

November 20, 2015

Dear Campus Community,

Sometimes events conspire to remind us that we are part of a larger world. In the last couple of weeks, we have seen incidents in our country and across our globe that demand our attention and call for reflection.

I'm writing to you today because I have been reflecting on the protests by students at the University of Missouri calling for accountability on the part of the campus for acts of racism directed toward Black students. Students throughout the country have joined their colleagues at Mizzou and called on their leadership to confront racism and address the safety and needs of students of color on their campuses. I've been thinking about the meaning for our campus of these protests and calls to action from students across the country.

We are a community that is committed to embracing diversity and advancing equity. Diversity and equity are cornerstones of both our current and forthcoming strategic plans. I want to acknowledge recent work to build cultural awareness and develop a culture of respect:

- Participation in Cultural Competency Training in October was excellent, and a team of faculty and staff are working to refine that training so it meets the specific needs and goals of our campus on an ongoing basis.
- The Student Diversity Center, which has an outreach coordinator who is dedicated to working with Black/African American students, has fostered dialogue among students.
- Our ASWSUV student leaders have been tireless in addressing issues of equity among our students.
- A number of our faculty, staff and students, including members of the Diversity Council, are providing leadership to explicitly address matters of race on our campus.
- Our African American students have just started a new club, Black People United.

- And last year we created a new position, advisor to the chancellor for equity, diversity and community engagement.

Our campus has had a number of important conversations around race, and I have been fortunate to have participated in some of them. It is clear from these conversations that we have much further to go to be the WSU Vancouver community we aspire to be. I have heard students speak of being disrespected or marginalized by others on our campus. Thirteen percent of our faculty say they have experienced directly an act of discrimination, and more than a quarter say they have witnessed a discriminatory act against someone else. Our students of color have significantly lower retention rates on our campus. That's not acceptable.

I have timed this message to our community for today because we have reached our Thanksgiving break. It's a time for reflection. I hope you will join me in thinking about how we might redouble our efforts to create a climate that values every member of our community. As an institution of higher learning, WSU Vancouver should be committed to the principle that racism has no place on our campus, but we welcome open, often difficult, conversations about race, which we engage in because we want to bring about a more equitable campus for all our students, faculty and staff.

Thank you for your commitment to this work and your vigilance in advancing equity for every member of our community. It sets the stage for the success of our current students, faculty and staff, and it demonstrates to those who will join our community that they are welcome here and can be successful at WSU Vancouver.

Sincerely,

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