



EAST TENNESSEE STATE
UNIVERSITY



June 3, 2020

Excerpts from
"Letter From a Birmingham Jail"
Written by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
April 16, 1963

READ BY STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF FROM EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

JUNE 2020

As we think about the events unfolding around us, how do we put today's action into context of the past? How do we create an assembly so voices can come together and share passion? I'm struck by this letter which is as timely today as it was in 1963.

*"We must come to see that justice too long delayed is justice denied."
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*

Future Operations Workgroup Releases Recommendations for Returning to Campus

Earlier this week, senior leadership had an opportunity to review and discuss the recommendations from the Future Operations Workgroup that has been meeting in recent weeks to articulate a plan for university services to return to campus. Dr. David Linville and his team have done an outstanding and masterful job developing strategies that ensure a safe return for our students, faculty and staff to our campus while continuing our work within our teaching, research and service missions.

These recommendations were presented to senior leadership and reviewed by our academic deans yesterday, and members of the University Council will have the opportunity for discussion on this topic next week. In addition, I will hold a Town Hall on Facebook Live on Tuesday, June 9 at 11 a.m. (see item below) to answer questions about this plan. The feedback from all of these listening sessions will help guide our implementation strategies. The workgroup was charged with creating a framework that could be easily adapted to meeting the needs of the ever-changing COVID-19 environment. In reviewing the plan, you will note that the return to campus is described as occurring within various stages. Since March, the institution has operated within Stage 1 whereas all teaching is being offered online and the majority of staff are working in remote locations. In recent days we began entering into Stage 2. This process will take place throughout the month of June.

Here are the major highlights of Stage 2 as they relate to members of the university community:

- During the remaining weeks of June, ETSU employees will start the process of transitioning back to campus. A soft opening will begin on June 15 at which time some employees will return to their offices working on rotational schedules while others continue to serve remotely. This period of transition will be in preparation to welcome the public back to ETSU by July 1. Information from department and/or division leadership regarding this process of returning to campus will be provided to employees soon.
- All summer courses will be taught online as planned; however, some experiential learning opportunities may be offered in-person on a case-by-case basis.
- We plan on transitioning into Stage 3 at the beginning of the fall semester when ETSU fully plans to offer face-to-face instruction whenever possible and to have students living within our residence halls and observing appropriate safety precautions that will be outlined in our Residence Life Operations Plan.
- The recommendations also outline decisions that will need to be made regarding calendars and other events during the fall semester. ETSU will continue to follow recommendations from the CDC, the State of Tennessee and other entities in making those decisions. Some decisions will be subject to approval from our Board of

Trustees. We will keep you informed of these changes as the summer and fall continue.

The report from the Future Operations Workgroup is available to [read in its entirety](#). Our [coronavirus website](#) will remain as the primary online source for the latest information on ETSU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I ask for your continued patience as we navigate these extraordinary days and address the questions, issues and challenges that are ahead. Thank you for all you have done throughout this time.

[Report: Future Operations Workgroup Recommendations](#)



**A Guided Conversation
on Racial Justice
in America**

CONTACT
Multicultural Center
423-439-4844
etsumc@etsu.edu

Thursday, June 4 | 1:30 PM
via Zoom | Register at etsu.edu/mcc

Students encouraged to attend 'A Guided Conversation on Racial Justice in America'

As we search for ways we as a University can lead and promote change, it is imperative that we provide a means to share our stories and emotions following the hateful and violent acts that have occurred in our country. I encourage our students to let your voices be heard by attending A Guided Conversation on Racial Justice in America this **Thursday, June 4, at 1:30 p.m. via Zoom**.

The event is to provide a space where students can voice their concerns and feelings about race relations and receive information on resources to support them during this time. There will be a facilitated conversation for participants to seek understanding of the various perspectives and ways of responding to the current events. Our hope is that students will

share how together we can enhance the campus climate.

Registration is required. For more information, visit the Mary V. Jordan Multicultural Center website at www.etsu.edu/mcc. For those unable to attend, the next guided conversation event will be announced in the coming days.

A special thank you to the many individuals from these units who have worked quickly to plan this event: Center for Teaching Excellence, Counseling Center, Leadership & Civic Engagement, Mary V. Jordan Multicultural Center, and the Office of Equity and Inclusion.

“Without Struggle, There is No Progress”

By: Dr. Keith Johnson, Vice President for Equity and Inclusion

Like many, we are still trying to process the public murder of 46-year-old Mr. George Floyd, a Black man who was senselessly murdered in broad daylight by police officers of the Minneapolis Police Department. Mr. Floyd was unarmed, in handcuffs and face down on the ground. Even though there were several bystanders, cell phones recording the incident and Mr. Floyd begging for his life, this officer persisted for a little over 8 minutes until he breathed his last breath. My degrees and many successes in this instance are futile, as this could have easily been me or my son. The issue surrounding his loss of life amounted to \$20. This type of police brutality is nothing new, but it being so blatant and careless elevates it to a new level. Historically and even in recent times, this type of behavior has been woven into the fabric of American culture. What the world just endured is akin to what my parents witnessed in 1955 with the murder of Emmitt Till, and what my grandparents and great-grandparents witnessed with public lynchings of Black Americans. Though I realize we have made some progress in this country in many areas, there are still so many more that have been ignored for far too long.

I am privileged as a Black, American male working from home during the era of COVID-19. However, only 1 in 5 Black Americans in this country have that same privilege. It's been very difficult watching so many Black Americans succumb to COVID-19, being shot and killed in their own homes by those who are sworn to protect and serve, being falsely accused by someone who used their race and privilege as a weapon against us and countless other scenarios. Just because many of us are not openly expressing our frustrations, dismay, anger, hopelessness and desperation, does not mean that we are OK. Just because we smile and are able to sustain a regular work schedule, and appear to be very productive in our work environments, does not mean that we are OK. We are not OK.

What happened to Mr. George Floyd highlights the disparities that continue to plague Black America in this country, ranging from health care, black wealth, education, death rate, incarceration, and employment, to name a few. This most recent outcry was a collective effort among many individuals of many backgrounds, ethnicities, including White Americans to say enough is enough. In Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a Dream" speech in 1963, he said "all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." In 2020, the dream has not been fully realized. Almost 60 years later, it is clear that America has defaulted on its promises to citizens of color, especially Black Americans. What most people forget about regarding that speech is Dr. King also spoke about the "fierce urgency of now." Mr. Floyd's death, among others, launched a call to action. The protests that are being played out around the country, and now around the world, send that message that the time is now.

Historically, protests have been the voice and language of the unheard. However, it is unfortunate that the real message that Colin Kaepernick, former quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, was emphasizing by kneeling during the singing of the National Anthem, may be overshadowed by the looting and misbehaving of several with personal motives to riot. Though their anger is understood, their actions are not appropriate and do not represent those of us who stand in solidarity. After having been inundated with the continuous live media coverage, many of you are judging the actions of the looters and other law-breaking citizens across this country, and not seeing the depth and breadth of this deep-rooted problem that exists. A lot of what I have written will make for very uncomfortable conversations; however, the dialog will need to occur in order for any kind of healing to begin. Fredrick Douglass, once stated “Without struggle, there is no progress.” Like many times in the past, we have struggled, but for true change to happen, there have to be diversity champions from all walks of life. We need you to step up and challenge the norms that have consistently harmed Black people. Those who sit idle and choose not to respond when you have the power and influence to do otherwise, are part of the problem. This is not a “Black” problem, it’s an American problem. If you are not sure what to do to be a change agent, here is a suggested list of things that can help. By no means is this an exhaustive list; however, the more you educate yourself, the more options become available.

1. Always confront racism and inappropriate behavior/language when you see, hear, read, or experience it.
2. Encourage your peers to talk about racism. Learning “what not to say” should not be your goal. There are many options that you can exercise. Write a letter to the editor when a racist incident occurs or educate your family members who have racist tendencies.
3. In your professional environment, eliminate discriminatory policies and practices that are institutional and harmful to Black Americans.
4. Get involved in activities or organizations that include Black Americans.
5. When conducting employment searches, make sure there are sound policies and practices for attracting Black Americans....and when you get them, mentor them, create a supportive and welcoming environment.
6. Support our Black students by not assuming that the playing field is level and they “are like everyone else.”
7. When teaching our Black students, don’t assume that their knowledge or opinions represents an entire population. Believe it or not, we may not be an expert. So, don’t always call on us to answer the questions that are related to Black matters.
8. Understand that you are part of the solution regardless of your race or background.
9. Come to grips that this is not a “Black” problem.
10. Remember that you are not powerless . . . Do not be fearful of speaking up if a person, regardless of age or status, says a racist comment or joke.
11. Educate yourself.

The Office of Equity and Inclusion is here to support the faculty, staff and students that it serves. Please feel free to reach out and contact us. We are here to foster an environment of inclusion. Our mission is to seek support and advance the University’s mission, vision, and values by providing guidance for the development and implementation of proactive diversity, access, inclusion and research. Our office serves to promote an environment where people come first, are treated with dignity and respect and are encouraged and supported to achieve their full potential. The office will collaborate with university and community partners on matters associated with equity and inclusion to foster relationships and advocate for underrepresented populations.

Our office recognizes in tandem with the novel coronavirus, the tragic events have caused trauma and stress to ETSU faculty, staff, students and especially the Black community. We want you to know that we are here for you. There are several resources on our campus that support you: the Counseling Center, Dean of Students, and the Multicultural Center. Even though many of you are away from campus, each of you are an integral part of the

university. We will keep our virtual office hours available to encourage positive and supportive communication.

In the days ahead, we must strongly affirm East Tennessee State University's fundamental commitment to equity and inclusion. Equity and inclusion must become institutional to effect change. We must continue to level the playing field and stand strong together as an educational community fighting to be inclusive, supportive, and welcoming to all.

ETSU SUPPORT RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Please reach out, ask for help and do not hesitate to share how you are feeling. Only through sharing emotions and dialog can we find empathy, healing and peace. [Click here](#) to access a list of resources available to students and employees.

Town Hall Event Set for June 9

Please join me for a Town Hall on Tuesday, June 9, at 11 a.m. via Zoom. The link to access the Town Hall is etsu.zoom.us/j/93082749231. During this time I will move through the recommendations of the Future Operations Workgroup and gather feedback that will guide and inform our implementation strategies. I look forward to having you be part of this event. If you have questions about the workgroup recommendations you would like me to address, please submit prior to the Town Hall at president@etsu.edu. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions during the event.



An Academic Year Unlike Any Other

With each passing day, I am reminded that the spring and now summer are not as we expected them to be. While none of us are able to predict what tomorrow brings, one thing I am sure of is the commitment to our mission, to improve the lives of the people of this region, has never been more evident. I am proud of each and every member of our ETSU family who has shown their dedication to maintaining our teaching, research and service activities. We will see one another again in the coming weeks and months and I appreciate this look back at all the celebrations and life-altering events we have been through this last academic year. I hope you will share this video with colleagues, friends and family members.



ETSU Office of the President | president@etsu.edu | 423-439-4211