

On 2-22-21, the Faculty Senate approved a resolution to send the following statement to a faculty-wide referendum. Senate has not endorsed the statement, but refers the question to faculty for determination.

### **Western Colorado University Faculty Statement in Support of New Leadership at Western**

Whereas, the Faculty of Western Colorado University recognize that a university president's job is multi-faceted and involves many significant responsibilities, the purpose of this resolution is to assess the information gathered from faculty and students by Faculty Senate with respect to President Salsbury's leadership;

Whereas, Western's success, economic viability, and ability to recruit and retain students is inextricable from our commitment to diversity, as well as our moral values and leadership;

Whereas, though we are grateful for President Salsbury's many efforts on behalf of Western, the feedback we have received supports the opinion that President Salsbury's leadership in some essential areas is deficient. In particular, the available information supports the view that President Salsbury's leadership lacks:

- A strong understanding and commitment to Western's institutional mission, including our charge to prepare students "to assume constructive roles in local, national, and global communities" and ensure "high standards of scholarship;"
- A strong understanding of and commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Internationalization (DEII) work at Western, as specifically required by the Board of Trustees and the 2018-2023 Strategic Plan;
- An ability to put personal political views aside in order to represent the University's values, as expressed in our institutional mission and strategic plan;
- An ability to model evidence-based reasoning, critical thinking, and moral clarity around matters of pressing public concern; and
- A willingness to reflectively listen, learn from others with opposing views, and grow;

Whereas, *speaking as the leader of the University*, President Salsbury's January 7, 2021 "Voice Against Violence" message, which could be construed by a reasonable person as equating the 2020 protests for racial justice with the pro-Trump coup attempt at the Capitol on January 6, 2021, and which falsely suggested that protests in 2020 resulted in the "destruction of entire cities," is the most recent example of the aforementioned leadership failures;<sup>1</sup>

Whereas, the information gathered by Faculty Senate supports the view that President Salsbury has demonstrated a misunderstanding of and dismissiveness toward DEII issues, beyond his most recent public messages;<sup>2</sup>

Whereas, feedback from individual students and the Student Government Association (SGA) provided to Faculty Senate regarding President Salsbury's conduct, indicate, according to these students, that President Salsbury has not treated them with respect, that President Salsbury has not adequately communicated with students, and/or that President Salsbury is not committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. While this is a serious concern in its own right, we also note the long-term challenges this may pose to Western's ability to successfully recruit and retain students;<sup>3</sup>

Whereas, similar concerns have been communicated to the President and/or the Board of Trustees on several previous occasions;<sup>4</sup>

Whereas, the available information supports the view that President Salsbury has too often responded to critiques with either defensiveness or avoidance, rather than treating them as opportunities for reflective listening, learning, and growth, and, further, has not accepted offers for guidance or assistance from faculty and other members of the campus community with differing viewpoints;<sup>5</sup>

Whereas, we believe that President Salsbury's seven years at Western have been too frequently characterized by turmoil, turnover, and tension among faculty, staff, and administration;

Whereas, Western deserves a leader who actively seeks input from faculty and staff across campus, eagerly engages with students and prioritizes student well-being, enthusiastically builds a campus culture committed at every level to diversity and equity, and successfully unifies our campus around a shared and inclusive vision;

Whereas, the Faculty of Western Colorado, are committed to our institutional mission, care deeply about the success of our institution, and have an obligation to be good faith stewards of this public institution for our students, our community, and the People of Colorado;

Therefore, Be it Resolved, that the Faculty of Western Colorado University, respectfully requests new leadership at Western.

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<sup>1</sup> President Salsbury issued a second "Voice Against Violence" message on January 9, 2021 to clarify his original January 7 message. In the January 9 message President Salsbury states that he did not use the terms 'President Trump' or 'Black Lives Matter' in the January 7 message, but he also did not revise his original statement nor did he disclaim equating the 2020 protests for racial justice with the pro-Trump coup attempt at the Capital. President Salsbury attended the February 4, 2021 Board of Trustees meeting and stated that he was not referring to the peaceful portions of the Black Lives Matter protests in his January 7, 2021 message, but again did not disclaim equating the 2020 protests for racial justice to the pro-Trump coup attempt at the Capital and, despite knowing the controversy caused by his January 7 message, affirmatively stated that he stood by the January 7 message.

<sup>2</sup> a) President Salsbury's June 2016 *Chronicle of Higher Education* letter to the editor "Will Colleges Now have To Let Students Self-Identify as a Different Race?" in which we believe he wrongly equates gender identity with racial identity, therein demonstrating a lack of awareness of the prevailing scholarly evidence regarding these complex social issues;

b) President Salsbury's failure to notify the campus community about and publicly condemn the drawing of a swastika in a student dorm in Fall 2016. The lack of pro-active leadership in the aftermath of this event, paired with news stories regarding allegations of racial and sexual harassment involving Jackson National Life Insurance (the President's previous employer) led the Faculty Senate to draft and approve the original Diversity, Equity and Inclusion statement in Spring 2017;

c) His June 2020 message regarding the police killing of George Floyd. Although this message mentions "bias," it never uses the words racism, white supremacy, or police and we believe conflates the harms caused by the overwhelmingly peaceful response to racist violence with the harms of racist violence itself; and

d) President Salsbury's Fall 2020 advocacy of the idea that the DEII committee needed to define "person of color," his pressing of this idea at a "listening session" he attended with the DEII committee, and his citing of the cases of Rachel Dolezal and Jessica Krug as evidence for why

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defining “person of color” is necessary, which we believe reflected his misinformed belief that racial “identity fraud” was something other than the extremely rare phenomenon that it is.

<sup>3</sup> a) When a student critiqued President Salsbury regarding his 10-28-2020 “The Election” message as being tone deaf, the President responded to that student by accusing the student’s interpretation of the President’s message as exhibiting “tone deafness,” which we believe is an inappropriate accusation when delivered from an authority figure (instructor or administrator) to a student.

b) Faculty Senate received two reports from students indicating that when President Salsbury met with the family of a Western student on 10-29-2019, the day after that student took their own life, President Salsbury acted inappropriately at that meeting. One report reads as follows: President Salsbury “...continued to press that it is important as a parent to recognize these struggles and provide the appropriate resources in order to prevent a situation like this from occurring. Quickly this conversation turned to President Salsbury making remarks that sounded as if [name redacted]’s parents didn’t do enough to save his life...I felt gutted by his words in that moment. How could someone say that to a family that just lost their son, lost their twin, and lost their youngest brother? President Salsbury’s comments were harsh enough that one of the [name redacted] brothers stormed out of the room making a point to slam the door in order to convey the fact that Salsbury was offending and preforming acts of insensitivity towards the grieving family. Yet Salsbury continued on talking as if he did nothing wrong. Since that day I have not trusted President Salsbury as someone that can protect our Western community. Especially through the hardships of student deaths, a flooded dorm building, a global pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the recent riot at the U.S. Capitol. All our community receives is another disappointing email from this man. It is time for a change in leadership at Western.”

c) The Executive Board of the Western Colorado University Student Government Association reported on 1-18-2021 in an official communication that a “lack of communication from President Salsbury has been on ongoing complaint brought to SGA over the last two years.”

d) In mid-January 2021, Faculty Senate received 15 communications from current students and 9 from alumni who expressed concerns regarding President Salsbury’s public statements, his commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, his concern for students, and/or his leadership abilities. Faculty Senate received 1 communication from a current student who critiqued faculty and not President Salsbury.

e) On February 4, 2021, Faculty Senate received an official statement from SGA titled “Failure to Include Students in Campus Dialogue,” which expressed concern regarding the “failure to send out a formal statement to the student body regarding the events of January 6th from either WCU’s administration or President Salsbury.” The statement continues: “The lack of transparency creates barriers on WCU’s principles of shared governance, an essential component of this institution. As members of Student Government, a vital part of our role is to reinforce not only transparency, but an open line of communication that should ideally be shared between administration, faculty, and students...Further, Western’s statement on inclusion, supported by both President Salsbury and the Board of Trustees, reiterates foundational sentiments found in the mission statement, of principles ‘necessary for the free and open inquiry that defines our role as a public institution in a democratic society. [Western] believe[s] that these principles are a moral imperative requiring constant vigilance and a firm stance against actions motivated by hate or intimidation.’ As a ‘public institution in a democratic society,’ the failure to send out a statement to students regarding the events of January 6th demonstrates a disrespect of students’ role in the necessity for civil discourse, that according to WCU’s governing principles, is crucial to its success.”

<sup>4</sup> a) A faculty survey conducted by our Faculty Trustee in Fall 2019 (116 respondents out of a total of approximately 162 faculty, for a response rate of approximately 71.6%, in which more than 75% of

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references to the President (n=144) were negative, while only 6% (n=12) were positive; 17% of references were ambiguous (n=32). The results of this survey were sent by the Faculty Trustee to the Board of Trustees on September 26, 2019.

b) The “Campus Climate Survey” conducted by the DEII committee and Culture Journey consultants during 2019-2020 academic year, which found that:

- “oppressive systems...characterized the climate and culture of Western:”
- “the president lacks understanding of the critical work and support...that are imperative to the delivery of systems level change campus wide;”
- a “lack of welcoming and belonging was identified...Almost all participants voiced concern with executive leadership, more specifically, the University President’s ‘lack of awareness of folks who have different experiences than him’ (participant quote). There is general consensus that senior leadership members are aware of the disparities and disenfranchisement occurring as result of toxic leadership. However, they fear these leaders are preoccupied with the potential consequences they might face if they pushback or challenge decision-making processes. Significant disbelief exists among faculty, staff and students regarding the ability to cultivate transformative change with the current leadership at the helm.”

c) A letter signed by 64 faculty and staff in response to President Salsbury’s June 3<sup>rd</sup> “Statement on Recent Events,” which stated that the President’s statement “does not reflect a commitment to diversity and inclusion” and “respectfully request[ed] that [President Salsbury] do more to elevate and support the voices of other campus leaders” who have a fuller understanding of and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion work, such as the DEII committee.

d) A letter signed by over 200 alumni (in a 24-hour period) in June 2020, which cites not only the President’s statement regarding George Floyd, but also the President’s silence in earlier years regarding the drawing of a swastika and threats to transgender students on campus, in 2016 and 2017 respectively.

e) A January 2021 Faculty Senate initiative to collect comments and information with respect to President Salsbury’s leadership found that:

- Among faculty responses (n=38), 23.6% were positive, while 63.2% were negative;
- Among student/alumni responses (n=28), 3.6% were positive, while 95.4% were negative;

<sup>5</sup> a) In preparation for President Salsbury’s “State of the University” address to Faculty Senate September 23, 2019, Senators (in accordance with the Faculty Constitution) provided a list of questions for the President to address. The President largely ignored those questions, and instead summarized material from his previously delivered all-campus convocation. Subsequent requests from Senate to the President to respond to the list of questions were never answered.

b) Though the DEII committee’s official charge includes “developing recommendations for improving the University’s policies and practices regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus, including but not limited to, all university operations,” the President did not consult with the DEII committee prior to publishing the “Voice Against Violence” statement. Further, the President did not respond to the January 18, 2021 DEII statement on this matter, which specifically asked the President to “seek collegial consultation with the DEII” committee. When a DEII committee member sent a follow-up email on February 1, 2021 requesting a response, President Salsbury replied that he “offered more collegial consultation by way of one-on-one conversation,” which we believe is not an appropriate substitute for formal consultation with an official administrative committee. Further, the President declined the DEII committee’s request to name the events of January 6, 2021 “as a coup attempt” and he ignored the committee’s call to decry “the seditious speech and falsehoods that motivated it.”