

Nov. 17, 2015

To the Oregon State community,

On Monday night, university students led a moving and powerful 'speak out' during which students of color openly and honestly shared their experiences with racial injustice while attending Oregon State. They also shared fears for their own safety and for other OSU students of color. More than 500 people attended this essential and revealing conversation and nearly 3,000 more viewed this conversation on-line.

I am very appreciative of the students who organized this 'speak out,' and I am very thankful that they called upon me and other leaders at Oregon State to listen and learn from their experiences, and to take immediate and effective steps to ensure that this university is a much more inclusive, racially sensitive and safe community.

I was greatly moved by the honesty and bravery of the students who shared their stories last night. I also was incredibly saddened to learn what our students of color experience while attending this university that I love. I am truly sorry for these experiences and I personally apologize for not having seen and better responded to the needs and issues that were expressed Monday night.

In 2011, I said that "Oregon State University aspires to be a collaborative, inclusive and caring community that strives for equity and equal opportunity in everything we do; that creates a welcoming environment and enables success for people from all walks of life; and that shares common, fundamental values grounded in justice, civility and respect while looking to our diversity as a source of enrichment and strength."

This vision is not just a set of words. It is this institution's aspiration and it represents my personal commitment. It also should be the commitment of all of us who work at and attend Oregon State University. I believe deeply in the vision we described in 2011, and while we have taken many actions and instituted many programs to move toward that vision, we still have much work to do as our students have demonstrated through their courageous testimonies.

I feel it is also important to note that the racist, negative and hateful comments and behavior that were captured on social media during Monday's 'speak out' are unacceptable and are completely against our values and aspirations as members of the Oregon State University community. We should not tolerate such behavior. I know that as president of this university, I will not tolerate it.

We must do better beginning now. We must change students' experiences and foster a community of greater inclusivity, racial justice and safety. I will not stop until we do so. But to do this correctly and effectively, our students need to be part of the discussion

and the solutions. As OSU's president, I will be much more aware of what's going on and be more fully engaged with our students.

The students who organized Monday night's 'speak out' meeting closed the conversation by offering four very thoughtful recommendations:

- that all Oregon State faculty and staff engage in required identity and social justice training;
- that all entering Oregon State students be required to complete on-line education and other courses in race, social justice and equity;
- that Oregon State improve campus safety for students of color; regularly assess and report information related to the university's racial climate; and provide all community members the ability to report racial issues and concerns; and
- that Oregon State make systemic and institutional changes to increase the diversity of its faculty and staff and grow the number of students of color attending the university.

I am genuinely committed to do all that I can to get this right.

On Monday, Nov. 23, I and other university leaders will meet with the student organizers of yesterday's 'speak out.' We will review what we learned at the meeting and discuss what immediate next steps Oregon State can take to address concerns; improve safety; and effectively and measurably ensure that OSU is a more collaborative, inclusive and caring community that strives for equity and equal opportunity. I pledge to provide the Oregon State community an update of next and specific steps by the end of fall term.

We can achieve this aspiration if we work together. This is an essential priority and one that I will work to achieve and sustain until this is done.

Please know that my door is always open. I invite you to join me and others who are committed to social justice, civility, respect and safety for all.

Sincerely,

Ed Ray  
President