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### Beyond the spotlight (Embracing our shared narrative)

Nicole Porchia

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*Lead photo: Dr. Nicole Porchia (right), associate vice president for student success & retention at Ouachita, assists a student in the Academic Success Center.*

For immediate release

**Beyond the spotlight (Embracing our shared narrative)**

*By Dr. Nicole Porchia*

March 07, 2024

For more information, contact Ouachita's Office of Communications & Marketing at [comm-mark@obu.edu](mailto:comm-mark@obu.edu) or (870) 245-5206.

*As we celebrate Women's History Month this March, we're recognizing notable women at Ouachita Baptist University. Dr. Nicole Porchia '09 is the first African American woman to be an associate vice president in Ouachita's history. Dr. Porchia shares some of her story on Ouachita's blog.*

March is often associated with celebrating and empowering women and recognizing the contributions of historical figures and trailblazers. This year, I was fortunate to be recognized during Women's History Month, and the experience sparked a deeper reflection on the impact of "ordinary" women like myself.

Honestly, a part of me felt hesitant. While I'm proud of my work and journey as a wife, mom and higher education practitioner, the spotlight felt intimidating. It's easy to admire the iconic figures whose stories fill history books, but to have your own story spotlighted feels different. But then, I remembered the true purpose of this month. It's not just about the extraordinary women who have changed the world but also the countless ordinary women, like myself, who are building their own paths and making their own contributions.

In fact, I am working and writing this story from home today because I have a sick little one. I have often questioned my leadership during such times, asking questions like these: Since the mother is likely to stay home with a sick child, can women still lead adequately? What will my supervisor say when I have to attend a meeting virtually? Can women still be great leaders and attend our children's various school events? Is it possible to pursue an advanced degree while working full time and juggling all our other responsibilities? The answer is yes. Yes, ladies, we can!

Our leadership may sometimes look different; it won't require fewer hours of us, but it can reflect our wisdom, creativity and flexibility in using the hours we have to offer. While setting boundaries and establishing a work-life balance is imperative in higher education leadership roles, being a team player and partnering with other departments to best serve our students is equally important. As a woman, I've had some of my most meaningful, empowering conversations over an informal lunch with women who have been or are currently going through the same season of life.

Women's History Month is about individual narratives *and* our collective story of resilience, strength and innovation. It's a reminder that the journey toward equality is a marathon, not a sprint; that each of us has a role in shaping a future where women can thrive in every sphere of life. Leadership does not solely rest within a particular position or title. Many women on our campus exhibit tremendous leadership qualities through their influence and deserve to be celebrated.

From one of my favorites, Mrs. May, who arrives more than an hour before many of us each morning to ensure that the building is cleaned, sanitized and prepared for a proper learning environment for faculty, staff and students. Nothing is more empowering than seeing Mrs. May take so much passion and pride in her work. As I enter the building to start my workday, our small talk each morning inspires me more than she will ever know.

To one of our longstanding Ouachita women, Mrs. Jeanette, who desires to serve our faculty, staff and students by providing a delicious entree. I remember when I was a student her greeting us daily with a smile. Not to mention our rock star directors, assistant directors, faculty, specialists, coordinators and administrative staff, many of whom daily orchestrate the intricate schedules that maintain our programs, organizations and schools.

I soon realized that sharing my story isn't about self-promotion; it's about adding my voice to a chorus, contributing to a narrative that's bigger than myself. It's about showing students and other women, especially those who might feel unseen or unheard, that their stories matter, too. Although I was initially hesitant, this experience turned out to be incredibly empowering. It allowed me to reflect on other inspiring women, each with their own unique narratives, adding to the tapestry of shared experiences. It reminded me that even seemingly "ordinary" journeys hold immense value and deserve to be celebrated.

Women's History Month may be a designated period, but its message resonates throughout the year. We don't need a spotlight to shine our light. We can choose to uplift and empower each other every day, celebrate our individual and collective achievements and keep pushing the boundaries of what's possible.

So, this March, let's not only remember the women who have come before us but also celebrate the women around us and within ourselves. Let's keep telling our stories — big and small — because together, they weave a powerful narrative of strength, resilience and the unwavering spirit of women.

*Dr. Nicole Porchia is associate vice president for student success & retention at Ouachita.*