

From: Official ESU Email

Sent: Friday, June 5, 2020

Subject: Message from Dr. Santiago Solis to the Campus Community - June 5, 2020

At East Stroudsburg University Black Warriors Matter! Firstly, please let me apologize if I miscommunicated our stance on racism in my previous message earlier this week. On behalf of the ESU community, we wholeheartedly condemn any disparaging and offensive social media posts and racist language by current and incoming students. Such speech is completely disgraceful. Let me be clear. Racism will be challenged at ESU. In fact, I know I can count on many of you to unite and create the welcoming and inclusive campus community that we all desire and deserve.

In the spirit of creating a welcoming and inclusive campus, I invite you to join a virtual conversation about Freedom of Speech on University Campuses (look out for more details to follow). As a public university, ESU is committed to the ideals of free speech protected by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Freedom of speech is not only an important individual right, but also essential to a healthy democracy. Some questions raised during the virtual conversation may include:

- How does the First Amendment right of free speech apply to hateful language?
- What does freedom of speech actually protect?
- Can ESU deny admission to a student who expresses hateful views?
- Can ESU deny campus entry to people preaching hate like racism and homophobia?
- Which types of speech are not protected by the First Amendment?

Generally speaking, under the First Amendment, an individual can exercise their freedom of speech rights to express their opinions publicly without government interference. However, the First Amendment limits only government, not private entities such as businesses, organizations, private schools, or private individuals. Public universities like ESU, which are created by state governments, are considered governmental entities, and therefore cannot limit the speech rights of students.

In a democracy like ours in the United States, everyone has freedom of speech. At times, we may be exposed to mean-spirited, offensive, disparaging, hateful, hurtful, and even angering comments. This often creates confusion because it seems unfair and completely wrong that the First Amendment protects horribly offensive speech: how can that be? For what purpose and for whose benefit? Freedom of speech protects all of us because it works both ways. Because someone has that right to express their ideas – even if I find their ideas offensive, hateful, repulsive, hurtful, and wrong, it means my right to express my ideas is protected.

As Warriors and Champions of Social Justice, this fall, when you arrive on campus, I call upon each of you to challenge racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, stereotypes, and toxic language wherever you go: in dining halls, residence halls, student org meetings, locker rooms, athletic fields, and in the stands. I encourage you to get involved on campus to affect change. This is part of how we create a welcoming and inclusive campus. When you return to campus, we will certainly have another conversation about the complexities of the First Amendment and freedom of speech and expression.

As your Vice President for Campus Life & Inclusive Excellence, you have my word and commitment that I will do whatever I can to create the type of living and learning environment conducive to your social and academic success. As you know, I cannot do this alone. I will need your ideas, voices, and support. As global citizens, I urge you to consider what is your personal role and responsibility in creating a more

just society. While many of you are allies, I would encourage you to become advocates. Yes, you can re-tweet and re-share, but also consider that you can always do more.

An ally can engage in activism in solidarity with a marginalized individual or group, an advocate will focus on dismantling oppressive structures. In other words, ally work focuses on supporting and uplifting, but advocate work focuses on actively doing the work to change policies, procedures, and structures. I invite you to join me this fall, as I will need other advocates to continue creating the anti-racist campus that we deserve.

As a Mexican, gay immigrant little boy who grew up in poverty, I understand first-hand the importance of fighting for justice and equity. I've been marching and rallying for decades, starting when I was a college student, and I'm not done fighting yet. We still have much to do, as evidenced by the blatant racism we are currently witnessing and experiencing. So we must continue to fight, together, for historically marginalized people like me, from historically oppressed communities like mine – but we need to fight together!

Dr. Santiago Solis

Pronouns: He/Him/His

Black Lives Matter!

Vice President, Campus Life & Inclusive Excellence

East Stroudsburg University

200 Prospect St. | East Stroudsburg, PA 18301