



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

August 9, 2020

To: National Black Deaf Advocates, Council de Manos, California Educators of the Deaf, and California Association of the Deaf

Subject: June 16, 2020 Communication

Dear Valued Stakeholders,

Thank you for your patience in awaiting reply to these thoughtful letters. As you know, I have just assumed the Chair role and am working with fellow Trustees to address important outstanding tasks including engaging with our stakeholders around the Board's anti-racism work. I can assure you that the Board is working tirelessly alongside University leadership to get things moving. Time is required to do this right and we will share our progress along the way. I request your patience, support, and positive collaboration.

The Board held its summer retreat on July 20-21, which I facilitated as a consultant. It was during these two days that the Board had the opportunity to conduct a comprehensive and careful review of the feedback the Board had been receiving from both internal and external stakeholders such as yourselves. Additionally, the Board reviewed a draft of Gallaudet's current Anti-Racism plan. Each of these activities provided the Board with the foundation necessary to begin to develop its own anti-racism plan. The dedication and commitment the Board exhibited was commendable. At the conclusion of those two days, the Board approached me to ask if I would consider returning as chair. It was an honor and privilege to offer my service once again to Gallaudet University and the community at this critical juncture.

First, I would like to give the following response to the below statement in your August 3 letter.

A month has passed since our first letter; we have yet to receive any updates on concrete actions by the University. This includes actually responding to and addressing all seven items that were listed in the NBDA letter of June 16th, 2020.

The Board has received communications from multiple individuals and groups, and we do our very best to give each of them thoughtful consideration, including yours. The Board has been working consistently and diligently towards racial equity and reformative justice goals which align with our core mission and values. Our commitment is to our students, faculty, and university-wide community. This necessitated that we engage the internal stakeholders on our campus and obtain their commitments to do anti-racism work. The process of obtaining University-wide commitments involved the full Board, President Cordano and her executive team, the faculty, staff leadership, students, and other officers and leaders on campus. We have made significant progress thus far and intend to continue this University-wide approach towards anti-racism work.

The Board also has been focusing on its own strategic goals and committed to releasing its anti-racism plan for community feedback in late August. The administrative teams at the University and the Clerc Center plan to release theirs around that time, which will ensure appropriate coordination and opportunities for internal stakeholder engagement. I encourage you to frequently visit the Equity and Belonging section of the Gallaudet University website, which serves as a repository of our collective anti-racism work: <https://gallyshare.com/belonging-equity>.

Next, the following comments are intended to address the seven items in the NBDA's June 16 letter.

1. Resolve the Black Student Union and Student Body Government current concerns enlisted in the public petition that is available through change.org;

The BSU and SBG joint petition outlined six items for action. Please refer to the University administration's response released on June 22 and posted online at: <https://gallyshare.com/addressing-the-black-student-union-and-student-body-government-petition>.

Specifically, the administration addressed these six items with responses categorized as follows:

- Additional training for the officers at the Department of Public Safety
- Additional training for the staff and faculty of Gallaudet University
- Increase diversity in staff and faculty
- Include student representatives in the University hiring process
- Increase diversity in the student body
- Introduce a zero tolerance policy to stop racism at Gallaudet University

The administration also acknowledged that *"Dismantling racism is a long journey – one that should have clear markers of progress. We will continue engaging, listening, acting, and communicating. This list only states some of the work happening at Gallaudet University and should not be viewed as comprehensive. Our community's commitment to this work may not negate the pain of what has happened in the past, but it can lead to change and healing."* The Board agrees; our actions today are merely a first step in a broader and longer journey to take the University's (and our) long-held commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion to the next level and we will continue our progress in all these areas as part of our forthcoming anti-racism action plan.

2. Allocate a sufficient budget, resources, and expand staff in the office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and allow the EDI leaders to exercise their autonomy;

Equity and Belonging was identified as one of the imperatives of the University's new strategic plan, exemplifying the University's commitment and dedication of resources to this work and to our unified anti-racism work. Our collective anti-racism plans will form the core of that imperative, to assure that the values of equity, belonging, and inclusive excellence become embedded into our culture, systems and practices. As part of this commitment, the University has and continues to invest in the operations, programs, and initiatives of its divisions, including the division of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. But also, the work of equity, diversity and inclusive excellence is the responsibility of every division and its offices, and an expansion of resources have been underway to support this cross-divisional capacity-building. Just as one example, the division of Academic Affairs has established a Center on Black Deaf Studies and an Inclusive Excellence Ambassador program has been implemented, requiring every division to reallocate staff and time to collaborate with the division of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. In this way,

positive transformation becomes a part of our cultural imperative, and helps leaders remain accountable to themselves, to one other, and to the President.

3. Conduct an external audit of the Human Resources hiring process and internal files;

This goal was established and is currently in progress. Please note the June 22 announcement by Dom Lacy, Chief Operating Officer, on the creation of a Human Resources Transformation Steering Committee. This BIPOC-majority led committee has been meeting regularly and is in the process of interviewing and selecting an external firm that will support the work of evaluating and redesigning HR systems, policies, and procedures within an anti-racist framework. The HR Transformation will also be an integral part of the University's forthcoming anti-racism action plan.

4. The Board of Trustees should meet with the members of the EODSOC and with students of color without the President or University staff present;

The Board is committed to engaging internal stakeholders as a pillar of the Board's anti-racism action plan and through its oversight of the University's administration, and will continue to actively listen to and create opportunities for university stakeholders to share perspectives, including OESOC (the Organization for Equity for Staff of Color), students of color, and other critical internal stakeholders of color such as the Faculty of Color Coalition (FOCC).

5. When complaints of misconduct are filed, immediately place involved DPS officers on administrative leave and start an impartial investigation. Enforce appropriate consequences (i.e. suspension, termination) on the officers as necessary;

This work has already begun. [On June 25](#), Mr. Lacy informed the community of the creation of a process for individuals to log complaints involving the Department of Public Safety (DPS). This process will allow the Office of the COO, Human Resources, and Equal Opportunity Programs to review complaints and conduct a thorough investigation, independent of DPS. Complaints may be sent to DPSFeedback@gallaudet.edu.

Additionally, the University has engaged an external firm with extensive experience in this area to conduct an impartial review of DPS' policies and practices. Among other things, the review will include an assessment of DPS' and the University's complaint procedures for responding to allegations of misconduct as well as an assessment of the record of complaints that have occurred over the past three years. The intended outcomes of this assessment are to provide the University with overall findings on compliance, a comprehensive set of practical recommendations, and a concrete roadmap for transforming community caretaking across the University as a whole.

6. The Gallaudet University Department of Safety needs to undergo an independent review of the list of all persons not allowed on campus (Persona Non Gratas);

An integral part of the external DPS assessment will include a review of the University's (1) Persona Non Grata (PNG) list to determine whether disparities may exist, and (2) policy and procedures for barring and trespassing notices, a trespass arrest, the scope and duration of PNG notices, removing a person from PNG status, and communicating PNGs. The Board as part of its action plan has directed that the independent review discussed in the section above will be set as an agenda item once it has been completed.

7. Most importantly, acknowledge and take accountability for the current President's failure to create a safe space for all members of our diverse communities, remove President Roberta Cordano from the position of University President, and immediately begin the search for an Inclusive Deaf President.

As we communicated on July 28, our most important responsibility as Trustees is to ensure that the University has leadership continuity in place to address the myriad of pressing challenges currently confronting higher education. The decision to extend President Cordano's contract for a five-year term was not arrived at lightly. The Board thoroughly considered, examined and discussed the work and progress that President Cordano has led over the past several years. It concluded that President Cordano has demonstrated her passion and ability to lead the University through times of crisis and accord, as outlined in our communication. As with all Presidents, the Board will closely monitor her and her executive team's leadership and ensure that all leadership is held accountable for continued transparency and progress.

The University has announced a statement of no tolerance for any acts of retaliation by members of our campus community against those who participate in good faith in such dialogues and discussions. The University has also released a 14-point anti-racism commitment statement that addresses the student experience, faculty training, DPS, HR, community outreach, and university recognition. Furthermore, the University has announced as one of its anti-racism priorities the development of a bilingual resource library for anti-racism education, and as of this week, announced the establishment of a Center on Black Deaf Studies, and appointed Dr. Carolyn McCaskill as the founding director.

Further, the President's executive team has an anti-racism plan in the development stages. These include, but are not limited to, forming a university-wide racial justice committee, developing an annual report card for racial justice progress, and actions that will impact financial aid, development priorities, the university's curricula, and student programs and services.

Before concluding this letter, I want to respond to two other items from the August 3 letter.

"The composition of the Board itself continues to disturb all of us. The departure of Duane Halliburton and Claudia Gordon have removed two critical Black Deaf representatives from the Board. ... Moreover, the current composition of the Board does not meet the 1988 commitment to 51% Deaf members."

The composition of the Board is being addressed as we work to recruit deaf BIPOC trustees. We are seeking to fill three vacancies. At this time, we have 14 non-public trustees along with three congressional trustees, and nine of the 14 non-public trustees are deaf or hard of hearing. Further, 12 out of our 14 non-public trustees know ASL. We have four members on the Executive Committee, with three of them being deaf BIPOC. We do not intend to stop there, and we are committed to more diverse representation and a strong deaf and hard of hearing majority.

"The expectations of the Gallaudet University Board of Trustees are clearly laid out in the Education of the Deaf Act. We strongly encourage you to connect with the U.S. Department of Education and review these expectations."

The University's leadership and the Board has and will continue communicating with our U.S. Department of Education liaison and other Federal offices in full compliance with our obligations.

Thank you for expressing your perspectives and we hope this response provides you with greater insight. We look forward to apprising all our internal and external stakeholders of new initiatives and accomplishments as we continue to focus on the very important work we have before us.

Sincerely,

Glenn B. Anderson, Ph.D.

Chair and Trustee Emeritus
Gallaudet University Board of Trustees

CC: file