

Dear Kimberly Dearman,

To Ms. Dearman and to whomever is in support of her, I please ask that you read the remainder of this letter with an open mind; a willingness to listen to our perspective. This is no attack on you, nor is it directed at your political beliefs, but rather this letter provides a voice to those who have had theirs extinguished by the flames of injustice.

One of the core values of the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse, taken directly from their web page, is as follows: “Diversity, equity, and the inclusion and engagement of all people in a safe campus climate that embraces and respects the innumerable different perspectives found within an increasingly integrated and culturally diverse global community.”

As an employee at the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse, you are one of many staff members, that of which includes professors, advisors, counselors, and any other adult on campus, that work to uphold this university value. This value of equity and inclusion can only exist through your actions as an advisory figure at this university. More specifically, as a law enforcement dispatcher and a supervisor in the law enforcement building, you hold a position of power that requires a large amount of responsibility. As a member of the campus police, you are tasked with instilling, promoting, and maintaining a sense of security and safety on campus for all students, no matter their race.

According to the Official Employee Incident Investigation Form, a conversation took place between you and a first-day employee under your guidance regarding Joe Gow’s email about the president’s Immigration Ban. The employee states that you said, “people ‘who don’t belong here,’” referring to immigrants, “deserved to go back to where they were from.” Recognizing that you were talking to a person of color, you followed that statement saying, “but no offense to you.” Consequent meetings with Human Resources states that the victim’s “demeanor during the interview with Kathy [Acolla, an Employee Relations Specialist in HR,] clearly showed the depth of the hurt Kim’s comments and behavior caused.” During a conversation with Sergeant Jordan Schaller following the employee’s resignation, you said, “It was nothing. She better get used to it ‘cuz it could happen to her the rest of her life.”

By exclaiming that all immigrants should go back to where they came from, you have effectively excluded a large majority of the population from this community. Unless you are Native American, which according to the United States Census Bureau made up 2% of the population in 2015, you are an immigrant in this country. As a person of color, and someone who thinks about such issues of inclusion on a daily basis, let me tell you that this comment immediately damages one’s sense of belonging. No longer am I a student on this campus but a burden to you; an inconvenience. A vermin who should be evicted.

In addition, by brushing off your comment, excusing it for something that just happens in life, you are allowing racism to thrive in our communities; to be something that people of color need to “get used to.” Although your comment was not physically damaging, the psychological harm done to the recipient can be as hurtful as a punch in the face.

As a person of color on a predominantly white campus, it is difficult enough for me to feel welcome, let alone feel a sense of belonging. I walk the campus sidewalks ever-aware that I am

perceived as different from my peers around me. I am not judged by the content of my character or the greatness of my achievements, but rather the color of my skin.

When repeatedly exposed to comments such as “go back to where you’re from,” or other racist comments ranging from subtle to explicitly blatant, I cannot explain to you how badly I want to tear off my colored skin. To be white just long enough to know what it feels like to belong; to be seen. To show you, to scream and shout, “Look at me! You and I? We are the same! Both made of bones stronger than steel; both full of blood redder than a seven o’clock sunset; both with a beating heart just trying to live our dreams. You and I? We are the same.”

Although we are both members of the human race, and should be treated as such, I cannot erase my colored skin. My heritage and culture are ingrained deep within me. It is because of my inescapable colored-ness that your words will affect me differently than if towards a white individual. They hold a different weight, one oftentimes with more meaning and severity.

We come to this campus, not only in search of a good education, but hoping to thrive and bloom in a community of excellence; one that promotes growth and inclusivity. Unfortunately, ignorance and hate provided by others can make us feel unsafe and unwanted; can make us feel ashamed of our ethnicity and culture; can make us wish we were someone else. I encourage you to step into someone else’s skin, whether that be one of color or not, before you act. Realize that your comments and actions, especially coming from a position of authority, can truly impact those around you.

Sincerely,
William Villaflor

And In Solidarity:

Matt van Druuten, Jamie Capetillo, Mai Yer Xiong,
Vandali Vang, Chevana Vang, Linda Xyooj,
Matilda Sprain, Yer Xiong, Jori Given,
Callie Huseh, Pilar Olvera, Isabella Kilibarda,
Mark Morales, Bedston Burrell, Khadijah Islam,
Sabah Khan, Gaokhia Yang, Dani Kallis,
David Bicoy, Miriam Hurula, Duabchi Vang,
Fuekai Xiong, Paj Thoj, Kaosia Thao, Lani Xiong,
Alexandra Stewart, Mason Sonnenberg, Linda Lee,
Kyleigh Hall, Nick Shankey, Christian Morzinski,
Taying Yang, Alicia Quinones, Imani Paul,
Q Howe, Jenna Laidlaw, Alfonso Gunaratnam,
Tshaj Li (Charlie Yang), Cristian Noriega,
Roosevelt Yang, Cindy Vang, Natalie Burgess,
Dylan Kersten, Kristin Treichel, Chai Yang,
Ben O’Connell, Jake Roberts, Aaron Bhatoya,
Jeremy Ames, Jacob Schimmel, Pangchaan Yang,
Andrew Quaschnick, Brittany Tashner,
Tyler Halloran, Lauren Mason, Spencer Garcia,
Lang Vu, Keyla Jones Rosa, Alex Olp.