

Dear WVU Faculty Colleagues,

I've recently been made aware of the expression of white supremacist sentiments via flyers tacked up in public spaces, including on campus. These flyers also reportedly have been posted at other colleges and universities.

While West Virginia University supports the First Amendment rights of all members of our community to be heard and never wants to censor free speech, the sentiments expressed on these flyers and endorsed by this group are contradictory to the very core of our institution.

We are a university of forward thinkers who value all members of our community for the unique voice that each adds to our collective whole. Those who come to any of our campuses — faculty, staff, student or visitor — should know we stand in solidarity against any attempts to divide, separate or isolate any member of the WVU family.

This group is exercising its right to freedom of speech and expression. I urge all of you to exercise yours.

- Post a positive and affirming message celebrating diversity on your Facebook page or in your Twitter feed.
- Reach out to those in your own professional or personal community — students, colleagues, friends, neighbors — who might feel targeted by these recent flyers and assure them that they have your support.
- Talk to one another to affirm your commitment to making WVU a safe and welcoming environment for all people.

Together, we can be a beacon of light, love, inclusion and celebration.

Sincerely,

Joyce McConnell

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## Dear West Virginia University Faculty Colleagues,

Welcome to the start of the 2017-2018 academic year! I look forward to meeting those of you who are new to our faculty for the first time and to working with all of you this year and.

Each year brings new challenges and opportunities, but this year we face a very particular challenge revealed by last weekend's events in Charlottesville. We strongly condemn white supremacist, neo-Nazi, and other hate groups. These groups understand the role of public universities as venues for free speech and seek to exploit our campuses for their own purposes using racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic, anti-immigrant, misogynist, and anti-Muslim speech and violence. They know that free speech is their right; we know that it is also a responsibility. As a public land-grant university, we have an obligation to promote free speech but to also do everything in our power to oppose bigotry, hate, and violence, to keep our community safe, and to use education to inspire our students to seek justice for all.

So we begin this year with an increased commitment to use education to open minds and hearts to learn from and embrace difference - to celebrate who we are as humans. The inevitable question is how to translate commitment into action. I have a few thoughts to share.

/ **SAFETY** - Keeping our campus community safe is essential. Our Chief of University Police and other university leaders are actively engaged with university, town, county and state leadership to plan proactively for safe assembly and for the individual safety of faculty, students, staff, and campus visitors.

/ **CARE** - Caring for one another will elevate us above hate and allow us to be a model of a community that stands against hate and violence and for inclusion and unity.

/ **ACTION** - Creating an advisory team with faculty, students, and staff will position us to plan proactively for actions that promote tolerance, inclusion, and safety and to meet the challenge of actions that threaten these values.

/ **DIALOGUE** - Continuing to create a campus environment conducive to safe, open, reasoned, and respectful dialogue will empower us as a learning community.

/ **ALTERNATIVES** - Opposing hatred should not be through physical confrontation; instead, create an alternative event that displays values of care, inclusion, equality, and unity.

/ **ENGAGEMENT** - Modeling tolerance and inclusion can be done by engaging in a positive and open way with those who are fearful of those who are different.

/ **COMMITMENT** - Examining one's own biases and stereotypes, exercising empathy, listening to others, and committing oneself to standing against hate are essential to countering hate.

These are preliminary thoughts; they will evolve and there will be more. I invite you to share yours. We may disagree with one another but I have faith we will listen respectfully and be better for it. My first act will be to create an advisory team with faculty, student, staff, and other constituency representatives to help our community respond proactively and positively to the challenges presented to higher education by those who would divide us by hate.

Sincerely yours,

Joyce

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