



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

W A S H I N G T O N , D C

To: American University Students
From: Gail Short Hanson, Vice President of Campus Life
Date: March 16, 2015
Subject: Response to Recent Yik Yak Posts

The central commitment of American University is to the development of thoughtful, responsible human beings in the context of a challenging yet supportive academic community.

American University Statement of Common Purpose

The AU community is deeply offended by recent, anonymous, racist posts on Yik Yak, a location-based, social media platform that publishes comments from individuals within a ten mile radius of our campus.

It cannot be stated strongly enough that these posts stand in stark contrast to American University's core values of respect for human dignity and appreciation for diverse cultures and viewpoints. The posts' authors speak only for themselves, under the cover of anonymity that Yik Yak affords them.

Our educational mission should bind us more closely together in our humanity. But like many communities, AU is far from being of a single mind and far from perfect. So, what do we do about those among us who express opinions and views that hurt, offend and attempt to divide us?

It will take all of us to answer this question, and the answers will not come easily. But the university's leaders – and many students, faculty and staff – are determined to cultivate a community that is inclusive and free from the ignorance and intolerance on display in these recent posts. We will not be deterred.

In the wake of similar, objectionable expressions in December 2014, we announced a series of programs and activities designed to engage us in dialogue and enhance our understanding of the many perspectives we hold. All are encouraged to access these opportunities, listed at:

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/discuss-race.cfm>

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/cdi/Privilege.cfm>

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/cdi/InclusiveCommunities.cfm>

As we work toward the ideal of an inclusive community we also will hold true to our commitment to freedom of expression, consistent with our traditions of academic freedom and First Amendment rights. From protests to abhorrent speech, members of our community have broad license to express themselves – providing these expressions occur within the boundaries of the law and our Conduct Code. The AU community's time honored response to abhorrent words and deeds is to prevail against them with ideas and actions that inspire us to do better.

If you have ideas for ways to advance AU toward its ideal as an inclusive community, we want to hear them. Please attend a Forum on Thursday, March 19, 8:15-10:00 p.m. in Ward 5. We also invite you to e-mail campuslife@american.edu or arrange to discuss your ideas in person.

We can do better – and we will.