January 24, 2019

Dear Campus Community,

I want to extend a warm welcome to every member of our community as we embark upon another semester at the flagship campus.

Our continued commitment to excellence is reflected in many ways as you make your way around campus. The stunning, new Business Innovation Hub addition to the Isenberg School of Management is now open, providing space for entrepreneurship-in-residence programs and experiential learning spaces. Our online bachelor’s degree programs were just ranked 20th nationally by U.S. News & World Report, demonstrating our academic excellence in this extremely competitive environment. Meanwhile, construction is underway to transform our Student Union building into a modern center for student life. Please pardon the inconvenience, but this is the facility’s first renovation since it opened in 1957 – it’s long overdue! And, of course, I hope to see you at the Mullins Center to cheer on our extraordinary hockey team, ranked among the very best in the country.

There is much to look forward to this year, but there undoubtedly will be challenges as well. Even though we are consistently rated as one of the safest college campuses in the country, we are not immune to the broader issues facing society. Nationwide, incidents of hate are up and last fall we experienced a number of hateful acts right here on campus. We will not be intimidated by the ignorant, intolerant acts of a few cowardly individuals who hide in anonymity. We stand with our students who have been victimized, and we will continually strive for a more inclusive community that welcomes all and embraces the dignity of all. As an enlightened community, we will fight back against this rising tide of intolerance with a series of educational opportunities to promote understanding and an ongoing commitment to inclusion and transparency.

From a communications standpoint, we continuously assess and reassess how to most effectively confront acts of hate. In some instances, we have sent a campus-wide message, and in others we have focused primarily on the local, affected campus communities. Going forward, we will refrain from regularly issuing campus-wide statements of condemnation. In this way, by no longer amplifying their expressions of hate, we hope to deny the perpetrators of these cowardly acts the attention they crave. We will, however, redouble our commitment to transparency by maintaining a publicly available database at www.umass.edu/diversity/track-acts-hate with information on acts of hate.

When an act of hate occurs a comprehensive response protocol is triggered. This protocol includes meetings with those directly affected, deployment of support services, communication to members of the impacted residential or academic community, and notification of university police (UMPD). Unfortunately, because these incidents have been carried out anonymously and without witnesses, UMPD investigations, several of which are currently underway, have been inconclusive to date. However, if the perpetrator of any of these acts is identified, the full weight of the university’s disciplinary and legal apparatus will be brought to bear.
I want to share with you some additional steps we have taken to foster a safe and welcoming living-learning-working environment for every member of our community. On February 5, we will host a daylong symposium on polarization, *Understanding the Forces that Drive Us Apart*, to offer a variety of opportunities for educational engagement as we wrestle with rising hate. In addition, our commitment includes new training for our campus leadership, including myself, to better understand and handle incidents of hate. We are also exploring implementing online diversity training for the entire campus.

I truly believe the course we have chosen will be most effective in confronting these difficult challenges and building a community that is just and caring. And I call on every member of our community to join me in rejecting hatred in all its forms, and to stand united in support of diversity and inclusion.

For those of you who are returning from a much-needed break, I hope that you are well rested and energized to re-engage in campus life, and for those who are new to campus, I encourage you to take full advantage of all that UMass Amherst has to offer.

Sincerely,

Kumble R. Subbaswamy
Chancellor