



A Message from University of Kentucky

PRESIDENT ELI CAPILOUTO



Dear Campus Community,

A jury is about to deliver a verdict in the killing last summer of George Floyd. Irrespective of this case's resolution, we have been reminded, repeatedly, that so much pain remains unresolved, as we grapple with a necessary national and community reckoning around issues of race and racism.

In the last several weeks, killings of people of color have occurred in Chicago, again, in Minnesota and in Atlanta. Only a few weeks ago, we solemnly marked the one-year anniversary of the killing of our former student, Breonna Taylor.

These deaths shake Kentuckians to our cores and have prompted changes to laws and policies across our state. Even so, there remain legitimate concerns about whether enough is being done. On our own campus, we've been reminded recently that vile symbols of hatred and intolerance — the flashing of a Nazi symbol at a student of Jewish faith — can take root here, too. We are not immune from baseless hostility or ignorance.

The sense of loss and concern about who we are and where we are as a country can be overwhelming at times. I can't imagine what our neighbors and loved ones of color must feel and how traumatic and exhausting these individual and collective experiences must be for them.

There's no way for so many of us to fully understand, but we can be there — to listen, to offer support, to provide space and to commit to change. And toward those goals of understanding and compassion, I have two thoughts:

One, we must fully support each other — now and always. For people impacted so directly by these searing experiences, there are places to find help and healing

[Emotional wellness resources for students are available here.](#)

[Emotional wellness resources for employees are available here.](#)

Second, we must continually lean into what we are fundamentally about: people and ideas. That's what we bring to these issues: people committed to the power of ideas to create change in hearts and minds; to force reforms in policies and programs; and to create spaces for all people to debate and encourage, dream and aspire.

The word university is derived from Latin roots, meaning "a whole." In its fullest sense, the idea is to communicate that a university is a community of teachers, scholars, students and staff. We are many individuals, many perspectives and identities, bound together as one — many people, one community, seeking to make our world better.

To this task, of course, we are imperfect people operating in a deeply imperfect and flawed world. But that doesn't mean we can't ask ourselves every day how we, as a community, can make the world a little better tomorrow than it is today.

That is what we want for ourselves and each other. And it is what we want for our students, who we are preparing not only to compete in the world, but to change it. We are providing them with the tools and broad perspectives to lead lives of meaning and purpose, compassion and empathy, understanding, conciliation and respect.

My hope for us is that the events of this past year compel us to reflect on our shared humanity, our mission and our purpose. Our hope must be that the trajectory of these tragedies doesn't define us or lead us into despair and cynicism. Rather, we must find some way to renew our commitment to the ideals that bring us together — as many people, one community.

Eli Capilouto