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Why Diversity Matters

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Why Diversity Matters

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Monday August 7, 2017

By Eric F. Spina

Over the summer, I crafted a values-based statement about the University of Dayton's deeply held commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Rather than just stating that we are committed to these core values, I think it is important for us to have a clearly visible and relatively brief statement that explains for what we are striving and why. The President's Cabinet and the Educational Leadership Council have reviewed the statement and support the approach. I offer it here for reflection by the campus community and for future discussion and improvement:

The University of Dayton affirms that diversity, equity, and inclusion are inextricably linked with excellence. We aggressively pursue these core values, which align with our mission of building community in the world and working for justice for all people.

Diversity at all levels of the University — from the board of trustees to the student body — enriches our learning environment and expands our institutional ability, intelligence, and creativity.

As a Catholic and Marianist institution, the University of Dayton embraces diversity as a gift of God's creation and is committed to honoring the intrinsic value and dignity of all people, no matter their race, religion, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, (dis)ability, ideology, and other expressions of human difference. We commit ourselves to eliminating discriminatory or hateful words and actions, pursuing equity, and becoming known as a fully inclusive and welcoming environment for learning, discovery, and community engagement.

We are deeply committed to advancing the common good in partnership with the local and global community. We invite you to learn more about the University of Dayton's commitment to excellence as shaped by diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Less than 200 words, this statement identifies the importance of this strategic priority, which is both a foundational commitment and a cornerstone of realizing our vision. We're thinking beyond race and gender to the fundamental value of *all* people. We're cultivating a culture where differences are valued, respected, and seen as strengthening our community.

Why does this matter? Research shows that “a more diverse community improves learning and problem solving, enhances research and innovation, and strengthens organizational culture and teamwork,” according to the book *Strategic Diversity Leadership*. In other words, living and learning in a diverse campus community prepares students for career success in the workplace in an increasingly global society. But it's more than that. To be fully human, we must embrace multiple perspectives and look at the world through the eyes of people who are different from us to grow in our own knowledge, empathy — and humanity.

In my own life I have seen the difference this approach — an approach that values and prioritizes diversity and inclusion — makes in a variety of professional and personal settings. In my one year at Dayton I have seen this time and time again — and I'm sure you have, too.

As we enter a new academic year, I plan to post this diversity statement on our website, which will complement a Diversity and Inclusion web page that details a number of new initiatives — from workshops for hiring for diversity and inclusion to the development of an assessment task force that will be announced very early in the semester. I am grateful for the work that so many have done to help us make advances in this critical area of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and I look forward to another year of progress toward greater excellence.

Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, founder of the Society of Mary and an inspiration for our times, brought diverse people together in a common mission.

Today, we must do the same. We are builders of community — across and through all differences.

