Dear Alumni, Families and Friends,

Colleges and universities have been witness to demanding conversations, protests and dialogue about race, diversity and inclusion. I applaud the Clark students, staff, faculty and alumni who, through multiple forums and meetings, have ensured that our own campus is part of this important period of reflection and response. Our community is also aware that the searching questions being asked of us today build on an important history of leadership by alumni and friends of Clark.

Issues of diversity and inclusion are integral to Clark University’s mission to educate undergraduate and graduate students to be imaginative and contributing citizens of the world. If we are to empower our graduates to achieve this mission, it is imperative that a Clark student’s education include sustained and productive interactions with people, perspectives and experiences different from their own. To achieve this result, Clark University must be a place where learning from difference is an embedded and intrinsic feature of the educational and campus-life experience.

In many significant ways, Clark is a diverse and inclusive community. Currently 23 percent of our undergraduates are students of color. A further 15 percent of our undergraduates are international students. Our campus is economically diverse. Students of many faiths and traditions are well supported. Tolerance and respect are core values of the institution and these values are stewarded through a variety of curricular and co-curricular initiatives.

At the same time, and like many of our peer institutions, we have much work still to do. What follows are three concerns that Clark is actively addressing as we seek to make diversity and inclusion a mark of excellence for our University. These concerns are not unique to Clark. To the contrary, they are manifest to varying degrees across all colleges and universities. This shared challenge makes Clark’s leadership all the more important as we pursue an inclusive democracy in our country.

The first responsibility is to afford students the immense benefit of studying within a diverse community. We meet this challenge by enrolling students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Over the next five years, we want to build on our recent progress in increasing student diversity. Equally important, we will seek to ensure that all students who enroll at Clark University have the opportunity to flourish and succeed, as measured, for example, by the graduation rates of our students. There are many factors that contribute to student success, including robust programming, excellent advising and faculty mentoring, and a campus culture where all students feel supported and valued for their contributions. We will elevate our work in all of these areas, including through efforts to enhance the diversity of our leadership team, our faculty and our staff who serve as role models and mentors for our students.

A second responsibility is to sustain a thriving and resilient culture of inclusion. Across college campuses, time and again, we hear stories of a lack of understanding or awareness of how our own actions are experienced by others within a diverse community. We need to strengthen the competence of all our community members to support a culture of inclusion as we prepare our graduates to flourish in a diverse economy and society. To meet this need, Clark is putting in place a comprehensive set of student programming, professional development for administration and staff, and faculty-focused workshops within academic departments. The University is also considering ways in which the curriculum might be further developed so that all students who graduate from Clark engage rigorously with issues of diversity and inclusion.

The third challenge facing universities is ensuring that the commitment to diversity and inclusion is built on the values intrinsic to liberal education. These values include a commitment to freedom of inquiry and expression, rigor of analysis in testing claims and assertions, listening and actively seeking out opportunities to learn from those with whom we disagree, and vigorous response to discriminatory practices, along with great care and clarity in defining and responding to acts of hate and oppression. This is not easy work. Not a month goes by without a controversy arising on a university campus where the relationship among these values is tested. However demanding this work may be, it remains the responsibility of universities to demonstrate how to learn from difference and thereby strengthen our whole community.

I am excited by the leadership Clark is already providing in addressing these challenges. As we move forward, we will prepare our graduates to be highly effective leaders in a diverse global society, and as we do so, we will elevate Clark’s reputation as one of this country’s more influential and impactful research universities.

Sincerely,

David P. Angel
President