

June 1, 2020

Dear Students:

As we begin this week in the wake of the horrible events of the past few days, I find it difficult to know what to say or do when our hearts and minds are challenged in such painful ways. Like many of you, I have found myself horrified, angry, and appalled at the killing of George Floyd, as well as others, while being shocked, hurt, and horrified at the senseless loss of yet another human life because of racism, bias, and intolerance. That shock, hurt, and horror has intensified even more in the past few days as we have seen the unrest, protests, and violence that have followed. No community in this nation has been untouched by these events and, like many, I struggle to find the words to express all that I am experiencing right now.

As a Black male and child of the South, I have (like too many others I know) spent my entire life confronting, overcoming, and at times simply surviving issues of racism, bias, and systemic intolerance and discrimination. I am frustrated, angry, and so very tired of the unending cycle of Black and other lives lost to racism, bias, and intolerance for difference. I am tired of sharing in the grief of families destroyed in the name of fear and bigotry, and by the senseless acts of violence they produce. But I also continue to cling to hope and resolve that we will not be defeated, and that we can and will continue to work to end this cycle and finally live up to our promise as humans, a nation, and a world. For me, there is no other choice.

My heart and soul cry out to you, our students, and especially to all who are most impacted by these events, as well as by the world in which we find ourselves today. These events could not have come at a more challenging time for college students, who even before this tragedy found themselves at one of the most troubling periods in history. The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic and social issues have already created more challenges for navigating these times. I know so many of you have been tremendously impacted by having to be isolated from your peers and are often sharing the financial and other stresses of your families, in addition to navigating a rapidly changing world.

For students of color and all who are allied against racism and intolerance, the additional pain caused by the violent death of Mr. Floyd and other people of color has been added to an already unfair set of circumstances being navigated in the midst of the pandemic. The African American community, which is already encumbered by racism, violence, and inequality, has been more adversely affected by COVID-19 due to previous and on-going iniquities. I know that you are all dealing with so much, and the combination of it all is difficult to carry.

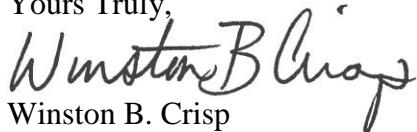
I believe, however, that it is at precisely this time that we must redouble our efforts to fight these difficult battles. While I am proud of our efforts to be more inclusive, foster collaboration, and seek answers to the most challenging questions, I am more committed now than ever before to

pushing forward with the work of improving our ability to build community and remove barriers for all of us. The entire Student Affairs team and I look forward to engaging with you as we continue planning this summer to develop and expand both virtual and on-campus spaces that promote intercultural student-centeredness, support inclusion, and build community. For example, we're in the process of reimagining the space in the current Student Union to provide community lounges, meeting rooms, and support services for student communities. This also includes enhancing the current space already being used for centers for Asian Pacific American, Black, Latinx/Chicanx, Veteran, and LGBT students to improve and facilitate dialogue and build community. But we still have a lot of work to do to ensure all students feel safe and included within USC community. This terrible incident has brought upon our consciousness a need to reaffirm for many, and to impress upon others, that Black lives do matter and that they must matter to us all.

I thank you for the courage and persistence you have shown throughout these past few months, which are among the most challenging in our nation's history, and again call on your fortitude and indomitable Trojan spirit to endure and affect much-needed justice in our society. I thank you all for the many wonderful acts of kindness that have pierced through the pain and suffering so many feel. Such good will seems almost surreal given the extraordinary circumstances in which it is being offered, but is absolutely necessary for us to achieve all that we must. I encourage you, also, to take care of yourselves during this time. Student Affairs' [Student Equity and Inclusion Programs](#) are an extremely valuable resource, and [USC Student Health](#) continues to offer counseling, wellness, and mental health support.

I know that there are many questions about how we can, as a community, move forward together ... many more than we currently have answers for, but I will continue to trust that we can together find the answers we need. I will never accept any other outcome, and I look forward to standing together with you as we continue to seek a just, fair, and peaceful world to live in.

Yours Truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Winston B. Crisp". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "W".

Winston B. Crisp

Vice President for Student Affairs