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Recommended Citation

Georgia Southern University, "Newsroom" (2015). *Newsroom*. 685.
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/newsroom/685>

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Message from the President

NOVEMBER 17, 2015

Dear Eagle Nation,

Yesterday, a posting by a student on social media resulted in increased conversation among students, parents, alumni, faculty, and staff on the issue of race in our community. Much of this conversation has been civil, constructive, and in keeping with behavior one would expect from educated individuals attempting to engage in productive discourse about a difficult issue. We are proud of those Eagles who have shared opinions and offered suggestions while maintaining the respectful environment we strive to achieve at Georgia Southern. If we are to improve our school, our nation, and our world, this type of respectful sharing of experiences and ideas is critical. We stand with all concerned individuals in our commitment to creating an institution where no student feels ignored, mistreated, or forgotten. We know we have work to do to reach this goal. To get there, we must have input from students and others in an environment that is safe for the expression of viewpoints.

With the increased communication of the past 24 hours, some speech (including the original post) has resulted in a call for disciplinary action against the speaker. Please know that this University takes threats very seriously and will not tolerate behavior that is in violation of our Student Code of Conduct or the laws of the State of Georgia. Know also that Georgia Southern University is a public institution and a government agency. As a result, Georgia Southern is not permitted to restrict speech that is protected by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. All speech that is reported as a potential violation of the Code of Conduct is evaluated under these Constitutional standards and handled appropriately. In addition, the University is subject to laws regarding the privacy of student education records. Disciplinary records are protected items. As a result, the University generally is not able to share information regarding charges, outcome, or any other details of any individual student's case without that student's permission.

As a collective group, this institution has seen triumph, tragedy, and great change in just the past few years. This University is a family that has celebrated together, cried together, and joined together in anticipation of great things to come. When even one member of our community feels marginalized, we should all be concerned.

Today, we are facing an issue that seems challenging at best and insurmountable at worst. We are threatened with division. We are jeopardized by conduct that belies the very values we have set for ourselves. As we struggle to grow and change in a positive direction, I call upon all of you to do the following things: listen to each other, respect each other, and treat each other with dignity and

concern. This is my personal commitment as well. If we are able to rise to this challenge, I am confident that we will move forward toward a place where each student is able to learn and thrive in a safe, diverse, and inclusive environment.

Respectfully,

Jean E. Bartels, PhD, RN
Interim President
Georgia Southern University