

To the UConn Community:

I write to you today to announce that we are launching a nationwide search for UConn's next Chief Diversity Officer.

As a direct report to me, the CDO is an important partner in advancing UConn's commitment to diversity and inclusion. I want to thank Mark Overmyer-Velazquez, the director of the Hartford campus and professor of history, for agreeing to serve as the chair of the search committee. The full committee, which will include faculty, staff and students, will be announced shortly, once it is finalized.

As if to remind us of the importance of this position and the ways in which the values of diversity and inclusion must define our university, this search is being launched in the wake of a recent racist incident near the Charter Oak residence halls on the Storrs campus. This, or any similar incident, is deplorable and antithetical to the values of our community and the university as a whole. It has no place on our campuses – or anywhere.

We know that no hire or set of hires will be a cure-all for the challenges this and every community faces. But we must always ask ourselves: Can we do better? Can we be better than we are? Can we make progress? The answer is always: we must.

As we continually work toward this goal, the CDO is a vital member of my senior team and a key leader here at UConn. In preparing for this search, I met with a number of constituency groups, including our Diversity Council, the Executive Committee of the University Senate, the Directors of our cultural centers, students, and others. Those consultations helped sharpen the description of the individual we are seeking for this position. It is clear that we will seek someone who has the vision and leadership needed to significantly advance diversity and inclusion at UConn, help cultivate and nurture an environment that supports those values, and can play a lead role in effectively confronting acts that violate our values as a community.

We want everyone to feel welcome at UConn, including those from historically underrepresented communities. Yet every community, including ours, struggles to contend with episodes that have the opposite effect. This includes everything from basic thoughtlessness to outright bigotry. Unless one has had the experience themselves, it is difficult to fully express what it is like to be made to feel unwelcome or even alienated in the place that you call home.

It is important that we remember that we get to decide who represents our community, and what behavior truly reflects who we are at UConn. To me, the best among us represent who we are – the 99%-plus who are good citizens and share our values, not the few who don't. This is a choice we get to make.

I want to continue to hear from members of our community about this search, the qualities we are seeking in candidates, and about the values that are most important to you when it comes to broader issues of diversity and inclusion at UConn.

As you know, the directors of our cultural centers report to the CDO, and I have planned to hold my open office hours in each center, beginning with PRLACC last month. Next Friday, October 25, at 9:45 a.m., I will hold my open office hours in the African American Cultural Center and invite members of the community to join me there. In addition to discussing the CDO search, I also want to use this opportunity to hear directly from members of our community who were affected or impacted by what took place at Charter Oak last week, and to share my own thoughts with you.

I will soon schedule similar visits to the Asian-American Cultural Center, the Women's Center and the Rainbow Center in the weeks ahead.

Stay tuned for the announcement of the full search committee next week.

Sincerely,
Tom

Thomas Katsouleas
President
University of Connecticut