Dear members of the fraternity and sorority community:

Earlier this week an email surfaced that was originally sent back in January 2014 from a member of Kappa Sigma fraternity that went to a small group of members. When the Department of Fraternity and Sorority Life (DFSL) was informed of the email, we responded immediately. The sentiments expressed in the email represent racist and predatory thoughts that have no place in our community. When the leadership of the chapter learned of the incident from us earlier this week, they took swift action in suspending the individual responsible for the email and condemning the sentiments expressed. Staff in DFSL have met with the chapter leadership and identified six areas to focus on moving forward in relation to Kappa Sigma: 1) assessment of the chapter culture, 2) diversity education and programming, 3) sexual assault prevention programming, 4) individual accountability, 5) personal reaction of men in the chapter, and 6) reparations to the community. The chapter will begin diversity-education programming when they return from Spring Break and will participate in a ten-week sexual assault prevention program starting next fall.

Within DFSL, we are committed to helping foster greater education and dialogue within the broader fraternity and sorority community. To that end, we are committed to hosting an open forum the week following Spring Break for members of fraternities and sororities to process their reactions and express their feelings. This will be in addition to other forums sponsored by other organizations that are open to the larger campus community.

As a department, we are committed to fostering a community that lives by the values upon which fraternities and sororities were founded – values such as moral sensitivity, compassion, human dignity and character. Racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, and other intolerant sentiments should be rooted out wherever they exist and confronted. In our efforts to strive for an ideal community, we need to embrace differences and not just adopt politically correct language. While we expect chapters to host educational programs that promote diversity and inclusion, we also work to foster engagement in meaningful discussion that leads to cultural change. Education is not enough, there needs to be action. A longer-term strategy to promote more regular, meaningful discussion and programs surrounding these issues within the fraternity and sorority community is being developed in consultation with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Office of Multicultural Involvement and Community Advocacy, the Office of Civil Rights and Sexual Misconduct, and the UMD Inclusive Language Campaign.

Our focus should be on how we can educate the entire community, not just one fraternity. As a department, we encourage you to engage in personal reflection about this incident and other related incidents that have happened on this campus and nationally in the past several months and then discuss your thoughts and feelings with brothers, sisters, and friends inside and outside of your chapter. The more we talk about these issues, the less likely people are to live insulated lives where the perspectives of others are ignored. We are committed to building a more unified community through education and, most importantly, action.

Matt Supple
Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life