

A joint statement by CSU Faculty Senate and Administration approved on September 9, 2020

As we approach a new academic year at Cleveland State University, we note that much has transpired in the world with broad and significant impacts on students and faculty members. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed habits and our relationships and reminded us that even with advanced knowledge, nanoscale pathogens can bring us to heel.

The community response by faculty, staff, administrative leadership, and students showed an unshakeable spirit which helped to move our university forward. We will continue to need this strength and collective forbearance as we enter another uncertain period associated with the pandemic. As we did before, our community must approach uncertainty with what we know: physical distancing, washing hands frequently, and protective covering around the face helps manage disease spread. These practices will bridge the time between the virus as an active threat and the development of an effective therapy.

The coronavirus was, and is, a generational event. Yet amid the battle with COVID-19, we, as a nation had to deal with the fundamental problem of race and racial exclusion in America so often triggered by police involved fatalities in communities of color. The death of George Floyd, and others around the same time, opened the floodgates of protest rarely seen in our time. Significantly, the protests led to a questioning of institutional and individual privilege, especially when that privilege hinders rather than enhances opportunities and inclusion for members of communities of color.

As scholars and educators, we distinguish between genuine protests and unacceptable violence no matter what the claimed motivation. That is what many of us do as a matter of course in our research and classroom. Many of us strive to create inclusive learning environments for our students. While we support self-questioning and reflecting on institutional and individual privileges, we affirm that each of us earns academic expertise and professional accomplishments. Those earned privileges entail the responsibilities to translate our knowledge and skills to our students, and to reexamine and constantly improve our translation of this knowledge.

We note that Cleveland State University and its faculty have long pursued the goal of accessibility, excellence, accomplishment, and success for our students. We have done much to realize that goal, but we can do more.

As with other institutions, higher education is being asked, “what is your role, not only in inquiry, but actively engaging in change that will assist all students?” Our role in offering solutions to inequity, of all kinds, must remain steadfastly rooted in what we do best, which is teaching and scholarship. We must always evaluate what we do as scholars and educators and strive to reduce the inequalities that obstruct the education of our students.

To this end, we affirm the commitment of the CSU Faculty Senate to recognition of the dignity, humanity and personhood of all members of the CSU community, and beyond, without regard to their racial, political, or other identity or social category. Accordingly, we offer the following suggestions to open a conversation among CSU faculty, staff and students about what is necessary to identify and address areas of inequity throughout Cleveland State University. We must recognize that many students face significant barriers to their education based on their race, ethnicity, income class, disability, social and family structure, geographical background, and/or sexual orientation and the intersections of these categories.

What does this mean for CSU faculty members? We shall, among other objectives:

- find ways to encourage and acknowledge faculty and student involvement with community organizations in Cleveland communities to better understand the perspectives of persons, groups, and populations that are different from themselves.
- be more intentional in examining our academic policies for biases or inequities.
- engage together to mitigate some of the undue challenges that students face through positive reinforcement.
- recognize the necessity of promoting intellectual rigor alongside the compassion and encouragement that will allow students to feel valued and to enhance learning.
- fully support ideas that enable the success of students who put forth effort to learn yet may need extra care to encourage them along. In particular, we shall develop specific pedagogical enhancements to promote learning and further success.
- take the time to understand what our students consider to be a welcoming environment, move towards implementing some of those ideas, and eliminate barriers to success.
- conduct a climate survey and use the results to inform further action.
- model inclusion by showing mutual respect among ourselves for differing opinions and approaches to important and controversial issues, particularly persistent institutionalized inequality.
- explore and support the growth and development of pathways and mentoring programs that champion the admission and success of underrepresented students.
- be more intentional about recruiting a diverse faculty, staff and administration, recognizing that access to the full range of ideas and perspectives strengthens our institution and that a diverse faculty helps to attract and retain a diverse student body.

We shall continue this conversation throughout the academic year by sharing ideas, methods, and encouragement to bring about an even more collegial, diverse and welcoming university community.