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# [Email from Karen Lawrence to the Community, December 8, 2015]

Karen R. Lawrence  
*Sarah Lawrence College*

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**From:** [SLC\\_Distribution@slc.edu](mailto:SLC_Distribution@slc.edu) on behalf of [President of Sarah Lawrence College](#)  
**To:** ["tempdist@slc.edu"](mailto:tempdist@slc.edu)  
**Subject:** Letter to the Sarah Lawrence Community  
**Date:** Tuesday, December 08, 2015 8:30:26 AM

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December 8, 2015

Dear Members of the Sarah Lawrence community,

I hope you all had a happy and healthy Thanksgiving.

Since Dean [REDACTED] and I last communicated with you regarding events related to race and inclusion on campuses around the country as well as here at Sarah Lawrence, a group of students of color and other community members held a #BlackOutSLC demonstration on the South Lawn. At the afternoon rally on November 16, attended by about 200 people, a number of students of color spoke eloquently about their experiences at Sarah Lawrence and concluded by presenting a list of demands to the administration. I wanted to update you about discussions and actions that have occurred since then.

Dean [REDACTED], Dean [REDACTED], and I met with representatives of the group, heard further explanation of the demands, and discussed what is already being done and what can be done to address them.

Dean [REDACTED] and Dean [REDACTED] have continued to meet with representatives of the group to discuss each demand and to propose next steps for considering them.

Since the event, senior staff and our faculty governance committees such as General, Admissions, Curriculum, and Diversity committees, all of which include faculty, students, and staff members, have been discussing the list of demands and working to address them.

- The Admissions committee, chaired by Dean [REDACTED], sent a letter to the community a few days after the #BlackoutSLC to outline two initiatives intended to improve the likelihood that students of color will enroll at Sarah Lawrence. They have proposed the creation of informational material and a web presence specifically designed to enroll more students of color on campus. In addition, they will develop a plan to engage alumni of color in the recruitment of prospective students of color.
- Members of General committee had a productive discussion about the demands presented. Several threads ran through the conversation including the desire to use the internal resources of the existing faculty, staff and students to support healthy classroom discussions on diversity, the need to have sustained activity on this topic across the years involving all segments of the campus community (faculty, students, staff and administration) and the importance of developing ways to monitor and assess the results of the various efforts and activities undertaken on campus. It was agreed that several faculty on General will work with the Diversity Committee to steer the planning for a cross-campus dialogue on racial issues.
- The Diversity Committee will play a leadership role in steering the discussion and response

on campus to the issues raised. The committee plans to develop a set of strategic initiatives with timelines to be reviewed annually for the committee and the community.

The inclusion of some demands indicates that we have not adequately communicated to the community the relevant efforts already in existence on campus. For example,

- Dean [REDACTED]'s new cabinet position as Dean of Equity and Inclusion was created specifically to oversee graduate and undergraduate activities, as well as faculty and staff diversity recruitment and well-being. He and the Dean of Graduate and Professional Studies, [REDACTED], have since communicated with graduate students so that they understand that his new role includes the entire campus community.
- Over the past two-three years, Graduate Studies has offered a series of workshops called *Undoing Racism* and is exploring repeating these for additional graduate groups. Students in the Health Advisory Program and Art of Teaching, as well as faculty and graduate studies office staff, have participated in these workshops.
- The College has an existing endowed scholarship fund of over a million dollars, raised more than six years ago, that is dedicated to supporting students of color. This being said, student scholarships are our highest campaign fundraising priority, and within that effort, we will work to garner additional funds specifically designated for supporting students of color.

As we continue to advance this year's agenda of fostering ongoing dialogue between the Board of Trustees and members of the on-campus community, we will ensure that we will discuss long-term plans, as well as immediate measures, to recruit and retain more students of color.

We plan to involve and update the community throughout the year on initiatives focused on race, bias, and inclusion. Recently, we have been made aware of incidents of anonymous cyber-bullying and disparaging comments expressed on social media, related to areas that include religion, ethnicity, and race. As we encourage a series of meaningful and direct dialogues this year, it bears reminding that the College views cyber-bullying as a violation of its community standards and principles of mutual respect; this kind of anonymous comment is intolerably destructive.

If you have specific comments or suggestions to help us coordinate a meaningful and effective campus response to issues of bias, please address them to Dean [REDACTED] and the Diversity Committee. I look forward to working together as a community.

Sincerely,



Karen R. Lawrence  
President, Sarah Lawrence College