

06/09/2020

Executive Committee

For Immediate Release



---

Response to President Heckler's "Now is the Time for our Light" Statement

Dear Valpo Students,

On Friday June 5th, we met with VP of Student Affairs Julie DeGraw and Associate Provost for Inclusion and Retention Stacey Miller. We discussed the disappointment we saw from Valpo students regarding President Heckler's statement on the global unrest sparked by the death of George Floyd and fueled by the need to rid our justice system of institutional racism.

It is important to note that President Heckler did not write this statement on his own; he consulted with multiple people (including black staff members). After learning this, we suggested that in future communications that involve this topic, it would be especially helpful to know which persons and offices were behind the development of the President's statements. If students would have known that black voices contributed to the previous statement, it may have been more well-received by the student body. This suggestion will be taken into consideration in future communications from the University.

After receiving many messages, emails, and tweets from students expressing confusion about why the statement did not include the words "Black Lives Matter," we sought the answer to this question. According to Associate Provost Miller, there was no intention to disclude the words "Black Lives Matter" from the statement. She said that it was seen as "a given" that black lives matter and wanted the message to provide a more thoughtful response to the state of our nation, while maintaining Valpo's ethos and mission. She also said that Valpo is working on many institutional reforms/programs to address students' concerns about systemic racism on our campus.

We then explained that, because the message came from the voice of a white man in the highest office at our University, students needed to hear that President Heckler believes that black lives matter. We also informed the administrators that students did not believe that the statement truly reflected the ethos of our current student body, as the religious overtones meant less than hearing

the President say, without reservation, that black students, faculty, and staff matter on our campus.

As a result of this discussion, students, faculty, and staff will be receiving an email including the institutional changes/programs that will be taking place this fall to address systemic racism on our campus. This email will also confirm that, without a doubt, Valparaiso University believes that black lives matter.

If any of you would like to reach out to administrators/staff about this issue, we have included some key contact information below. These staff members are more than willing to have a conversation about any concern you may have. Please do not hesitate to reach out to either of us with concerns as well.

Sincerely,

Kaitlyn Steinhiser  
Valparaiso University Student Body President  
[senate.president@valpo.edu](mailto:senate.president@valpo.edu)

Ben Jacobs  
Valparaiso University Student Body Vice President  
[senate.vp@valpo.edu](mailto:senate.vp@valpo.edu)

**Staff Contacts for Students:**

Julie DeGraw, VP of Student Affairs, [julie.degraw@valpo.edu](mailto:julie.degraw@valpo.edu)

Stacey Miller, Associate Provost of Inclusion and Retention, [stacey.miller@valpo.edu](mailto:stacey.miller@valpo.edu)

Byron Martin, Executive Director for Intercultural and International Engagement,  
[byron.martin@valpo.edu](mailto:byron.martin@valpo.edu)