Dear Keene State Students, Faculty, Staff, and Alumni:

I am grateful that you are part of our college community and I am privileged to serve this community as your President. My position confers authority and responsibilities that I strive to leverage with a compassionate heart, with openness and access, with integrity, and with conviction to declare and model our values. This is not, and cannot be, mere rhetoric.

I am fallible, and our institutional responses can be imperfect. The demands and overlapping expectations of recent months and our physical distancing have resulted in less access for me to our community and for members of our community to me. It has also demonstrated the need for more efficient communication with you. I believe this has exacerbated a sense of isolation for all of us, but certainly for students calling out for action.

We must acknowledge the challenging time we are all facing across the country. We are operating within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a tumultuous election cycle, and ongoing injustice across our country. It is more important than ever that we hold each other with grace and compassion.

Recently, two students have spoken out about an incident that happened on our campus with Keene Police Department, in March 2020. As I became aware of their experiences, I spoke with the students directly, conducted an internal review of this incident, and reached out to our City partners to discuss our working relationships, supports, and values. As a result of this specific incident, we have implemented de-escalation training and we are expanding professional development programming for our employees, we will also be updating our campus safety/Keene City Police crisis management protocols and expectations.

During the past summer, I also requested a broader assessment of our bias, Title IX, and discriminatory harassment policies, protocols, procedures, and structures of support. I have recently received a set of recommended improvements. I will be sharing information and progress as we implement continuous improvement actions.

As President, my direct authority is limited to our College community, and I take this responsibility seriously. My external engagement and advocacy on behalf of our mission and values will be ongoing as I seek to represent our work effectively. We will act when we learn of necessary improvements. When our students need support, we must do all that we can to provide it. I spoke with both students who were involved in the March 2020 incident to support their academic progress and to hear their concerns. Additional staff members also reached out to support the two students. We will continue to do our best for them.

I receive hundreds of messages that I wish to respond to, but given the work underway for the institution, I regret that I simply cannot respond to every message. In this case, I missed an email from one of these students in October. Had I seen this message, I am confident our students would have felt a stronger sense of support from me and the College. As a result, I am implementing a communications protocol in the President’s office to ensure that important outreach from our students, faculty, staff, or partners does not go unanswered.

In over three years as your president I have asked that we continuously refine and re-declare our values, and we reflect on the experiences of our students and make changes to ensure that all of our work is centered around them. I have called upon our community to elevate and hold our expectations for free speech, and grapple with all instances where members of this community feel silenced and isolated. At Keene State, we challenge each other to embrace
our obligations to create a teaching and learning community where we compassionately engage in difficult conversations, and that we grow in understanding together.

As a result of our ongoing community conversations, we have expanded our first-year experience programming; conducted increased training and education programming; sharpened performance expectations for senior leadership, frontline staff, and faculty; and developed policies to align our resources for students to address all forms of bias, harassment, or discrimination—and our work continues.

We are actively evaluating and adapting our organizational structures to ensure we are student-centered. My commitment is to attract and retain a leadership team committed to service, to integrity, to our values, and to our students, faculty, and staff. I have changed our leadership structures and positions to ensure more accountability and direct leadership for a student-centered campus. We are updating our policies, practices, and performance expectations and accountabilities as we move forward.

We remain a community committed to our students and we will not shrink from obligations to address needs or to make changes as we learn of areas of improvement or where we have failed to hold our values. When a member of our community raises concerns about their experience, our supports and actions—particularly if our values are potentially compromised—we will listen, review, and make changes to improve, grow, and deliver on our commitments. You should expect that from me and our College community.

Ultimately, I am but one member of a dedicated team of faculty and staff committed to our students, who are the individuals we have the joy and responsibility to teach, to learn from, and to grow with. When our students speak, we will listen and move to action. This has been my demonstrated commitment and will continue to guide our organization. Certainly, some actions are visible and rapid, while others are longer to develop, but we are committed to self-reflection and change as a constant.

I am always proud of our students and our alumni community. Thank you for your care and support of each other and for your questions of me and your College. We will get through these challenges together and you will continue to hear and see evolution at Keene State College.

Sincerely,

Melinda D. Treadwell, Ph.D.
President, Keene State College
Alumna, Class of 1990

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keene.edu/spring21