

April 13, 2019

Dear Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences,

By now, many of you may have been informed about the painful and very complicated events that took place on Emory's campus on April 4th. If you would like some more information about what transpired, here are some links:

<https://emorywheel.com/students-outraged-over-mock-eviction-notices/> and <https://emorywheel.com/emorys-response-to-justified-protest-immature/>.

The members of the Emory School of Medicine Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee (DISC) want to express our support for actions that unify our community in kindness, acceptance, and compassion. While we firmly support open expression and people's right to express themselves, we denounce any form of expression that encourages and/or instigates hate, violence, division, or 'isms'. We stand with individuals who are impacted and are always one with them in speaking out and standing against hatred. We firmly believe that students should not be targeted and made to feel unsafe because of their religion, nationality, family background, or beliefs and views, etc. We feel strongly that if harm occurs to any group or groups of students based upon their background, it is wrong.

DISC members are faculty, staff, and trainees who are extremely diverse on so many levels, including religiously, ethnically, politically, socio-economically, immigration status, and much more. We share many deeply held values and have engaged together in actively advancing the department's diversity and inclusivity agenda in a myriad of ways. Never before have we been unable to come to a unifying conclusion in any debate. Of note, however, people spoke up in very thoughtful and courageous ways. Even though we agreed to disagree, we were able to have a respectful yet deep conversation where people who held different beliefs felt heard.

In preparing a statement pursuant to the events that occurred on Emory's campus on April 2, we were faced with a divide so deep that it led us to recognize that any statement we prepared would either be so watered down as to be meaningless and speak to no one, or it would be biased in some manner and thus alienate members of our community on one or both sides of the aisle. We have different understandings and emotional reactions based upon our histories, experiences, and multiple identities. This parallels what is occurring on the larger Emory campus, in our country, and internationally, including in the Middle East.

Our commitment to diversity and inclusion, alongside our deep respect for each other, led us to a process of open dialogue related to finding common ground, particularly when events occur that are complex, multifaceted and have fundamentally different meanings for different people based upon their social identities and affiliations. We recognized that we are all struggling to understand the different perspectives that people bring to bear when there are conflicts and tensions between social groups.

Instead of taking sides, we decided to validate the human experience and share our struggle.

As behavioral health professionals, we engage everyday with people who see the world very differently from us. And yet we typically avoid engaging actively in conversation about difficult and complex topics with those with whom we disagree. Unfortunately, that adds to the divides between people and allows for microaggressions to persist. Engaging in respectful and meaningful discussions, however, enables us to genuinely begin to understand, respect, and have empathy for people whose worldviews may differ from our own in key ways. As behavioral health professionals, we must stop and think about the positive roles that we can play in encouraging students, the members of our department, and the community at large to engage in productive and meaningful conversations. Doing so is one path forward toward mutual understanding and shared solutions.

As a committee, DISC members hope that we can facilitate our department's efforts to create a culture in which we can engage in difficult conversations in small and large groups related to a range of diversity-related topics. Doing so will require all of us to make a commitment to creating a safe and brave environment in which we can truly learn from one another, express our honest thoughts, and share the emotional impact on us of various historical and current day events. It also will entail all of us being mindful that open dialogue is based on creating an environment where no one feels unduly attacked, disrespected, marginalized, or silenced just by virtue of their demographics or beliefs. It also will empower us to stand together on issues that historically may have divided us, as we develop a more shared understanding and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusivity.

Respectfully,  
Members of the DISC



**DIVERSITY & INCLUSION**  
SUBCOMMITTEE

