

Memorandum

To: David A. Green
Garrett Killian
Isaiah M. Green

From: Randall C. Ramsey
William L. Roper

Date: June 9, 2020

Subject: UNC System Equity Task Force

Thank you for your message of June 8 proposing the establishment of a task force to bring together the combined talent and resources of our universities and communities across North Carolina in the pursuit of greater racial equity and understanding.

We support the sentiments expressed in your communication. George Floyd died a horrible, violent, and unjust death at the hands of a white police officer. This immoral and indefensible act cries out for justice and compels all of us fully to recognize and grapple with our country's history of racism and oppression that has so often resulted in violence. As members of the University community, it is our obligation and responsibility to do the hard work needed to address inequities in the UNC System for the benefit of students, faculty, staff, and all North Carolinians.

We are pleased to announce that the UNC System Equity Task Force is being established as a six-member special committee of the Board of Governors, with each of you as members, joined by Board of Governors members Darrell Allison (Chair), Kellie Blue (Vice Chair), and Anna Nelson (Vice Chair). The UNC System Office will provide staff and resources needed to support the important work of this task force. We ask that the task force do the following:

- Meet with student, faculty, and staff groups to discuss issues of race and equity in the UNC System and all tangible steps that can be taken across the UNC System in pursuit of equity and understanding;
- Gather, explore, and develop recommendations, suggestions, and feedback;
- Prepare a report to the Board of Governors, to include a list of recommendations and action steps in priority order; and
- Present the report to the chair of the Board of Governors and the president by October 2.

We look forward to working with you on this important project for the future of the UNC System.

cc: Darrell Allison, UNC Board of Governors
Kellie Blue, UNC Board of Governors
Anna Nelson, UNC Board of Governors
UNC System Chancellors
UNC System Office Leadership Team

Attachment Enclosed



To: William L. Roper, Interim President, UNC System
Randall C. Ramsey, Chair, UNC System Board of Governors

From: David A. Green, Chair, UNC System Faculty Assembly
Garrett Killian, Chair, UNC System Staff Assembly
Isaiah M. Green, President, UNC Association of Student Governments

Re: Message of solidarity against racism and support for healing

Date: June 8, 2020

On behalf of the three organizations that we represent, we stand in solidarity with our co-workers of color and other marginalized colleagues. Collectively we are horrified by the continuing systemic acts of racism and injustice that affects our entire community; particularly those that disproportionately impact members of our Black community. We condemn these continued acts of violence against people of color, especially those that target Black men. The most recent example which has gained global as well as national attention was the shocking death of George Floyd at the hands of law enforcement personnel. This tragedy has a direct connection to the UNC community, as Mr. Floyd's stepmother works at Fayetteville State University. As members of the academic community, with the continual reports of death and injustice, we too greatly share the emotions of grief, exhaustion, and frustration arising from the endless reports of death and injustice. We are keenly aware that some members of our academic community may know, on a visceral level the traumatizing pain of racism while others are safely insulated from these lived experiences. Collectively, we believe that silence equates to consent. United, in this historic moment, we choose not to be silent, but instead to be active agents of change in this teachable moment.

There are numerous ways which hate, racism, and injustice grossly intersect with our life choices and life chances. With the pain and fatigue that all are experiencing, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are also bearing witness to a harvest. The seeds of racism bear fruit in the form of long-term physical and psychological trauma, coupled with institutional obstacles that deny growth and opportunity to vulnerable learners, colleagues, friends and family. Racism negatively impacts all of us; borrowing from Fannie Lou Hamer, "people are tired of being sick and tired."

The University of North Carolina is an extension of society, and as such all of us are obligated to provide a safe, secure, and dignified environment inclusive to all members of our university community. This inclusion cannot stop at sheer optics; rather, inclusion also means engaging in uncomfortable discourses on topics ranging from student access and staff development, to

decisions regarding tenure and even to budget allocations. In short, our people of color in our community, and in particular our Black stakeholders, have a right to feel safe, valued, and supported at every layer within the University of North Carolina System. It is equally important to recognize the value that the UNC System Historically Minority Serving Institutions (HMSI) provide to higher education in North Carolina. Further, the teaching about racism is an obligation, one that extends beyond the university community. It represents not only a UNC System commitment, but an investment to equality and social justice.

Dialogues about racism during this difficult time will be uncomfortable for all. However, it can serve as the first step to help process feelings of grief and associated fears. Let us also listen with both our hearts and ears, even if we do not understand all of the ramifications of the longstanding violation of human rights in our country. Toward this end, we pledge, and ask you to pledge, to move forward with positive support and strategic short- and long-term action.

As a community of higher education, we are dedicated to knowledge, inclusiveness, diversity, and truth. We ask that there are several issues that can be quickly addressed to begin the healing and attenuation of the pain:

- Convene a UNC System Task Force to develop a strategic plan to engage and leverage its tremendous intellectual and financial resources to address this issue in a comprehensive, meaningful, and impactful way for all faculty, staff, students, and the communities we serve.
- Ensure a safe working environment that is rooted in belonging and in which the personal rights, lives, and dignity of everyone is assured. The perspectives of all North Carolinians must be exemplified by those who will guide the University of North Carolina System into the future.
- Start a discussion regarding culturally relevant decisions, even while we deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Re-dedicate ourselves to reflect on what we can do as an academic community and as individuals to confront the issues of racism in our own communities.
- Ensure that our students, staff, and faculty have access to whatever is needed to try to be in a state of wellness, both psychologically and physically, when they return to campus in the Fall Semester. Ensure that all university constituents have access to mental health resources, to health care, and to academic help that will ensure their respective success.
- Advocate to find solutions for our students who continue to experience oppression on our campuses and in their daily lives. The pain from longstanding racial oppression cannot be healed quickly, but the discussions to do just that can start today, from the UNC System Office outward.
- Acknowledge the indispensable role of the UNC System HMSI's in fostering the empowerment of marginalized communities, and especially people of color. It is imperative that these institutions receive adequate support to continue to meet their individual missions, particularly during these economically uncertain times.

- Above all, stay engaged with our students, staff, and faculty by acknowledging openly that the current situation is challenging, and that everyone is suffering, especially students, staff, or faculty of color. The COVID-19 pandemic has sensitized us to an unseen disease of viral etiology; it is beyond time to address the disease of racism that attacks our collective soul.

One of the central tenets of higher education is to prepare our learners for a world that does not yet exist. The work being done today is built on the hope for the real societal change that needs to happen. Yes, we believe that there is cause for hope. To exemplify that hope, at the 2009 spring commencement at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Archbishop Desmond Tutu offered comments that are just as poignant today:

... God has a dream. And we say, "Hey, God, that was really Martin Luther King Jr. who said that." And God says, I know, Martin had a dream, I have a dream, too. I have a dream that my children everywhere will know that they belong in one family, a family that has no outsiders. You know, Jesus said "I, if I be lifted up, I will draw – he didn't say I will draw some – he said I will draw all, all, all! I will draw all! Rich, poor; clever, not so clever; beautiful, not so beautiful; yellow, red, black, gay, lesbian, straight."

... God says, "Go on dreaming. Go on being the idealistic people you are. Go on being the ones who believe that poverty can indeed be made history. Go on believing that it is possible to eradicate hunger. How can we live and sleep comfortably, knowing that millions of our sisters and brothers go to bed hungry? God says "Please, please, help me; help me to make this world a little more compassionate. Help me, please, help me to make this world a little more gentle. Dream, dream, dream of a world that is going to be without terror because there will be people ... nobody will have become so desperate, desperate because of poverty, of disease, of hunger."

Yes, we will, together.