November 20, 2015

Dear University Community:

The incidents of racism and bigotry that occurred during a peaceful protest outside Jack Trice Stadium on Sept. 12, and the subsequent public forum held on Sept. 30, coordinated by Students Against Bigotry (now known as Latinos United for Change or LUCHA) and Student Government, reminded us all that racism, bigotry, discrimination, and marginalization are happening on the Iowa State campus. The forum provided me an opportunity to listen, learn, and feel – to truly understand what some of our minority students, faculty, and staff have endured; and it underscored the importance of empathy and action.

In the time since the Sept. 30 forum, my senior administration and I have taken a number of steps, as promised, to continue addressing these issues:

1. Immediately following the Discussion on Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion, I charged my senior staff to compile recommendations from the university community. The email address president@iastate.edu was provided at the forum to submit concerns or recommendations.

2. Oct. 5, we launched the process to develop the university’s new Strategic Plan. I named the Strategic Plan Steering Committee and charged them to develop a plan that features four overarching goals, including one specifically focused on ensuring a welcoming, safe, and inclusive campus environment.

3. Oct. 6, Latinos United for Change (LUCHA) provided a list of grievances and needs and solutions to improve the campus environment pertaining to ISU Police, recruitment and retention of Latino students, financial assistance for Latino students and other minorities, ensuring a diverse faculty and staff, training, and representation on campus. One other suggestion was submitted regarding the naming of Catt Hall.

4. Oct. 15, I appointed Dr. Reginald Stewart as the university’s first Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion.

5. Oct. 22 – Nov. 11, The Strategic Plan Steering Committee was finalized and six strategic planning subcommittees were established, including one focused specifically on initiatives that ensure a welcoming, safe, and inclusive campus environment. Subcommittee nominations were solicited and evaluated, and a total of 95 members were appointed, including members of LUCHA and other minority groups.

6. Nov. 5, I charged Student Affairs leadership to work closely with LUCHA and evaluate the needs and solutions which they provided.
7. Nov. 11, LUCHA met with the Senior Vice President for Student Affairs, Dean of Students, and Student Government to evaluate and discuss their recommendations.

8. Nov. 18, First public forum held to collect university-wide input on the next Strategic Plan.

9. Nov. 18, Senior Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students met for the second time with LUCHA and Student Government.

10. Nov. 19, Pursuant to LUCHA’s recommendations, ISU Police assigned Officer Dwight Hinson as liaison to Multicultural Student Affairs to establish a strong partnership with Iowa State’s multicultural community. We anticipate adding a second multicultural officer position in the near future.

11. In Progress, Pursuant to LUCHA’s recommendations, ISU Police are developing a plan to expand the safety escort service and changes will be implemented by spring. In September, four dispatchers were hired to solely handle safety escort calls.

12. In Progress, Pursuant to LUCHA’s recommendations, University Museums has developed a plan to relocate multicultural artwork in the Senior Vice President for Student Affairs Office to more visible areas on campus. In addition, University Museums has outlined three initiatives that I have agreed to fund:

- Diversity in Art Course. A discussion-based course that utilizes the Art on Campus and University’s Permanent Collections as a catalyst for discussion about issues of diversity and inclusion.
- Student Curated Exhibition. In cooperation with the Multicultural Student Center, students will be invited to curate a biannual exhibition for the Reiman Gallery of the Christian Peterson Art Museum on central campus.
- Multicultural Art Exhibition. University Museums will present an exhibition by a multicultural artist who uses art to present issues of diversity. The exhibition will also include public programs and will be incorporated into curriculum across campus.

These steps are in addition to the university’s extensive ongoing diversity and inclusion efforts.

Student Affairs leadership has provided detailed information to LUCHA of the university’s current efforts pertaining to:

- **ISU Police**,
- **Recruitment and retention** of Latino students,
- **Financial assistance** for Latino students and other minorities,
- Ensuring a **diverse faculty and staff**,
- **Training**,
- **Representation** on campus,
- **ISU Extension and Outreach**, and
- **Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT)**.
I am pleased we have been able to take immediate action to implement a number of LUCHA’s recommendations as well as additional steps to improve our campus culture. However, it is critically important that we respect the principles of shared governance. It gave me pause when I read LUCHA made specific demands of all faculty, staff, and students without open discussion or any commitment to shared governance (e.g. mandatory training, attendance at conference, etc.) These demands would involve significant time commitments and financial implications for faculty, staff, and students. I find that making demands of partners often produces reluctant compliance when we need sincere buy-in. Even in my role as president, I do not make demands or unilaterally institute mandates. I believe in our shared governance process, and I value strong partnerships with Faculty Senate, P&S Council, and Student Government. What LUCHA is proposing will necessitate input from all stakeholders who would be impacted.

The way to effect substantive change on this campus is through inclusiveness and shared governance. In accordance with that philosophy, the university is developing an initial plan of action in close collaboration with Dr. Stewart and all stakeholders focused on three areas:

First, in the realm of our classrooms, existing training for tenure-track faculty, lecturers, and teaching assistants on issues of diversity will be evaluated and, where necessary, new training will be developed and offered annually. This training will also help faculty and staff establish procedures and protocols for creating a welcoming, inclusive environment. I would like to thank all faculty, staff, and students who have completed the university’s Title IX and harassment training.

Second, in the realm of advising, a framework will be established to enable departments to understand more about the cultural climate in all of our programs. If/when concerns or complaints arise, the Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion will work with departments to address these issues.

Third, in the realm of student experience, student orientation programming will be evaluated to ensure it includes culturally dynamic opportunities for students to engage with one another. Existing diversity committees and initiatives within colleges and departments will be reviewed and evaluated to determine gaps and ensure student representation. Finally, we will ask that all student clubs and their advisers understand the university’s expectations for creating a welcoming and inclusive culture.

Acts of racism, bigotry, discrimination, and marginalization have no place on college campuses or in society, but we cannot ignore the fact that they are happening and Iowa State is not immune. The reality is there are students, faculty, and staff on college campuses across the country, including here at Iowa State, who do not feel completely accepted, welcome, or safe. We must acknowledge this openly and candidly. We must work together to change this reality by taking action every day to reinforce a culture of inclusion and respect that upholds freedom of speech and expression in a way that fosters open discussion and civil discourse.
Diversity isn’t something we should merely tolerate; it’s a fundamental component of higher education and the Iowa State experience. By working together to embrace diversity and create a more inclusive culture we will make Iowa State a more inspiring and invigorating place to discover, learn, and achieve.

Sincerely,

Steven Leath
President