



Dear Members of the DePaul University Community,

As a community, we are coming to the close of this academic year, and many among us are beleaguered and afraid. We have much work ahead.

Students, startled that the Milo Yiannopoulos lecture and the events surrounding it could happen at DePaul, feel let down that the university community did not more immediately close ranks around them when they needed it most. When discussing this in classrooms, our students heard other students recommend that they develop “thicker skins” or “shake it off.” They were surprised to find that some faculty were unaware of the events, and they were concerned that the stress and trauma of the situation would adversely affect their ability to complete the term successfully. They read my letter about free speech as they were still shaking from the frightening effects of the hate speech they experienced. They further felt exposed and blamed for the escalation of the crowd’s behavior. And I’m concerned that my own silence in recent days, as we’ve begun a series of meetings to hear people’s feelings firsthand, has been deafening. In short, many of our students, staff and faculty felt insufficiently supported by the DePaul community last week, including by me. For all of this, I deeply apologize.

Let me recount what was obvious to many regarding the recent events, but perhaps not to all.

- You have seen the videos by now of the crowd attending the Yiannopoulos lecture harassing and verbally abusing DePaul students of color and others. Some students were shoved and hurt. Sixty-nine percent of the crowd were not from DePaul, but we also have reports of DePaul students joining in the taunting. The abusive taunts targeted protestors in the room, those peacefully gathered outside, students simply studying in the Center for Identity, Inclusion and Social Change, and also our staff who were trying their best to keep a bad situation from devolving further.
- A number of faculty, staff and students are still reeling from being subsequently targeted by the blogosphere, especially individuals who supported our students or who challenged the racist, xenophobic, anti-feminist, homophobic, transphobic, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim messages that they encountered online. Not merely were our email and social media accounts overrun with hate-filled and threatening messages, but we witnessed anonymous attempts to ruin personal reputations or fake Twitter accounts set up in the name of loved ones. The pure evil of this activity has no name and we had few means to protect ourselves from it.
- The discovery of a noose as well as the sidewalk tagging with an anti-Mexico slur added to the fear among the student body, especially as the culprit who fashioned and left the noose has not yet been identified. Last night, at a gathering of students, a young man talked about the collective effect of all this, courageously describing his fear walking alone to his car.

We are not talking about speech alone on these matters, but people's actions. At DePaul, we will never tolerate actions that are antithetical to the Vincentian values we teach, and we hold ourselves accountable to this from the first day students, faculty and staff set foot on our campus. I am deeply sorry for the harm that was unleashed by a speaker whose intent was to ignite racial tensions and demean those most marginalized, both in our society and at DePaul. Perhaps we should not have been surprised, but I think all of us — protesters, event organizers and administration alike — were taken aback by the level of vitriol that was unleashed and the damage that our community would experience. I am truly sorry that members of our faculty, staff and students have experienced this kind of hatred. No member of our community should ever feel unsafe at DePaul and we will do all that we can to protect our students, faculty and staff.

I am grateful for the many faculty and staff who have worked tirelessly trying to support students and their own colleagues through this. Student Affairs and Public Safety immediately began new safety initiatives, including 24-hour campus escorts, visible staff presence during class exchange, and expanded patrol presence. Faculty spent long hours speaking with students, giving reassurance that students had someone in their corner. Indeed, the students did that for each other as well. That was DePaul at its best, and seeing the care you showed for each other reassured me and made me proud.

All of this has a context that is important. The Black Student Union (BSU) told us earlier this year that they were growing weary of the racism they found within DePaul, which they described in details that enabled the President's Diversity Council (PDC) to begin designing specific actions for each of their concerns. The BSU were not the only students feeling these things of course; they were simply the first voice invited to come forward. Other student groups of Latino/a students, as well as STRONG, Feminist Front and others have now come forward and are contributing their own observations to the mix. Faculty and staff are as well.

Several of you, for example, have asked if, hypothetically, DePaul would invite the head of the KKK to speak on our campus. My answer is no, but it immediately makes obvious that the university has no bright line defined for such questions. A task force of faculty and staff gathered and created a statement on speech at DePaul in 2008, and it has served us well, but it does not address the full range of questions that now faces us. Is there any person DePaul University would not permit to speak on campus? What would the criteria be? Who would decide? Is there a difference if university funds are used or an outside entity pays? What if the students hold the event off campus? These are dangerous waters to navigate — for the bar for free speech is extremely high at a university — but others have charted them before us and we have the resources to address it. I appreciate the care many of you have taken in sending me your views and will work with all of you to reconstitute that task force when we return in the fall.

I personally worry about the months ahead as the election continues to embolden and unleash the worst elements of society. Those voices will rankle within the university, and will threaten to divide us further. The question for DePaul is how to strengthen and maintain a human community where all of us commit to kindness and civility first, even as we discuss matters where we disagree. And for this, I write to request your help today.

A number of you have already met with me or other university administrators to talk about these matters. In each case, we sought advice on what initiatives DePaul should consider now and for the

future. Those meetings will continue. Your ideas are already being collected and will be carefully reviewed by the PDC and/or the relevant university office responsible for those activities. I will also set aside funds in the coming year so that these initiatives can be initiated immediately — without waiting for the usual budget cycle to begin. In the immediate term, we will continue to actively listen and support and care for the community in every way we can. Please know that, in addition to all the usual ways to communicate with one another, you have the ability to file a confidential, anonymous report via either the telephone at 1-877-236-8390 or [online](#).

Communities are not built alone but as a collective of people who care and respect one another. I am fully committed to devoting my energies to creating a culture of kindness and attentiveness in the coming year, but I also know it will take the whole village. We cannot eliminate all of the racism and sexism around us, but together we can and must do a great deal better within DePaul.

Thank you for your willingness to help improve the safety and civility of our campus. May God bless us all, particularly in the summer months ahead.

With great respect,

Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, C.M.
President