

SCC-AS 2021-03-16 Public Statement from Rachel Petrocelli

Good afternoon. I am Rachel Petrocelli, co-chair of the History Department.

When the agenda for this senate meeting came out, it took only minutes for the comments to appear from colleagues about the item regarding the creation of a campus culture. And you already know why. But I wish to clarify it here for just a moment the issue at hand. Creating a culture is what is done in situations in which power structures feel compelled to act upon those underneath them to ensure predictable behaviors. Examples of this abound, from a large company that wants to make sure employees all think and act within the paradigm of its business model to authoritarian governments that see rhetoric about culture as the only option to influence and control populations against the backdrop of dysfunctional statecraft. In contexts that are free and open to innovation and critique, there is no need nor desire to seek the creation of a culture. Culture exists and grows organically. It is the embodiment of everything already normative in a society. The reality is that here, at our college, the call to create a campus culture comes at a time of crisis. Beset by a yearlong public health emergency and brought once again to witness the horrific facts of our unequal society, realities have been laid bare in our country, and this college is no exception. The realities here, as have been made very clear to me and to many of our colleagues, entail denial of systemic racism embedded within our own organization, refusal to take responsibility for one's own actions, failure acknowledge the true nature of wrong done to others, attempts to silence voices of dissent and critique, inability to step away from unsuccessful endeavors, and concentration of power into the hands of few individuals amid the general complacency of more numerous others. No statement from any administrator about bringing us together will do that so long as we do not address these crucial issues directly and frankly. The call to establish a campus culture is a distraction: it asks you to look the other way from these serious problems, dismiss the calls for change as playground politics, and allow the college to continue on its path toward deeper crisis. As you proceed, consider this: what will you do once you create this campus culture? How about those who don't fit into it – or who disagree with it? Remember, this is a college, a place of higher education. It requires not a single culture but diverse voices and ideas, and free exchange.

Thank you.

Please place my statement into the official record of this meeting.