

---

**Subject:** For the divisions of Academic and Student Affairs

**Date:** Monday, June 1, 2020 at 4:34:49 PM Eastern Daylight Time

**From:** Provost at WCU

To: Divisions of Academic and Student Affairs

From: Laurie Bernotsky, Executive Vice President and Provost; Zeb Davenport, Vice President for Student Affairs; Jeff Osgood, Deputy Provost

As the senior leaders of the Divisions of Academic and Student Affairs, we write with the simple but important purpose of expressing our deep and profound anger and grief surrounding the wrongful deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Freddie Gray, and countless others. And in the midst of the protests occurring in the wake of this tragic death, we must look to the cause of this civil unrest to fully understand it and the actions of our families, friends, colleagues, and neighbors who have joined these movements. These protests are the result of something that is insidiously true about American society: that your fortunes, treatment by the justice system, and the consequences of a police encounter are impacted by your race.

As President Obama said in his statement: "We have to remember that for millions of Americans, being treated differently on account of race is tragically, painfully, maddeningly 'normal.'" Today we must look inward and ask uncomfortable questions like: What more can we be doing as an institution of higher education to ensure that we are changing what is normal and expected in our society? How are our curricular and co-curricular activities providing students with an ability to think critically about their own beliefs surrounding issues of race and ethnicity? And, perhaps more importantly, are we giving our students the tools necessary to be agents of change in their communities by preparing them to fight against the bigotry they will inevitably encounter?

So many of us place this work at the core of what we do as an institution of higher education. But, clearly, it is not enough. We must do more. We must ensure that every member of our university understands that this is not someone else's fight, it is not some other group's fight, it is not a fight that impacts everyone else but themselves. Instead, it is our mission, it is our fight, and it is our responsibility to seek to eradicate the racism, bigotry, and intolerance that impacts us all. We are reminded of Dr. King's insightful words, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

We have many important achievements and outcomes to point to as an institution of higher education, but they are simply not enough. We know that, you know that, and our brothers and sisters of color know that. Today, we will not pretend that we have the answers. Today, we will not announce yet another initiative. Today, instead, we write to share our anger, grief, and sadness about the state of our society.

Tomorrow, we will seek your partnership in making meaningful changes in the way our divisions educate and train students and the broader community on how to fight the intolerable injustices associated with racism and bigotry. We look forward to tomorrow, when we recommit ourselves to the work of changing a society where a life like George Floyd's, and all those who look like him, would be lost on the streets of Minneapolis.