



From the Office of the President

Edward J. Ray

October 4, 2012

To the OSU Community:

I write today to challenge all of us to demonstrate the great progress we have made at Oregon State University in the last five years to create a more inclusive community – one that celebrates our differences and shows that together we are attaining excellence through diversity.

This fall, we can do that in a very simple way: wear black attire to the Oregon State - Utah football game on Oct. 20 and to the Cal game on Nov. 17 to express support and affection for the remarkable football Beavers. This simple act sends a profound message: that we are united as a community and that those who engage in behavior that is hurtful to others will not deter us from taking this next step in appropriately living our values.

In recent weeks, discussion about going forward with wearing black attire to two OSU football games this year has called attention to an incident in 2007 that was very hurtful to many in our community. At that Blackout Reser event, some students seeking attention wore black facepaint and afro hair wigs to the game. A picture of one of those individuals was published in the Daily Barometer. A very brave woman of color asked the Barometer to publish a guest editorial about how hurtful it was to see the paper portray such negative stereotypes. The Barometer declined to publish her editorial, which led to deeper, powerful discussions of insensitivity and ignorance on this campus. Sadly, some did not know that white students wearing black face and afros represented a throwback to hateful times in this country when white minstrels “played” black entertainers, and that such behavior was and is hurtful and frightening to many among us. In time, the editor of the Barometer understood the need for swift and strong condemnation of such behavior.

At the next MLK Jr. Breakfast on campus, I noted that there will always be knuckleheads among us and that we will know that we have made real progress toward an inclusive community when we can call out foolish behavior, secure in the knowledge that we have each other’s back. I believe in each of you and the basic goodness of this wonderful community and University, and I believe we can show support for our football team and for each other in this simple way: appropriately support your school’s athletes by wearing black attire to the Oct. 20 and Nov. 17 Beaver football games.

We cannot always choose the time and place and circumstances to demonstrate the power of our convictions. Yet, we can make a powerful statement about who we are and what we stand for with this simple act.

Others have been involved in discussions about promoting this activity and it was announced that we would not promote a campaign for fans to wear black attire to these football games. I take full responsibility and apologize for not engaging in that discussion sooner. I hold myself and all of us accountable for understanding the harmful effects of racial stereotypes and avoiding behavior that perpetuates those stereotypes. I would hope the Barometer would also avoid perpetuating stereotypes and will condemn the behavior if it occurs.

Over the next two weeks, we will promote this activity and participation in a joyous and respectful way. We will announce discussion groups and other means of informing and reminding all of us of the events of 2007. And I will rearrange my schedule to the fullest extent possible to participate in those discussions myself.

I believe in the basic goodness of this University community and each of you. It is time to move beyond a sorry chapter in our history and to celebrate our team and our progress as a community that attains excellence through diversity.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Ray
President, Oregon State University

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