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# President's Statement on Diversity and Inclusion

**Steve Bahls, President of Augustana College**

**March 14, 2016**

*Augustana is a community driven by purpose, respect and civic responsibility. It strives to create the best environment where every member of our community can achieve personal fulfillment and success. —*

Augustana College Community Principles

In my 13 years as president of Augustana College, the college has grown much more diverse and more inclusive of those historically underrepresented on our campus. As a learning community, we owe it to our students, faculty and staff to be part of the national conversation on race and inclusion. Doing so helps us provide our students with the opportunity, throughout their lives, to develop thriving communities with others, even when they come from different backgrounds. We need to do our part in providing our nation a diverse set of leaders with these skills.

Diversity can serve to unite us in our resolve to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God.<sup>1</sup> Through our diversity, we can gain the wisdom, power and resolve to build a better Augustana, a better nation and a better world.

I have been privileged over the years to welcome a student body much more reflective of the surrounding world. Over the past decade, the percentage of students of color has nearly tripled, better positioning Augustana to prepare students from all backgrounds to succeed. However, our students of color report a lesser sense of belonging than do white students. I suspect as well that different levels of belonging at Augustana are not limited to certain racial groups, but to many groups that have been historically marginalized in our society.

It is clear Augustana doesn't yet have an environment where all students have a sense of ownership for their education and experience, or feel this place is as much theirs as the next student's. If we think of Augustana as an ecosystem, then one part of our ecosystem is not as connected or supported, which is unhealthy for the whole. Such an environment cannot be sustained.

To determine the causes of and possible remedies to this disparity, I met with groups of students and staff across campus during the winter term. In these meetings, my role was to listen. One of the most difficult but best things a leader can do is to listen. Deep listening entails making time to hear what students are talking about, and what concerns them. It also entails asking how we might address their concerns, which also are our concerns. So I listened and learned to ask how we might better enable all students to feel a stronger sense of belonging at Augustana. I want to share what I learned with you.

I am grateful to the many students, faculty and administrators who were part of this discussion. I appreciate their passion for making Augustana better. I've shared what I've learned with the board of trustees and many other leaders on campus, and all want to do something about this disparity. We believe in each and every one of our students, and we believe in Augustana's mission to prepare students for a diverse and changing world. Now we need to turn that belief into action.

Therefore, I urge all of us to commit to more rapidly move Augustana to becoming a college where all students have a similar sense of belonging, and where historically underrepresented groups not only are welcomed and respected, but feel equally valued and cherished. I encourage all to look for opportunities to listen and learn from the experiences of each other.

From our collective learning, let's ask how we can build not only a stronger Augustana, but do our part — collectively and individually — to promote social justice and inclusion in our society. In doing so, we must work, at every juncture, against the forces of exclusion. We are preparing a new generation of leaders, at and from Augustana, to overcome fear and ignorance in our country and to make the important decisions to open doors for all.

As we do so, it is essential that we understand the critical distinction between equality and equity in helping all in our community have the tools to achieve their full potential. That is the dream of higher education — that each of us has the same fair chance to climb the ladder of opportunity. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) publication, *Step Up & Lead for Equity: What Higher Education Can Do to Reverse our Deepening Divide*, describes the difference as follows:

*Equality* is about sameness; it focuses on making sure everyone gets the same thing. *Equity* is about fairness; it ensures that each person gets what he or she needs. This distinction is especially important in education, where there are visible gaps in opportunities and outcomes for large numbers of students. . . . To effectively educate today's students, higher education must focus on both equity and equality — to make the most empowering forms of college learning available to all students.

At Augustana, we treat students equally with respect to admissions and graduation standards. Yet between enrollment and commencement, the principle of equity is particularly important, so that all students can participate fully in the Augustana experience. I urge all to take seriously the AAC&U's challenge to "know who our students are," to "have frank, hard dialogues about the climate for underserved students," to "invest in culturally competent practices that lead to success of underserved students — and of all students," and "make student achievement — including underserved students' achievement — visible and valued." Let's do all we can to ensure that each and every student is provided the tools to be successful at Augustana.<sup>2</sup>

You can read the [AAC&U statement in its entirety](#). Here are my additional reflections on [equity and equality](#).

I encourage all members of the Augustana community to look for ways to engage in conversations about diversity and inclusion. And I call on all members of the Augustana community to move from appreciating to embracing diversity at Augustana, such that we prepare each student to create a more just world through a life of leadership and service.

I offer three suggestions, based on what I've heard, that require our immediate attention to move us forward:

**1. Take positive steps to ensure all students have a similar sense of belonging at Augustana.**

Many students have shared with me concerns about everyday insensitivity directed at them at Augustana. The reality is that repeated insensitivity and lack of empathy from members of their academic community accumulate and result in an atmosphere that is not welcoming and is even hostile to them. Students from less

privileged backgrounds are concerned that some from more privileged backgrounds equate their privilege with entitlement. During our winter term conversations, many students told of times they had been singled out, as if requested to speak for their race. Others related instances when insensitive statements were made, without anyone calling attention to those comments. They spoke of not being invited into groups, or being chosen last for group assignments. Others believe their experiences and perspectives are not given the same authority in class. Make no mistake — Augustana students do not wish to be coddled, or to protect their ideas from debate, but they do ask that their experiences and background be respected.

Racism has no place at Augustana. The privilege of being unaware of one's insensitivity must be confronted if we are to embrace the opportunity for learning moments, as well as teaching moments. One of Augustana's community principles is that we all should be "responsible and aware of our own words and actions, and speak out against injustice, intolerance and discrimination." Those who witness this conduct should call it out in a constructive and engaging manner. We are all privileged to be part of the Augustana community, and with that privilege comes responsibility.

I ask each of us to identify how we can better welcome and cherish all students, and celebrate how our individual differences make our community stronger. Doing so helps ensure that an Augustana education is a critical step on the ladder of opportunity for all. As Augustana's mission states, we are called to provide "a challenging education that develops qualities of mind, spirit and body necessary for a rewarding life...." We need to do this for each and every student.

## **2. Take positive steps to increase the diversity of our faculty and staff.**

A diverse workforce is an institutional priority at Augustana, because a diverse workplace is critical to achieving the goals set forth in our mission. Greater diversity in the workplace has been a priority for more than 10 years at the college, but our progress has been too modest. We must take bolder and more effective steps to embrace workforce diversity, just as we have taken bold steps to embrace diversity among our student body.

Today's students need a changing mix of advisors, mentors and role models<sup>3</sup> and we should aspire that our faculty and staff represent the mix of our student body.<sup>4</sup> Faculty and staff also must be able to connect better to the diverse Quad Cities community, to continue to create vital connections for our students. We must do more to develop diverse pools of candidates for our open positions. To our list of qualifications for positions we must ask whether they can effectively teach today's increasingly diverse students. Do they possess the cultural competencies to serve effectively as mentors and advisors for all? Are they able to create important connections for our students in our increasing diverse society?

And we must ask ourselves: How can we put parochial departmental interests aside to build a critical mass of diverse employees, who themselves have an equal sense of belonging and empowerment? How do we avoid the self-replication of employees that often plagues higher education? By the same token, how do we attract candidates of diverse backgrounds who are sought by other colleges and universities? We must work hard to develop diverse pools of candidates to add to the intellectual and cultural diversity of our community, and strive to recognize and eliminate any unconscious bias or other attitudes that stand in the way of a diverse workplace.

## **3. Embrace dialogues about race, diversity and social justice.**

As one of 26 colleges related to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we hold a special passion for

helping our students grow in mind, spirit and body in order to advance issues of social justice. Social justice is a core value at Augustana, but we have room to grow in its pursuit. Many of our students from historically underrepresented populations told me about their particular passion for issues of social justice. Our diverse and changing student body can make important contributions from which we can all learn. There is no better time to do this than on the national holiday of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and currently we are deficient by not celebrating on that day.<sup>5</sup>

We must affirm and value our students' efforts to address social justice issues, even when it makes us feel uncomfortable. We must encourage our students to be more active in bringing issues to light and developing strategies to address these issues. We must recognize that the passions of those in our community will sometimes conflict, but in that conflict we are challenged to find the truth. We must cherish free and respectful dialog and should not seek to silence those who challenge us.<sup>6</sup> And we must give our students the courage to tell the truth and be impatient with the status quo. Most of our faculty and staff have been involved in advocating for social justice in our communities. It is important to share these experiences with our students, as we are their role models.

Martin Luther King Jr. spoke about the courage we need in his 1961 sermon, "Transformed Nonconformists." His words hold equal force at Augustana today:

In these days of worldwide confusion, there is a dire need for men and women who will courageously do battle for truth. . . . We must make a choice. Will we continue to march to the drumbeat of conformity and respectability, or will we, listening to the beat of a more distant drum, move to its echoing sounds . . . . More than ever before, we are today challenged by the words of yesterday, 'Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.'<sup>7</sup>

## **Final Matters**

In the appendix I have included charges to various parts of the college to address the three items above.

It is important to thank those who have helped our progress over the past years. Augustana faculty, staff and students have facilitated a more welcoming place than at any time in our history. Alumni have generously funded financial aid to those who could not otherwise enroll in the college. And the college has committed to provide our students from less wealthy households with additional financial aid if the State of Illinois does not have the vision to continue the Monetary Award Program, which for a generation has made higher education more readily available to all.

Being open and embracing is not a burden, but a privilege. A diversity of students adds to the rich fabric of a 21st-century Augustana. Among the most important marks all of us can make during our time at Augustana is this commitment to our college's mission and future.

I look forward to continuing discussion of this statement with students, faculty, staff and board members. And to all those who have taken time over the past months to visit with me about these issues, thanks again. I have learned much from you.

## **Appendix**

Augustana College will take the following actions to address the issues in the President's Statement on Diversity

and Inclusion:

- The Dean of Students and Provost should work on conducting an inventory of our diversity and inclusion efforts and recommend gaps to be filled. Request report by May 15, 2016.
- The Dean of Students should develop a "bystander intervention" program to encourage all to not let insensitive statements and conduct stand unaddressed. Plan should be in conjunction with our larger bystander intervention emphasis at Augustana.
- The Provost should engage in discussions with faculty hiring committees about achieving the goals set forth above and develop a set of best practices to move us forward. Report of actions due by May 15, 2016. Because the college is in one of the rare instances in its history where the diversity of the faculty is so different from the diversity of its students, the Provost is requested, effective immediately, to review all hires more closely, consistent with the law, to achieve the goals set forth herein.
- The Director of Human Resources should engage in discussions with hiring managers to develop a set of best practices in hiring and to ensure that administrative and staff hiring achieves the goals set forth above. Likewise, the Director of Human Resources should, effective immediately, review all hires more closely, consistent with the law, to achieve the goals set forth herein.
- The Dean of Students, Provost and Faculty should establish a signature event on Martin Luther King Jr. Day to advance and celebrate our commitment to diversity and social justice, and to inspire further progress.

The Dean of Students and Provost should establish and publicize an inventory of opportunities students at Augustana have to engage in dialogue about social justice, as well as ways students might pursue social justice.

1 Micah 6:8.

2 Through my years, I have been blessed and privileged to have had helping hands at nearly every juncture by people who could help me be successful. My father received an important helping hand, through the GI Bill after World War II, to break the cycle of poverty in our family. I am certain that neither my family nor I would have had so many helping hands had we been members of an underprivileged group. I join many others at Augustana in being passionate about helping others have the privilege of enjoying a nurturing environment at Augustana. And, of course, I watched my daughter Angela have an excellent experience at Augustana, with so many faculty, staff and students helping her become the fine professional she is today. I want each of our students to have a similar great experience.

3 Augustana's workforce does not reflect its increasingly diverse student body. We experienced rare instances like these around 1900, as Augustana moved from a college for transplanted Swedes to a more American model, the faculty and staff changed as the college changed. In the late 1950s and 1960s, when Augustana transitioned from a college "of Lutherans, for Lutherans" to become a less sectarian school, the composition of the faculty and administration changed again. Today, as the college becomes more diverse- racially, socio-economically, and in other demographics-a similar openness to change is demanded.<sup>4</sup> Of course, we must act in a way that honors the law. Federal and state laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of an applicant's

race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age or disability. In addition, Illinois prohibits discrimination based on ancestry, marital status, military status, sexual orientation and pregnancy.<sup>5</sup> There are, of course, other events and times that promote inclusiveness within our country and society. We should celebrate those at Augustana because these events and times help us reflect on how we best welcome all at the college.<sup>6</sup> I agree with the [University Of Chicago Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression](#): "Although the University greatly values civility, and although all members of the University community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community."<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther King's 1961 sermon "Transformed Nonconformists" reproduced in American Sermons (New York: The Library of America, 1999, Michael Warner, ed.), p. 841. The scriptural reference in his sermon is to Romans 12:2.



Accounting	Communication Studies	Geography	Music	Pre-Optometry
Africana Studies	Computer Science	Geology	Music Education	Pre-Pharmacy
Anthropology	Creative Writing	German Studies	Music Performance	Pre-Physical Therapy
Art	Economics	Greek	Neuroscience	Pre-Physician Assistant
Art History	Elementary Education	Graphic Design	Non-Profit Leadership	Pre-Seminary
Asian Studies	Engineering	History	Development	Pre-Veterinary Medicine
Biochemistry	Engineering Physics	International Business	Philosophy	Psychology
Biology	English (Literature)	Japanese	Physics	Religion
Business Administration	English (Writing)	Landscape Architecture	Political Science	Scandinavian Studies
Chemistry	Environmental Management	Latin	Pre-Dentistry	Secondary Education
Chinese	& Forestry	Library and Information	Pre-Law	Sociology
Classics	Environmental Studies	Science	Pre-Medicine	Sociology (Social Welfare)
Communication Sciences	Ethics	Mathematics	Pre-Music Therapy	Spanish
& Disorders	French	Multimedia Journalism	Pre-Nursing	Theatre
		& Mass Communication	Pre-Occupational Therapy	Women's & Gender Studies