

April 16, 2025

Dear Faculty Colleagues,

We write to share our deep appreciation for our colleague Dr. Tabbye Chavous, the University of Michigan's Chief Diversity Officer. This week, Dr. Chavous announced that she will soon leave the university and take up the directorship of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). While AERA is gaining a phenomenal leader, we at the University of Michigan are acutely aware that we are losing a fearless and relentless advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Under Dr. Chavous's leadership, the University's diversity, equity, and inclusion program was framed widely, offering support for first-generation students, for people with disabilities, for veterans, for racial and ethnic minorities, and for others who are at the margins of our institution. Dr. Chavous understands that diversity, equity, and inclusion are not abstract values. They are conditions that (as research clearly shows) are necessary for enhancing the excellence of our collective work as teachers, students, and staff.

Dr. Chavous is a pioneering and well-respected scholar of the psychology of education and race. She used this knowledge to advance her work as an administrator of the University's DEI program. Under her leadership, the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI) substantially expanded access and affordability for low income and first-gen students; improved graduation rates and shrank group disparities in graduation; and advanced greater demographic representation across students, faculty, and staff. Her office has built programs supporting people with disabilities and challenging religious/cultural and racialized bias, including antisemitism and Islamophobia. The closure of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is a tragedy for our University.

The challenges posed by Michigan Proposition 2 to the enrollment of Black undergrads was staggering. After its passage in 2008, enrollment consistently fell, and the number of Black students on campus fell below 4% of the total student population, which did not reflect the demographics of Black youth in the state of Michigan (which today stands at ~16%). The strategic efforts that Dr. Chavous and her team made to develop community partnerships, building pipeline programs, and engaging with alumni helped stanch the losses and shift course. Currently, there are (numerically) more Black students at U-M than at any other time in the institution's history. Since 2020, Black student enrollment at this University has grown by 87%, and in Fall 2023, Black enrollment numbers grew by 13% over the previous year. In Fall 2024, new enrollment of Black students was 8.8% (6% Black only and 2.8% Black-identified with more than one race/ethnicity). All of this was, in large part, thanks to Dr. Chavous's leadership and her knowledge of the network of supports needed to reach and uphold disenfranchised populations. These strides were made possible through central leadership roles and offices like ODEI, along with the efforts of so many offices, units, groups, and individuals working

individually and collectively toward our campus' DEI strategic efforts.

One of the ironies around the untimely closure of the office that Dr. Chavous led is this: DEI was never particularly expensive for this University. In a commendable effort, Dr. Chavous procured much of the funding for the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and for a significant number of their own staff through external funds. Wolverine Pathways staff and programming were fully funded by donor gifts, and the work of the Office of Academic Multicultural Initiatives, the National Center for Institutional Diversity, and the Center for Educational Outreach has been supported significantly through external grants.

Over the past year, Dr. Chavous has courageously fought to correct misconceptions and propaganda about this critical part of our shared work. We in SACUA have had no information from the University's leadership explaining the elimination of the ODEI. It appears that the University leadership has relied on information calculated through flawed methodologies, with an ear to biased ideologues who lack sound evidentiary grounding or expertise in DEI work. Dr. Chavous's departure puts our institution at greater risk, for we have lost both a visionary leader and a pragmatic architect of social, racial, and economic justice.

We want to thank Dr. Chavous for her courageous leadership and service to the University of Michigan community. We shall miss her greatly.

Sincerely,

Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs (SACUA)

Approved by SACUA on April 16, 2025