

January 8, 2015

Campus Safety, Inclusivity, and Community Engagement

Dear St. Mary's College Community Members,

Happy New Year! I hope you enjoyed the winter break and found time to do things that you like with your loved ones.

Every semester on a college campus has a recognizable cyclical pattern. It starts with great hope and aspiration. As the semester moves along, there are successes that remind us how powerful and wonderful a campus community can be as well as bumps in the road and obstacles that cause us to alter our direction. The end of the semester typically brings with it a sense of closure and accomplishment and a need for respite.

The Fall 2014 semester was not very different from others but for the lack of the sense of closure. The challenges that presented themselves to our community – concerns surrounding sexual misconduct, YikYak, the rope swing, and the events sparked by Ferguson and New York - all seemed to converge at the same time. While many of these issues are national, they seem intensified in a small community like St. Mary's College. Nonetheless, it is our size and the ethos of the St. Mary's Way that call us not to shy away from difficult issues but rather to address them directly.

We are one community with multiple perspectives. In order for us to most effectively address the concerns that have surfaced in our community, each of us must commit to being part of the solution and part of the dialogue. We must commit to entering into this process willing to listen, to learn, and to fairly evaluate viewpoints that are different from ours as well as our own beliefs. It is both important and essential that, as a small institution, we get to the point where we have an environment and community in which we all feel safe to discuss our feelings and voice our viewpoints civilly and that these will be respectfully received and acknowledged by colleagues, friends, and mentors regardless of whether we all agree.

As a community of higher learning, we need to approach the issues from last semester that gave us pause with intent and purpose in a manner that allows us to simultaneously address each issue for its own challenges while remaining cognizant of the systemic processes that connects each of them. St. Mary's College has the capacity, ability, and *will* to do this effectively. However, the effort will take coordination, participation, and time.

To begin this process, we have organized several immediate opportunities for community dialogue and discussion.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day activities.

1. The 11th annual prayer breakfast will begin at 6:00 am on Monday, January 19. Michael Steele, the keynote speaker, will be featured in the programming beginning at 8:00 am.
2. Teach-in "Race, Power, and Social Justice: the American Experience?" Professor **Garrey Dennie** will lead the teach-in as part of several activities for the community on January 19, 2015. This event is co-sponsored by the **Black Student Union** (BSU). The teach-in will take place in Cole Cinema at 8:00 pm.

Selma 65

This is a one-woman play based on events surrounding Viola Liuzzo, a white civil rights activist shot dead after the Selma Voting Rights March, and Tommy Rowe, an informant for the FBI who infiltrated the KKK – the organization responsible for Liuzzo's death. The **TFMS department**, with help from the **Lecture and Fine Arts committee**, the **Arts Alliance**, and the faculty of the **African and African Diaspora Studies program**, will produce and present the play on the evening of Friday January 30, 2015.. Time TBA.

St. Mary's College 175th Anniversary Celebration

Throughout the year, we will be engaged in activities that celebrate and acknowledge the College's past as a trailblazer in equality and toleration in the context of the challenges and potential for the present and

future. **Kathy Grimes** is coordinating these events. As part of this yearlong anniversary celebration series, there will be a yet-to-be-determined speaker who will focus on race in America. The **President's Office**, the **faculty of the African and African Diaspora Studies program**, and the **Division of Student Development** are collaborating to identify a speaker to be brought to campus during the Spring 2015 semester.

Many in our community have reached out with ideas, programs, and offers to assist in the effort to involve our campus in these critical conversations. I have asked **Dean of Students Leonard Brown** to coordinate these efforts so that our work in this realm compliment the work of the 175th Anniversary Committee. I encourage you to be in contact with him directly so that our efforts can be coordinated and resourceful.

To address the issues of safety and inclusion more expansively, I have asked the following people to lead small working groups that will include faculty, staff, and students.

Diversity and Inclusion.

Campus Culture, Policies and Programming – **Dr. Sybol Anderson** will lead this group. They are charged with examining our campus community, assessing the campus climate, developing/refining policies and procedures, and recommending programming needs.

Education and Training. **Dr. Beth Rushing** will lead a group to identify expert individuals or groups who can assist us in our efforts to organize diversity education and training opportunities for various constituencies on campus.

Civility and the Embodiment of Our Ethos– This group, to be led by **Dr. Robin Bates**, is charged with instilling the St. Mary's Way into new community members and developing curricular and co-curricular programming that ensures that we, as a community, are regularly tending to these ideals.

Along those lines, there have been several discussions surrounding YikYak. **Dean Brown** is researching options the College has to address posts that single out individuals and contain threatening or violent statements. I have asked him to develop an official statement that defines how the College will respond to posted statements that run counter to our student conduct code and ethos. The statement will be sent to the community by mid February.

Sexual Misconduct - **Dean Brown** will lead a group to develop recommendations to increase transparency and increase the sense of safety for students who report sexual misconduct. This group will also develop ways to respond to the community when these incidents occur on campus.

Hate and Bias – This group, headed by **Dean Brown**, developed a protocol and response to Hate and Bias incidents in Fall 2014. In an effort to increase the sense of campus safety, the group is now charged with expediting the implementation of a plan to educate our community about our policies and programming.

If you have recommendations for people to serve on these working groups, please feel free to contact the point person listed above. As the semester progresses, we will send regular updates to the entire community as ideas and plans present themselves. Our collective goal is to shape our community to reach its true and full potential.

As you have probably surmised, the winter respite is over. It is now time for us to get down to work. I look forward to the coming semester as I am filled with hope and have high aspirations for all that we will accomplish together. As you can see from the list of individuals and groups that are involved in these preliminary activities, community members are working collaboratively to help make this campus safe and inclusive. We are off to a very good start to what will be a busy and engaging semester.

I wish you all the best.

*Tuajuanda C. Jordan, PhD
President
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