

LETTER TO THE UB COMMUNITY

## UB committed to inclusive campus

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Dear University Community:

I want to take this opportunity to say once again how vitally important I feel it is to foster a welcoming, safe and inclusive campus climate where all feel respected and valued. This is a core principle for our UB community. But together, we must understand that creating this environment requires constant commitment, dialogue and intellectual engagement on the part of all of us.

I believe as a university community, we have committed ourselves to this effort, and with that, we should acknowledge the strides we have made. At the same time, we can't turn a blind eye to where we fall short in this effort. Last night, I was informed of the presence of graffiti that used intolerant language in one of our academic buildings. This is very disappointing and disrespectful of our values as a university community.

As we are all aware, over the past few months, university and college campuses across the nation have been the site of ongoing and intensifying debate about what it means to create a genuinely inclusive environment and whether our nation's campuses are living up to this ideal. These questions have been in the national spotlight at multiple campuses across the country, where students, faculty and staff are confronting painful issues of intolerance, bigotry and discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender and sexual identity.

These are difficult but necessary conversations and I believe the University at Buffalo can help lead the conversation about critical social issues like these as they play out both on our own campuses and on a national and global level. We don't just grapple with these issues in the abstract; we live these principles every day and examine their implications in all that we do — from the way in which social justice is embedded in the academic mission of our Law School, School of Social Work and other units, to how we plan the physical environment and shape the educational curriculum.

For all of us, these issues have been especially in our consciousness this semester in the wake of the controversial student art project [[http://www.buffalo.edu/ubreporter/campus/campus-host-page.host.html/content/shared/university/news/ub-reporter-articles/stories/2015/09/art\\_project.detail.html](http://www.buffalo.edu/ubreporter/campus/campus-host-page.host.html/content/shared/university/news/ub-reporter-articles/stories/2015/09/art_project.detail.html)] that sparked considerable debate and discussion across UB. It is a tribute to our students, faculty and staff that as a university community we have been able to take this difficult conversation and evolve it into an opportunity for constructive and sustained dialogue.

In my Sept. 24 open letter to the Spectrum [<http://www.buffalo.edu/president/from-the-president/communications/spectrum-lte.html>] and later at my State of the University address [<http://www.buffalo.edu/president/from-the-president/speeches/state-of-the-u-2015.html>] on Oct. 9, I shared a few of the actions our university community is undertaking and I wanted to take this opportunity to provide an update on some of the many ways our students, faculty and staff are moving the conversation forward.

Our Vice Provost for Equity and Inclusion has organized a series of meetings in our residence halls as an opportunity for students to discuss issues and concerns related to race, diversity and the campus culture.

We have convened a students of color advisory committee to the University Police Department, and our students, faculty and staff are engaging in valuable conversations with UB law enforcement about how to foster a safe and welcoming campus climate for all. Since the end of September, members of our University Police Department have met twice with concerned students about these issues.

The College of Arts and Sciences Policy Committee and Office of the Dean have been meeting to contemplate SUNY's policy on academic freedom in the context of campus concerns resulting from the student art project, as well as instructional policy regarding displays in public spaces.

This past week, the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences held a cultural competency training for its entire faculty, staff and administration.

The Intercultural Diversity Center has organized workshops around diversity and inclusion, and the UB 101 program is exploring new approaches to how these topics are presented to undergraduates as they enter our university.

Across the university, we are having in-depth conversations about new ways to explore race, ethnicity and cultural difference in the academic curriculum, from graduate seminars across the university to planning for our new general education program.

And as President, together with other members of the university's senior leadership, I continue to meet with concerned students about how to build on our efforts to foster a welcoming and inclusive campus environment for all. In the past few weeks, for example, I have had two meetings with members of the Black Student Union and other student leaders to discuss their concerns about the student art project and will be meeting a third time with this group next week.

Together, we are making progress. But we have much more yet to do to ensure we provide the most inclusive, welcoming and intellectually open environment possible.

Like everything that is truly meaningful, this requires much effort and I thank our students, faculty and staff for all your work. As always, I encourage us all, as members of the UB community, to reaffirm our shared commitment to diversity, inclusion and mutual respect as essential core values at the foundation of our academic community — and to live those values each day.

Sincerely,

Satish K. Tripathi

President

## Comments

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