



THE UNIVERSITY  
of NORTH CAROLINA  
at CHAPEL HILL

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Dear students, staff, alumni, and faculty,

I am profoundly saddened and outraged by the recent white supremacist and neo-Nazi-led events at the University of Virginia and in the town of Charlottesville. Violence and intimidation are not free speech. This brazen display of bigotry coupled with violent attacks on counter protestors and the death of activist Heather Heyer is deplorable. It continues a spate of deadly attacks in the United States stemming from intolerance and hate. We have all been watching and reading the news reports of what happened in Charlottesville and are trying to make sense of these disturbing events. We realize more than ever that our work in public health is necessary and that as a unified community we can help bring about positive social change.

Last year, our department initiated a series of discussions about diversity and inclusion facilitated by Adjunct Faculty member Dr. Deborah Stroman. Many health behavior students, staff, and faculty have participated in these sessions. Engaging in racial and equity conversations is hard work, and some of the conversations have been challenging. We know that many more tough conversations lie ahead as we work toward creating positive social change.

What can we learn from these recent events? We, as a department, will continue the inclusion series next week - Wednesday, August 23 at 4:30 p.m. - when everyone is back for the fall semester. Please join Deborah Stroman, others, and me in a session to help understand and prevent future tragedies and injustices. In addition, we are hopeful that you are willing to share your input and perspectives to help us realize our departmental objective of providing a safe and inclusive environment where each individual is valued and appreciated. We stand in solidarity with our colleagues at the University of Virginia in condemning all acts of violence, hatred and racism.

Kurt M. Ribisl, PhD  
Professor and Chair