

President's Statement to Academic Governance

15 November 2016

Remarks by Quentin Wheeler

Recent months have been very difficult for us all. I know that many of you have expressed your concerns and anxiety in different ways — most significantly through the vote of no confidence. I respect the democratic process and I thank those of you who expressed your concerns through that means.

I want to fully acknowledge that I have heard your concerns expressed through this vote, the campus climate survey, and the listening sessions. Here and now, I publicly acknowledge and take full responsibility for my own actions, inactions, and words that may have contributed to the sequence of events culminating in the vote.

You expressed concerns through the vote, survey, and other mechanisms. While I do not want to list every example of what I could have done differently, they do include sharing details of the college's structural budget deficit before there had been time to formulate a path to permanently close it, trying to rush a draft of strategic objectives without assuring that all relevant views were incorporated, and clarifying my understanding of the role of counsel. Building relationships is important — and I need to become better at it.

This community has had to deal with a lot: We have highly qualified faculty and staff, but they are too few in number and over-worked; we have fantastic graduate students, but they are inadequately funded; and, we have had to navigate the uncertainties of resetting a century-old relationship with Syracuse University. We are working in a decades-old infrastructure that needs upgrading. And I began navigating all of this as soon as I arrived... giving you no time to get to know me or to have a track record for you to evaluate.

I commit to you that I am formulating specific actions that will respond to these concerns, beginning with an elevated focus on relationships, communications, college priorities, shared governance, and leadership. I am building on positive, intensive work with the chairs, with Tom Amidon, and SUNY to bring our community together.

My sincere hope is that we can make today a turning point. I stand ready to address my own shortcomings and to engage the entire community in addressing the challenges and choices we face to assure that ESF and our students remain successful.

Uncivil speech is sadly on display across the country and now, I regret to say, on our campus in the form of hateful words and symbols that appeared in Centennial Hall over the weekend and in the defacement of women and other faculty offices in Marshall Hall a few weeks ago. This kind of abuse of speech will not be tolerated and we must make it clear, as a community, that we are tolerant and caring of one another. Please be vigilant for any further inappropriate speech or actions and support one another and the principles we hold dear.

A letter to campus will be going out today reminding us of these things and of the resources available to you on campus if you are victim to such incivility.