Diversity and Inclusion at Westminster College

To the Associated Students of Westminster and our entire Westminster Community:

Last week, like you, I received the letter of support prepared by the Associated Students of Westminster regarding student diversity and inclusion on our campus. I want to first applaud their call to action and recognize that at Westminster and at many colleges and universities in our nation, new efforts and actions are necessary to end racism and systematic oppression in higher education. Our students’ deep concerns and initiative for change speak volumes about your priorities as individuals and as a student body, and I am proud and encouraged to have such strong and passionate students at Westminster. I support your call to action because you’re right. When it comes to supporting racial diversity and inclusion on our campus, we have much to improve.

When we talk about diversity, we must focus on many areas, including (but by no means limited to) racial diversity, and diversity in sex, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, and socioeconomic status. At Westminster, respect for diverse peoples and perspectives is our second core value after impassioned teaching and learning, and while this value on its own is not enough, it is an excellent foundation to build upon. I accept the charge to begin working together—administration, staff, faculty, and students—to come up with some practical and transformative strategies for improvement.

Last Friday, a courageous group of students assembled outside of the faculty meeting to protest the lack of support for diversity on our campus. Provost Lisa Gentile and Faculty Chair Betsy Kleba invited the students into the meeting, and it was a powerful opportunity to hear students voice their perspectives and lived experiences. Their concerns were heard and well received, and Provost Gentile and I will be meeting with these students before the winter break to hear their ideas about how to better address the needs of marginalized students. Based on the conversation we have in this meeting, we will work together to design a plan for spring that creates open spaces for discussion and improvement of our current diversity climate. More information will be available after this meeting, so be sure to check your email in the first weeks of January for more details about how to get involved.

In many ways, we have already begun this important work. Exploration of diversity is a key component of learning in the classroom, in our work in South Salt Lake, and in many independent student research projects. The WCore includes diversity-related course work for all students, and the Venture, Clemente, and Walkways to Westminster Programs connect our students with heterogeneous populations in our community. In addition, our McNair Scholars
Program and our TIDES (Teaching to Increase Diversity and Equity in STEM) Program provide support for underrepresented students.

All faculty hiring committees have at least one member who is a trained diversity advocate, and we intentionally market job listings to attract a diverse set of candidates. Additionally, we are excited to announce that we are just about to hire the new Director of Student Diversity & Inclusion, and we have funds set aside in next year’s budget to add a Chief Diversity Officer to our administrative team. In Admissions, we have staff that includes African Americans, Latinos, and Pacific Islanders. We are also working to maintain productive and long-lasting relationships with many Latino and African American communities in Utah, and in all of our recruiting efforts, we highlight the diversity that we already have as a key benefit of the Westminster community.

Our current practices and programs represent movement in the right direction, and in the spirit of inclusivity and candor, we invite people all across campus (especially members of diverse groups) to step into the big picture of diversity at our college and contribute new ideas. By opening up our practices to honest review by those who are most affected, we hope to move toward more consistent, more authentic, and more meaningful diversity.

I want to reiterate how proud I am of our students in this moment. It is so encouraging to see you standing up for equality and inclusion at our own school and at schools across the nation. Your action is inspiring, and I am very excited for the progress we can make as a team. Together, we can change our community and insist that Westminster stands up for diversity, for justice, for inclusion, and, most importantly, for the safety and rights of all people.

With gratitude and excitement for the future,

President Morgan and the Senior Administrative Team