

From: [Kimberly A. Barrett](#)
Subject: Radical Respect
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Dear Lawrence Students, Faculty and Staff,

I hope that your first week of the spring term was a productive one filled with the optimism that warmer weather brings! And there are many additional reasons for optimism. I believe that we are entering a period of healing and rebuilding. We are healing from the emotional and physical toll of the pandemic by learning ways to coexist with a new virus. We are also rebuilding relationships severed by years of polarization exacerbated by social distancing. Folks are actively looking to create a new normal for how we relate to each other. Last term I met with a group of students with a variety of backgrounds and beliefs who were all concerned by what they saw as our inability on campus to engage with each other in productive ways when we disagree.

Among several examples, they recounted a situation that I am sure many recall that played out on social media. A student expressed ideas with which many Lawrentians disagreed as part of a platform for elected office on campus. He was met with personal attacks and spurious accusations rather than reasoned arguments against his proposals. This is concerning to me not simply due to the distress and personal anguish this behavior causes in our community but also because it contravenes part of our university mission, the cultivation of respect for the perspectives of others. I believe we are ready for a change. And the change we need and desire today is the practice of radical respect.

Radical respect is a principle of Gestalt Psychology. It posits that all of us, due to our shared humanity, are worthy of respect regardless of our 'packaging'. Each person (as well as all elements of the natural environment) deserves to be seen, heard and validated for the unique being that they are. We usually think of people earning respect but giving respect to people we admire is not radical. Radical respect is allowing other folks to have their space in the world, allowing them to simply be, even if we are critical of their behavior.

Inevitably we will encounter folks who don't yet believe in our common humanity. When that happens this approach allows us to find ways to move on with civility and grace. But it also compels us to stand in solidarity with those who are targets of hate, such as the members of the Asian community who during the pandemic are experiencing increased violence and harassment due to scapegoating and xenophobia. The irony of all of this is that we can't give others radical respect until we do the internal work of understanding, feeling good about and accepting ourselves.

For me, the Combahee River Collective captured this idea best several decades ago in their statement on black feminism. They wrote, "We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten

paces behind. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough.” This what we all deserve, to be seen and treated as levelly human. And radical respect is how we express this. This is what will eventually allow us to bridge our differences and create the next normal together.

To help us with this important work, the President’s Office will be hosting a presentation by Simon Greer, social entrepreneur and founder of Bridging the Gap on the evening of April 22. Look for more details soon. In addition, first year students have a unique opportunity to learn how to engage in dialogue across difference and to create more diverse friend groups by participating in First Year Dialogues. These dialogues are a chance for First Year students to engage with other members of their class in order to widen their social circles and build community during spring term. They will be online, so they are open to student's anywhere in the country or world. Please contact Terra Winston terra.r.winston@lawrence.edu if you are interested in participating.

You can also arrange a workshop with the Diversity and Inclusion Student Peer Educators on the topics of allyship or antiracism. And don’t forget about the Upstander Training open to faculty, staff, students and community members sponsored by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, facilitated by Common Talks Consulting on April 16 from 1-5 via Zoom. To schedule a peer educator workshop or register for Upstander Training contact Cindy Pickart cindy.j.pickart@lawrence.edu.

Finally, faculty and staff, mark your calendars for **Antiracism Training with facilitators from the Perception Institute on May 7 from 11:00-2pm**. More details to come soon. We will be providing a similar workshop for students in the fall.

Best wishes for a successful and healthy spring term filled with radical respect!

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