



AUSTIN
COLLEGE

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

July 17, 2020

Dear Austin College Community,

I write today to the Austin College community in recognition of the challenges of this moment in our history and the emotions that are running high for so many of us. While dealing with the isolation and anxiety surrounding COVID-19, we have felt the anger, grief, and pleas for change after watching heinous acts of violence against people of color leading to conversations about race in the United States.

Earlier this summer, I wrote to alumni and students to remind us all of the values of Austin College. In living out those values, discrimination in any form is not acceptable. Our pledge to community, inclusion, and diversity creates respectful interaction for all community members, regardless of race, gender, gender identity, culture, religion, or economics.

Over these last several weeks, we have been listening and have been made aware of members of our community who have suffered at the hands of others while on our campus. That they have been mistreated, damaged, or felt unheard when they have voiced their pain or outrage is not acceptable and is antithetical to the mission of Austin College. We must be better. We must do better. We also must be united in the effort.

This is important to me, and I want us to get this right. At present, we are taking the time to listen to experiences, gather suggestions and recommendations, investigate reports of misconduct, and continue to put into place initiatives that will ultimately present Austin College as a beacon of inclusion and diversity that we all can be proud of. Some things that are already happening include:

- The President's Committee on Inclusion and Diversity continues to invite not only the sharing of experiences but also actionable suggestions for how we can do better as a college. To share your suggestions, please complete the Actionable Steps for Justice and Opportunity Survey ([survey link open until August 1](#)).
- We are looking forward to an upcoming Town Hall meeting for listening and engagement on Monday, July 20, at 7:00pm CT. You are invited to virtually attend. ([register here](#))

- We are taking steps to further diversify various components of the Austin College community like our Board, our faculty, and our staff to more closely reflect the progress we have made in the diversity of our student body in recent years.
- In addition to quantitative progress, we are exploring new and better ways of qualitatively creating a truly inclusive culture for everyone in the classroom, on our campus, and in their everyday lives.
- We are committed to raising awareness within our entire community of biases, ignorance, and misconceptions that stand in the way of meaningful progress.
- We are committed to taking seriously and investigating reports of potential misconduct. I ask that such reports be submitted through our existing [Campus Conduct Hotline](#) to alert Austin College to problems that may affect the entire campus community.

As we continue to move forward, to plan for an unprecedented opening of school this fall, we commit to living out the values of Austin College and to stand firmly upon them. We commit to fostering a campus climate in which students are safe and do not suffer from racial or gender inequity.

Finally, throughout this vitally important process, as uncomfortable or even painful as it might be at times, I ask that we not let real and legitimate pain and emotion lead to disrespect or personal attacks. I ask, rather, that we strive to resist division and vitriol and approach the tasks at hand with mutual love and respect for all. Together, I know we can do this.

Thank you for your commitment to getting this right. In the meantime, I hope you will also hold close to your heart the positives that Austin College has brought to your lives and its potential to be and do better in the future.

We will continue to work on it with you.

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven P. O'Day". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'D'.

Steven P. O'Day, J.D.

President

The Cecil H. and Ida M. Green
Chair of Creative Educational Leadership