



A MESSAGE *from* PRESIDENT JAMES DANKO

Dear Butler Community Members,

On June 19, 1865, in Galveston, Texas, the last enslaved people learned they were free—two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation, abolishing slavery. Yet here we are, 155 years later, at an unprecedented moment where the legacy of slavery in the form of systemic racism in the criminal justice system, and racial and economic disparities of Black people, have become so strikingly apparent. It compels every one of us to take time today, as we commemorate Juneteenth, to reflect, to learn, and to act upon the moral imperative to collectively change our society.

Let us also reflect on our own obligations here at Butler University. Since my [May 31 message](#), I have solicited insights from Butler students, alumni, faculty, and staff, asking them to share their views on whether we are ensuring that a Butler education is truly “available to all—regardless of race, gender, or religion.” Are there injustices or disparities on our campus preventing us from fulfilling the commitment of those words from our founding mission?

After several virtual meetings, email exchanges, and calls to discuss this question, I must tell you that I am alarmed, frustrated, and disappointed. While I want to believe that Butler is the inclusive, equitable, safe learning community we desire for all, the experiences of many confirm otherwise. As a committed leader, I am hopeful about the future of our great University. But I would be doing our community a disservice if I ignored Butler’s shortcomings, or pretended that Butler is immune to the injustice that continues to be a daily reality for so many people.

It alarms me to hear students, staff, and faculty of color report not feeling safe on our campus, or having been subjected to hate speech, threats, or blatant discrimination. It is frustrating to hear about faculty not addressing insensitive remarks made in our classrooms, or, worse, to hear that staff, faculty, and students have made such remarks. It’s heart wrenching to know that there are Butler students and alumni whose longtime dreams of attending Butler have been tarnished by the reality of their experience. Finally, I am disappointed by our failure to achieve more racial diversity across campus, including in our senior leadership ranks.

It is clear that we—myself included—collectively share the responsibility for falling short in making Butler the environment we envision when we cite our founding mission.

Why is significant progress so difficult to achieve, despite the positive intentions and dedication of so many in our community who believe that seeking social justice is fundamental to the character of our learning environment? Certainly we have undertaken many efforts and made progress; for example, we are moving toward the goals set forth by our most recent Diversity Commission.

We can offer reasons for our lack of progress—whether a shortfall of resources, or perhaps the slow nature of implementing change within an academic setting. But one thing has been made clear, in both internal discussions and the current state of our country: we must take action *now*. Thus, I am not going to form yet another task force to analyze, discuss, and recommend actions. Rather, I am going to be more directive in my approach to ensure that Butler fulfills its obligation to educate our students for the reality of the world into which they will graduate, a world in which discrimination has no place, not in our country and certainly not in our University.

As such, I am charging each of our divisional and college leaders with producing a list of actions that will be undertaken across four key areas that I have broadly outlined below. By the time we start the fall semester, we will have specific actions vetted, approved, organized, and communicated to the Butler community. And I will commit sufficient resources to ensure that significant progress is made.

Education. As a University, we're perfectly positioned to provide educational opportunities to *all* members of our community. The new Social Justice and Diversity requirement within the Core Curriculum is one positive step, but we can do even more for our students to raise awareness, improve dialogue, foster intercultural understanding, and help end racism. In addition, we must require education for ourselves—Butler employees, trustees, and advisory council members—for the same purposes.

Organization. How can we enhance the representational diversity of our campus community at all levels, including our student body, our faculty and staff, and our institutional leaders?

Behavior. What actions are necessary to ensure that all members of our campus community engage in respectful dialogue and refrain from words and actions that are hurtful and offensive to members of our campus? Do we demonstrate, clearly and consistently, that racism is not tolerated at Butler University?

Procedure. Are our policies and procedures for identifying, reporting, adjudicating, and responding to bias incidents and policy violations comprehensive and transparent? Do we opt for policing and punishment over enhanced community services and support?

The challenges above are premised upon the many experiences shared with me recently, but let me close with some words of wisdom I received from [Butler Volleyball Coach Sharon Clark](#), as she describes the opportunity that this historic moment presents.

“My advice to us all at Butler is to step WAY OUTSIDE of our comfort zone and take the courageous road to be leaders in the higher education community. We have an opportunity to own our past injustices to students, staff, and faculty of color. To truly examine our present highly ineffective system of encouraging and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion on our campus. Finally, I am most encouraged by the huge opportunity we have to change Butler University into a place that looks, feels, and supports a diverse set of people. A place not simply for the privileged but a place where you and I can both be proud of the experience folks have in our space. As we are still quite homogenous and don't truly reflect the global diversity they will step into in the work place. I always ask, If not us then who?”

We are called upon to truly live our mission as a University where *all* students, faculty, and staff are welcome, respected, and flourishing. As always, I welcome your [thoughts](#).

Sincerely,



James M. Danko
President, Butler University