

May 20, 2015

Dear President Marty,

We write with a sense of urgency and in a spirit of constructive commitment to supporting your incoming leadership in regard to issues of inclusion and diversity at Drake University. As you are aware, Drake has made an institutional commitment through its mission to preparing students for responsible global citizenship. For instance, through our general education curriculum, degree programs, and J-term travel seminars, we have committed ourselves to cultivating global and multicultural understanding. Likewise, Drake's adoption of test-flexible admissions policies promises to diversify our student applicant pool.

We believe, however, that true understanding is only partially a matter of curricular outcomes and admissions policy. As important as these are, only an institutional commitment to a campus-wide culture of inclusion will allow members of the Drake community to contend directly with issues of racial, ethnic, and cultural difference in our daily lives as students, teachers, advisors, mentors, and administrative personnel.

At this time, a number of institutional and structural realities at Drake are preventing the university from delivering on both its curricular and cultural commitments.

The ways in which Drake is currently falling short on these matters are not new. The limited racial/ethnic diversity and inclusion at Drake, as at many other schools whose applicant pools and faculty recruitment practices are similar to ours, have long and complex histories. Indeed, the HLC's advancement report in response to our most recently completed comprehensive accreditation efforts cites the University's shortcomings in recruiting and retaining a diverse student body as a central area for improvement. Among the more visible (but certainly not the only) indications that we have not sufficiently addressed these concerns are the faculty, administration, and student body demographics, as well as curricular priorities and commitments at Drake.

The 2014 profile of the faculty indicates that, university-wide, Drake's faculty is comprised of only 17 Asian/Asian American faculty, 10 Hispanic/Latino faculty, and 7 Black faculty, out of a total of 279 full-time faculty. These figures include international faculty; the number of non-white U.S.-born faculty is even lower. Moreover, undergraduates at Drake encounter an even more racially homogenous faculty. A faculty composition so unreflective of the demographics of the United States, not to mention global realities, militates against the case that the University is equipping students for engaged citizenship and global and multicultural understanding.

But this problem is not one of mere representation. Demographics both reflect deeper issues relative to campus climate and contribute to a campus climate hostile to those students and faculty of color we do succeed in recruiting. We know, for example, that the opportunity for students to see themselves reflected in their faculty is key to attracting and retaining a diverse student body. More importantly, perhaps, it is directly related to Drake's ability to sustain an inclusive climate free of racist sensibilities (a minimum requirement for a healthy campus culture). Our hopes, however, go beyond that minimum: We hope for—and we believe we are capable of creating—a culture that celebrates cultural and racial difference and, at the same time, acknowledges and contends with the complexities of history, both personal and national, that those kinds of difference entail.

In short, there are multiple layers to this problem. We need you as our incoming president to demonstrate visible and vocal leadership as we work to transform campus climate and institutional culture in support of realizing the Drake mission. The language of our mission and vision, as well as requirements for ongoing institutional accreditation, call for ongoing institutional commitments to inclusive diversity that can only be realized if our most highly positioned leaders embrace them.

This letter, then, comes with several requests for you during your first year as Drake's incoming president:

First, and most urgent in terms of immediate institutional impact: We believe it is imperative that a commitment to realizing an inclusive institutional climate be prioritized as we populate several key administrative positions at Drake. Job descriptions for incoming members of Drake's executive leadership, including the Provost, Vice Presidents, and Deans, should prioritize creating and sustaining an inclusive campus culture as essential job functions. Search committees need to include members of the Drake community who have already shown leadership and understanding of the urgency of these issues. Moreover, during the hiring process, demonstrated success in realizing measurable institutional outcomes related to diversity and inclusion need to be articulated as a key qualification. Once hired, these administrators should be evaluated based on meeting benchmarks towards those outcomes.

Second, we need to give critical attention to the issue of retaining faculty of color who are already here at Drake. Drake has repeatedly failed to retain faculty of color in recent decades. It is urgent that we commit to faculty who are critical intellectual members of this community and who are most imperiled by the far-too-slow pace at which we have made concrete strides to create a climate of inclusion. We believe a strong case can be made for considering racial diversity a qualification, and not just a neutral fact, that merits financial incentives in recruitment and retention decisions. In addition, research clearly demonstrates that emphasizing diversity in hiring efforts is insufficient without support for hired faculty through campus climate change, mentorship, research support, and consideration of P&T criteria. Drake currently makes no institutional efforts towards retention of tenure-track faculty of color. Many research-based best practices have been identified. A number of these have already been articulated in a report made to the Strategic Diversity Action Team by members of the Drake community who participated in the 2014 National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education—a report that takes into consideration successful practices at institutions of similar size and scale as Drake. We request you

investigate these practices and make significant progress towards implementation by the end of your first year at Drake.

Third, listen to what our students are saying: Both students of color and white students are deeply troubled by our current campus climate, which they understand as a hostile environment for students of color at Drake. For instance, students in one recent class were asked to play the role of an admissions counselor; the three profiles of fictional Black applicants presented in the assignment portrayed Black people as “ignorant, drug users, [and] sexually promiscuous,” in the words of one student. Further, students see the racial biases among current faculty as a failure of Drake’s mission to provide an exceptional learning environment. As one current student described his repeated encounters with racism in the classroom, “I shouldn’t have to be the one constantly educating my professors. I’m supposed to be the one here to get an education.” In response to Drake’s hostile climate, students have been clear in calling for the hiring and retention of more faculty of color, greater institutional support for students of color at Drake, and curricular changes that ensure that all students learn about the complexities of race in the United States.

We believe that racial diversity and inclusion in higher education ought to be core commitments of Drake University, from both an ethical and an educational point of view. Though we acknowledge the immense difficulties any institution willing to live up to these commitments must face, Drake is a mature, well established, and respected institution equipped with the wherewithal to overcome these difficulties. But without strong leadership on these issues, our potential to achieve a richly inclusive campus culture will find itself wasted.

We would welcome the chance to continue dialogue on these matters, and gladly offer our collective insights, commitment, and effort, should you find the needs we have outlined as urgent and important as we believe they are.

Sincerely,

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