



Minnesota
STATE COLLEGES
& UNIVERSITIES

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To: Higher Education Justice Minnesota participants

From: Steven Rosenstone

Subject: Your memo dated February 20, 2014

Thank you for your letter of February 20, 2014, stating your concerns about racial equity in higher education. I appreciate the time and effort that went into your letter, and I want to be clear that I wholeheartedly share your commitment to racial equity in all of education, including higher education and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. Indeed, providing more and better education opportunities to all Minnesotans and ensuring equitable access and opportunity have been cornerstones of my efforts as chancellor as well as the efforts of the Board of Trustees. In addition to providing benefit to individual Minnesotans, I believe that equity in higher education is essential to the broader public good. That will continue to be the focus of our work and we welcome thoughtful ideas about how best to accomplish those goals.

It is my view that the actions you demand in your letter would not, however, help accomplish those goals, and it does not appear that you have been provided complete information regarding events that occurred at Minneapolis Community and Technical College. As you may be aware, the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act prohibits both the college and the system from disclosing private personnel data. Under Minnesota Statutes section 13.43, only the subject of private personnel data can choose to publicly disclose that information; a government body cannot respond even if it believes the individual concerned has not fully or accurately represented the issues involved. However, I can assure you that very thorough and fair processes are available to employees who have a dispute about personnel actions, and these processes ensure that the dispute receives the process due in accordance with the Constitution, bargaining agreements, and state law.

As President Davis has stated previously, no faculty member has ever been disciplined by the college for teaching structural racism. In fact, the topic of structural racism has long been embraced by the college as an essential dialogue both in and outside the classroom. Additionally, MCTC offers over 80 courses that specifically contain content related to diversity, multiculturalism and race, including such programs and topics as African Diaspora, Global Studies, Civil Rights, American Indian Studies, American Minority Relations, and Human Rights. During fall semester alone, the MCTC chief diversity officer conducted nine workshops focused on racism, bias, stereotypes, and diversity. During the current term, student organizations have offered two programs on structural racism.

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While we also share the goal of increasing the diversity of leadership both within Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and Minneapolis Community and Technical College, I disagree that only the wholesale removal of leaders with whom someone disagrees will help achieve that goal. It remains deeply troubling to me that individuals who claim interest in these issues have stated their refusal to work with college leadership. I hope that stance can be reconsidered so we can move forward together to achieve what I believe to be shared goals.

If you are not already familiar with the system's work in "Charting the Future," I hope you will take the time to read this report (http://www.mnscu.edu/chartingthefuture/docs/charting_the_future.pdf). The first of the initiatives in the report is to "dramatically increase the success of all learners, especially those in diverse populations traditionally underserved by higher education." Over the coming months a team of students, faculty, staff and others from our college and universities will be developing implementation plans for this as well as the other five recommendations described in the report. I invite you to work with faculty and student representatives to convey your ideas for increasing the success of students from all backgrounds and improving racial equity for all students.

As those efforts advance, the system's Office of Diversity and Equity will continue to work closely with presidents and campus diversity officers to identify areas that need to be addressed to foster the success of all our students. I note that MCTC has made important progress in this area, including the percentage of permanent faculty of color (doubled from 11% in 2006 to 23% in 2012) and the number of students of color served (increasing from 5939 students of color in 2008 – 46.5% of overall enrollment – to 7767 students of color in 2013 – 56% of overall enrollment). In addition, graduation rates, while still unacceptably low, have increased over the past four years, and are slightly higher than the average for two-year colleges in Minnesota. Although continued analysis will be necessary, it appears that programs such as the Power of You, accelerated English and math programs modeled on work done by Baltimore Community College and the Carnegie Foundation, and the Student African American Brotherhood program, are all contributing to increased levels of student success. I hope you will agree that these and other programs should be evaluated based on their results and that improvements should continue to be made everywhere they can.

Finally, extensive work is being done by Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, the state Department of Education led by Commissioner Brenda Cassellius, and other P-12 and higher education leaders to aggressively address the educational gaps faced by students of color in Minnesota at all levels. Those efforts will continue to be top priority for all of us involved in making education work for every Minnesotan, regardless of race. I welcome all constructive voices to be part of this effort and to focus their energy on real improvements for the sake of all our students. These goals are critically important to the well-being and prosperity of Minnesotans. They demand that we make the best and fastest progress possible and they demand that we make the best possible use of the resources and ideas we have available. I hope you will join me in this important effort.