Dear ESF Community,

After several weeks of updates regarding the social change and bias/racist incidents happening on the hill, I would like to share some personal reflections. Syracuse University and ESF are in the midst of social change. Please be assured that everyone – leadership, faculty, and your peers – can be support systems. Your options to engage these support systems are many as are the ways you can support the cause that is unfolding around us.

Freedom of speech is a liberty and a responsibility we all enjoy, and so I will refrain from offering recommendations on what any of us should or should not say. Instead, I would like to direct us to a model offered by an activist and lawyer – with thanks to Dr. Malika Carter, the College’s Chief Diversity Officer, for bringing this to the College’s attention. Author Deepa Iyer explains that people will assume one of nine roles in a social change eco-system. These roles are healer, artist, storyteller, bridge-builder, frontline-responder, caregiver, disrupter, visionary, and builder. Each of these roles has a place in the social change ecosystem and is described fully here. I encourage you to read the message and see where you fit.

There is a role for each of us in this process, and often our role will change as the situation transpires. We must remain committed to listening to each other and be open to mutually respectful communication. We must also remember that our mission at ESF – first and foremost – is to provide a quality environmental education. The movement at hand is ongoing and around-the-clock. As the article referenced explains, there are many ways to engage in a social justice movement, and we are fortunate that the movement on the hill provides many times for us to do so.

Navigating difficult conversations is an opportunity to bring members of our community closer and to build understanding, compassion, and awareness of the issues that are most important to the people who impact our worlds. Effective communication starts with listening and empathy. Again, with thanks to Dr. Carter, I encourage you to review a publication entitled Start Talking: A Handbook for Engaging Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education. Created by the University of Alaska Anchorage and Alaska Pacific University, it is a field manual for people who wish to engage others more effectively in conversations about the most important issues of our time. The book addresses themes of academic freedom; classroom safety; rhetoric and debate; race, class and
culture; science and religion; and business, politics and social justice.

Once again, if ESF students would like to talk, please call ESF Counseling Services at 315-470-4716. Dr. Lizette Rivera, the new Director of Student Inclusion Initiatives (Office of Inclusion, Diversity and Equity) is also available to discuss this incident or any other concerns you may have. Dr. Rivera can be reached at lrivera@esf.edu or in 445 Baker Lab. For staff and faculty, support is available through the Employee Assistance Program coordinated by Nan Clark (nfclark@esf.edu, 315-470-6726).

I ask that as a campus community, we remain diligent and responsible to collectively reporting incidents of bias. Anonymous, anti-bias reporting can be done by clicking https://www.esf.edu/ide/bias.htm.

Sincerely,
Dave Amberg
Interim President