Adair named associate vice president for affirmative action

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. — Suzanne C. Adair, associate dean of the Graduate School at Penn State, has been named associate vice president for affirmative action, effective Nov. 1, after a national search.

Adair succeeds Ken Lehrman, who retired as vice provost for affirmative action on July 7 after a 15-year career in the Affirmative Action Office. Carmen Borges is currently serving as interim vice provost. With Adair’s appointment, the position will be re-titled associate vice president for affirmative action.

As associate dean of the Graduate School, Adair is responsible for managing graduate student issues and concerns and overseeing all programming for graduate students, including enrichment and professional development activities. Previously, she oversaw the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and the Office of Graduate Educational Equity Programs, which works to increase the diversity of the graduate student community across the University through various recruitment and retention initiatives. The office also administers, coordinates and evaluates programs that enhance the professional development of underrepresented graduate students.

Before joining the Graduate School in 2008, Adair worked in the Affirmative Action Office for seven years as a professional development coordinator and diversity training specialist. In these roles, she developed and conducted professional development sessions on such topics as understanding disability issues, improving workplace climate, addressing sexual orientation in the workplace, and preventing sexual harassment, among others. She also assisted with the development and implementation of faculty search committee briefings to promote the recruitment and retention of a more diverse faculty, and assisted with investigations into allegations of discrimination and harassment.

“Suzanne is an extraordinary asset to Penn State who truly lives the core values of our University,” said Nick Jones, executive vice president and provost. “We are fortunate to have an individual of Suzanne’s stature as our new associate vice president for
affirmative action. It is a vital position in which she clearly will excel, and the Affirmative Action Office will be glad to have her back in a leadership role.”

As associate vice president, Adair will lead the strategic planning and implementation of anti-discrimination compliance programs, practices and policies impacting faculty and staff University-wide. She will oversee Penn State’s adherence to local, state and federal laws and University policies related to equal employment opportunity, affirmative action and nondiscrimination, and serve as an adviser and resource to the University community in these areas. She also will serve as a critical strategic partner in Penn State’s efforts to recruit and retain a diverse workforce. In addition, Adair and her office will investigate discrimination and harassment-related complaints at the University.

“I’m honored to be chosen as the associate vice president for affirmative action,” Adair said. “One of the core foundations of Penn State’s current strategic plan is to prioritize the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce, and the Affirmative Action Office plays a vital role in those efforts. I am very excited about the opportunity to collaborate with various units across the University to explore new and innovative approaches to our work, while continuing to reinforce Penn State’s mission to support diverse individuals and communities through teaching, research and service.”

Adair has more than 30 years of experience in the fields of mental health, education and social work. Before coming to Penn State, she was the assistant director for a school social work program in the School District of Philadelphia and has worked as a family therapist, bereavement counselor and manager of residential sites for mentally ill adults. Along with her work at Penn State, Adair has served as a consultant for both local and national organizations, conducting professional development sessions on issues of minority recruitment and retention, promoting diversity and inclusion, team building, climate improvement and effective communication skills.

In 2016, Adair received a Way Pavers Award from the Council of College Multicultural Leaders in honor of her commitment to diversity and the creation of an inclusive community at Penn State. In 2011 and 2015, she was awarded the Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education Central Region Service Award for her efforts to address the educational needs of African-Americans and other minority students in Pennsylvania.

She earned a bachelor of arts degree in psychology from Antioch College, a master’s degree in social work from the University of Pennsylvania and a doctorate in educational theory and policy from Penn State.