

November 13, 2015

A Message to Penn Faculty, Students, and Staff

From

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As universities across the country debate the often difficult but essential topics of inclusion, intolerance and free speech, we thought it important to reach out to everyone on campus with a reminder of the values and principles that are at the very heart of the University of Pennsylvania, and which define what it is to be a part of the Penn community.

We cannot state strongly enough that at Penn, *everyone belongs*. Whether it be race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, nationality or cultural heritage, everyone here – students, faculty, staff – deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. We are firmly committed to creating and fostering an ever more inclusive community where everyone feels accepted and respected as a member of the Penn community.

Racism has a long and terrible legacy in our country. It can take many forms, both subtle and overt. Whatever form it takes, it is wrong. It creates an unacceptable added burden to the college experience of students of color and it has no place at Penn.

As we work to address the persistent problems of racism and all forms of bias and discrimination in our society, we must also remember the importance of free expression on a university campus. There is nothing that so clearly captures the core set of freedoms that we enjoy in this nation as does the First Amendment. It guarantees our right to speak, and it also guarantees the speech of those with whom we fundamentally disagree. Open expression and a commitment to social justice are not mutually exclusive; peacefully pursued, they go hand-in-hand.

Earlier this year, the Provost and Faculty Senate launched an important initiative called “Campaign for Community.” It is designed to bring people from across campus together to collectively address questions such as: *How do we interact with one another? How do we value our differences? How can we best talk about those differences?*

We encourage you to watch for upcoming events that are part of the Campaign, and urge you to become involved in helping us to better build a stronger ethos of inclusion across our campus.

Debates will no doubt surface across campus this year on the difficult issues that confront our society. Those debates are good. They are an important part of a college experience. Our commitment to free speech and mutual respect creates the strongest possible platform upon which to counter bad ideas with good ones. In an educational community, it is the power of the words, not their volume, that is persuasive.

At Penn we would like our campus to be an example for the nation of how an entire campus community can demonstrate mutual respect and create a welcoming home for all our members – making it clear that everyone at Penn belongs – with the most robust protections of individual freedom. As the people with institutional responsibility for advancing these ideals at Penn, we hope you will all commit to join us in this ongoing effort.