

September 16, 2020

Dear President Cook and Honorable Members of the Board of Clackamas Community College,

Thank you so much for your quick response in working with the American Red Cross to provide space for fire evacuees, as well as a staging ground for fire fighters on our campus. Further, thank you for working with the CCC Foundation to raise money in support of workers on the front lines. Your efforts during the past week have demonstrated the best of what CCC has to offer our community, and that has made us proud.

Needless to say, our college community has experienced a series of unprecedented and challenging crises during the last six months including the pandemic, the fires, and the unwanted presence of violent extremists on our campus. It's the latter event – the unsanctioned Oregon For Trump 2020 Labor Day Cruise Rally that occurred on September 7th that we'd like to talk about this evening. The rally included armed protestors associated with Patriot Prayer and Proud Boys, white nationalists that have been categorized as extremist groups. While respecting the right to free speech and free assembly, we must work together as a community to denounce extremist organizations and promote the values of diversity, equity and inclusion put forth in the resolution crafted by the College and unanimously adopted by the Board on June 24th.

We would like to express thanks to President Cook for his letter to the campus community, explaining to us that this gathering was a “flash rally” and not sanctioned by the College. We appreciate his quick and thoughtful response and his statement that the actions that took place on September 7th, “[were] not reflective of who are and what we care about.”

It was unfortunate that College Safety was informed of the rally only shortly before it took place, and understandably, they had to act quickly. While the College did not want to block Tri-Met riders from using the campus transfer hub, there appeared to be insufficient consideration given to the protection of Tri-Met passengers from armed militants, or to the effect on bus riders, including those of color, of hateful rhetoric and signs that were displayed. To those who viewed the rally that day or later in the media, the role of the College in making this event possible was at best unclear. We may forever be associated with it.

Additionally, because of COVID-19, the College has adopted a strict policy regarding limited use of campus grounds and facilities and mandatory wearing of masks. It is evident from videos on the local and national news that most participants at the rally were not wearing masks or practicing social distancing. It does not reflect well on the College to ban students from campus in the interest of public well-being, then subsequently allow white nationalist groups to openly flaunt our policies.

Even if the College was ultimately powerless to prevent these hate groups from invading our campus, it should always be clear that we do not willingly acquiesce to their presence. Complicity with violence and hate is intolerable. While we can't erase the past, we must work diligently to prevent events like this from happening again.

We understand that the Board has written a letter that goes beyond our campus community addressed to local and national news organizations, denouncing our association with the rally and the hateful values on display there. We would like to do whatever we can to support you in further communicating our disassociation with extremists.

Further, association leaders look forward to meeting with President Cook and College Safety to discuss how this event was allowed to happen, and help put concrete policies in place to prevent anything like it from occurring again. These policies should be communicated clearly to our campus, as well the community at large.

As an academic institution, we need to model campus-wide critical thinking and inquiry. We propose conducting a public forum (or a series of forums and events) that includes faculty and staff, as well as outside speakers. The forum, facilitated by experts and greater community representatives, would address issues such as free speech vs. hate speech and provide a chance for reasonable, moderated discussion and debate.

Finally, let's all work together to provide much clearer communication, shared understanding, and comprehensive application regarding our DEI policies. This communication should begin with faculty and staff through workshops, discussion groups, and other activities, which could then spread to the larger Clackamas community. It's critical that we move beyond mere statements about diversity, equity, and inclusion to action.

We have some difficult work ahead of us to heal from the multiple hits our community has taken. While wildfires remain out of our control, together we can make it a priority to manage our response to hate. Let's continue to work toward our better selves and make our campus a safe, inclusive, and vital place to be.

Thank you.

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