

A Democratic and Just Society Needs a Well-Educated Population

Dear Foothill Colleagues,

“We are pretending everything is normal. We are expected to act normal. I’ve been normalizing this. This is not normal.”

“We have to get to the truth before things can get better.”

Last night/early morning, I sent a letter to students as I wanted to re-state our commitment to equity and offer some perspective on how the insurrection in our nation's capital directly relates to Foothill College. I also met with students today to talk about the horrific events and how the college could support students. The statements above are a couple of the many student comments shared with me during "Boba Tea with President Thuy" and my meeting with ASFC today.

My letter to the students also expresses many of the sentiments I want to convey to you. I hope you get a chance to read it. Students are not alone. You are not alone!



Dear Foothill Students,

I hope you are staying healthy and getting settled into your classes.

I write to you as I watch Congress certify the votes – thus, rejecting the President's unfounded statements that the election was fraudulent. Today, Congress was violently disrupted when a mob illegally seized the Capitol building. Twitter has suspended the President's account, and leaders from both political parties have condemned these criminal acts and the President's role in inciting violence with falsehoods and false hopes.

This act of violence on our nation's capital and the President's own conduct go against the core values of Foothill: honesty, integrity, and trust. Foothill College's *own* mission and definition of equity speak to our college's unique role in our democracy:

"Believing a well-educated population is essential to sustaining a democratic and just society, we commit to the work of equity, which is to dismantle oppressive systems (structural, cultural, and individual) and create a college community where success is not predictable by race."

For many people, today's criminal acts are deeply saddening, but not a surprise. These events are not only an affront to our democracy and the peaceful transition of power, but also, once again, evidence of the destructive nature of white supremacy and the venom of systemic racism.

Foothill College will continue to work for a more inclusive democracy.

Foothill College believes Black Lives Matter.

Foothill College is committed to dismantling oppressive structures, including white supremacy.

Today's events have proven that we all need to work harder to achieve "a more perfect Union" and to ensure that although "the arc of the moral universe is long...it bends toward justice" as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said. My family and I fled communism as boat people in search of freedom and democracy. We saw the United States of America as a beacon of democracy, yet this country has a long history of racism. Today's events remind us that democracy is fragile and must be fought for every day.

The faculty and staff of Foothill College are committed to supporting your educational goals. We encourage you to harness your voice and leadership skills through the service of others, and in that process, develop your skills to distinguish facts from lies and learn how to engage productively with people whose opinions differ from us.

Please join me Thursday, Jan. 7, at noon for my virtual "Boba Tea with President Thuy." I would love to hear from you, whether it be about today's events or how your classes are going.

Today will impact each of us in different ways – many times, due to our political views and our lived racial experiences. One thing remains true: voting matters and as college students, our country needs you more than ever to commit yourself to voting, engaging civically, and fighting for the rights of others.

2021 must be a year of solutions. I encourage you to work toward solutions to unite our country.

Be safe. Be well. Lead with service above self.

Warmly,
Thuy Thi Nguyen
President, Foothill College

Our students expressed deep gratitude for all of you, and definitely saw why our college was named [No. 1 online community college in the country in 2020!](#) (By the way, **State Chancellor Oakley** congratulated us on this distinction and stated in a tweet post: "No surprise here.")

Students requested that faculty/staff continue to bring compassion into your classes and services; they are just like many of us, finding it hard to focus on their course work as they are following the news and are deeply affected by the events (some being re-traumatized by the violence and racism we are all witnessing). Students especially thanked faculty who are taking class time to acknowledge the events and process together.

Our students continue to inspire me; their service leadership, locally and globally, and their decency and awareness give me hope.

Thank you to the 100+ faculty and staff who joined the pop-up virtual gathering yesterday. It was so comforting to be in community with you, and to hear from our own college leadership. We all process differently, so please continue to reach out to each other in these trying times.

As I mentioned in my last communiqué, 2021 will be a year of solutions. Yesterday's events are yet another reason, as **Dr. Laurie Scolari** noted, why we must level-up by doubling-down on our equity efforts. We look forward to bringing our college's Equity Plan 2.0 (a strategic vision for equity) to the Board for their approval on Feb. 1. The plan offers solutions and commits us to actions that will dismantle some of these oppressive systems.

Everything we do at Foothill College is at the very foundation of a vibrant democracy. In my letter to students last night, I emphasized that our own mission statement attests to this:

“Believing a well-educated population is essential to sustaining and enhancing a democratic society.”

Your work is crucial as we help our students understand that facts matter, integrity matters, words matter, and character matters. As **Dean Roosevelt Charles** stated at our gathering yesterday, there is a moral standard we must achieve. **Dr. Charles** quoted the last Tuskegee airman; when asked why he would fight for a country that continues to discriminate against him, the Black airman said that this country is like a person who is ill and he will protect her until she gets better. That sentiment moved me deeply, as a refugee whose family fled communism in search of freedom and democracy.

2021 will be a year of solutions for our college and our country as we seek to recover from the twin pandemic: Covid-19 and racism.

The *Courageous Conversations* protocol wisely guides us that we must stay engaged and experience discomfort as we seek to deepen difficult conversations about race and racism.

Your engagement with Equity Plan 2.0 and your work and perspectives during this racial reckoning in our country give us hope.

Of Service (and in Solidarity),



Thuy

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