

December 1, 2015

To: Liberate MSU Representatives

From: Lou Anna K. Simon

Dear Representatives from Liberate MSU:

Thank you for taking time to meet with me yesterday. As I said toward the end of our meeting, we agree there is much work to do for MSU to achieve the vision of a truly genuine inclusive, world-class university. And I believe that together, students, faculty, and staff can accelerate change. Dialogue about the issues is a part of that change.

I apologize for the confusion at the beginning of the meeting. I had expected copies of my response to your demands presented November 18 to be available at the meeting space prior to my arrival. Our conversation was further complicated by the reading of your revised demands, which did not match the list from Wednesday, November 18 and to which the written response was addressed. As discussed, I will respond to the additional items included in your revised demands by next Monday.

In my view, the response provided to CORES and COPS November 19 regarding their list of demands (made available to the university community on the Vice President for Student Affairs website and at the Town Hall hosted by Student Affairs November 20) addresses some of the concerns you raised. While I understand this is not a shared view, I believe it is important to collect and connect the various lists of issues and demands being issued by various groups of students, as they relate to the same core issues.

There are many stakeholders in our core value of inclusion. In fact, all members of the MSU community must engage with this core value for us to make the kind of progress we need to make. Our progress, to date and as we move forward, involves evolving solutions and action plans that are broadly discussed across the university.

While we agree much work remains to be done, there has been much noteworthy work recently. Structural changes have been implemented around the new Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) that will handle the investigation of bias complaints. I invite you to attend a soon-to-be-scheduled town hall to be led by director Ande Durojaiye who will shape the work plan for OIE. Sergeant Florene McGlothian-Taylor will head a new bias incident unit within the MSU Police Department. If you or others have concerns about a particular incident, I encourage you to share that information with her. Residential and Hospitality Services will host a town hall for on-campus students to discuss issues related to race, diversity, and inclusion Friday, December 4 in the International Center Food Court at 3 p.m. Questions about police presence in the residences halls will be addressed in that forum.

Much of our meeting focused on the status of the African American and African Studies (AAAS) program and, through your new demands, the Chicano Latino Studies (CLS) programs. I acknowledge that our approach stressing strength and distinction through an interdisciplinary, doctoral program, with undergraduate courses as the basis for providing teaching experience for graduate students, is unique. It reflects the opportunity to learn from our own experiences, including the creation of a college with a department of racial and ethnic studies arising out of

the turmoil of the 1960s and its elimination in the 1980s based on recommendations from a special committee and action by the Board of Trustees. The work to create AAAS and CLS was based on a commitment to a 21st-century model that would be a force for inclusive excellence based on its interdisciplinarity rather than insularity.

Many of you have experienced a bit of turbulence during times of leadership change in these programs. And while I can provide data that indicates funding support for AAAS has increased at a higher rate than that of the College of Arts and Letters over the past five years, that does not eliminate the gap between resources available and the resources required to fulfill the full aspirations for the program. Unfortunately, this gap exists for every MSU program or unit striving for higher levels of excellence.

Since arriving at MSU, Dean Christopher Long has initiated discussions with AAAS leadership to reset the strategic direction for the program. This work will include student input. I know some of you already have talked with Dean Long and agree he is committed to enhancing the support for this program based on strategic planning. I have asked Provost June Youatt and College of Social Science Interim Dean Neal Schmitt to develop a similar plan to strengthen CLS and to improve communication during leadership transitions.

An underlying theme in our conversations is how to create avenues that enable your voices to be heard and your ideas to be part of ongoing communication and discussion about progress on shared goals, even if we disagree on the specific actions proposed. I understand your desire for what you see as a more democratic approach that values the voices of self-formed groups as much as, and perhaps more than, those of traditional structures such as academic or student governance. I will continue to listen and reflect on how to broaden engagement.

In this spirit, after you have reviewed the written material I shared with you, I hope you will have questions, ideas, and comments framed not as demands, but rather as thoughts that merit further conversation and collaborative discussion. Vice President Maybank and her team will reach out to you to follow up on our meetings. In addition, I have asked Dr. Carl Taylor to act as a key listener and liaison for me with various students, particularly those that do not feel represented by traditional governance, so I can continue to better understand the life experiences of all our students and consider the broadest set of evolving solutions. I encourage you to contact either of them to share reactions. Upon their advice, I am willing to meet with you in the spring semester if we can move away from demand and response to a deeper dialogue.

As I reflect on our interactions, my conversations with other concerned MSU students, and the voices of students around the country, I am aware we have an opportunity to use this moment to recommit to our ideals and accelerate action on our intentions. To be a truly great university, we must be at the forefront of genuine inclusion. This is not achieved simply through a checklist of requirements for education of the ever-changing members of our community. It must also come from a deep sense of our obligation to one another, the obligation to disrupt bias inherent in each of us so that all Spartans have the same opportunities to achieve not just an MSU degree but the experiences and competencies necessary to be successful over a lifetime.

Sincerely,

Lou Anna K. Simon, Ph.D.