

## Redbird Table Talk: Civic Engagement Panelists



**(Chair of Alumni Board RED Committee) Leah Walton** is currently a substitute teacher for the Westchester School District. Prior to this, she worked as a federal probation officer for the Northern District of Illinois. As a student, Leah worked in Vrooman Cafeteria, volunteered with the Office of Disability Concerns, and was a member of the American Marketing Association. When she is not assisting in the educating of young minds, Leah is stating her passion as a proud Redbird. She has volunteered for over 20 years with the Alumni Association at various events and programs, with the majority in the Chicagoland area where she serves as chair of the Chicago Suburban Alumni Network. She is also a Redbird football season ticketholder and hopes to attend as many games as possible. Her son, Aidan '19, is currently working toward his graduate degree in agriculture business at Illinois State.



**(Moderator) Matthew Rillie** completed their bachelor's in Sociology and Women's and Gender Studies at Illinois State University in 2015 and master's in Nonprofit Management at the University of Wisconsin in 2017. After working in the nonprofit sector for 3 years, they moved into Chicago higher education. Matthew has worked at Columbia College Chicago since 2017 working in diversity, equity, and inclusion work. They currently hold the title of Coordinator of Student Support and Engagement in the Student Diversity and Inclusion division, where they spend their days engaging Columbia students in the exploration of their identities; and in understanding the ways in which identity is uniquely actualized, expressed, and lived. Matthew is also active in many grassroots organizing efforts in Chicago, most recently, the launch of 48th Ward Neighbors for Justice in the far north side.



**(Panelist) Olivia Butts** is a native of Oshkosh, Wisconsin. She obtained her bachelor's degree in Spanish and International Studies from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh and her master's degree in Recreation Administration from Illinois State University. She's been a resident of the Bloomington-Normal area for eight years, with a brief hiatus to teach one academic year at Srinakharinwirot University in Bangkok, Thailand. She currently teaches in the School of Kinesiology and Recreation (KNR), serves on the Political Engagement Coalition, and is the chair of the Diversity and Inclusion committee in KNR. She also has volunteered as a faculty mentor on six justice-based alternative breaks trips. In the community, she serves on the Leadership Team of Black Lives Matter Bloomington-Normal.



**(Panelist) Lisa DeWeert** graduated from Illinois State in 2020 with a master's degree in Communication. Prior to that, Lisa received her bachelor's degree in 2018 from Illinois State in Interpersonal Communication (minor in Spanish) as well. She is passionate about her research (focusing on identity, stigma, and communication of physical disability and relationships) and has recently presented at regional and national conferences. She currently is an instructor at Illinois State and a Career Advisor at Illinois Wesleyan. In both of her roles in higher education, Lisa is focused on helping college-aged students navigate their professional growth and journey.



**(Panelist) Isaac Hollis**, pronouns are he/him/his, is a recent May 2020 graduate from Illinois State University. During his time at Illinois State Isaac was very active on campus. He served as the 2018 ISU Homecoming King. From 2018 until graduation, Isaac was a part of the Preview Staff and worked in the Office of Admissions. He has been a part of the Student Government Association, University Program Board, and the Black Student Union. Isaac is one of the co-founders of the Black Homecoming Committee, which branched into him starting the Anti-Black movement in 2019 with other student leaders. With Isaac's involvement in the anti-Black movement it inspired him to pursue a career in Higher Education. Isaac currently reside in Baltimore, Maryland where he is pursuing a master's degree in Higher Education Administration at Morgan State University.



**(Panelist) Nikita Richards** takes great pride in serving both her community and the state of Illinois. For most of her life she's served as a social equity advocate, labored in the works of human services and led grassroots efforts to improve the conditions of marginalized communities. It is said that she has served with almost every nonprofit organization in McLean County. Ms. Richards was elected as the first Black person and woman to be elected Chair of the Democratic Party of Mclean County; making her only one of six Black female Chairs in the state of Illinois. Ms. Richards was elected to the Illinois State University Alumni Board of Directors, received the 2019 YWCA Woman of Distinction Award, and in 2018 earning the Outstanding Woman in Communication Award by the Association of Women in Communication while making history as the first African American woman to earn the highest award bestowed by the organization.



**(Panelist) Simon Rodriguez Jr.**, a son of Mexican immigrant parents, born and raised in Aurora, IL. Simon is a 2005 graduate of East Aurora High School, 2013 honors graduate of Illinois State University, a Fulbright scholarship recipient, has lived in Mexico and England, and for 4 years, taught bilingual social studies at East Aurora HS. Simon is the current youth services manager for the City of Aurora, where he coordinates and works with various community partners to bring various programs to all the youth of Aurora and surrounding communities. Simon took the first group of IL high school students on a cultural exchange to Cuba in 2017. Simon is also active in his community: a proud member of the League of United Latin American Council (LULAC), ISU Latinx Alumni Network, Family Counseling Services board member, and a precinct committeeman for his ward. Simon believes the more we invest in our youth, the better the future of our city will be.