

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Degrees of Change Names Michelle Y. Bess as Chair of the Board, Welcomes Nine New Directors

Tacoma, Wash., June 14, 2019 – Degrees of Change, a national college success and leadership development organization based in Tacoma, Wash., announced that its board of directors has appointed Michelle Y. Bess as chair of the board and elected nine new directors.

Bess is diversity, equity, and inclusion director at Sprout Social, a Chicago-based software company, and has served on the Degrees of Change board of directors for five years. She was the organization's first program alum elected to the board and now the first to serve as chair. She earned a B.A. in Biology from Whitworth University in 2009 as a member of the third cadre of Act Six, the flagship program of Degrees of Change. Bess assumes the chair position from Bradd Busick, chief information officer at MacDonald-Miller, who is stepping down after seven years on the board.

“It has been an honor to serve Degrees of Change and to partner with our amazing staff and board to provide more opportunities for students, colleges and their respective communities. I cannot think of a worthier investment of time and resources than this vital mission. As the team continues to expand this body of work across the country, the board is in well-equipped hands via the leadership of Michelle Y. Bess. Michelle is warm, thoughtful, dependable and firm in her beliefs that every life matters and that the world needs everybody. Given how her own life was impacted by Act Six, Michelle is incredibly well positioned to articulate the importance of this work,” says Busick.

In her role at Sprout Social, Bess focuses on efforts to ensure all people feel a sense of belonging and that their voices are heard. She recently completed Georgetown University's executive certificate in strategic diversity and inclusion management. Prior to Sprout Social, Bess worked in college success at OneGoal and The Posse Foundation. She was recognized as a 2018 AdWeek rising brand star, a 2016 Surge fellow, and is the founder and co-lead of The Brave Space.

“Act Six was life changing for me. I never considered myself a leader before this scholarship. To say Act Six changed my life can hardly capture how I feel. Both my sister and I are Act Six alumna, so Degrees of Change's programming changed the trajectory of our family and the communities to which we belong. The opportunity to step into the role of board chair, following in the footsteps of leaders like Bradd Busick and [founding board chair] Larry Hughes, to help lead the strategy of an organization that can have such far-reaching impact is one of my greatest honors. I can't wait to bring our transforming equity work to more communities across the country.” says Bess.

“Michelle is an exceptional leader and distinguished professional who has lived the mission of Degrees of Change firsthand and exemplifies everything that Degrees of Change strives to develop in the leaders we support. I am thrilled to work alongside her as she leads the board into a new stage of organizational impact,” says Tim Herron, founder and CEO of Degrees of Change.

In a move that significantly expands the size and professional breadth of the board, the organization also announced the appointment of nine new board directors. The newly elected directors join Bess and four continuing directors, including Arturo Lucatero, senior program manager at Microsoft and fellow Act Six alum, who will support Bess in his role as Vice Chair. The full board consists of the following officers and directors, with new directors indicated with an asterisk:

- **Michelle Y. Bess** (Chair)
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director, *Sprout Social* (Act Six Alum '09)

- **Arturo Lucatero** (Vice Chair)
Senior Program Manager, *Microsoft* (Act Six Alum '15)
- **Courtney Lucas, J.D.** (Secretary) *
Associate General Counsel, *UnitedHealth Group*
- **Eli Taylor** (Treasurer)
Vice President, Relationship Manager, *Key Bank*
- **Melinda Anderson, M.Ed.** *
Community Engagement Manager, *Microsoft*
- **Brad Brown, M.Ed.** *
Executive Director, *Puget Sound Educational Service District*
- **Lily Colón, J.D.** *
Chief of Employee and Labor Relations, *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*
- **Michael Cruz** *
Vice President, Manager, *Banner Bank*
- **Yusra Hamidani, M.S.** *
Emerging Technology Analyst, *Boeing* (Act Six Alum '16)
- **Larry Hughes, Ed.D.** *
Vice President, Operations, *7-Eleven*
- **Erin Jones**
Consultant, *Erin Jones, LLC*
- **Jeff Nichols, M.B.A.** *
Consulting Partner, *Armanino*
- **Joel Pérez, Ph.D.**
Higher Education Administrator
- **Danjuma Quarless, Ph.D.** *
Senior Scientist, Computational Genomics, *AbbVie* (Act Six Alum '10)
- **Tim Herron, Ed.D.** (Chief Executive Officer)
Founder, Degrees of Change and Act Six

“We are deeply grateful for the depth of experience that each of these diverse, accomplished and connected professionals will bring to the board to advance Degrees of Change’s mission. In particular, the leadership that program alumni like Michelle, Arturo, Yusra and Danjuma are demonstrating as they both excel in their professional careers and provide leadership to the organization is a particularly powerful expression of our mission and values in action,” adds Herron.

About Degrees of Change

Our Mission

Degrees of Change prepares diverse, homegrown leaders to succeed in college and use their degrees to build more vibrant and equitable communities.

Our Means

We partner with community organizations, high schools, colleges and employers to provide cohort-based leadership training, college success support, career development and alumni programming to underrepresented students who desire to lead and serve their home communities. As both a national backbone organization and local, direct service provider in Tacoma-Seattle, we provide and utilize research-based programming, cutting-edge evaluation and data tools, and innovative operational systems and technical assistance to support all aspects of our integrated programs, including Act Six, Ready to Rise, Seed Internships and Tacoma Completes.

Our Motivation

We love our communities and want to see them thrive in all their diversity. As a faith-based organization, our work is motivated by Christian convictions that include a deep commitment to working across differences for equity and justice. We believe that diverse, college-educated, homegrown leaders are in the best position to transform the inequitable systems that persist in our communities. We engage broad coalitions of organizations in the faith community and the public and private sectors to create meaningful impact.

Our Values

1. **Educational Equity:** We work to identify and eliminate systemic barriers in higher education and career development that perpetuate social and economic disparities. In doing so, we remain attentive to our own individual and institutional contributions to these systems.
2. **Local Voices:** We believe communities can be positively transformed to the extent that they are loved and embraced by those that call them home. We look to local people and organizations as the most effective leaders of local change.
3. **Diverse Perspectives:** We recognize that our staff, board and students must reflect the communities we serve. We know that we will maximize our impact only when decisions are shaped by diverse voices across the organization.
4. **Service Leadership:** We seek to nurture in our students and ourselves leadership that is committed first to serving others. We look for the beauty amid brokenness that compels us to lean into, rather than away from, the most challenging places and problems.
5. **Courageous Culture:** We aspire to create among our team, our partners and our students a courageous space where people from different backgrounds and worldviews can bring their whole selves, speak honestly, take risks, make mistakes, extend and receive grace, develop trust, hold each other accountable, and commit together to a common mission.

6. **Committed Collaboration:** We bring people and organizations together to create partnerships that emerge from shared values and aligned mission. We believe we can only create systemic change together, and we seek to maintain relationships even when we disagree on important issues.
7. **Continuous Learning:** We rigorously assess and continuously reflect on our work, always looking for opportunities to measure, improve and innovate. We take informed risks and learn from our successes and setbacks.
8. **Operational Excellence:** We know our students and partners deserve our very best work. We strive to pursue ambitious goals, attract and retain extraordinary people, build effective systems, make data-informed decisions, deliver exceptional service and hold ourselves to the highest standards.

Learn more about Degrees of Change online at www.degreesofchange.org.

Contacts:

Michelle Y. Bess, Board Chair, Degrees of Change
(253) 444-0010 or michelle.y.bess@gmail.com

Tim Herron, CEO, Degrees of Change
(253) 444-0011 or tim.herron@degreesofchange.org