so. So, you know, we're there.

Will 40:48

So you mentioned future scholars.

And so I wonder if I could ask you, what led you to, to your exit from academia, what was the the reason for that?

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 41:06

I couldn't find a home. And, you know,

eventually, I would take my ball and go to another Park. And I just couldn't get along with the structures at Delaware State. I couldn't get along with the deans.

So I went to Lynchburg College and thinking the grass would be greener. And I was the only African American male with a PhD on campus in Lynchburg, Virginia,

Will 41:38

on the whole campus

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 41:39

The whole campus. And, of course, I was up front about who I was and what I was going to bring and..

Early on, it was good, until, of course, you know, you start seeing those structures in those systems that were bias, and I began to challenge it. And the more I challenged, then the more uncomfortable they got with me. And we did both a favor and decided that that wasn't the best place for me to be on both sides.

I was going to have to make a decision. I had a contract with the local school district, I started doing more work with Space Grant. And I was beginning to feel full, you know, like I was really full about being able to, to have some activism and being able to do scholarship

I just, I didn't get support for working with Space Grant when I was at Delaware State, I had to challenge Deans in two different disciplines. I was very confused about what you know,

often opportunity to students where I didn't know that because I had a PhD in one discipline, I couldn't help a student with my access to different resources.

I'm not really about box guy, I don't see why if I got words, or I can make a phone call, I can write a letter of support. If they are part of my family, why wouldn't I stand in front of that, you know, in front of that train for them to protect them.

But things are categorized so much, and people are so conditioned to think in one way that my way of thinking was, you know, it was it was really causing them to pull hair out. And I could tell that the relationships were changing.

And they're will comments being made to me about when I was at Lynchburg that the Dean said he was tired of defending me. And I said, defending is a term that is used by public defenders or private defense attorneys. And I have broken no law.

You don't need to defend me, I can speak for myself. And I said, saying that to the only African American male on campus, I could take that a number of different ways. I don't need you to fight my battles.

For me, what you're doing is that you're protecting people and students that won't come have a conversation with me because they are afraid to and you are listening to parents defending that \$38,000 that you're bringing in, instead of coming and having a conversation with me and finding out why that student is coming to class late, why that student is turning in half of the projects that are assigned.

And I couldn't be a part of a system that was focusing on economics and I value in education. And I'm grateful to my educators from kindergarten all the way through the PhD program that wouldn't allow such for me.

I'm thankful for those messages, they said Brian Starks, this isn't good enough. Chad Starks this isn't good enough. I'm thankful for my faculty member at Wofford that gave me F in calculus, excuse me,

that gave me the grade that I earned in calculus, I'm grateful to the chemistry professor, they gave me the D and say that you have a 49 average the next semester and son,

I don't think you're going to pass it. There's so many life lessons to fail to failure. I didn't see what that was being applied and these institutions.

And I responded to some say, you know, didn't respond the right way. But my value systems, we're not going to be challenged by systemic oppression, I got a degree I left money, to come get

the letters behind my name to be in the room to challenge such ways of thinking. So yeah, that's kind of how it ended.

And I was happy about it, because I'm not sure if I alone would have a the ability to say it's time to step away. Again, there were relationships. And, you know, you can imagine what my relationships with my students.

So I did feel bad that I was leaving them knowing the structure that they were having to navigate, that was going to be unjust to them and no one was going to pour into them the way that I was fortunate to. So.

Brooke 46:23

I'm kind of wondering, because I know, I know that you've touched on this throughout everything that we've talked about, but

what is the most important reason that you can share with us of why we need to enhance diversity in STEM, including what we've talked about as social science as well.

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 46:50

Brooke, are you a sports fan?

Brooke 46:54

No, [laughs]

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 46:56

Okay, well bear with me. Right?

Brooke 47:00

Okay.

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 47:00

I think sports has been able to to create an equitable system, where you put the best players on the field to create the best team to get the most productivity out of individuals and groups.

Why wouldn't we want the same thing in STEM?

Brooke 47:22

Right.

Right.

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 47:24

That's why

Brooke 47:25

absolutely

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 47:26

That's why I want I want to give STEM the best scientists, and we are missing a great deal of the best scientists, by excluding women and people of color. No doubt, no doubt.

best scientists are gonna produce the best research and the best work and his world changing and is life changing. Enough with that traditional way of thinking? We want the best pool. I'm one of those people that is actually trying to talk himself

out of a consulting firm.

I am.

Brooke 48:05

Yeah

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 48:05

I am.

Brooke 48:07

So I know that, you know, what you did in graduate school was really, really impactful, and now it's a program that's continued on to promote diversity. But one of the things that we're really passionate about, especially with this podcast, is we want to change the culture of STEM. So it does include diversity.

And, you know, I think one of the things that we're wondering is how. what, what can we do as graduate students, because you know, we're in this interesting power dynamic, where we really don't feel like we have a lot of power as graduate students, how can we make that change, so we can, you know, enhance this diversity?

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 48:55

Know,

your environment. You,

you are anthropologist, so, you know, you know, that as ethnographers was right, like, our lab is society. And we have a great deal for the space that we occupy in an organic way.

Right? Step back from your environment, and what people and watch human behavior and listen to what they say.

There's someone in your department, there's someone, where a relationship can be built, that you can trust with these, as our literature says these vulnerable conversations and populations that may be willing to advocate on their behalf, for what's right.

It took me a few years, I had to socialize, I had to put myself in harm's way, I had to get uncomfortable to get comfortable. But you gotta build a relationship with someone that is willing to be a messenger to go advocate to the people put it they sit in a room with to help change their mind. I didn't have to have

some of the conversations with the entire faculty, I built relationships with two faculty members, and they became the messengers with their groups.

Brooke 50:15

Okay

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 50:16

Build relationships, figure out who you can trust with these conversations, and allow them to go talk to like minded people that they will have the ears, the hearts and spirits to, to start relaying some of what you believe what they believe, in order to get the decision makers to come have a conversation with you. That is what is the initial step to what I did,

then,

Brooke 50:43

I think that's really good advice. Because oftentimes, the thought of addressing an entire department is very terrifying.

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 50:50

Exactly. And it should be right because there's either there's going to be hush money, or there's going to be even more marginalization.

Again

Brooke 50:59

Right

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 51:01

You're there also to get the degree because we need you in the field contributing to the literature contributing to the field. So we and traditionally, this is what happens, right? You know, that loud person in the room will always be the antagonists.

It doesn't have to be loud, defined in the same way. Use some of those social skills that you have to build relationships, and let those voices represent your voice. Someone that has as much on the line as the other people that they're going to be having the conversations with.

I felt very comfortable with that first faculty member saying, hey, no buddy, this isn't right. No. Did I know that he was going to send an email and invite the chair in. No, I didn't. I can't say that.

But I can say I know that eventually "silence is betrayal". And you know, the universe is going to speak to you. Put it out there and listen.

Yeah

Yeah. So and then you can call me to have in as a consultant when you need me.

Brooke 52:15

I was thinking that too.

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 52:19

I'm doing it right. Like, I'm bringing this where I know that, hopefully, Will, we get another another time to talk, but this a interdisciplinary approach to this thing. Right? We need to be social science and the STEM folks, you know, we're trained in certain expertise that, you know, graciously our STEM folks aren't trained in so why can't we have a team? Why can't we have a team? Yeah.

Will 52:48

Yeah, most of the best stuff gets done when you put more than one smart person on it.

Brooke 52:53

Yeah.

And people who have different perspectives,

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 52:57

Diversity.

Will 52:58

Right.

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 53:00

diverse perspectives, you know, it's important.

Brooke 53:03

Yeah,

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 53:04

It's important.

Will 53:05

So

it occurs to me that we've, we've talked a fair amount about looking up the hierarchy, and trying to convince people to make changes from the top down.

But what about the bottom up, you know, if there's a, an underrepresented, graduate student listening to this, what's something that you would say to that person about how to move forward and be successful and happy?

Dr. Brian Chad Starks 53:40

First thing I will say is, you deserve to be in the room, you deserve to be on the campus, you deserve to have your name listed as a graduate student or doctoral student.

And that comes with having some some confidence and some affirmation. And I would like to applaud you for taking the courage

to put yourself in this position to go after your goals and dreams and to become one of the best scientists. I would also say,

again, understanding the environment and knowing that you're going to have to go and rooms, social scenes, offices,

talks, lectures, where you may be the only one that has a physical representation from your identity as you do.

And that's going to be challenging, there's no other way to put it. It's going to be challenging, but we need you and we need you to show up often. And we need you to build relationships with people that don't look like you, you need to understand the way of thinking in an environment that you want to prosper in.

You can't play hopscotch with it, you can't decide Monday to go Tuesday not to go, you're gonna have to go to a number of these spaces where you feel ostracized. And it's heavy, I would advise you to step outside of your department and find a safe space on campus, be it the black Art Center,

the cultural center for Black Studies, black American Studies was a place where i built relationships with faculty members that I ate dinner with, I hung out with, created some friendships. Don't limit yourself to an educational, academic discipline, think about it from a cultural perspective. And one thing that's important is get into the city.

There's always a home in the city where you go to school,

go to the local restaurant, go shoot basketball at the local gym, because it's so important

to be around people that look like you. Another part of my story, Will, but that, that that first year in a PhD program,

I used to ride the Wilmington, and sit at the bus station.

Just to see black people

Didn't know em and didn't know it, I just used to park my truck, and just watch black people get off and on the bus. And it was, it was like refreshing. And it was like we do exist.

And there was some honor in saying I got you. I am about to go back down here to Newark because I understood about the bus and system and you know, the issues with you know, blacks getting in University of Delaware, I started understanding all that.

So I took pride that that I was the one of the chosen few to be able to have that racial identity, but also had the academic crack standards, in order to be able to be in that space and represent them. I got a great deal of love from people in Wilmington. Whenever I said I was a PhD student at the University of Delaware, I got a number of speaking opportunities when I used to say please come talk to my son, come talk to my daughter, hey, boo, you know, he he a PhD student at the University of Delaware. Church members, I was in ShopRight Picking out some fruit and having conversations and people like you go to UD, like you can see the surprise on their faces. But it means so much to me because I met hugs and affirmation and appreciation that you're basically representing a group that's been marginalized, and it's going to be heavy. Women included, it's going to be heavy. But we need you in as necessary to be that Trailblazer.

Will 57:47

Well, thank you. That was a, you know, a lot of insight that I know, I think is going to be valuable for my perspective going forward. And I hope also for everybody else.

And yeah, so you know, reflecting on that, that Martin Luther King quote that he mentioned was actually from a really interesting speech by Dr. King on the Vietnam War, which is called Beyond Vietnam. You can find that on YouTube, and I'll link it in the show notes.

But another thing that Dr. King said in that speech is that true compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It's sometimes, it comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. And that's a terrible reading of that. But,

the point being that our society will be better off if it doesn't produce beggars and you know, when we're talking about education, you know, and inclusion in fields like STEM. People should not have to beg to be a part of those things.

Brooke 58:59

Yeah. Yeah. Good point.

You can find us on Twitter at [STEMculture](#) one word, or email us at stemculturepodcast@gmail.com.

If you like what we're doing, please rate us on iTunes. To help more people interested in improving STEM culture find us. If you like to support us. You can find our Patreon on our website, plus show notes, articles to [STEMulate](#) and links to our YouTube channel have transcribed shows at www.stemculturepodcast.com

Find Dr. Starks on the web at brianchadstarks.com and his consulting firm at BCSandassociates.com. Until next time, don't forget to consensually hug a grad student or at least buy them a coffee.

Will 59:52

This wraps up the first season of STEMculture Podcast. It's been a journey for us, and we're grateful to all of you who have come along with us for the journey

We are planning our next season over the summer, so look for STEMculture to return in the Fall of 2019.

From all of us at STEMculture, have a great summer!

Will 1:00:02

Yeah, so

Knock knock.

Brooke 1:00:24

Who's there?

Will 1:00:27

Time's up gender and racial under-representation in STEM. It's 2019! GEEZ!

Brooke 1:00:35

Is that and joke

Will 1:00:36

NO! [Brooke laughing]

STEM culture 1:00:38

[Outro music plays]

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