

Dear JMC Faculty and Staff,

Given the continued issues surrounding inclusion in the College and our ongoing efforts to foster dialogue, I want to share with you President Simon's recent statement on campus efforts to focus on race.

Sherman Garnett
Dean, James Madison College

Our commitment to diversity,

Recent events on college and university campuses across the country demonstrate that racism and indifference remain persistent societal problems. And they are not distant issues. As I have talked over time—and continue to talk—with members of the Michigan State campus community and with our neighbors in the greater community, I recognize these issues are part of our lives in a real and present way.

In June I wrote to the Greater Lansing Ministerial Alliance following a community memorial service for victims of a racially motivated attack in Charleston, S.C.: “We will continue to find means for our campus community to have dialogue and build understanding.”

These can be difficult conversations, but they are both necessary and healthy as communities grapple with issues and develop achievable and sustainable responses. We’ve encouraged social justice conversations through the years with programs such as Project 60/50, and I’m encouraging more faculty and student stakeholders to engage. Today, yet another important dialogue is taking place to hear concerns of students around issues of diversity and inclusion, and I’m pleased to see students working with administrative leaders to plan more opportunities.

Talking and listening are vitally important, but they are not sufficient. There is work to be done and action to be taken, whether it means improving existing programs, addressing campus culture, or moving forward in new ways. It’s a long journey, but we can continue to work together to move more quickly toward our milestones. Our values are enduring; the solutions are evolving.

Great institutions are rooted in enduring values that define our contributions to society not just in what we do, but how we do it. At Michigan State, inclusion is a core value. In practice that means building a vibrant, intellectual community that offers and respects a broad range of ideas and perspectives.

We embrace diversity not simply to reflect the public we serve—which is proper and worthy in and of itself—but also because without it the spectrum of human experience cannot be applied to the work we do. Without such context, whatever wisdom is gained remains incomplete.

An effective, dynamic university must at once provide a safe space and a brave place in which to learn: where individuals can be and represent themselves without fear, yet be empowered to step outside the comfort of their own beliefs and respect the perspective of others and to learn and grow.

Making room for dissent does not mean condoning disrespectful or demeaning behavior. We must take a stand, together, to confront what would marginalize, stigmatize, or discriminate against others and to strive for understanding and inclusivity. Most of all, as we move forward together, we must never, ever stop listening. 11-13-2015

- See more at: <http://president.msu.edu/from-the-presidents-desk/2015/our-commitment-to-diversity.html#sthash.SJ32dhC8.dpuf>