

UNIVERSITY *of* MISSOURI

OFFICE OF THE CHANCELLOR

Dear Concerned Students:

In June 1965 Martin Luther King gave the commencement address at Oberlin College. He said: “. . . all life is interrelated, and we are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny....For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be – this is the interrelated structure of reality.”

This recognition of oneness remains valid. Within it lies the call to engage in a relationship: an encounter between people who listen to each other’s voices, best done face-to-face. In relationships there is no place for demands because there is no need for demands.

As you should know by now, President Middleton, Chancellor Foley, Provost Stokes, and I (to name just a few) have been meeting with hundreds of students. We are engaging in relationships in ways you may not have experienced. For my part, I have been seeking you out. I have invited you to come see me. However, as yet we haven’t met.

Had you accepted my invitation to meet face-to-face, you would already know the answers to most of the issues raised in your recent communication. As many other concerned students already know, much of what can be done to transform our culture is already underway. We have begun the work of generations by educating our fellow citizens in Columbia, our senior leaders, faculty, staff and new students on inclusion, diversity, implicit bias and the history of the African-American experience in Missouri. We are improving our ways of hiring faculty and staff by, among other things, requiring diverse candidate pools of people qualified to teach and work at a tier 1 research institution and instituting mandatory hiring committee education. We are already working almost all of the issues raised in your communication. These are the things that university administration can do for the benefit of everyone in our on- and off-campus community.

You would also know that there are things, like hiring faculty or staff, or admitting students based on protected characteristics to meet a numerical target, will not and cannot be done. It is against state and federal law. It also is a bad model for a sustainable community. The administration is not responsible for curriculum requiring specific courses. That is the sole responsibility of the faculty – and the faculty is working on this issue.



You also would know, had we met, that I created a permanent part of the Division of Inclusion, Diversity and Equity called The Working Group. The point of The Working Group is transparency, access and input – your input into how we transform our culture and improve our relationship. This is where student leaders, faculty staff and administrators meet to learn what the Division is doing and why it is being done. This is where I hear your input, criticism and ideas. This how your solutions may get incorporated.

Much work has been done, is being done and will be done to make our community better for everyone who is a part of it. We are working on relationships that value all voices. We are engaging face to face, realizing that what we are achieving will be sustainable over generations. And who doesn't want better relationships?

If you sincerely want better relationships, the time for demands, threats and arbitrary deadlines is over -- you don't need them. I hope you'll join me with other concerned students in The Working Group to get down to the work of building.

Sincerely,

Chuck Henson

Interim Vice Chancellor for Inclusion, Diversity and Equity