August 19, 2020

Dear students,

I hope that you have had a pleasant summer. Although I am still adjusting to the changes that the pandemic has caused us to make in our daily lives, I am looking forward to fall. One item on our fall calendar is the launch of our annual Common Reading program, which invites students to engage in dialogue on critical social issues. This year’s themes for the program include racism, anti-racism and how COVID-19 has impacted local and global societies.

As a sociologist, I have found that classrooms, even virtual ones, are useful spaces for dialogue about racism and social justice. Our Common Reading program will give you a chance to engage in that dialogue outside the classroom. Moreover, it will give you tools to use to dismantle racism. Our reading list includes an excerpt from Ibram X. Kendi’s book, How to be an Anti-racist, which reminds us that “being an antiracist requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination.” Kendi also gives us steps to take individually and collectively to change the racial structure of our communities, so I urge you to read his entire book when you get the chance.

The COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on local and global communities has spotlighted mental health, medical care and food security issues, showing plainly how social determinants of health and how racial disparities disproportionately impact communities of color. Examining this issue is extremely critical to the world’s ability to ensure equitable outcomes as we work together locally, nationally, and internationally to recover from the crisis.

Such work is central to the purpose of an Ohio State education, expressed concisely by our university’s motto: education for citizenship. Our Common Reading program’s focus on racial justice, with special attention to the COVID-19 pandemic, is therefore an excellent way to begin putting your Ohio State education to work to improve the human condition. I hope that you will fully embrace this opportunity to enrich your experience at the Newark campus—and to sustain the momentum of the movement to end racism. Indeed, I am counting on you to do so.

With sincere wishes for a safe and fulfilling autumn semester,

Sincerely,

William L. MacDonald, PhD
Dean/Director
The Ohio State University at Newark