



February 7, 2022

Dear campus community,

February is Black History Month. This is a time dedicated to reflection, remembrance, and celebration of achievements by African Americans across U.S. history and society. It is a time when we pause to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history,” as Gerald R. Ford said in 1976 when he became the first U.S. president to officially recognize Black History Month.

The national theme for this year’s observance is “Black Health and Wellness,” which acknowledges the legacy of Black scholars and medical practitioners in Western medicine and other ways of knowing throughout the African diaspora. This theme considers activities, rituals and initiatives that Black communities have participated in to be well.

It is especially ironic, then, that in this moment, certain individuals have decided to threaten the health and well-being of primarily, but not exclusively, Black students by directing bomb threats at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) across the country. These are institutions that have powerfully contributed to the health and well-being of our society since 1837, with valued contributions in art, science, medicine, technology, mathematics, engineering and more, and that have been at the vanguard of civil rights advancements.

As authorities begin to tighten the net around the suspected perpetrators, reports are that the threats were racially motivated. In today’s world, this is unconscionable and intolerable — not because this is Black History Month, with its health and wellness theme, but because this is the United States of America in the year 2022. We have had nearly 60 years of focused conversation on the founding notion that all are created equal, and that there is greater peace and prosperity when we value each other, regardless of color or national origin.

A National Education Association survey of studies by multiple universities shows that interdisciplinary ethnic studies helps foster cross-cultural understanding among students of color and white students, and aids students in valuing their own cultural identity while appreciating the differences around them. These studies confirm that students who participate in ethnic studies are more academically engaged, develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy and personal empowerment, perform better academically and graduate at higher rates (“What the Research Says About Ethnic Studies,” National Education Association and Center for Enterprise Strategy, 2020).

Clearly, there is value in cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. Unfortunately, this has not been the dominant message in mainstream America over the past few years. We find ourselves in a time where hatred and bigotry have an increasing impact on the fabric of our country instead of being transmuted into kindness and good will. Attacks like these on HBCUs and others that have occurred more shockingly or more quietly in less prominent settings seem more the norm now than the exception.

At USC Upstate, where nearly half the student population is non-white, we understand better than many the benefit of valuing others regardless of cultural background. As I have said before, we don't do this perfectly. But we are more complete as individuals because of this breadth of shared experiences. This positions our graduates to succeed and lead with excellence in a global economy, even as a large majority stay in the Upstate region to elevate economic prosperity and demonstrate the value of cultural diversity.

USC Upstate stands in solidarity with HBCUs that have recently been the targets of bomb threats. Education is a fundamental right for all, and an academic environment should be free of fear and bigotry so those who learn, teach, and work there may thrive and grow. We condemn any attitude or action intended to intimidate and terrorize those carrying out the vital education process. These violent threats remind us that knowledge is our most potent tool to counter racism and hate. We stand with all the students, faculty, and staff at these institutions and fully support their dedication to their mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bennie L. Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Dr. Bennie L. Harris  
Chancellor