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## **Response to the President's Task Force on Diversity**

Fordham University

**Joseph M. McShane, S.J.**, President

11 November 2016

Dear Members of the Fordham Family,

I am pleased to share with you the report of the University's Task Force on Diversity, which I charged last year to examine Fordham's climate and policies with regard to issues of race, representation, and inclusion. The Task Force, ably chaired by Peter Vaughan, Ph.D., the Dean Emeritus of the Graduate School of Social Service, and composed of faculty, staff, students, and alumni, presented its final report to me in mid-August. The report contains a series of recommendations touching on just about every aspect of Fordham's life, including suggestions for structural, curricular, and policy changes. Among them are recommendations to appoint a Chief Diversity Officer, to significantly diversify the administration and faculty, and to set in motion curricular changes that will embrace all the dimensions of human diversity.

As the Task Force has been carrying out this vital work, I have been speaking regularly about race, diversity, and inclusion with members of the President's Advisory Council (PAC), a body composed of the vice presidents, deans, and co-chairs of our Continuous University Strategic Planning (CUSP) process. Throughout the fall semester, PAC has carefully been reviewing and reflecting upon the recommendations of the Task Force, and with PAC's strong concurrence I am pleased to share with you today a Diversity Action Plan that, taking the Task Force's report as a starting point, outlines some of the steps that Fordham will take to advance a culture of inclusion. The conversations that have led to the development of the Action Plan have been extensive, robust, and candid, and the members of PAC and I have sought to give the Task Force's report the careful reflection and deep attention that it deserves. We have also sought to craft the Action Plan in light of diversity initiatives already underway and in light of the prominent priority that our CUSP Strategic Framework gives to the topics of diversity and inclusion. The Action Plan also reflects feedback on these issues that I have received directly from members of the University community.

Especially in light of the presidential campaign that has just concluded, and that has made the divisions from which the country and Fordham are suffering all the more intense, painful, and raw, I must begin from the place where we find ourselves. I believe that slavery is our original sin. Racism is a legacy of this original sin, and it shows itself in sinful social structures and systems.

The past year has been a time of reflection, activism, division, and strain for our whole country. We at Fordham have not been immune to these tensions and this pain, and I take seriously the Task Force's finding that too often, members of our community report experiencing feelings of distrust or fear when they speak or advocate on issues connected to race and diversity. I likewise take seriously the Task Force's concern that previous reports and recommendations on these subjects have not produced concrete outcomes satisfactory to all members of our community.

I can say with absolute clarity: diversity and inclusion are institutional priorities at Fordham, priorities that emerge directly out of our identity as an American, Catholic, and Jesuit institution

located in the City of New York. The thoughtful work of the Task Force reminds us that our mission and identity call us to treat not just every member of the Fordham community but indeed every human being with respect, affirmation, reverence, and affection. This is our ongoing challenge, and I am confident that we will rise to that challenge together. I will have more to say about Fordham's mission in the paragraphs that follow the Action Plan. For now, I would be remiss not to thank wholeheartedly the members of the Task Force who did such fine work, work that will stand us in good stead as we move forward as a community. Their names appear at the end of this message, and they deserve our enduring gratitude.

### **Diversity Action Plan**

Fordham is committed to creating a learning environment in which each student, and everyone who shares our mission, receives *cura personalis* (care for each person, and care for the whole person), which is one of the defining characteristics of Jesuit education, and indeed of every Jesuit apostolic work. In order to create a climate on our campuses that welcomes all individuals, whether students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, or visitors, Fordham will advance a series of initiatives that fall into four overarching categories: people, curricula, community engagement, and policies and procedures. These initiatives will dovetail not only with each other but also with work already being undertaken in many of the University's schools, colleges, and administrative areas. For each initiative there appears a brief description and a projected timeline for implementation. A final timeline will be worked out with the Chief Diversity Officer on the basis of the conversations he or she has with the cognizant parties. During the development of the fiscal year 2018 budget, Fordham will establish the budget allocations that will be needed to support the work outlined in the action plan. As we move toward searching for and welcoming to campus our first Chief Diversity Officer, that individual will lead the effort to devise the metrics by which we will be able to measure the success of these initiatives, and to hold ourselves accountable.

### **People**

1. Fordham will appoint a new senior administrator, the Chief Diversity Officer. As the Task Force's report notes, this leader "will serve as [the] champion for the University's overall diversity and inclusion agenda by developing and facilitating at all levels of the University, the strategies, decision making, priority setting, and actions necessary to advance diversity and inclusion at the University" (Task Force Recommendation No. 2). This officer will carry the full title of Special Advisor to the President for Diversity, Chief Diversity Officer, and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, reporting both to the President and to the Provost. The Chief Diversity Officer will participate in the monthly Vice Presidents meetings. He or she will work with all of the vice presidents and deans on all faculty and staff searches. He or she will also produce an annual diversity report for the University community. The University has already identified the financial resources necessary to bring to campus a highly qualified leader to serve as Chief Diversity Officer.

**Timeline:** We will begin a national search for the first Chief Diversity Officer in early January.

2. Since the subject of diversity touches all areas of University life, beyond fulfilling this recommendation from the Task Force, Fordham will also be refashioning two other positions in order to provide diversity leadership in the areas of Student Affairs and Human Resources. In Student Affairs, we will promote the position of Assistant Dean and Director of Multicultural Affairs to the position of Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs for Diversity and Inclusion. The leader in this role will continue to manage the Office of Multicultural Affairs, will be a member of the Student Affairs senior management team, will create and facilitate student experiences to foster greater appreciation of diversity, and will work in close collaboration with the Chief Diversity Officer. In Human Resources, the University will undertake a search for a Chief Human Resources Officer. A major part of this position's job responsibilities will now include overseeing diversity and inclusion initiatives in Human Resources, developing orientation programs for all incoming members of the University's staff and administration, and creating and overseeing the delivery of ongoing professional development programs in diversity. Since all this work is too important to be committed to any single individual, the Chief Diversity Officer, the Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs for Diversity and Inclusion, and the Chief Human Resources Officer will together form a Diversity Leadership Team that will regularly be consulted by the President.

**Timeline:** The promotion of the Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs for Diversity and Inclusion will be implemented at the beginning of academic year 2017–18; the search for the Chief Human Resources Officer has begun.

3. Fordham will place priority on diversifying the ranks of all University administrators and faculty members (see Task Force Recommendations No. 1, No. 4, and No. 5). With regard to faculty hiring, the University will implement the Task Force's detailed recommendations regarding "cluster hiring" and the John LaFarge Visiting Scholars and Fellows Program, in which doctoral candidates of color who may be close to completing their programs are recruited to work in departments related to their field of study and are mentored by faculty members at Fordham. The joint title of Chief Diversity Officer and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs will permit the Chief Diversity Officer to assist in and advance these efforts (see Task Force Recommendation No. 6). In order to facilitate greater diversity in hiring, the Chief Diversity Officer, Chief Human Resources Officer, and Title IX Coordinator will conduct annual workshops for deans, chairs, vice presidents, and search committees to familiarize them with the University's expectations for hiring practices.

**Timeline:** This will be an ongoing effort, with planning commencing immediately.

4. Fordham will expand its outreach to recruit students of color (see Task Force Recommendations No. 7 and No. 15). Extensive resources have been committed to this work over the years, but our experience has shown that simply providing additional financial aid is insufficient to increase the enrollment of students of color. While funds from the current campaign (which seeks to raise \$175 million for financial aid) will be used to establish aid programs directed specifically toward undergraduate and graduate diversity goals (see Task Force Recommendation No. 8), we must also provide a welcoming culture and climate. Therefore, the new Diversity Leadership Team will consider establishing a peer mentoring program for students of color, as well as setting aside specific scholarship funds for students who

seek to become leaders in diversity and inclusion, among other recruitment efforts and enrollment practices designed to increase the enrollment of students of color. The deans of the individual schools and colleges will work with their faculty and staff members to identify specific diversity goals and initiatives. In addition, the University will expand mentoring programs such as those that the Dorothy Day Center for Service and Justice has piloted at Cardinal Hayes High School in the Bronx to bring more students of color to campus during their high school years. Finally, the University will continue (with the help of a grant from the Bloomberg Family Foundation) to host New York State's only African-American and Hispanic College Fair.

**Timeline:** Planning for some of these initiatives has already begun; planning for others will begin immediately, with implementation to follow during academic year 2017-18.

### **Curriculum**

The Task Force's report, along with the CUSP Strategic Framework, has taught us that the goal of forming women and men for others requires us to attend carefully to the ways in which we engage with issues of diversity and inclusion in formal as well as informal educational settings. The initiatives in this section seek to strengthen existing programs for our students, faculty, and staff, as well as to prompt conversations about the content and delivery of our curricula. They include, but also build upon, a series of recommendations from the Task Force.

5. Fordham will strengthen and expand the University's new student orientation programs for undergraduates. The three divisions—Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Mission Integration and Planning—to which the orientation programs are currently entrusted will work closely with one another and with the Chief Diversity Officer to ensure that messages concerning student behavior, community expectations, and inclusion are coordinated with and mutually reinforce one another.

**Timeline:** Planning to begin immediately for implementation during orientation 2017.

6. Insistent on the need to spotlight the treatment of diversity and inclusion in all our student orientation programs, but cognizant that the life experiences and expectations of incoming graduate and professional students are different from those of our entering undergraduates, the deans of the graduate and professional schools will work closely with their faculty members and with the Chief Diversity Officer to develop orientation programs and ongoing personal and professional development programs that are appropriate for their students.

**Timeline:** Planning to begin immediately for implementation during academic year 2017-18.

7. Although our new student orientation programs are strong, they are too short to introduce incoming students to Fordham's expectations of them. Therefore, it would be wise (even imperative) for the University to provide these students with an orientation experience that extends beyond the busy first few days of their time on campus. As a result of an intentional collaboration among Academic Affairs (led by the undergraduate deans and the faculty), Student Affairs, and Mission Integration and Planning, Fordham will advance a proposal that seeks to

require all first-year undergraduate students to enroll in a one-credit “First Year Experience” course containing a significant diversity component (see Task Force Recommendation No. 9). Responsibility for designing and implementing such a proposal, if approved through the necessary curricular channels, will be shared among the undergraduate schools and colleges, Student Affairs, and Mission Integration and Planning. In keeping with the collaborative approach to this course, the responsibility to staff sections of this course will be shared among Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Mission Integration and Planning.

**Timeline:** Planning to begin immediately for implementation during academic year 2018-19.

8. As the Task Force has noted, in the long-required American Pluralism component of the undergraduate Core Curriculum we have in hand an admirable resource for engaging our students in discussions about issues of diversity. The Task Force has also pointed out, however, that many of the courses through which students may fulfill the American Pluralism requirement do not adequately address issues of diversity. Therefore, the deans of the undergraduate colleges will work in an intensive and focused way with the members of the Arts and Sciences Faculty to identify and develop enough diversity-rich American Pluralism courses to serve all of our students.

**Timeline:** Planning to begin immediately.

9. More broadly, all of the University’s deans will work with their faculty members to ensure that courses include discussions or treatment of issues of diversity as often and as richly as possible. In this regard, special efforts will be made at the undergraduate level to include questions about race and diversity in Values Seminar and Interdisciplinary Capstone Core courses.

**Timeline:** Planning to begin immediately.

10. In order to assist faculty and staff in our efforts to become more informed of and masterful in their use of techniques both for raising issues of race and diversity in course syllabi, and for dealing with such issues with sensitivity and compassion when they arise in the course of work with students inside and outside the classroom, Fordham’s deans will form school-based committees to identify and/or create professional development programs for faculty colleagues (see Task Force Recommendations No. 10, No. 11, and No. 12).

**Timeline:** Planning to begin immediately.

### **Community Engagement**

As we work together to engage members of the faculty and staff around the issues of diversity and inclusion, it is imperative for us also to consider how we can engage the whole University family, and the broader communities of which we are a part, in this work that is central to our mission as a Jesuit and Catholic university.

11. Fordham will strengthen our highly successful Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP), the most effective and successful program of its kind in New York State, which supports students who are both economically and educationally disadvantaged in attending, and succeeding in, college. Fordham will also strengthen our Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP), in which CSTEP scholars receive career counseling, paid internships and research opportunities, study skills workshops and tutorials, and support classes for all pre-health and introductory science courses, among other benefits.

**Timeline:** Planning to begin immediately for implementation during academic year 2018-19.

12. Fordham will expand mentoring programs such as the one that the Dorothy Day Center for Service and Justice conducts in the elementary, middle, and high schools of the Bronx and Manhattan (see Task Force Recommendation No. 15). Specifically, Fordham will enhance and expand more broadly its affiliation with Cristo Rey New York High School in East Harlem, along with its involvement in the three local Cristo Rey schools. This expanded affiliation can and should include intense mentoring for Cristo Rey students, as well as open the way for Cristo Rey students to take Fordham courses in their senior year of high school.

**Timeline:** Planning to begin immediately.

Unfortunately, it is presently not practical for Fordham to create a community college, such as Arrupe College at Loyola University Chicago. Among other reasons, the students of such a college would not be taught by Fordham's full-time faculty and would not be ensured admission to one of our four-year undergraduate colleges upon the completion of the associate's degree. The initiatives outlined above do, however, seek to respond to the Task Force's recommendations (No. 15 and No. 16) that Fordham make greater educational opportunities available to students and families in our surrounding communities. We will also continue to explore the development of new pipelines to bring students from local community colleges to Fordham.

### **Policies and Procedures**

13. Fordham will create a standing Diversity Committee (Task Force Recommendation No. 3), but, out of respect for the leadership of the incoming Chief Diversity Officer, we will leave it to that individual to form the committee after he or she arrives in ways that are based on her or his experience and expertise. When formed, the committee, like the Task Force, will be broadly representative in its composition. Its work will include the coordination of existing efforts and the publication of a comprehensive directory of existing and new diversity initiatives at the University. Additionally, the Chief Diversity Officer will determine if the creation of a Diversity Allies program (Task Force Recommendation No. 17) should be implemented. In the interim, Fordham is blessed to be able to draw on the continuing counsel of the alumni, faculty, staff, and student leaders who served on the Task Force.

**Timeline:** After the new Chief Diversity Officer begins service.

14. With the beginning of the 2016-17 academic year, the University has implemented a new electronic calendar system where individuals and campus groups can advertise upcoming events. As part of the new system, diversity-related educational events can easily be labeled (see Task Force Recommendation No. 14). This labeling system will enable users to quickly view those events that pertain to their interests.

**Timeline:** This is an ongoing effort.

15. The University has in place a very strong bias incident response and investigative team. In connection with the Task Force's recommendations about mechanisms for addressing bias incidents (see Task Force Recommendations No. 13, No. 18). The University will continue to monitor its policies and procedures, ensuring that the University follows the law, acts professionally in investigating any charges, responds appropriately, and respects confidentiality. Policies related to cases of bias and discrimination are available online at [www.fordham.edu/bias](http://www.fordham.edu/bias).

**Timeline:** This is an ongoing effort.

### **Concluding Reflections**

The publication of the Task Force's report and the University's Diversity Action Plan is not, by any means, the last word in this vital conversation. As you know, I have written to the Fordham family on a number of occasions over the course of the past year to share with you some thoughts on the issues and challenges with which we have all been wrestling. Therefore, although you all know where I stand, I wonder if I could conclude this letter by once again sharing a few reflections with you.

First: the context in which we find ourselves as a nation. We must be mindful of the facts that the Emancipation Proclamation was issued more than 150 years ago, and that the Civil Rights and the Voting Rights acts were passed more than 50 years ago. In spite of these facts, our nation has not achieved the racial equality that those actions promised and hoped to create. In fact, in spite of the hopes and promises contained in those actions, we remain a nation marked by racial inequality and deep divisions.

Second: the moral nature of the challenge that we face. I have said this before. Therefore, it will come as no surprise to anyone at the University when I say that the issues and challenges that we face have political, social, and economic components to them. Thus, we have to seek to approach them with a heightened sense of urgency through the passage and enforcement of laws and the creation of social programs, to be sure. At its base, however, racism is both a deeply personal and moral issue. Therefore, at the end of the day, we have to approach it and confront it on moral terms. We have to admit to ourselves that the issues we face and the conditions they create can only be solved by conversion of heart. If that is the case, we have to engage in honest examinations of conscience and of consciousness. This, of course, is not easy. In fact, such undertakings are always difficult precisely because they invite, challenge, and force us to examine inherited and ingrained habits of heart, mind, and action on which we may never have reflected. Since they are inherited and largely unexamined, these attitudes and habits have the



power to blind us and to short-circuit any and all efforts to get to their heart. But we must begin. The time for conversion is at hand.

And finally: Fordham's responsibility and contribution. One of my predecessors as Fordham's president, James C. Finlay, S.J., upon hearing a group of younger Jesuits talking about the need for the Society of Jesus to abandon education and go into hands-on work with the poor, said very quietly that education is the greatest work for social justice—for two reasons. First, he said, education can both foster the creation of communities of concern around the major social issues of our time, and transform the members of such communities of concern. Second, he said, when it is done right, education begins an ongoing (and lifelong) process of conversion.

For my part, I think that Father Finlay was right. Our specific contribution to the conversations and the work of the moment is to see and accept the truth of Father Finlay's contention that education is a powerful tool for empowerment and an equally powerful tool for forming consciences. Having embraced these two insights, we have to throw ourselves wholeheartedly into the work of educating for justice—for the good of our nation and the whole world. I believe that we at Fordham are under a four-fold mandate to undertake this challenging and saving work.

What do I mean? Simply this: we are an American, Catholic, and Jesuit institution located in the City of New York. Each of the terms of our identity invites us and challenges us to be better people, and to work harder to create a more just society. Our American roots call us to redeem the vision contained in our founding documents and to work with all our might to make sure that the sentiments contained therein and in the Emancipation Proclamation don't just remain sentiments, but become marching orders.

Our city is presided over by the Statue of Liberty, that iconic sculpture that promises a welcome place for all who seek to live in our midst. As a Catholic institution, we are under the Gospel mandate to love, cherish, and nurture all, especially those who are forgotten, discarded, alienated, or abused in or by society. And finally, in speaking of our Jesuit identity, we frequently say that we wish to create a learning environment in which each student receives *cura personalis*. But what does that mean in the present context in which we find ourselves? Simply this: we must go the extra mile to ensure that every student, and every person, is treated with respect and affirmation, and surrounded with care. In order to achieve that goal, we must listen carefully to our students and all the members of our community. We must attend to them, hear their concerns, fears, wants, and needs—and take them seriously.

I could never adequately thank the members of the Task Force for the extraordinary and important work they have done for all of us. To all the members of the Fordham community, I offer a challenge. How can we work together, today, tomorrow, and in all the days to come, to ensure that our University affirms and advances ever more the inherent human dignity of each member of the human family? The work of the Task Force calls us to strive, as St. Ignatius Loyola taught us, not for the banal “good,” and not for the impossible “greatest,” but for the exhausting and exhilarating “greater,” the magis.

Joseph M. McShane, S.J.  
President of the University

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