

07/12/2020



For Immediate Release

A Joint Statement Addressing Discrimination and Racism at Valpo

Dear Valpo Students,

Recently a current Valparaiso University student publicly liked a tweet using racial slurs and shared a post on Facebook claiming that Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Black History Month, Juneteenth, and other institutions in the Black community are racist. This post also scribbled out the Black Lives Matter mural in Washington, D.C.. The posts are documented in the following Twitter thread:

https://twitter.com/Brenden_Perez7/status/1280154900635308033.

This student's blatant display of racism broke several of the policies listed in our Student Handbook. While some may argue that this student's posts are protected by the university's free speech policy, we would like to point out that that policy states: "The right of free expression and advocacy is equally protected for all providing it is peaceful and not patently offensive to Christian sensibilities." We would certainly hope that the sharing of posts including slurs used against the Black community is considered patently offensive to Christian sensibilities.

Additionally, the first section of the university's personal social media policy states that using "derogatory statements and threatening or intimidating others" on social media can "get you in trouble" with the university. This student includes their association with Valparaiso University in both their Facebook and Twitter bios. Furthermore, our nondiscrimination policy states that members of the student body are prohibited from "discriminating against any other such person or member of the University community" both on and off campus.

While the posts were not directed at specific students, our harassment policy states: "Even if actions are not directed at specific persons, a hostile environment may be created when the conduct is sufficiently severe, pervasive or persistent so as to unreasonably interfere with or limit the ability of an individual to work, study, participate in activities of the university, or achieve their purpose for being on campus." We would strongly argue that this student's public statements interfere with Black students' ability to achieve their purpose on campus.

July 6, 2020 was the first day that many Black students felt that they were not respected/ welcomed within the Valparaiso University Community. Seeing one of Valpo's students freely post racial slurs and hate online without any immediate response from the university was disappointing. Students of color are uneasy and intimidated by the words and opinions shared by this student. As a result of these posts, students of color have reached out to both the Black Student Organization and Student Senate about their fear of returning to our predominantly white institution if this behavior is tolerated. It is the university's responsibility to protect all of its students from hate, hostile environments, and derogatory statements from other students whether it is experienced in-person or posted on social media.

Aside from their impact on our campus as a current student, this student will one day have to work with patients of different races and ethnicities. Our university should not send students into the medical field without ensuring that they have a thorough understanding of implicit bias and racism. Patients should know that medical specialists who graduated from Valparaiso University will treat them to the best of their ability, regardless of their skin color.

To ensure that this student and others who publicly endorse racism face mandatory consequences on our campus, we ask that this case and others like it be brought to the Campus Judicial Board. If you have already brought this case to the Campus Judicial Board, we support your efforts to make our campus a more inclusive place. While we understand that whether these cases make it to the Campus Judicial Board is ultimately confidential, we hope that you consider our request nonetheless. We also ask for the Bias Team to use their power to advise other campus bodies to support our request. If we want Valparaiso University to be a place where everyone feels welcome, we cannot tolerate this instance of racism and all future racist acts in our community.

Sincerely,

Imagine Dempsey - President of the Black Student Organization Class of 2021

Jhanelle Spence - Historian of the Black Student Organization Class of 2022

Deuce LaRose - President of the Rho Tau Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Class of 2021

CJ Elion - Member of the Rho Tau Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Class of 2020

Reese Jones- Program Coordinator of African Student Association Class of 2020

Nosi Oleghe - President of African Students Association Class of 2020

Kaitlyn Steinhiser - President of the Student Body Class of 2021

Ben Jacobs - Vice President of the Student Body Class of 2022

Christopher Grimpe - Public Relations Coordinator of Student Senate Class of 2022

Paige Mecyssine - Executive Secretary of Student Senate Class of 2021

Isis Zaki - Parliamentarian of Student Senate Class of 2021
Jackson Sheputis - Executive Treasurer of Student Senate Class of 2021
Mark Lorenz - Assistant Treasurer of Student Senate Class of 2022

P.S. This letter was also forwarded to the following campus leaders to ensure that they take action to prevent racism on our campus as well.

President Mark Heckler
Title IX Coordinator Janelle Ramsel
VP of Student Affairs/Interim Dean of Students Julie DeGraw
Associate Provost of Inclusion and Retention Stacey Miller
Dean of the College of Nursing and Health Professions Karen Allen
Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences Jon Kilpinen
Executive Director for Intercultural & International Engagement Byron Martin
Director of Multicultural Programs Janelle Love
Assistant Dean of Residential Life Ryan Blevins
Athletic Director Mark LaBarbera
Interim Provost Rick Gillman
Dean of the College of Engineering Eric Johnson
Dean of the College of Business Jim Brodzinski
Dean of Christ College Susan VanZanten
Chief Communications Officer Nicole Niemi
Assistant Dean of Students for First-Year Students and Commuter Programs Bonnie Dahlke
Goebbert