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Our Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

Edward Montgomery
Western Michigan University

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Our Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

Dear members of the WMU community:

As we approach the start of the fall semester our campus is busy with preparation for the return of continuing students and the welcoming of new students to the WMU family. Each year brings with it new opportunities for discovery and engagement. Our University is committed to the free exchange of ideas and perspectives. That exchange is at the core of the academic enterprise. However, our campus does not exist in a bubble.

We are not immune to the currents and controversies going on at other universities and in our country. The past weeks have seen the specter of prejudice, hatred and bigotry rear its ugly head in Charlottesville, Virginia, with tragic consequences. Such events challenge us as individuals and as institutions to make clear our moral values, to take a stand on the side of human decency, and to speak out with one loud voice for the kind of society we believe in.

As the new president of this fine university I am proud to reaffirm our longstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion, to our fundamental belief in the dignity and worth of all human beings no matter their race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, religion, or sexual orientation. It is our differences that make us stronger. Efforts to threaten, demean, or degrade one of us is an assault against our whole community and should not go unchallenged by an inclusive and welcoming campus.

We at Western Michigan University will always honor higher education's role as a place that nurtures the open exchange of ideas and advances our constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech and expression. However, we abhor attempts to use those freedoms to preach and practice hatred, or to take us back to a darker time or place where genocide was practiced and human bondage condoned. The strength of this campus is its people, and we will vehemently guard against expression that is rooted in hatred and the kind of violence that should be abhorrent to every citizen.

This University's senior leadership team and I are deeply concerned about the tenor of the time. With the academic year about to start, we call on every individual in our community to revisit and reconsider the values that have, for so long, made this institution a beacon--a place where every individual is recognized as a valued member of our campus community and treated with respect, and a place where civility guides our debate.

While our university has strived to lead in its commitment to diversity and inclusion, we have room to improve. We admitted our first minority students over 100 years ago when many of our peers would not, but for too many, their experience in our community was not free from bias or discrimination. Building a diverse and inclusive campus or society is hard work. Bias can be as explicit as the Whites Only signs of the Jim Crow era, but it can also be as subtle as the nonverbal cues and stereotypes we apply in everyday situations. We are committed to combating these biases and making diversity and inclusion an institutional hallmark both in word and in

deed by taking time to continually examine what we can do better. Our Diversity and Multicultural Action Plan remains a valuable tool to guide us in our effort.

Let there be no doubt or ambiguity, here at WMU we are welcoming and inclusive of all. The families and communities we serve expect and deserve nothing less, and we owe that to ourselves as well.

Thank you for your commitment to our shared values and goals. Let's make this an academic year full of unity, civility, achievement and success.

Sincerely,

Dr. Edward Montgomery
President