

[This letter was written by Dr. Leslie Alexander, former faculty member in the Department of African American and African Studies and sent to President Michael Drake, Executive Vice President and Provost Bruce McPheron, and the Faculty Council leadership. In it, she describes a gathering of students convened by a coalition of student groups, including the Black Student Association, the African Youth League, the Latino Student Association, and the Asian American Association, on November 10, 2016.]

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing because I feel very strongly that you need to know about an event that took place on campus. Yesterday evening, nearly 1,000 OSU students gathered at the Hale Center. They were Muslim, Black, Latino, White, LGBT, and Asian students—a beautiful reflection of the diversity and strength of our university.

But they came to the Hale Center because they are afraid. They came because on this campus—a place they once called home—they no longer feel safe. As one student put it, “this is not my campus anymore.” So last night they came together at the Hale Center, where we created a safe place. They shared their testimonies, offered each other encouragement, and made plans to unify and move forward together as a community.

But I moderated last night’s event, and I think you need to know what I heard. Over the past 48 hours, across campus, our students have been subjected to numerous acts of racial, religious, cultural, and homophobic terrorism. They have endured threats, physical assault and intimidation, jeers, and a range of indignities. Even in their classrooms.

As they walk to class, they have been taunted with shouts of “Build the Wall” and “Go back to Mexico.” Muslim women (because their hijabs make them visibly identifiable) have been harassed, threatened, and terrorized on campus buses, in the dorms, and as they walk between their classes. One Muslim woman, en route to class, was surrounded by a group of males and they trapped her in a circle, yelling threats and racial/religious slurs. Another woman said that she hasn’t been going to class at all, because she has been threatened so regularly that she’s afraid to walk around campus. A Black female student was actually called the N word in her class yesterday, and no one—not even the professor—acknowledged it. After expressing a point in class, a White student responded to her by saying “it’s n---ers like you that are the problem in this country.” And the professor said nothing.

These stories are just the tip of the iceberg. I stood in the Hale Center last night and listened to testimonies like these for more than two hours. Student after student bravely stepped up to the microphone and shared their stories.

Yes, there was something beautiful and inspiring about last night. I was overcome with pride and hope, as I watched the students come together to support each other. And equally proud to see how many faculty members came out to stand with them in solidarity. But the truth is, no matter how beautiful that moment was, it never should have happened. Our students should never feel afraid in their “home.” We are at an institution of higher learning where we are supposed to be

training the next generation of American citizens, so we can not remain silent in the face of overwhelming bigotry. Most of the students who spoke last night are first-generation college students and students of color. You can not imagine the seemingly insurmountable odds they have overcome to be here in the first place. And now they are terrorized in a place that is supposed to be safe—a place where they have come to seek an education and transform our society.

It is wonderful to issue statements that celebrate diversity and inclusion, but we MUST do more. Right now, in this moment, I can't claim to have all the answers. But I know we must do more. As Desmond Tutu once said, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." Administrators and faculty MUST come together and take a stand. We have to show the students that we are here for them, that we care, and that OSU has a zero-tolerance policy against bigotry and hatred. We must make clear that we will not allow terrorism and intimidation to rob our students of their safety, security, and well-being. The students need to know that we are with them, and they are not alone. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once reminded us, "The ultimate measure of man (or a woman!) is not where he stands in moments of comfort or convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

I am calling upon you to take action against hatred and bigotry on campus, and not simply rely on words. Know that when you are ready to do so, I will be standing with you.

In hopes for a better future,

Leslie