Memorandum

Date:    February 26, 2015

To:    Members of the MICA Community

From:    Samuel Hoi, President
          Neil Meyerhoff, Chair, Board of Trustees

Re:    Public Response to BSU Open Letter

Dear MICA community,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, the vice presidents and ourselves, we write to provide a public response to the Black Student Union (BSU) Open Letter that was delivered to the administration on December 2, 2014. This response also addresses a similarly-spirited letter from the 2015 class of the MFA in Community Arts program (MFACA), which was written in solidarity with the BSU and the Office of Diversity and Intercultural Development. Both letters, and other related campus communications including this public response, can be viewed via this link – www.mica.edu/campusinclusivity.

You will find at the end of this letter a list of signatures from every member of the Board of Trustees, the president, and vice presidents to demonstrate our unanimous agreement to the content herein. In addition, the faculty at the Full Faculty Meeting on January 16, 2015, as well as the staff at the General Staff Meeting on February 11, 2015, pledged their full participation in the upcoming campus dialogue on diversity, inclusion and equity. Both groups have committed to playing their respective key roles in achieving campus goals that emerge from the dialogue. A broad engagement and collective commitment anchor the partnership of the above constituencies with the student body to transform campus culture and practices.

Continuing our spirit of collaboration, we have shared a draft of this public response with the leaders of BSU and received in advance their endorsement. Hence, this letter may be viewed as an action roadmap forward rather than a back-and-forth communication between the administration and BSU.
The BSU Open Letter presents nine requests related to the enhancement of diversity efforts on campus in the interest of supporting the welfare, safety and success of students of all backgrounds. In the context of the current national discussion on race and violence, as well as the hate speech incident at Leake Hall last November, it advocates for an appropriate focus on the rights and needs of students of color and particularly those of African-American students. Ultimately, the letter calls for a campus dialogue to establish and sustain an authentic culture of diversity here at MICA that supports all students.

Three themes underpin the nine requests. It is generally more productive to address the themes, although specific response to a request is provided where feasible.

**Theme #1: Safety, Protection, and Transparency**

Requests I, II, III and IV pertain to this theme. Affirmative and specific responses are provided below.

I & II  Transparency around investigations of incidents involving racial bias incidents, inclusive of clear, timely, and further detailed reports to campus community

Administrative discussions to increase transparency of MICA’s campus safety efforts and communication of incidents pre-date the Leake Hall hate speech incident*. To develop a process that ensures input and support from the campus community, a Community Safety Review Group will be created in the near future and include faculty, staff, and student members, led by a vice president. Meeting quarterly, this group will be charged to review practices related to incident reporting, investigations, community education, and other related matters. The group will share its assessment with the president and vice presidents regarding the effectiveness of current practices and recommendations for improvement.

In addition, the following specific actions will take place:

- Effectively immediately, incidents involving threats of racial bias will now be reported to the MICA community through the existing “Timely Warning System”. This means a campus wide timely warning will be issued (as we presently do with muggings, robberies, sexual assaults, etc.), inclusive of descriptions of the incident, the location, and relevant resources.
- Campus Safety will develop a specific tracking system for racial bias incidents that will be maintained publicly alongside MICA’s current Campus Safety reporting policies and regulations.
- Starting with the 2015-2016 academic year, a Racial/Bias Annual Crime Report will be generated annually for review by the Community Safety Review Group, vice presidents and president.

*The BSU Open Letter asks why this incident was called a “crime with racial bias” versus a “hate crime.” MICA follows the legal and judicial definitions of crimes, and the elements of the Leake Hall hate speech incident belong to the category of crimes with racial bias. This explanation was offered at various campus meetings after the incident.*
III. Administration’s review of the training resources of the MICA Campus Safety department to increase, and an advisory committee of students, faculty and staff from multicultural backgrounds for Campus Safety

Before the end of this academic year, MICA will engage third-party experts to conduct a thorough organizational review and assessment of MICA’s Campus Safety program. The external experts will have deep knowledge of higher education campus safety and will conduct conversations with students, faculty, general staff, and safety officers. This review will be comprehensive, and as such will include considerations on training and investigation protocols.

This assessment will yield a report to President Hoi and Vice President for Operations Mike Molla, who will in turn share key points of this report with the campus community. Recommendations that can be acted upon immediately will be undertaken; in consultation with the Community Safety Review Group noted above, a longer term plan will be developed to implement the remainder of other viable recommendations.

IV. Clear and concise plan of action to ensure protection of students of color on campus

Although no institution can realistically guarantee safety of all community members, MICA is committed to providing a campus environment that is as safe as is possible and where individuals feel secure in voicing their concerns. To foster this, MICA’s Campus Safety program will begin to shift from a “Crime/Response” model to that of a “Community/Collaboration” model. This model is based on three key tenets: Partnerships, Problem Solving, and Prevention. Through this model, all campus community members should be empowered to enhance their quality of life and help prevent or eliminate the issues that lead to crime. This model also recognizes the importance of diversity training and sensitivity, as the ability to effectively serve all aspects of a community is central to success. This model shift will inform the third-party assessment of the Campus Safety program, as outlined in the previous section.

Related to this theme but not articulated as a numbered request, the BSU Open Letter demands that the Leake Hall hate speech vandal(s) be held accountable. We share this desire. Unfortunately, despite all efforts it does not appear at this time that the perpetrator(s) can be identified. This investigation was complicated by the discovery that two days passed before the action was reported, which dramatically increases the difficulty of identifying the responsible individuals. It is important that as we engage in a broad campus dialogue regarding diversity, we explore honestly how such an offense did not provoke a timely report so that we can ensure a more responsive future.

Theme #2: Campus Community Diversity Training

Request VI (The part regarding mandatory faculty diversity training) and VII (Training for students, faculty, staff, and safety personnel regarding race) pertain to this theme.
Instead of rushing to agree to mandatory diversity training of the campus community, we strongly believe in and advocate for the primacy of a collaborative and widely participatory campus dialogue. Training is best grounded first by understanding and a collective commitment. As the MICA community engages in a campus dialogue as proposed in the next section, we will pinpoint our needs and identify best practices to inform our action steps for change. There is no question that a campus shift towards authentic diversity is our goal, and we will engage in the right process to determine if and how diversity training should be included.

**Theme #3: Increase in Campus Diversity and Support for Diversity**

Requests V (Move beyond “conceptualized” diversity plan towards action-oriented goals that are systemic and curricular), VI-A (The part regarding recruitment of faculty of color), VIII (Increased funding to support offices and programs for diversity, inclusion and globalization), and IX (Conversations on plans to increase student diversity of all forms, in particular among students of colors) pertain to this theme.

The commitment to this theme is to arrive at action goals by the end of May 2016 that are systemic, inclusive of campus community recruitment and curricular efforts, and that lead to transformative and sustained change. The path to successful identification of such goals is an open, honest and in-depth campus dialogue about diversity, inclusion, equity, and globalization that will be planned for and unfold over the 2015-2016 academic year. The outcome will be a concrete plan to support campus diversity in a comprehensive and powerful manner. This is the right approach for sustainable change because we must first explore among ourselves how diversity is understood and defined before we have a real chance to integrate it into our identity, culture, and practice. Such a definition does not yet exist at MICA. Also, since diversity is an ever evolving concept and increasingly complex in a global world, our best hope to harness its power is to master a campus capacity for frank yet civil exchange that can manage sometimes difficult conversations for mutual understanding, respect and support.

The action timeline is as follows: From March through mid-May 2015, the existing Power/Equity Forum, composed of multiple constituencies on campus and led by a core group of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff from the offices of Academic Services, Community Engagement, Diversity and Intercultural Development, Graduate Studies and Student Affairs will work together to develop a key set of recommendations for the 2015-2016 campus-wide dialogue on diversity, inclusion, equity, and globalization. The recommendations may include third-party consultancy or facilitation. During the summer, the administration, under the leadership of the President’s Office, will study the recommendations and prepare for a year-long campus process to begin in September. From September 2015 through April 2016, the entire campus community, led by the President and involving the Trustees, will engage in that process and dialogue. The end product in May 2016 is a college-wide, multi-year plan to achieve a more equitable, diverse, and reflective place of learning at MICA. In the context of our educational mission, we seek to deploy diversity as a catalyst for creativity, educational excellence, and responsible engagement.
Our work ahead will consider the interest of all students without losing sight of the specific reality and needs of students of color and within that group, the African-American students. The heartfelt pledges from Trustees, faculty, staff and students to come together for a collective dialogue bodes well for our goal to create at MICA an educational environment that is a model of inclusion.

Samuel Hoi
President

Neil Meyerhoff
Chair, Board of Trustees

Attachment: Signatures of Trustees, President, Vice Presidents, and Vice Provosts
Trustees
Vice Presidents/Vice Provosts

Ray

Kelsey

Joe

Gaynor

Dorella

G. Grill

Bill

Pete

B. Camp