



Dear Colleagues:

The year is not even halfway over and the dramatic events that have been set in motion in 2020 are daunting. The nature and number of crises we have had to respond to is truly historic. The country is reeling from the ongoing pandemic, the resulting economic setbacks, and now most recently, the volatility resulting from the senseless homicide of George Floyd that triggered waves of protests across the nation signaling a moment of reckoning in our nation. It is this last issue that is the focus of this message.

The murder of George Floyd and the tumultuous events of the last many days throughout the United States have given rise to a mixture of sadness, anger, and inspiration. The inspiration is found in the outpouring of citizens that are exhausted, but ready to work toward eliminating the scourge of racial inequality in our country.

Like the pandemic, the call to action for social justice and institutional reform is not just national, but global. It is clear that the overwhelming interest of American citizens to root out systemic, institutional racism is paramount and enduring. Leaders at all levels – political, business, social, religious, community, entertainment, athletics, and educational – have condemned racism while committing themselves to addressing underlying inequities and working to create lasting change.

As a community college, we have a unique role to be a voice for progress. Right now, our faculty, staff, administration, and student leaders at College of the Canyons have an opportunity, and a moral responsibility to create, review, design, and enact change for our community and the students within our college.

College of the Canyons is committed to the long term, permanent review and assessment of all its practices to ensure, as an entity of academic integrity and learning, it is doing everything it can to ensure all barriers, by intent or neglect, are removed.

As individuals, working alone or collaboratively, we need to be the instigators for change that matters. Each and every member of the college community has a personal obligation to review their actions for the betterment of all people. All policies, procedures, norms and practices will be reconsidered toward race conscious change and improvement. We must use our diversity, perspective, creativity, energy, and unite for social justice. Our students, for whom we provide the access for brighter futures, are looking to us with hope and expectations that we do what is right, not just now, but in all times.

Being committed to self-reflection leading to institutional reform is an inherent part of what California community colleges do. Self-reflection and evaluation come in many forms. Collectively we strive to

verify we are doing what our mission statement proclaims we must do. Going forward, we will re-commit and enhance institutionalized ongoing, long term, and permanent review processes to meet the standards that so much of this county has failed to live up to. Here at COC we have not done enough.

Our goal in this moment must be to work to dismantle discriminatory policies and replace them with ones that honor the dignity and the potential of every individual. Addressing the issue of personal racism, institutional racism, policing in America, and all related matters will not be easy. That is not because we believe we are inherently flawed at our campus. It is because we are human, and do not necessarily have the capability to see ourselves clearly, hear ourselves clearly, or understand that which we have never been exposed to. With a sense of urgency, our campus community must work to advance social justice, equity, and inclusion at College of the Canyons.

It is a time to listen. We need to listen to the voices and stories of Black Americans and all people of color. Combating racism is not and should not be a political issue in this country. It is a matter of human rights. Intellectually understanding racism and systemic barriers is not the same as emotionally understanding. We as a college community need to find a way to emotionally understand that which so many of us never could, given our own paths in life.

We believe that if we allow vulnerable, authentic, and courageous conversations, we can impact and change the tone on our campus, in our community, community college system, our state, and in our nation.

How are we going to do this? Last week Chancellor Oakley hosted a call to action webinar whereby some of our colleagues throughout the state shared their experiences and feelings. It was powerful. That webinar served as a call to action for institutional reform and review to eliminate systemic racism. The attachment to this email contains the Chancellor's six initial points of action.

Often, significant historic events result in society declaring its commitment to reform, only to see a loss of momentum and a return to business as usual. For those of you that wonder if our focus at COC will wane once the news cycle and public attention shifts to other crises and matters, we pledge to you that our college will not relent in its efforts at seeking social justice and institutional reform.

Our college's past efforts provide a clue on how we might respond. In those cases where meaningful change has occurred, individuals created momentum in supporting equity and inclusion by first identifying activities that made a difference and then working through the college's governance structure. While equity is the foundation of our strategic plan, and our cultural diversity and inclusion efforts are integrated throughout our college district, we must acknowledge the possibility that structural and institutional racism at our college has led to an inequitable outcome for students that must be addressed in a most urgent manner.

Important, sustainable and productive community-based actions begin with dialogue. We must create the space needed to give voice to the historically underrepresented and disenfranchised. The very people who have been silenced, not invited, not engaged, and not heard for decade upon decade, must be provided with a safe space to engage, be angry, be heard, be seen, and valued.

America's students have always provided leadership in the civil rights movement and have leveraged the educational venue as a platform for organizing. We need to join them in fighting for what they know is

right; we need to stand right by their sides and fight along with them: racial justice, equity, and maybe and hopefully one day, healing. Public education is the bedrock of our democracy plain and simple.

Locally, the process of listening and learning will begin with a series of collegewide forums designed to provide us all with diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and feelings that will inform our efforts for moving forward.

There is no doubt that systemic racism exists in this country. While the original governing documents of the United States were revolutionary and forward thinking for their time, they were drafted during a time of slavery and white male supremacy. While we have taken great strides to address a powerful institutional framework for inequality and inequity, we nevertheless have far to go. What has emerged from those governing documents has been worldwide leadership forged within ongoing conflict, fight, war and violence that has plagued our nation as it struggles to live up to its vaunted ideals. We must improve upon those ideals by listening deeply, planning, and then we must draw courage from one another to act on those plans in a timely manner. Now, more than ever, we must create and foster a culture of inclusivity that will lead to a better future.

“The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion.” - Abraham Lincoln

We stand with you in unity to do what we can to improve our beloved college and to usher in cultural change that fosters equitable practices and anti-racism.

There are initial steps that we will take to begin this important work:

- Engage student groups in online forums with college administrators, faculty, and staff so we can learn from them how the college can best support and provide a safe, inclusive and equitable experience.
- Immediately expand our equity and inclusion training opportunities to staff and faculty.
- Reevaluate our hiring practices and materials so that we are not arbitrarily and preferentially excluding people.
- Continue to support existing equity programs, and develop new resources, and services, even though we face budget challenges.
- Review our curriculum processes, delivery modes, and prerequisites to ensure they reflect the perspectives multiple races and cultures.
- As we continue to engage in dialogue, listen for understanding, and hear what is being said, we will generate new ideas and action steps for moving forward.

This moment gives us an opportunity to dismantle systems that have failed far too many for far too long, and replace them with an educational system built on aspirations of promoting a more just and fair society.

With ardent and sincere yearning for a commitment to social justice and equality, we can instill hope for days ahead. We support our students, our faculty, our staff, and our community. We understand both the urgency of the situation, and the tragedy; and take our responsibilities as educators, and as individuals as seriously as we can in order to build a culture, society, and community that lives up to the ideals of equal opportunity and respect for all.

With unity and resolve,



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Chancellor



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Academic Senate President-Elect



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Academic Senate President



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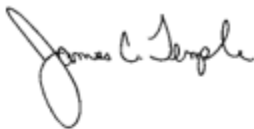
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