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May 4, 2023

Message from the President - Decision regarding the May 12 symposium

Dear Students, Staff and Faculty:

I am writing to inform you that I have decided to rescind the use of our facilities for the Wisconsin Association of Scholars (WAS) symposium that was to take place May 12, 2023, on our Milwaukee campus.

A fundamental purpose of a university is to facilitate the exchange of ideas, even when those ideas challenge our cherished values or are offensive to members of our university community. However, the exchange of ideas should not disrupt the core functions of a university or jeopardize the safety of our MCW community. While I have decided to rescind the use of our facilities for the symposium, I am retaining the possibility to allow the symposium or a similar event to be held at MCW in the future under less disruptive conditions. To be clear, the rescission is not due to the topic or the viewpoints of the speakers.

I have valued and carefully weighed all of the input that has been provided by so many of our stakeholders. Over the course of the week, discussions (both internal and external) about the purpose of the WAS symposium have become unacceptably disruptive. The timing of the symposium and the related needs to prepare for it also have already distracted us from the responsibilities of our upcoming graduation events.

Together we have a responsibility to create conditions that maximize the value of the exchange of ideas; that respect the safety and well-being of the people who work, visit and learn here; and that minimize disruptions to the operation of our institution.

Therefore, going forward, I will convene two working groups to better prepare for and address similar situations. Each working group will include faculty, staff, learners and administrative stakeholders, and will have access to the expertise needed to complete their respective charges.

I will charge the first group with examining and improving policies and procedures for reserving and using MCW facilities and with clarifying responsibilities, expectations and accountabilities when using our facilities. The group also will advise on criteria for MCW employees or learners to host or sponsor an event. These criteria should be transparent and open to a broad range of participants and topics.

The second group will be charged with developing principles for the expression of ideas on our campuses and with advising about how to balance our commitment to our values and to our role as a place where uncomfortable ideas can be discussed and vigorously debated. Our starting point will be the [Chicago Principles](#), but the group will expand on these by considering whether we should create individual expectations for constructive and respectful dialogue and whether there are institutional responsibilities to weigh the impact of free expression of ideas that might be perceived as threatening to our stakeholders.

I look forward to identifying opportunities for us as an MCW community to facilitate a meaningful and constructive exchange of ideas guided by principles based on inclusion, respect and professionalism.

Respectfully,

John R. Raymond, Sr., MD

President

Chief Executive Officer

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