

Statement from President Eisgruber '83
November 22, 2015

I write today to update all members of the Princeton University community about recent events on campus, to describe important initiatives already underway or currently being considered to make Princeton a more welcoming and supportive community for all of its members, and to outline a process that the Board of Trustees will use to collect information about the record of Woodrow Wilson and his legacy on our campus.

For more than a year, Princeton—like many other colleges in this country—has been the site of intense and often emotional discussions about racial injustice. These discussions emerged from and reflect disturbing national events, but they have often focused on the racial climate and the sense of inclusion at Princeton.

Although these conversations have often been difficult and uncomfortable, I have learned a great deal from them. I have heard compelling testimony from students of color about the distress, pain, and frustration that is caused by a campus climate that they too often find unwelcoming or uncaring. In some cases, these feelings are heightened or exacerbated by exchanges, frequently anonymous, on social media. These problems are not unique to Princeton—on the contrary, similar stories are unfolding at many peer institutions—but that does not make them any more acceptable. Our students deserve better, and Princeton must do better. We must commit ourselves to make this University a place where students from all backgrounds feel respected and valued.

Important efforts are under way. In December of last year, I charged a Special Task Force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to develop recommendations that would enable our University to provide a more welcoming environment for students of all backgrounds. The task force included students, faculty members, and administrators, and it had strong representation from student leaders who had participated in the heartfelt discussions that led to its creation. We accepted every recommendation that the task force made—recommendations that ranged from additional funding for programming and for staff support in key areas to a review of our academic programs and requirements and our orientation programs for students and new faculty. The task force also recommended that we strengthen and reconceptualize the Carl A. Fields Center to make it more responsive to the needs of the students it is intended to serve; we have begun that work, but we also are taking more immediate steps to designate areas within the Center for several cultural affinity groups. Reports on our progress in carrying out the recommendations of the task force can be found on the [Inclusive.Princeton.edu](https://www.inclusive.princeton.edu) website.

The task force recommendations complement an earlier effort initiated by my predecessor, President Shirley Tilghman, in January 2012. She created a joint faculty and trustee committee and charged it with finding new strategies to diversify Princeton's faculty, staff, and graduate student body. Increasing the diversity of these campus populations is essential to enhance our scholarly and educational excellence as well as to make our campus more fully inclusive. Co-chaired by Trustee Brent Henry '69 and Professor (now Dean of the Faculty) Deborah Prentice, the committee published its report in September 2013. A number of important steps have been taken already and more are planned; the committee report, and an update about progress in these areas, can be found on the University's website at: <http://www.princeton.edu/main/news/archive/S42/32/24O59/>.

Even as we pursue the recommendations of these committees, more remains to be done. Recent events have focused renewed attention on the concerns of underrepresented students. Earlier this week, students occupied Nassau Hall for a day and a half to advocate for improvements in the climate for black students on campus. Last weekend, Princeton Latino and Latina students endured a traumatic experience at a LatinX Ivy League Conference at Brown University, and upon returning to our campus they and other students have written to request a number of further improvements that would make our University more inclusive. Other student groups are also addressing these issues, and I anticipate continuing discussion—and, I hope, constructive dialogue—over the coming months.

I care deeply about what our students are saying to us, and I am determined to do whatever I can, in collaboration with others, to improve the climate on this campus so that all students are respected, valued, and supported as members of a vibrant and diverse learning community.

Making further progress will require compassion, commitment, and imagination. It will also require that we discuss difficult topics civilly and with mutual respect. To be an inclusive community we must treat one another with respect even when we disagree vigorously about topics that matter deeply. When I spoke to the students who occupied Nassau Hall, I insisted that we would consider carefully the issues that troubled them, but that we would do so through appropriate University processes—processes that allow for full and fair input from the entire University community.

One of the most sensitive and controversial issues pertains to Woodrow Wilson's legacy on the campus. As every Princetonian knows, Wilson left a lasting imprint on this University and this campus, and while much of his record had a very positive impact on

the shaping of modern Princeton, his record on race is disturbing. As a University we have to be open to thoughtful re-examination of our own history, and I believe it is appropriate to engage our community in a careful exploration of this legacy. Since the Board of Trustees has authority over how the University recognizes Wilson, I have asked the Board to develop a process to consider this issue, and the Board has agreed to do so. The Board will form a subcommittee to collect information about Wilson's record and impact from a wide array of perspectives and constituencies. This information will include a range of scholarly understandings of Wilson. Toward this end, the Board will solicit letters from experts familiar with Wilson, and it will make those letters public. The Board will also establish a vehicle to allow alumni, faculty, students, and staff to register their opinions with the subcommittee about Wilson and his legacy. In addition, members of the Board's subcommittee will schedule visits to Princeton's campus early in the spring semester to listen to the views of the University community, including its alumni. After assessing the information it has gathered and hearing the views of all parts of the Princeton community, the Board will decide whether there are any changes that should be made in how the University recognizes Wilson's legacy.

These are turbulent and demanding times, but if we engage in thoughtful and meaningful conversation they offer hope for real progress. The quest for a diverse and inclusive community has been among Princeton's most important goals at least since the presidency of Bob Goheen '40 *48, and we have come a long way. But we have not come far enough, and making further progress will require hard work and good will. I am confident that Princeton's extraordinary community—on campus, and throughout the world—is up to the task.

Christopher Eisgruber '83
President