

Subject: Black Lives Matter: University Actions to Combat Racism and Discrimination
Date: Thursday, June 11, 2020 at 4:16:28 PM Eastern Daylight Time
From: Rev. Scott R. Pilarz S.J. <scott.pilarz@scranton.edu>
To: university-all@scranton.edu <university-all@scranton.edu>
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Dear Members of the University Community,

Since I wrote you last week, the anger and grief unleashed by the murder of George Floyd has coalesced into a demand for immediate and systemic changes across our country and the globe to combat racism and to ensure, once and for all, that Black Lives Matter. Within our own community, my colleagues and I have heard the voices of black students, faculty, staff and alumni as they shared their own experiences of racism and let us know that we must do more and do better to create a community where all can feel welcome and safe always.

The concerns that we have heard most frequently relate to the following:

- Policy on racism, discrimination, bias and inclusion for all members of the University community;
- Training and development for students, faculty and staff; and
- The need to address better in our curriculum both racism and discrimination and the cultural richness and contributions of blacks and all persons of color.

As I said, we are not waiting until September to act. Here are some immediate steps:

- Since last summer, the University's various governance bodies have been considering a substantially updated and revised **Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy** recommended for approval by University Governance Council following a review by all three senates. The new, comprehensive policy applies to the entire University community – students, faculty, staff – and even those who visit campus to indicate clearly that we do not tolerate acts of racism. While there may still be minor amendments needed in the future, I am today approving this policy and directing the Office of Equity and Diversity to begin its immediate implementation with appropriate collaboration across campus. This implementation should include sessions to educate all segments of the University community on their respective responsibilities. You can read the new policy [here](#).
- Determined to **increase representation and improve retention of diverse populations among our faculty and staff**, I have asked Jeff Gingerich, Ph.D., Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Patricia Tetreault, Vice President for Human Resources, to convene a special task force that will work with the Office of Equity and Diversity to implement ways that we can expand our pool of candidates and intentionally seek to build a faculty and staff that better represent the growing diversity of our student body. At scheduled meeting of the Board of Trustees next week, I will ask them to designate a portion of the University's quasi-endowment to support our hiring objectives. We are working to identify other sources of funds as well.

- **The Office of Equity and Diversity will now report to the President.** In recognition of this move, Elizabeth Garcia, J.D., will lead the office as Executive Director of Equity and Diversity and Special Assistant to the President. In this role, she will continue to chair the Council for Diversity and Inclusion and will serve as a member of the President's Cabinet bringing her important knowledge and perspective into our deliberations. I am grateful to Ms. Garcia for her willingness to accept these new responsibilities.
- I charge my colleagues on the faculty to **develop and implement a curricular component to our general education that addresses racism and discrimination.** Given the gravity of the moment, I would expect this to demand your immediate and sustained attention and look forward to receiving your recommended changes by the conclusion of the fall semester. Relatedly, I have **approved a proposal from the History Department to hire a full-time faculty member** with a focus on African American history. We will be asking for proposals from other departments to strengthen our curriculum and help to diversify our faculty.
- Last year, under the leadership of the Office of Equity and Diversity and Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence, we began a series of ongoing workshops, many of them led by our faculty on topics of diversity and inclusion. These recorded sessions include [Pedagogy Workshops on inclusion and links to materials](#) on creating inclusive classes, courses, etc. Once again, I charge every member of the faculty to avail themselves of these resources over the summer and to consider **how you can engage race and racism within your courses, scholarship and/or University service.**
- Last year, Dr. Gingerich established the broadly representative Council on Diversity and Inclusion to provide insights and guidance to institutional plans for diversity, inclusion and anti-racism. I am asking **every member of Cabinet to review and, when possible, implement recommendations as they are developed.**
- Dr. Gingerich will ask the deans to **implement an annual evaluation** of how academic departments have contributed to the University's diversity and inclusion efforts and policies and how they might further support our efforts.

Other suggested actions for the University were already in place. These include:

- Student Life **developed and implemented a session for all incoming students** that focuses on diversity and inclusion and educates students about micro-aggressions. The new session is part of the Summer Orientation sessions set to begin June 22.
- Last year, the Office of Equity and Diversity developed a [Toolkit for Inclusionary Recruitment and Hiring](#) and updated training for faculty hiring to include implicit bias.
- In 2016, The University of Scranton Police Department earned accreditation by the Pennsylvania Law Enforcement Accreditation Commission, becoming one of just 10% in the Commonwealth to earn this distinction. Part of this accreditation process included a thorough review of policing tactics and training. As a result, **University Police protocols already ban the use of choke holds.** The department was reaccredited in 2019.
- As an additional resource for students of color, the Counseling Center in collaboration with the Cross Cultural Centers launched a **weekly support and empowerment group** just prior to the COVID-19 campus closure. Restructuring last year in Student Life, created an Assistant Dean of Students position to increase retention and student success with **emphasis on first generation students and students of color.**

The actions outlined above are not the end of our efforts. Nevertheless, they are an important beginning. I challenge you all to join in the hard work that lies ahead to accomplish our aspirations.

Sincerely,

Scott R. Pilarz, S.J.
President