



Office of the President

January 16, 2017

Dear Community Member,

Welcome back to the new academic semester. Even as the days grow slowly longer we will be caught in the lingering hold of winter for a few more months, so welcome to this next part of our journey. In the academic world we divide our efforts into roughly four month segments. The reasons for this are largely the legacy of an older time when travel was slow and the demands of everyday life different. Yet this orderly slicing of the year does give us the chance to regularly start anew. We are able to have two beginnings every year and my sense is this year we need a new beginning more than usual.

Let me begin by acknowledging that last semester was a difficult one, sometimes a very difficult one for some members of our community. While we cannot and should not separate ourselves from the wider society, we cannot completely ignore the broader climate affecting our land which appears to be bringing out the worst in a few individuals, but I hope only a few. It is hard to adjust to a climate in which civility, common discourse, and truth itself is disparaged and hateful speech is given license. This does not absolve us of our responsibilities however, responsibilities in two domains.

First, I believe it important to acknowledge that members of our community were injured by other members of our community. To say that the hateful words and actions taken by a very few were merely expressions of free speech misses the point. Certainly, freedom of expression is a primary obligation of the academy. We cannot make progress as a people if we do not nurture emerging truths which arise from dialogue. It is inevitable in a free society that there will be differing viewpoints. But this adherence to open conversation does not include the passive acceptance of speech or actions designed to injure. Such targeting has nothing to do with freely entered dialogue and indeed it deliberately inhibits such dialogue. When we encounter such hateful acts, we have taken and will take action. We have disciplined and will discipline any member of our community, student, faculty or staff, who is found to have committed such acts. We will continue to investigate each and every act in cooperation with local law enforcement as we follow the law and privacy requirements, which may mean you never hear about the consequences of actions taken. Justice is a fundamental precursor to a learning community, yet discipline after the fact, while necessary, likely does little to affect the root cause of such speech or behavior.

This speaks to the second area in which this Community must acknowledge a need to improve. Our Catholic Edmundite tradition compels us most fundamentally to respect and honor the dignity of each human person. This is the foundational element of our very reason to be a College and the most basic expression of our mission. When this fundamental tenet has been violated we have several courses of action, in addition to an honest acknowledgement. First, the individual acts can be addressed by moving to exclude members of our community who have performed such acts or spoken such hate. Regrettably, there are times when this course of action may be the only one available. As an

educational institution whose intention is to change individuals, this manner of exclusion of a member should be very rare. Our second response is more in keeping with who we are as a Catholic institution and community founded on hope. Here we should rely on our very nature as an educational institution to be able to change minds and hearts. Relying on legal remedies is a poor substitute for the building of broad consensus within the community that inclusiveness is absolutely fundamental to whom we are. And inclusiveness only starts with welcoming; it requires active engagement between all members of the community. Our fundamental challenge then is to create a community in which every member wants to live and grow.

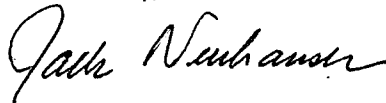
This is difficult and likely to be imperfectly achieved at any given point; still, this is our obligation. How can this be achieved? Well, first by an honest discernment of what is in each of our hearts and then a moral and intellectual commitment to improve. At the most basic, this involves learning to talk honestly and being able to listen clearly. This is not easy because we all bring our personal and communal history to the conversation. But we should be clear that this is a project that is intended to change minds and hearts; nothing less will suffice.

There will be a number of activities this coming semester designed to help us listen and change, beginning with those of Martin Luther King Jr. week. I will be hosting a number of forums designed to encourage honest conversation with the intent that we, including myself, learn. We will also be encouraging a number of other more intimate venues for conversations and a number of classes will provide venues as well. My hope is that we can resort to what a learning community does best, listen and think and change, even when there is a cacophony of loud voices elsewhere.

I believe we are better than that now and acknowledge that we can be even better.

May this semester bring peace and learning to us all.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John J. Neuhauser". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

John J. Neuhauser
President