

January 16, 2017

Dear Tashan, Ontario, and other student leaders,

We are deeply concerned about the issues confronting our nation and globe; these challenges affect many of us in deep and personal ways. We are passionate about our work in higher education precisely because we believe that in providing a quality education we are helping ensure a freer, more just and equitable democracy. Our work is as important as ever, and we are glad to partner with you and other community members to make positive change at the University of Denver.

We are troubled by the upsurge in hate crimes and other bias incidents reported across the nation, and are angered that many of you have experienced harassment or bias on *this* campus. We share a frustration that culture change is a long game—for decades, we have been pushing for equity and diversity in higher education.

Before we outline the many ways we share your vision for the University of Denver, we need to acknowledge something rather important: we will likely never achieve a community totally free of bias or prejudice. We will try, ardently and with full conviction, to realize our values. We believe strongly that to provide an education that leads to freedom, justice, and democracy, we must defend certain freedoms within our community. People have a right to their beliefs, even if those beliefs lead them to question various aspects of our humanity. Throughout history, freedom of speech has been critical to progress on issues of social justice—and we must protect those freedoms for future generations. And we acknowledge that there will be and have been moments that the beliefs of some deeply hurt and fracture our community.

What the University *can* promise you is that if anyone or any organization violates its anti-discrimination policies, honor code, or employment standards, the situation will be investigated and accountability will be held. The University does not tolerate discriminatory behaviors or verbal harassment.

And while we cannot and should not try to force all in our community to adopt a single value system, our institutional values are incredibly important for a variety of reasons. They guide our decisions about resources and policies; they determine the standards and limits we have set for our community; and they define our mission and goals. As outlined in DU IMPACT 2025, the University is committed to providing an education built on a foundation of inclusive excellence. We believe strongly that is the kind of education most needed today. And we recognize we have a long journey ahead to realize that vision with you.

As we considered the many ideas you presented, we found that they could be placed in one of three topics: Campus Environment, Curricular and Co-Curricular Offerings,

and Students as Important Partners. The following list is also a navigational tool for you, so you have the information you need to continue these conversations with the individuals leading them.

### **The Campus Environment**

As a community, there is a lot of healing that needs to occur and trust that needs to be built. You are right to point out that setting the environment for that important step to begin is the University's role. However, your participation is also needed to accomplish change. We must all be fully engaged in listening and dialoging for meaningful change to occur in our community.

1. An important first step in creating a more inclusive environment is tracking community perceptions about diversity and inclusion and our progress in changing the climate for the better. The Chancellor's Diversity and Equity Advisory Committee (CDEAC) has engaged [Alma Clayton Pederson](#), creator of the concept of "inclusive excellence" to conduct audits on academic units, as well as the divisions of Enrollment, and Campus Life and Inclusive Excellence. The purpose of this audit is to get a sense of the definition, commitment and active pursuit of inclusive practices into their work. We are in the final stages of the first round of this audit with an expected completion date of Spring 2017 (Frank Tuitt is leading this effort).

To assess how students experience the campus environment and how much progress we are making in transforming it, we have adopted the [Culturally Engaging Campus Environment Survey](#), created by Sam Masueus from the University of Indiana. The goal is to conduct this survey every two years and adjust our programmatic offerings based on the outcomes of the survey. The survey will be administered in January for the first time, to both undergraduates and graduates. Results are expected by March and a report will be released to the community by the end of the academic year (Lili Rodriguez is leading this effort).

2. The campus environment is also physical, and we understand the importance of making it more reflective of and relevant to our real histories and actual present. We are considering how this will be a sustained effort moving forward, as a variety of committees and people are involved in the various ways this work manifests: art, buildings, plaques, awards and commemorations, etc. Of course, as we discussed in person, this involves both the current campus environment and future choices made.

We would like to engage you in a change of the visual representations within Driscoll Student Center and continue to think of how to provide more accurate information on current structures/people/founders or commemorate new ones moving ahead. (Carl Johnson will lead this effort and establish a process by the start of spring quarter for student involvement in a Driscoll overhaul).

3. When community members make mistakes, intentional or not, how they

experience the process of accountability is an important aspect of building community and ensuring we learn from those mistakes. Your recommendation to have the honor code policies and procedures reviewed more regularly, particularly through a student lens, is a good one. (Kristen Olson will be leading this effort and will seek self-nominations from students to join this group by the end of Winter quarter).

4. What a community values is most often reflected in the types of events and programs held. The Center for Multicultural Excellence would also like to make heritage programming much more robust and include many more faculty and staff in planning and execution. This will likely require a centralized programming board with an intersectional approach to the programs themselves. Moreover, the University is working on making many of our diversity and heritage programming much more visible by consolidating how they are presented to the community. For example, [ONE DU presents](#) was just launched to highlight the importance of the [Diversity Summit](#) and other annual programs that challenge us to be more inclusive (Johanna Leyba is leading this effort).

5. The Enrollment Division is undergoing a strategic planning process to determine how best to recruit and select the kind of community members we seek. This process has already begun with a primary goal of increased compositional diversity and students with a firm commitment to the public good. It's hard to say what recommendations will come out of this reflective process, but we do know that student voices will be included and that your suggestion for a supplemental essay focusing on inclusive values is being considered (Tom Willoughby is leading this effort).

6. An unofficial Boone mascot continues to be present at major campus events despite the fact that we have not had Boone as our mascot since 1998. The presence of this unauthorized character is offensive to many, and represents potential risks to safety. Our leadership team is committed to developing procedures that ensure that our past decisions regarding mascots are respected (Full leadership team is leading this effort).

### **The Curricular and Co-Curricular Offerings**

The content we teach is perhaps the most important indication of our commitment to inclusive excellence. Moreover, as we listened to many of you speak, it was also clear that there must be an accurate portrayal of histories taught, both DU-specific histories as well as global histories. After all, "history is the polemics of the victor."

To provide the kind of education that is not only empowering but also preparatory for a 21<sup>st</sup> century citizen, we have taken on the following initiatives:

7. As a part of the strategic planning process, many faculty are reflecting on how the

curriculum can evolve. Staff educators are also working on how best to incorporate the skill development students need to engage across difference in constructive ways—both in and out of the classroom. These are intensive projects with many moving parts, given all the current offerings, professional schools, requirements, potential interdisciplinary programs, learning outcomes, etc. It will take some time to outline where we are headed and pilot new offerings. We encourage you to continue to connect with the Faculty Senate, especially their president, Kate Willink who is seeking formal ways to engage with students regularly around these topics. We highlight some specific initiatives most aligned with your goals here, along with the individuals leading those efforts:

- a) Infusing the Undergraduate Curriculum with Critical Reflection and Integration (Jennifer Karas and Danny Macintosh)
- b) Strengthening and Expanding I-RISE (Interdisciplinary Research Incubator for the Study of (In)Equality) and RISC (Race, Inequality, and Social Change) Curricular Offerings (Tom Romero and Frank Tuitt)
- c) Co-Curricular Experiences build Inclusive Communities (Lili Rodriguez and Keith Miller)
- d) Experiential Education and the Public Good (Anne de Prince)
- e) Intergroup and Sustained Dialogues in and out of the Classroom (Thomas Walker)
- f) Inclusive Pedagogies and Faculty Training and Development (Valentina Inturbe-LaGrave)

Many of the initiatives listed above are well on their way. For instance, Valentina Inturbe-LaGrave led two trainings for faculty in December on inclusive teaching practices. Over 150 faculty attended those daylong trainings and we are pleased Valentina has joined the Office for Teaching and Learning as an inclusive excellence trainer. Moreover, 50 faculty, staff, and students spent the first weekend of January learning intergroup dialogue techniques with Thomas Walker and the Sustain Dialogue Network trainers. We hope to include intergroup dialogue opportunities throughout the curricular and co-curricular experience for all students.

8. Finally, helping incoming students understand our values and commitment to diversity and inclusion is important. This could be done in a variety of ways throughout the summer before they arrive, into the orientation week, and intensively throughout their time with us. The division of Campus Life and Inclusive Excellence is working on re-conceptualizing the entire first year orientation for a student and infusing that time with trainings on diversity and inclusion (Lili Rodriguez and Carl Johnson are leading this initiative).

### **Students as Important Partners**

As you can see, we share similar goals for this institution. While we may not arrive at the exact suggestions you made through this work, we will continue to confer with community members, investigate best practices, and try to reach our ideals of inclusion. What is quite clear to us is that our communication and engagement with

YOU is lacking. It saddens us that we have not done as good a job as we can in helping you and other students become aware of all the initiatives in place. We need your help with this. How do we best communicate and incorporate you into this work? We are wholly committed to doing a better job of including you in these discussions.

So let's prioritize and commit to improving our communication and engagement with one another. Let's partner in this because we need you to transform the culture just as much as you need us to initiate that transformation. And we can offer suggestions on how to make this a greater part of the leadership structures you have built as students—from the affinity group level to the governing level. It's important that more than a few of you take on these responsibilities and that many more of you are engaged in these efforts with us.

When all is said and done, this is a long game. That may frustrate us, but as you can see from the world around you, moments of progress are usually followed by intense backlash. We need to weather this storm and we can do it better together. We'll need you in this work long after you graduate—continuing to push for a better DU and society as engaged alumni.

Respectfully and on behalf of the Chancellor,

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