

# Call for Focus on Core Values in Wake of George Floyd's Death

From President James Dean and Provost Wayne Jones

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Thursday, June 4, 2020

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Dear UNH Community,

Like virtually all Americans, we reacted with horror at the recent death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. This was particularly painful coming on the heels of the shooting of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia and Breonna Taylor in Kentucky. While the circumstances of these deaths were different, they all underscore the risks to black people interacting with police or simply going about their daily lives (as was demonstrated vividly by what happened to Christian Cooper in New York City). It is beyond belief that more than 50 years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, nearly 30 years after Rodney King's beating, six years after the shooting of Michael Brown and the choking death of Eric Garner, tragedies like this continue to occur. It is clear that, as former President Obama said in a recent statement, "If we want our children to grow up in a nation that lives up to its highest ideals, we can and must do better." Our hearts go out to our African American students, faculty, staff and alumni who are particularly affected by these events.

What is the responsibility of a public university like the University of New Hampshire in this situation? We have an obligation to fight ignorance, intolerance and bias, and to teach equality, respect and kindness—these are [core values at UNH](#). The university is where we tackle societal challenges and work together to find solutions. This is founded on our mission to support the bedrock American principle that we are all created equal, and that all of us, regardless of any differences, should enjoy equal rights, opportunities and freedoms. It is fair to say that this passion for freedom is particularly acute in New Hampshire. We must ensure that our students and the whole UNH community deeply understand this shared commitment to our fellow citizens, to better understand when it has been violated. Our recent climate survey revealed that we have our own work to do in this area, which we will continue to do.

We cannot remain silent in the face of the trauma that these events inflict on marginalized communities across the country. We are united in our rejection of hate and intolerance, and call upon all in our community to support each other and those who are surely feeling the weight of these events. We all must renew our commitment to providing a safe and inclusive environment for everyone at UNH, including in interactions with UNH and Durham police. UNH Police Chief Paul Dean has worked extensively to build strong positive relationships with underrepresented students and has provided direction and training to his officers to do the same. Durham Police Chief Dave Kurz has done this as well.

As a research university, we also have the responsibility to address significant national issues. We will conduct a review of our research portfolio and look for opportunities to stimulate and support research on this important national problem. We hope that research can help us to identify practical steps that can be taken to protect the well-being and safety of all Americans while also improving our own racial understanding.

In the coming weeks, we will be meeting with and creating opportunities for faculty, staff and students to come together and share their input and guidance on responding to this challenge. Even in the face of the pandemic and the need to work and learn remotely, we must not lose sight of the importance of all aspects of our mission. In the aftermath of experiencing or witnessing trauma, it is normal to experience a range of feelings and emotions, such as shock, fear, sadness, anger, helplessness or guilt. For those members of our community who are feeling the trauma of this most acutely, we want to remind you that services continue to be available including: [Psychological and Counseling Services \(PACS\)](#); the [Beauregard Center](#) (formerly OMSA); [Health and Wellness](#); and the [Office of Community Equity and Diversity](#).

This is in so many ways a challenging time in America, but we as a people have risen to challenges before, and we will find ways to meet this one. We will be in touch with more detail on opportunities for education, research and conversation soon. In the meantime, our wish for all of you is health and safety.

James W. Dean, Jr.  
President

Wayne Jones  
Vice President and Provost

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The stories are written by the staff of [UNH Communications and Public Affairs](#).  
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