



# PennState

Dear Members of the Penn State Community:

Over the past two weeks I have heard from hundreds of students, faculty, alumni and community members about their concerns involving hate in the Penn State community. People are justifiably upset about the events in our nation, and the limitations surrounding our institutional response. We must acknowledge the pain, anger and frustration that such events inflict on our community. We must recognize that Black Lives Matter, and that racism, bias and religious intolerance yield an inexcusable cost to life and liberty.

We have an obligation to fight ignorance and intolerance, model inclusivity and embrace the power that diversity represents. Yet we operate in a national environment where there is growing polarity on these issues, greater conflict and an amplification of hate speech. The path forward will be challenging. We must work together to address both immediate issues and the solutions to long-standing problems, and to be candid and direct [about what public universities can accomplish](#), while still setting the bar high as a national leader in higher education.

I write to you today to say that we are committed to making changes at Penn State that address these issues. I believe that together we can make significant progress. As a first step, I plan the following actions:

1. **Convene a task force to initiate a full review of the Student Code of Conduct**, with significant participation by student leaders, including a student in the role of co-chair. We will seek every opportunity for improvement as we work to ensure that our community has a full understanding of its purpose and provisions, including the role of restorative justice.
2. **Work with the University Faculty Senate, Staff Advisory Council, student leaders and University administrators to initiate mandatory bias training for all employees** beginning during the fall semester. All senior administrators will complete the training modules already developed by Penn State's Equity Action Resources Team as soon as possible, and we will examine the potential for adopting training programs developed at other institutions external to the University.
3. **Partnership with the University Faculty Senate to support the request of student leaders for required racism and bias coursework for all students.** Our students have been persistent in requesting these educational programs and it is time to work with them to improve our educational offerings and opportunities.

4. **Partner through shared governance with the University Faculty Senate to continue to develop improved policies, procedures and expectations that will increase the hiring and retention of faculty who are members of underrepresented groups at the University.** Hiring and retention continues to be a major challenge for Penn State that must be addressed.
5. **Work with the Board of Trustees to help ensure that educational and employment equity has the full attention of the trustees.** The board has expressed considerable interest in continuing to elevate this topic in its deliberations.
6. **Ask the Task Force on Policing and Communities of Color to reconvene,** examine where we have made, or not made, progress since the Task Force completed its work in 2017, and to explicitly examine all procedures and practices related to bias and to use of force, including those that result from our partnerships across the commonwealth.
7. **Prioritize the well-being of all students and employees, including enhanced mental health resources, and community building initiatives.** We must recognize that students and employees have cited the stress of feeling unsafe and unwelcome as a result of hate speech.

In addition, I will name a **Select Penn State Presidential Commission on Racism, Bias and Community Safety**. This commission will initially be tasked to make concrete recommendations on supporting the safety of faculty, staff and students associated with bias and racism as they return to our Penn State campuses, especially in the context of the expected political and social unrest that we face in the fall. The select commission will further be tasked to examine the deployment of University resources to address the profound social issues related to bias that we face pervasively as a nation, and specifically at Penn State. This select commission shall include a broad representation of leaders and scholars at all levels in the University, including the leadership of the current [University Presidential Commissions](#), as well as members of our alumni whose independent judgment will be of value to this important work.

Finally, the University will initiate a variety of communication and information gathering efforts so that our actions are informed by our community. We will be open to ideas and suggestions from these groups and others to develop additional ideas that can be included in our action plans. To begin:

- I am joining with Vice President for Student Affairs Damon Sims to meet with student leaders to discuss all aspects of student concerns related to bias, racism and student safety.
- We are scheduling a town hall to discuss and answer questions from our faculty, staff, students and alumni on our code, and issues of bias, racism, the actions of Penn State, now and in the future.

- We will initiate listening sessions to continue hearing from the breadth of our community.

We face a profound challenge in university communities across the nation. Our very mission is to serve and advance the citizens of our commonwealth and nation through education. It is a mission that fails if we are not diverse and inclusive. I believe in the power of the Penn State community to create a more just society.

I welcome your ideas and participation as we move forward.

**Eric J. Barron**

President, Penn State