December 6, 2018

Board of Trustees
Saint Joseph’s University
5600 City Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19131

Dear Distinguished Members of the Board,

It is my obligation as a student, your obligation as a member of the Board of Trustees, and our obligation as Hawks to address this issue in a serious, intentional, and efficient manner.

Over the past two weeks, our campus has experienced a period of anger, frustration, and discontent over a racial slur posted on two first-year female African American students’ door as reported in the November 28 issue of The Hawk. Members of the student government and other student leaders have gathered and listened to our community, and it is clear that we have a pervasive issue on our campus. As leaders, we must take the perspective of those we lead and we must take action.

I will be blunt – we have failed as an institution. Students are characterizing the actions of the administration as defense and denial. This strategy is neither productive nor just. The message of “tolerance” and “confusion” sent to our community severely misreads the situation. We do not tolerate racial slurs. We will not tolerate any kind of intolerance towards a member of our community.

There is widespread disappointment in the process and the process has come into question significantly. We as an institution are working to complete the first step of recognition of a problem. Student organizations have expressed our belief that

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there is a problem, and this problem demands our utmost attention.

But this is the first of many steps.

We as a student body have listened to one another and are currently compiling a list of actions we believe the University must consider. Some of these ideas have been discussed in various circles, but we, again, emphasize the need for synergy instead of silos. Again, the list below is a working list, and incomplete; some of these actions are currently under review, and others are being implemented. These actions include the following:

- An actual call to action. We believe the forum held by the Black Student Union clearly gave our University a mandate to act, and the University alone must iterate this call.
- An open forum in collaboration with student groups, faculty, and administration to discuss institutional responses and formally address the situation as a whole, field questions, and increase general transparency.
- A reemphasis on diversity and sensitivity training for all members of our community in light of recent circumstances. These trainings, coupled by awareness campaigns and programming, will be most effective in changing the culture. Students must be aware of the differences that each and every one of us has. This training must include faculty and administrators so they can be equipped to address these situations appropriately.
- A reassessment of our pedagogy within the classroom. Again, this needs to be a multilateral approach. The implementation of a mandatory one-credit course devoted to first-year students which emphasizes a number of issues students face simply because they are students (diversity and a respect for others in the globalized era, financial literacy, career discernment, general acclimation to SJU, etc.). Similar courses are already available at St. Louis University and Xavier, and we believe St. Joseph’s has the resources and need to ensure the success of this course.
- A review of the Office Community Standards and other policies which assesses current procedures, processes, and adjudications so we as a community can have a comprehensive and serious view of how we as an institution handle incidents and their ramifications.
- An increase in reporting to the general community. This would involve the inclusion of these types of incidents in The Hawk, and a biannual report published to the community to raise awareness.
- As a student body, we wholeheartedly support the expedient and thorough

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vetting of a Chief Diversity Officer to serve as the institutional coordinator for combatting these issues. As we have stated, this is a systemic problem, we emphasize the need for this position to report directly to the Provost and the President with the support and advice of the President’s Council for Inclusion and Diversity.

Some may characterize this as a student culture issue. It simply is not. While this is one component, student culture, in fact, changes with the coming and going of each class. In a year, one-quarter of us will not be here, and it will be up to the institution to work with new leaders to ensure the implementation of our values in an entirely new class. As seen above, this is a pervasive and institution-wide cancer and it must be tackled at multiple angles aggressively.

Despite all of this, I am encouraged by the response to this horrible event. I am encouraged by our student body who are demonstrating true Jesuit values and true leadership. For example, groups like the Black Student Union and the Athletics Department have held forums to engage in dialogue, various administrators and faculty have denounced the act and are eager to begin collaboration.

This letter and our actions are out of love for Saint Joseph’s and our fellow Hawks. Your role on the board is out of love for Saint Joseph’s and your fellow Hawks. We all believe in something greater and we are capable of something greater. Therefore, we must implement something greater and address this problem seriously.

I now ask that you, a member of our esteemed institution, join us in this effort. We look forward to your support.

Sincerely,

Jason D’Antonio ‘19
Senate President

–University Student Senate–