

My name is Daniel Strom, I am the President of our student government and I am here today because I represent a student body that is hurting. A student body that has consistently been locked out of the most important decisions affecting it, a student body that does not see our values being defended at the highest levels of administration and a student body that time and time again sees our concerns and issues ignored and cast aside.

We, the students of this school, are the only reason this institution exists. We pay the bills. We keep the lights on. We struggle, working multiple jobs and having hard conversations with our families to pay the ever-rising tuition that is the foundation upon which this entire place rests. We built this place and we keep it alive with our talents, our minds, our voices, our labor, and our skills on the field, on the stage, and in the classroom.

So we are stakeholders. Our perspectives matter when it comes to the most important issues facing this school and not just the perspectives of some. It is not enough to appoint some of us as tokens -- we need the perspectives of all of us.

This administration has continuously made important decisions that have major impacts on the experience of us here on campus with little-to-no input from students. So often when an invitation has been extended to us, it has been with the condition that our voices actually mean nothing, that at the end of the day we just make meaningless recommendations to be discarded. When those who are affected by policies and procedures have no say in how those policies and procedures are crafted, and when the mechanisms that are supposed to provide us a voice do not actually do that, it makes a mockery of the idea that we are partners in this school relegating us to the position of subjects as opposed to autonomous individuals with meaningful power over the decisions that affect our lives.

In addition, we see no clear direction from the university, especially the senior administration--the Board included--in terms of actually seeing a full commitment to the values advertised by the university--values that I know everyone in this room holds dear. For so many of us here, our intercultural distinctive binds us together as the core distinctive, one that helps us understand and contextualize the others: Christian and City Centered. As we become a campus made up of a majority of students of color and are now recognized as a Hispanic Serving Institution, we need to provide the resources to actually support and promote our intercultural distinctive so that we can build a beloved community -- not a segregated one. We need real resources and real democratization in decision making to allow the input and voices of students to be heard in terms of what course is charted for the future. And in a time when the powers that be in our government demonize and deny the dignity of so many students on this campus, will this school and administration have the moral courage to take sides? To stand up for our students in the face of rising antisemitism, islamophobia, anti-black racism, homophobia and transphobia, sexism and misogyny, anti-immigrant sentiments, a carceral state, and deportation machine which traumatize so many and attack our poor and marginalized? Or will there be a continued sentiment that what goes on outside this pristine campus does not find its way in here? Because I can assure you all that goes on in our world deeply affects the lives of so many of the students gathered here today.

Finally, I am here today speaking and so many students are here today because we are tired of being told to wait, tired of being told it's our fault and tired of conversation and dialogue -- we want action. So many students have faced harassment, discrimination, workplace abuses of power, sexual harassment, racist comments, and actions. Consistently, time and time again students bring forward issues faced through the official channels and are stonewalled, ignored, not taken seriously or fear repercussions. Part of a culture of secrecy and fear that has been fostered on this campus that affects faculty, staff, and students a result of a lack of transparency, a breakdown in shared governance, the denial of decision making powers to those affected by decisions and a culture of intimidation and retaliation for speaking up and speaking out.

I know there are multiple ways to get a point across, and I know this in part because I have tried or seen just about all of them in my three years in student government. I understand there are likely some of you that would like to dismiss these words and by extension the concerns of so many students as rabble-rousing, impatient, impolite and misguided. But I want you to look into the eyes of this mass of students assembled here and I want you to know that there are many more who feel exactly the same way. I want you to know that we are tired of the old ways of doing things. Last semester the President pointed out that students with concerns should go through the proper channels, and I agree with her. So here I am -- the proper, designated representative of the student body elected last year to do just this. But I hope you all understand, even as SGA works to promote this vision for the campus we want to see, the students we represent need far more power and far more of a voice than what an effectively toothless SGA can provide. When our only real power is advocacy and that advocacy goes unlistened, one can not meaningfully say that the use of proper channels can actually bring about the change we seek. I know the members assembled here are not only reasonable people but compassionate ones with a deep love for this school and a strong desire to see it succeed--a goal we all share. As we continue to move forward and heal as a community, I want to ask all of you to consider doing so in a way that ensures that students having meaningful power in the future--which will make certain that our university lives up to the values it professes on paper. What is required of us all as we have a conversation--that must lead to substantive reform and effective action--is to remember that command given all those years ago: to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.