

An open letter to UB students

Dear Students:

As the semester is quickly coming to a close, I wanted to take a moment to provide our campus community with an update regarding activities related to the continuing dialogues, programs, curricular discussions, and policy development in response to the controversial student art project from earlier this semester.

As I shared earlier, I have been meeting with a group of student leaders, including Student Association President Minahil Khan and Vice President Sean Kaczmarek, Black Student Union President Micah Oliver, Vice President Deidree Golbourne, and Secretary Tiffany Vera, People of Color Council Coordinator Jessica Calderon, and members of the Caribbean Student Union, African Student Association, and Puerto Rican Organization for Dignity and Equal Rights (PODER) Latinos Unidos.

To date we have had three meetings, and we hope to meet again prior to the end of the semester.

We have had several positive outcomes as a result of these conversations:

We have convened a students

of color advisory committee to the University Police Department that has met monthly to sustain a dialogue between campus officers and students to help ensure a safe and welcoming campus environment for all students.

Vice Provost for Equity and Inclusion Teri Miller, in her role as UB's chief diversity officer, has been engaging in continuing conversations with students in residence halls across campus and has, to date, had three meetings and dialogues with our students to ensure our UB practices and programs are characterized by the fair, inclusive, and equitable treatment of our diverse campus population. Vice Provost Miller is in the process of convening a student equity and inclusion advisory committee.

Across the university, we continue to explore new curricular approaches to issues of race, ethnicity, and cultural difference as part of the new General Education program, as well as the development of new programs and lectures for next semester

and beyond.

And we have been having robust conversations regarding student art projects, operating procedures, and policy development. Toward that end, I have charged the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences to assemble a committee comprised of members of the university community to develop policy regarding the installation of student art projects in university public spaces. With this charge, I have stated that it is imperative that we strike the appropriate balance between academic freedom and inclusivity.

While the university committee is developing a policy, I have established an interim operating procedure for the installation of student art projects in public spaces on campus. This interim procedure will require that student art projects exhibited outside of the Center for the Arts must be accompanied by a notation or explanatory identifier. Consistent with current university policy, placement of art projects in common areas must be reviewed by the Environment, Health and Safety Department for

physical safety and security issues. It is important to note under this policy, only physical elements and placement of an art project may be reviewed for safety and security purposes. The content of student art projects, which is expression that enjoys the protection of the First Amendment, may not be reviewed as part of this process.

Together with the collaborative efforts of our student leadership, our faculty, and university administration, I believe that these conversations, procedures, curricular discussions, and policies are allowing us to balance freedom of expression with the need to foster a welcoming and inclusive educational environment that is necessary for learning.

I want to thank our students, once again, for your leadership and partnership in helping to create meaningful institutional change for the betterment of our university.

And to all of our students, best wishes as you complete your final examinations, and warm wishes for the happiest of holidays.

Sincerely,
Satish K. Tripathi
President