



## Joint Statement Regarding Civility

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*November 23, 2010*

This fall, a number of our University of Wisconsin System campuses and surrounding communities have experienced incidents of violence and intolerance. Classmates, colleagues, and neighbors have been the targets of threatening graffiti, vandalism, harassment, bullying, intimidation, and physical assault. Some were evidently targeted because of prejudice against their particular race, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, or religion. Others were victims of ugly behavior often associated with overconsumption of alcohol.

We should all be disturbed by these kinds of events, and we should all take steps to prevent such behavior.

Acts of intolerance and violence happen across our nation, in big cities and rural communities alike. However, even one such instance is cause for alarm, especially at universities where we strive to provide safe, collegial learning and working environments.

Universities and colleges are uniquely positioned to address these thorny issues. Civil discourse is a cornerstone of democracy and a central tenet of academic freedom. Building on this tradition, we must set the stage for “civil behavior” in all its forms.

What constitutes civil behavior? Are we contributing to a general sense of civility in our communities? Are we willing to confront those who engage in acts of disrespect and hostility? Every generation must answer these questions, building upon lessons learned from the past.

At times like this, we must recommit ourselves to a shared sense of civility. To be clear, this is not a call for limits on individual expression. Everyone has a right to his or her opinion, and everyone else has a right to challenge that opinion – with evidence, and with respect. Nobody has a right to engage in abusive behavior, and we each have an obligation to challenge that kind of conduct whenever it occurs on our campus or in our communities.

The vast majority of UW System faculty, staff, students, and alumni already share these values. We celebrate the heterogeneous blend of cultures, political viewpoints, personal histories, and worldviews that fuels learning and discovery.

Our institutions are working hard to address recent events we wish had never happened. Individuals, groups, and entire communities have stood up, spoken out, and demonstrated their collective commitment to a safe and inclusive learning environment. They are collaborating with community agencies that share our interest in long-term solutions.

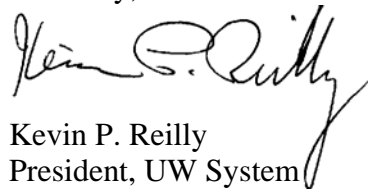
As we work toward these shared goals together, we encourage anyone who feels unsafe at any time to seek help from the campus police, your Dean of Students, the Human Resources office, or other university officials.

In addition, we hope that people will take time to explore these issues in more depth. One such opportunity is a special UW conference on "Civility in Everyday Life," to be held Feb. 22-24, 2011, at UW-Oshkosh. Watch for more details.

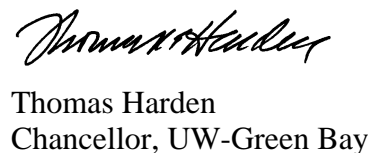
Even if you cannot attend this particular conference, we hope that you will consider participating in similar local events, or you might choose to simply start a conversation with your roommates or co-workers about ways to make our UW System campuses models of what we want the larger society to become.

Thank you.

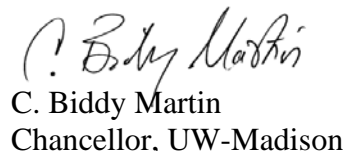
Sincerely,



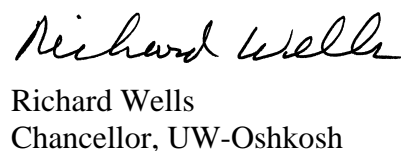
Kevin P. Reilly  
President, UW System



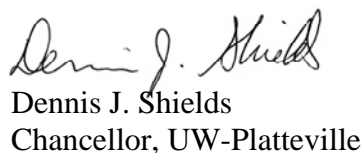
Thomas Harden  
Chancellor, UW-Green Bay



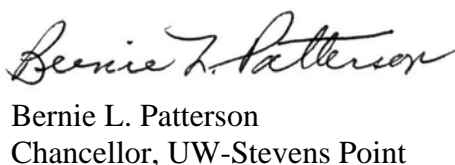
C. Bidy Martin  
Chancellor, UW-Madison



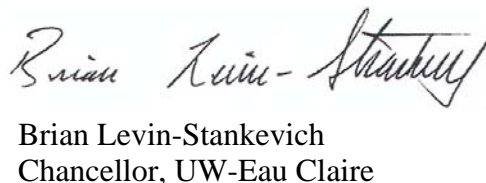
Richard Wells  
Chancellor, UW-Oshkosh



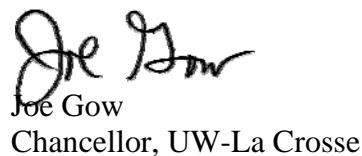
Dennis J. Shields  
Chancellor, UW-Platteville



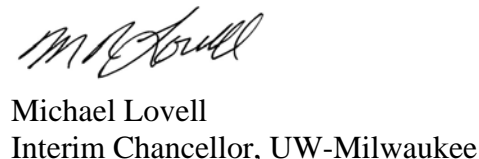
Bernie L. Patterson  
Chancellor, UW-Stevens Point



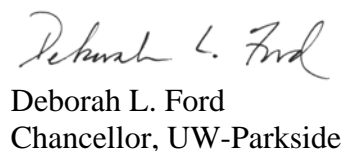
Brian Levin-Stankevich  
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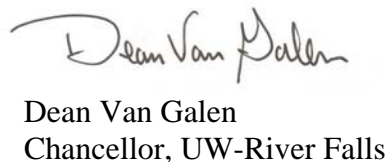
Joe Gow  
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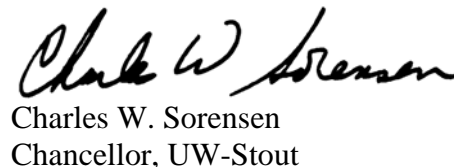
Michael Lovell  
Interim Chancellor, UW-Milwaukee



Deborah L. Ford  
Chancellor, UW-Parkside



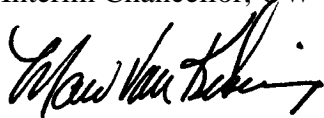
Dean Van Galen  
Chancellor, UW-River Falls



Charles W. Sorensen  
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Christopher L. Markwood  
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Marv Van Kekerix  
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Richard J. Telfer  
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