



VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY

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21 June 2020

An Open Letter in Response to Department of Public Safety Director David Tedjeske's email to the Villanova Community

We write concerning the statement emailed to the Villanova community by David Tedjeske, Director of Public Safety and Chief of Police, on June 12, 2020. We appreciated the expression of outrage at the violence committed against George Floyd by armed, sworn Minneapolis police officers. We also find it demoralizing to consider that this is simply the most recent episode in a long history of violence against Black men, women, and children, violence which is perpetrated by the very people whose duty it is to protect them, and a history which is doomed to repeat itself unless we take seriously our responsibility to confront our mistakes and change our attitudes and practices.

We acknowledge the intentional steps which Public Safety has taken in order to improve its relationship to the Black faculty, staff, and students who are such a valued part of the Villanova community. We are disappointed, however, in what amounts to a listing of accomplishments by Director Tedjeske rather than an owning of actions that have resulted in Black faculty and students feeling unwelcome and unsafe – having their very belonging on this campus questioned and threatened. This should be a time for reflection, as Fr. Peter stated in his email to the Villanova community on June 6, 2020, a time when we “look humbly” at ourselves, our “words, actions and inactions,” and seek “to better understand how these have negatively impacted others.” The point of this reflection, Fr. Peter insisted, is both to acknowledge the ways we have fallen short of our responsibility to support our Black faculty, students, and staff, and to commit ourselves to having the “difficult and uncomfortable conversations” which we have avoided for too long.

We call on Director Tedjeske to take a step past this email and to join the campus community in having the sort of “difficult conversations” Fr. Peter calls us to. We might start by examining the differential impact which the conduct of Public Safety has had upon our Black faculty, staff, and students. We listen to too many stories of Black community members and guests being subjected to demeaning treatment at campus events, or to unwarranted suspicion and interrogation by Public Safety officers simply for being Black in their own offices, their own classrooms, their dorms, their library, and in other community spaces. We invite Director Tedjeske to dialogue about the tangible and sadly warranted fear that members of the Villanova community feel as they consider the real possibility of becoming a victim of violence on their own campus at the hands of their armed guardians. We call on Director Tedjeske to revise the structures of oversight and accountability which have allowed the cases of Public Safety's mistreatment of Black faculty, staff, and students to be explained away, ignored, or silenced altogether.

If we are to reflect upon ourselves and to have these much needed but difficult conversations, we must not hide behind platitudes and congratulate ourselves; we must listen with humility and resolve to change. This process must begin with an acknowledgement of the instances in which our ways of thinking and acting have harmed vulnerable members of our community. Without this acknowledgement, it is too easy to pretend these harms did not occur. And it becomes too easy to convince ourselves that we have done enough. If we are to be a community committed to learning and growing together, to seeking truth in love, then we must face our past failures, together.

We as faculty and staff in the Department of Communication commit, at a minimum, to:

- Reexamine our curriculum to identify where we can offer more courses focused on Black identity and intersectional oppression and how we can invite more BIPOC students into areas of the curriculum where they are not currently represented.
- Engage in planning sessions directly with students, including majors, grad students, and alumni, as well as student groups like the Black Student Union and #GetWokeNova, to understand their needs and incorporate them in our departmental practices.
- Reexamine our hiring practices to consider how we might expand our already concerted efforts to attract, promote and retain BIPOC faculty.
- More actively recruit BIPOC students at the undergraduate and graduate levels, to find a home in our department.

We urge Director Tedjeske to publicly acknowledge where Public Safety has fallen short of its responsibility to our Black community members and to outline a plan for immediate change.

The Communication Department