

SIUE leadership hears student demonstrators

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EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville **Chancellor Dr. Randy Pembroke**, along with SIUE vice chancellors, faculty and staff, listened attentively as approximately 250 SIUE students gathered Tuesday, Nov. 15 in the Stratton Quadrangle.

A variety of speakers came forward to voice concerns about campus life and their expectation that the University work toward a more inclusive environment.

Chancellor Pembroke wants all campus community members to know that their voices are valued. "I'm proud of the students who came forward today to share their stories, voice their opinions and raise awareness," he said.

"There is a time for listening and a time for doing," he continued. "Along with my leadership team, we are grateful for the opportunity to listen and are committed to

acting. Both are essential. In order to act effectively, we need to hear from students, and listening is part of the process. But, we also won't accomplish real change if we don't do something after better understanding the issues. We are enriched through open dialogue and respectful intellectual discourse."

Jeffrey Waple, SIUE vice chancellor for student affairs, pointed to next steps. "Campus administrators will attend a meeting Thursday, (Nov. 17), with concerned students who organized and attended Tuesday's event," he said. "The university administration plans on holding a public forum that was recommended by Students for Change before the end of the fall semester. Chancellor Pembroke and his team also plan on meeting with small groups of students representing the many forms of diversity at SIUE when we return for the spring semester."

"As an institution, SIUE will work to create structures and practices that promote true equity and inclusion, and that serve to dismantle inequality," said **Denise Cobb**, interim provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs. "The students' collective voices will make SIUE even better, and we recognize their leadership contributes to positive change. We remain ready to work with them to improve our campus for everyone."

"Moving forward, group discussions and open forums are extremely important," said **Venessa Brown**, associate chancellor and chief diversity officer. "We invite the protesters and the entire university community to participate in the various summits, conferences, and other diversity and inclusion training that are held on campus. It is critical that all administrators, including the chancellor's council and the deans, are open to listening to the issues first hand."

Chancellor Pembroke also addressed alleged incidences of intolerance. "When disrespectful events occur, we must find a way that people feel comfortable reporting them," he said, "whether that is to discuss with residence advisors and administrators, make formal reports to police or finding someone such as a campus counselor or faculty ally, who can help work through the issue, particularly if that individual is striving for privacy or confidentiality. We need to know what students are experiencing."

"Disrespectful behavior and oppressive speech are unacceptable, and have no place on our campus. Differences of opinion are an essential part of the dialogue on any university campus, but personal attacks based on race, gender, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation should never occur."

"I will continue to work with our senior leadership team to address any actions that violate campus rules and values. We will work to maintain a safe, secure and inclusive campus environment for all students, faculty and staff."

The perception of isolation described by students made an impact on Chancellor Pembroke. “This should function as a call to action for our campus to consider how we can better facilitate and encourage communication and understanding between individuals and groups,” he said. “SIUE should not be a campus where students feel disconnected, insecure or unsafe.”

Chancellor Pembroke reiterated from the campus message he delivered last Friday. “This is a time for us to put aside whatever ideological differences there may be and work together to continually improve our community moving forward,” he stated. “There will always be differences in political perspectives, social backgrounds and experiences, but as an intellectual community, we choose to cherish and respect those differences at SIUE.”