

It's all about being positive for alumnus Clifton Shambry

Ask Clifton Shambry '12 about his experience as a Ramapo student and he always speaks in positive terms. He is proud to have developed wonderful relationships at the College and to have met people who encouraged him to cultivate his professional interests. He is grateful to be the first in his family to earn a degree and is so honored that "Ramapo took a chance on him" as an EOF transfer student. "One of the greatest things Ramapo offers is opportunities to get involved. It only takes one opportunity to help you gain experiences, knowledge and networks to excel, which is why I believe I am where I am today!" says Shambry, who majored in Business Administration with a concentration in Management and was involved in several organizations on campus. The Millville, N.J., native earned his master's in Higher and Postsecondary Education from Teachers College of Columbia University in 2014.

Shambry has channeled all that positive vibe into a successful career at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, where he – not surprisingly – helps students tap into their own positive energy.

What is your role at Johns Hopkins?

I serve as the Assistant Director of Life Design for Diversity and Inclusion where I get to help folks see themselves as an asset in their life journey as they seek to build a well-lived and joyful life.

Tell us about the Life Design Lab.

Life design uses design thinking principles to help people solve a wicked problem – a problem that is not tame and doesn't have one way to solve it or answer to it. That wicked problem is designing your life! At the core of designing your life is 1) Being curious; 2) Talking to people about your curiosities; 3) Trying stuff out (having a bias towards action) and 4) Showing your work.

Has your work helped change the culture at JHU? If so, can you give a few examples?

This is a hard question. I would like to say 'yes' yet it is hard to know sometimes as change is constant. In some ways I see the work I have done, although it was not me alone:

Structuring processes for student organizations: Instead of just doing great work alone, we were able to bring folks together – faculty, staff and students, to work together in ensuring things were streamlined. This provided a collaborative approach to managing student organizations rather than taking the ownership. Knowing that others were involved and should continue to be involved due to the excellence that they all brought to the experience.

I was also able to bring new perspectives that help others see how they can be more supportive or inclusive in their work. For example, support of nonbinary individuals by suggesting usage of pronouns when introducing oneself and/or renaming oneself in virtual meetings to include one's pronouns. Another example is challenging language when folks say that some roles have more value – helping folks realize that there might be more positional power in one role over another yet not more value and how changing value of a role helps folks to feel the value and produce valuable work.

Being my authentic self has helped me connect with others and help them connect with others so they can thrive. This was not always the case as I had to continue to learn what it meant to be my authentic self and feared negative treatment being my true self. In turn, having a manager who showed me what this meant was wonderful as I continue to do so, more and more folks share their stories with me and are becoming their best self.

Your email tag states *Believe, Be Kind & Be True to Yourself*. Please discuss why you chose those words.

I was in a reflective moment in April 2020 working through the challenge of the pandemic and needed some encouragement. I found it somewhere by reflecting on my own journey and why I am doing the work – for my mother in her absence, may she rest in peace and power. I then wanted to share my story with others and did so on social media, as part of life design is showing your work. I added it to my email signature for a consistent reminder.

If you could tell Ramapo students anything, what would you say?

Be yourself now and for your future self! It will help you get what you want and need in life.