

Emerson College

REMARKS TO FACULTY INSTITUTE

The past several weeks have been very difficult for our community.

An Emerson College professor has died.

We are struck by the poignancy of his death as we begin a new school year and welcome new students, faculty, and staff to our community. I acknowledge that the responses to his death have been various, both within and outside of the Emerson College community.

The circumstances surrounding Professor Robert Todd's death have been much discussed, and judging by some emails I have read, misleading and false statements have been promulgated with the sad patina of truth. These assertions, in particular, have alarmed and disappointed me as a member of an academic community devoted to critical thinking, sound judgment, and discernment. While I understand the very human and innate impulse to construct meaning out of uncommon human events, it is difficult for me to understand the impulse to assert and facilitate unsubstantiated hearsay or rumors without direct or corroborating knowledge.

I speak to you today in order to clarify the much discussed circumstances, as well as shed clarifying light on actions the College took while Professor Todd was living and after his death.

Focused foremost on our common humanity as a virtue worth preserving and while faced with challenging, complex, and conflicting events, the College sought, in the immediate aftermath of Professor Todd's death, to provide space and time, as best we could, for those who mourned the loss of a husband, brother, professor, mentor, son, friend, and colleague, and to provide support to others directly affected by Professor Todd's life and death.

As many of you know, there have been questions and speculations about Professor Robert Todd's death and whether he was involved in a Title IX investigation. I speak to you this morning with the intention of being as transparent as possible, and dispelling misperceptions that are not based in fact – while respecting the feelings and privacy of all those affected by his death and events that preceded his death.

In December 2017, the College received a complaint from an Emerson staff member alleging that Professor Todd engaged in multiple, concatenated behaviors that might have violated the College's Sexual Misconduct Policy. The Title IX Office assessed the complaint and, as a result, brought in an outside investigator. Based on the findings of a months-long investigation, Professor Todd was found responsible for engaging in sexual harassment, which is prohibited under the College's Sexual Misconduct Policy.

As a sanction for violating the College's Sexual Misconduct Policy, Professor Todd was suspended from the College without pay for the Fall 2018 semester. Additionally, he was required to work with a professional coach to help him understand the impact of his behaviors, as well as to ensure that

they would not occur in the future. Professor Todd's right to appeal the decision was abrogated by his death.

The staff member who brought the complaint has been supported by the Healing and Advocacy Collective (formerly Violence, Prevention and Response) and others in the College before and during the Title IX investigation, as well as after Professor Todd's death.

During the investigation, the chair of the VMA department and the Title IX Office received additional third party reports about Professor Todd, which, if true, would have indicated inappropriate behavior or possible violations of certain provisions of the College's Sexual Misconduct Policy. Each report to the College was followed up, and after having interviewed those involved, the Title IX Office assessed that there was insufficient evidence to support additional claims that Professor Todd had violated the Sexual Misconduct Policy.

While the college typically does not release such information, these extraordinary circumstances, the very public nature of Professor Todd's death, the promulgations of falsehoods, and the continuing circulation of rumors and speculations, compelled me to speak to you today in order to provide an accurate and true accounting.

We continue to support the member of our community who came forward, and we wish to make it very clear that the College will never tolerate sexual misconduct or sexual harassment, and will act decisively should findings of either arise.

As I said in my opening, the past several weeks have engendered a variety

of perspectives and powerful emotions. No doubt, many of us continue to search for resolution and meaning. This will be a process that will take time. However, I am hopeful - even confident - that our community will meet the challenges ahead of us with humanity, respect, and allegiance to the truth for all those who are grieving now, those who have variously been impacted and perhaps, equally important, for ourselves.