

October 4, 2019

Governing Board Message to the Community Regarding Recent Incidents

Dear College Community,

This week has been a difficult week for our students, faculty, administration, classified professionals and broader community. There have been multiple media stories about incidents at the college that address marginalized communities, such as our LGBTQIA+ and Black communities; deal with sexual misconduct; and the critical issues of power and equity.

We recognize that these experiences do not impact only the individuals involved, but the hurt and pain is felt by others who share similar experiences. Our students are the most important people at our college. They are our purpose. Our community and our students deserve a college that provides educational excellence and is a convener and safe space for all.

Our students are resilient, intelligent, and equity-minded. Many of them face economic, homeless, and hunger challenges each day. As a predominantly diverse student body, they also face systemic racism and oppression daily. This is a reality.

Our college has not been perfect. The Governing Board is committed and focused on creating equitable educational opportunities for every student and ensuring all students know that they are welcomed, valued and belong at Southwestern College. Our commitment to the community is a college that is open, transparent, accountable and engaged. In January 2017, we hired Dr. Kindred Murillo as Superintendent/President because of her expertise in organizational and culture change.

Culture cannot change without acknowledging the issues that got us to the place we are now. Our college has a history of racial tensions, fear-based leadership and lack of accountability. We conducted a racial campus climate assessment that publicly confirmed many of the college's challenges. Since then we have not shied away from moving forward to address each one, while also addressing the larger issues around fear and accountability.

Some of the most challenging work we have done together is the work we are doing to address the history of racial tensions on campus. You can read more about by visiting the [Advisory Task Force on Inclusion & Race Relations webpage](#). Acknowledging that change starts at the top, we intentionally hired a diverse and equity-focused Executive Leadership Team.

Three additional things we will be doing in the near future is (1) creating a Community Advisory Commission to the Governing Board and Superintendent/President on equity and inclusion, (2) re-instituting our police advisory commission, and (3) providing additional culturally-responsive and implicit bias training to our Police Force.

We are aware that change does not happen overnight. Cultural change can take three to five years when there is a trusting environment. That has not been the case at Southwestern

College. We recognize that as we work to right the wrongs of the past, it will be difficult and will require uncomfortable and courageous conversations. These conversations must be accompanied by action.

Our community is diverse. It is a community where many of our members are targeted in national and political rhetoric solely because of the color of their skin; their country of origin; their gender identity or who they love. In fact, our community is intersectional with many of our members facing barriers on multiple fronts. We know that the fear and stressors faced by our students are larger than Southwestern College. Our priority is to ensure that we are not reinforcing these fears, but instead we are providing a safe space for our students to learn, grow and achieve their personal and academic best.

That is the Governing Board's commitment to our students and to our community. We welcome you to join us in this work.