

To: Divisions of Student and Academic Affairs

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

As the senior leaders of the Divisions of Student and Academic 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.

To: West Chester University Community
From: Chris Fiorentino, President; Laurie Bernotsky, Executive Vice President and Provost, Zeb Davenport, Vice President for Student Affairs, and Jeff Osgood, Deputy Provost Re: Our response to recent events (part 2)

On Monday (see attached e-mail) we sent the attached message expressing our anger, grief, and sadness surrounding the wrongful deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Freddie Gray, and countless others. While we have always experienced these feelings when hearing of the loss of yet another Black life, our emotions surrounding the tragic loss of George Floyd have only intensified in the hours and days since his life was senselessly lost in Minneapolis.

As we have watched the protests occurring not only across America, but around the world, we cannot help but feel that we are at an inflection point in our society where there is a collective call to action. We know that it is no longer enough to simply participate in these protests, although participation in such civil actions are an important part of a well-functioning democracy. It is not enough for us to write about our emotions, but we must put those words into action. To that end, we are announcing the following as an important and critical review of how we educate our students and the broader community around creating a just and equitable society, engaging inclusively with diversity, and responding thoughtfully to diversity.

The President, Executive Vice President and Provost, Vice President for Student Affairs, and Deputy Provost have joined with the leadership of the Curriculum and Academic Policies Council (Dr. Francis Atuahene, Chair and Dr. Josh Auld, Vice Chair) to announce the establishment of a taskforce with the explicit charge of reviewing and recommending revisions to the University's "Diverse Communities Requirement," which is a critical part of our general education program. These are courses that "focus on historically marginalized groups and are framed by theories that lend understanding to the analysis of structural inequalities. They also invite students to consider how marginalized groups resist oppression and have agency in spite of structural exclusion and discrimination."

This taskforce will be guided not only by recent events, but by the questions we posed in our letter on Monday, including: 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?

This group will be comprised of faculty, staff, and students and will be identified from an open call that will be distributed to the entire campus community. It is our goal to have broad representation on this taskforce and it must be reflective of not only our faculty, staff, and students but it must also reflect the larger diversity present in our society. Details will soon follow. Ultimately, the goal of this group will be to make recommendations to the Curriculum and Academic Policies Council that will reinvigorate and make relevant an important part of our undergraduate curriculum that informs every single undergraduate student's educational experience at West Chester University.