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Compassion and Inclusion: Guiding Values Moving Forward

These past three months, defined by a pandemic and an economic downturn, have been trying for us all. Recent weeks, however, have proven to be a particularly painful time for local communities and our nation. We are again reminded of just how far we must travel to achieve the goal of our nation's founders to provide justice and equality for all.

North Central Michigan College emphatically denounces racism, hate, violence, and injustice in all forms. We believe that to remain silent in this regard is to be complicit. Community colleges have a long and proud history of serving underrepresented populations across America, and we value diversity, equity and inclusion. As such, we must lead, not simply with words, but with deliberate action to build a brighter future for each and every individual we serve.

To guide these efforts, North Central Michigan College recently adopted a Strategic Plan that incorporates the values of Compassion and Inclusion. Compassion is defined as 'seeking to understand complex and unique needs of others, with kindness, caring, and dignity.' For the purposes of Inclusion, we 'strive to create a welcoming environment that values the equitable treatment of each individual and the power of a diverse, well-balanced community to foster personal growth.'

To that end, I identify three actions that North Central is taking that are consistent with these guiding principles. There will be more.

First, Associate Dean of Public Service Jim Cousino will host a public safety roundtable focused on current societal issues of racial bias. This discussion is slated to occur yet this summer and will engage both students and professionals in the field. It is planned that such bias and de-escalation training will be incorporated into North Central's criminal justice curriculum moving forward.

Second, North Central has engaged the counsel of Dr. Paul Hernandez, a sociologist whose research focuses on education, social inequality and diversity. His unique pedagogical approach is informed by his own experience as a young man attending community college while simultaneously trying to escape the gang culture and poverty of Los Angeles. Dr. Hernandez met with our faculty and staff in January, and we have invited him back to campus in August to teach us how we can better understand and address the many challenges faced by diverse populations.

Finally, we commit to listening, seeking a deeper understanding, and continuing the conversation. Education is an immensely powerful tool that can break down barriers, change minds and dispel stereotypes. Sensitive yet critical conversations are happening across the nation, including inside our classrooms. We will not shrink from our responsibility to address social inequities.

Higher education has the power to lift both individuals and communities to greater opportunity, economic mobility, and prosperity. It is North Central's aim to 'light the way' to a better world via this formative learning. This work will not be easy or quick. Nonetheless, it truly defines what we do when we are at our very best.

Sincerely, David

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