Announcer: "The Missouri State Journal," a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: The topic of racism will take center stage at Missouri State University's Collaborative Diversity Conference this year. Themed "Facing Racism in 2018 and Beyond: A Changing Dynamic," the conference will take place from April 25th to 27th in the Plaster Student Union. I'm Emily Yeap.

 Wes Pratt, chief diversity officer and assistant to the president at MSU, is with me today to offer more information about the event.

Wes Pratt: The conference was established about six years ago to identify and promote best practices or to inform folks about the resources that might be available that promote the value of the inclusion of diversity. We've tried to make it, over the last couple of years, a more practical, hands-on experience where folks who are promoting diversity and inclusion, whether they're on college campuses or in the public sector or in business corporate, can come to the conference and find some best practices, some efforts. We try to provide some solutions to some of the challenges we face in our current society and in our current community.

Emily Yeap: Pratt explains that the theme was chosen to explore why America seems to be getting more divisive and how to address the issue.

Wes Pratt: We recognized that over the past couple of years at least, there's been more of an emphasis on what divides us as a nation as opposed to what we all have in common. We just felt that in light of these challenges, in light of the apprehension and the angst that's been generated amongst some of these issues, that we would identify what some of those issues are and try to find solutions to addressing them; that in spite of a perceived national climate of divisiveness and hostility, that we would try to have a conference that focused on those areas but from a perspective of trying to find solutions to issues or ways to address it in a manner that is inclusive as opposed to dividing us.

Emily Yeap: From 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on April 25th is the pre-conference. The Facing Racism Institute will help participants build a shared understanding of racism together, as well as develop tools to create an inclusive workplace and community. April 26th and 27th include plenaries and panel discussions. Dr. Damon A. Williams will deliver the opening plenary address on inclusive excellence at 9:15 a.m. on April 26th. He's the chief catalyst in the Center for Strategic Diversity Leadership and Social Innovation.

Wes Pratt: Dr. Williams is a recognized professional in the field of diversity and inclusion. He's written two books on inclusive excellence. When we talk about cultural consciousness, it's being able to negotiate those cross-cultural differences, but our diversity is so broad that it goes beyond race and nationality. Dr. Williams did much of the research on the value of inclusive excellence. That is something that is basically a core value we've adopted here at the university. Not only will he be a plenary speaker and we'll have a conversation with him regarding his research and regarding his field of interest, but he'll also meet with our business and corporate community, he'll meet with our faculty and our administrative leadership, as well as some of our colleges and talk about the value of inclusive excellence not only in higher education, but also in the public sector.

Emily Yeap: The panel discussions will cover several contemporary issues, such as the NAACP Missouri travel advisory and religion and worldview.

Wes Pratt: We'll have the state president of the NAACP, Rod Chapel, who will be here. He'll be on a panel with members of the Chamber of Commerce, the Branson Chamber of Commerce, and we'll be talking about how we identify those issues that are contained in that travel advisory and what we can do to address them and perhaps become a model for the rest of the state in addressing the issues that were the underpinnings of the travel advisory. We're looking at an interfaith session, as well. Interfaith cooperation's gonna be critically important, but we have to recognize everybody has value regardless of their religious background or regardless of the fact that they may not be religious at all. They may be agnostic, but we all have something to give in the pursuit of value and the inclusion of diversity. It's a multifaceted approach. We wanna identify the issues of diversity and inclusion, but also hopefully provide a framework or a working approach to, "How do we engage these issues and provide solutions to some of the challenges we face?"

Emily Yeap: The registration fee is $250 and the pre-conference costs $100. For more information or to register visit diversity.missouristate.edu/conference. I'm Emily Yeap for "The Missouri State Journal."

Announcer: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397. "The Missouri State Journal" is available online at KSMU.org.