



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

March 31, 2008

Dear Colleagues:

The welcome spring vacation was marked by overflow crowds attending the appearance of a presidential candidate, by visits from scores of prospective students and their families, and by hourly changing weather patterns that allowed us simultaneously to view cherry blossoms and snowflakes from the same office windows. Welcome back to what I know will be longer days, milder weather, and a glorious western Oregon springtime. As we look forward to the renewal that comes with spring and the challenges that lie ahead, we also have cause to reflect on important progress that has been made on our campus.

Two years ago we adopted a campus-wide diversity plan in a process often marked by deep contention but which, in the end, yielded a broad common ground and shared commitment. We engaged this process — as has nearly every major American university — because of our concerns about access by the next generation to educational opportunity, because of our commitment to realizing an academic mission in which diversity and inclusion is part of its very fabric, and because rapidly changing demographics make it even more important for the University of Oregon to be an inclusive and welcoming multicultural environment.

Since the adoption of the diversity plan two years ago, we have also seen the adoption of strategic action plans for every unit on campus. These plans reflect tangible goals directed toward specific challenges within each unit and represent real commitments across this campus to change. This spring, we will have an opportunity to assess our progress on these action plans when we receive a campus diversity status report from Provost Linda Brady and Vice Provost Charles Martinez. In my discussions with people across campus and in our larger community I have been inspired by the widespread engagement in these strategic action plans. For us to make progress, we must continue to see that diversity concerns us all, and it requires us all to act, to engage, and to work together in the face of differences of opinion. Thus far, it is heartening to see both the collaborative spirit and genuine willingness to be deeply creative that has characterized work on the unit plans. For example, we have seen the establishment of a competitive Innovations in Diversity award program that puts resources in the hands of academic units to launch new initiatives that address specific unit diversity goals. We have witnessed a variety of professional development workshops and substantive conversations about diversity for faculty and staff across campus. This summer, we will see a cadre of middle- and high-school students enrolled in our Oregon Young Scholars Program that encourages pathways to college among students who often face substantial barriers.

In moving forward, there will always be a diversity of opinion about our approaches to equity by constituencies both on and off our campus. Our efforts benefit from continued open and honest engagement in these differing perspectives. Yet, even as we talk about our different perspectives, we must remain committed to advancing these efforts.

Even as we make notable progress, there have been challenges to the inclusiveness of the community we attempt to create here. Just last term, a student writer for the *Oregon Daily Emerald* was the subject of a viciously personal anti-Semitic posting for expressing her journalistic views on American foreign policy. In another incident, a group meeting on campus,

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

1226 University of Oregon, Eugene OR 97403-1226 T (541) 346-3036 F (541) 346-3017 www.uoregon.edu

in an unabashedly racist manner, mocked efforts by others to honor contributions by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. And, finally, larger issues of First Amendment freedom of expression were raised once again by the Pacifica Forum, an outside group that holds its meetings from time to time on campus, and which hosted as a speaker the person who targeted the *Emerald* writer. These incidents occur in a larger landscape of our diversity efforts I described above. Some might counsel against revisiting in this letter those issues which still touch raw nerve ends. My own feeling is that these subjects are better expressed — even if there is risk of error or mischaracterization on my part — than left to fester silently or to create doubt as to our central values.

The first incident I hope can be addressed with summary censure of the kind of gutter bigotry with which the writer to an *Emerald* blog filled his diatribe. The second and third incidents deserve the same summary condemnation. Most important, we cannot forget that we regard such events as isolated incidents only at our peril. Common to all of these incidents is a stunning lack of self-awareness and, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, lack of “a decent respect for the opinions of mankind.” We should remind ourselves that religious and ethnic hatred assumes many self-righteous masks. There will always be tension between the rights of individuals to express their views no matter how repulsive or hateful and the responsibility we feel to build a community that is welcoming and safe to all. One thing however is clear. Groups such as this that use university facilities from time to time do not speak for the University of Oregon. Nor does the appearance of any invited speaker or the use of our facilities imply the institution’s endorsement, support, or even its moral indifference to the content of a message.

On a happy note, albeit one with tragic undercurrents, Provost Brady and I this Sunday will host the students or the families of the students whose educations were cut short at our University by the racially inspired internment order of 1942. The nineteen Japanese American citizens who were our students at the time of the Federal Executive Order 9066 should have been our graduates and our alumni. Now, 66 years after that order and with the unanimous concurrence of the University Senate, we will recognize each of them with an honorary degree. It is a privilege to welcome our students back and it underscores the importance of our work regarding diversity, inclusion, and human rights. Let us not leave as our legacy actions based on hate and prejudice that future generations will deplore in the way that we deplore the actions that took away our valued students of 1942.

I wish you all a productive and fulfilling spring quarter and, as always, welcome learning of your concerns at pres@uoregon.edu.

Warmest regards,



Dave Frohnmayer
President