

An Update from the Dean of Students

Thursday, September 21, 2017



Dear Fellow Wildcats,

Earlier this week I wrote to you about a video posted online that showed members of the Alpha Phi sorority singing a popular song that uses the n-word. Not surprisingly, this video evoked strong reactions.

I do not believe that it is appropriate for anyone to use the n-word. It is a derogatory term used historically to dehumanize and demean African Americans. It is true that this word is pervasive in certain genres of film, television and music, having been reclaimed by many in the African American community. This does not, in my view, legitimize its use by others. It is hurtful and hateful, even when that is not the intention, as in the singing of popular songs.

I would emphasize that this is a matter of common decency, not law. My earlier message incorrectly implied that students would be subject to investigation or sanction for speech, which was not my intent. The University of New Hampshire remains fully committed to the First Amendment.

At the same time, we encourage all members of our community to approach one another with generosity, decency and good will — and to think about how one's actions and words could affect other members of our community.

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The sisters of Alpha Phi have written a sincere [letter](#) of apology and will play an active role in working to improve our campus culture. I ask everyone to join our efforts to make all members of the university community feel welcome and respected as they pursue their education on campus.

Please accept my thanks for everything that you can do to help.

—John T. Kirkpatrick

Dean of Students

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