

Subject: Creating a more inclusive Lawrence

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From: Communications

To: STUDENT-L; FACULTY-L; STAFF-L

Dear Lawrence faculty, students and staff,

I am writing to introduce myself, welcome you to a new academic year and begin a conversation about how we will work together to create a more inclusive Lawrence. I am extremely excited to be engaged in the work of fostering diversity and inclusion at this time, both in our country and at Lawrence.

The past year was a turbulent one that exposed the lingering pain of some while causing new anguish for others. But, as is the case in many periods of disruption, we have the opportunity to come together with new awareness to create a stronger institution and community. As author and activist bell hooks once wrote, "We cannot despair when there is conflict. Our solidarity must be affirmed by shared belief in a spirit of intellectual openness that celebrates diversity, welcomes dissent and rejoices in collective dedication to the truth."

The evidence based on research is clear: Diversity improves the curriculum, pedagogy and co-curricular programs. Taking an inclusive approach to our work in higher education benefits everyone. It increases the cognitive complexity of students' thinking, helping them to approach the tasks of living an engaged life both critically and with compassion. It helps us teach all students more effectively, better achieving the desired learning outcomes. And finally, it strengthens our democracy by helping create and expand an educated citizenry, including those historically underserved by higher education, who are capable of contributing fully to our shared political and economic success.

In President Burstein's recent letter about the new academic year, he urged us to create a new path together that welcomes and supports us all and fosters civil discourse. I am developing a framework to facilitate creation of this new path, as well as a theme for our work. The framework is tactical, while the theme conveys the philosophy behind the work. Initial activities related to the framework will build upon the many critical strategies people across campus implemented prior to my arrival. I am grateful to those who have been and continue to be committed to and engaged in this important work at Lawrence. Their work laid a strong foundation upon which to build. Ultimately, conversations with faculty, students and staff over the next few months will determine specific strategies and priorities for the framework.

In order to institutionalize inclusion, the framework will focus on developing and supporting three areas.

- One will be strengthening relationships, both within and between various groups on campus. This includes relationships between supervisors and employees, students and faculty members, and Lawrence and Appleton, as well as among and within various cultural affiliation groups.
- Another focus will be on capacity-building—facilitating programs to ensure all members of our community have the skills, knowledge and resources they need to take an equity-minded approach to their work.
- The third area of focus for my framework to achieve greater inclusion is accountability. This will focus on assessment across the organization (institutional, departmental and individual) in order to track and celebrate progress while identifying areas still in need of improvement and additional support.

Finally, in this time when there appears to be so much animosity, mutual hostility and hate, how can we, as our university's motto urges, bring more light? To me, love is the light. So my theme for our diversity work will be, "Loving Large at Lawrence." It refers to ideas related to loving learning, loving ourselves and loving community.

Loving learning is about the predisposition Lawrentians have to enthusiastically seek out opportunities to encounter and create new knowledge while bringing all of who they are to the educational enterprise. It also speaks to our understanding that optimal intellectual development occurs when significant challenge is accompanied by sufficient academic and emotional support. Loving ourselves is about becoming strong self-advocates and working to find harmony between the demands of rigorous, engaged liberal learning and self-care. It's also about accepting ourselves so we can do the same for others. Loving community is based on the idea of Ubuntu, commonly translated, "I am because you are." It is about acknowledging and supporting our interdependence as we strive to create a just, equitable and inclusive learning community.

So I hope you will join me in working to make sure we are indeed, "Loving Large at Lawrence." As we embark on this journey together, keep in mind what celebrated scholar Noam Chomsky once said: "Optimism is a strategy for making a better future. Because unless you believe that the future can be better, you are unlikely to step up and take responsibility for making it so." I look forward to getting to know you and welcome invitations from departments or organizations to discuss strategies for achieving a more inclusive Lawrence.

Wishing you much success in the coming academic year!

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