March 11, 2025

Dear District Community,

Over the past few weeks, we have experienced significant changes in the landscape of higher education in our country. Policy changes in immigration enforcement by Homeland Security and the specific presidential Executive Order targeting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) have caused confusion, anxiety, and fear among students and employees alike. I am amazed by the resilience demonstrated by YCCD faculty and staff and am thankful for your continued focus on supporting all the students we serve.

Today, I would like to take a moment to address how we want to follow federal and state laws while remaining true to our District Mission, Vision, Values, and policies. As the situation will likely continue to evolve, the perspectives offered today are based on what we know at this moment.

Firstly, it is important to note that California's Proposition 209, enacted in 1996, clearly prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, and ethnicity in employment, public contracting, and public education. This legislation remains a cornerstone of our commitment to fairness and equality. All District policies and practices are in compliance with state law.

On February 14, 2025, the Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Education issued a "Dear Colleague Letter" that called on educational institutions to cease using race preferences and stereotypes as a factor in their admissions, hiring, promotion, compensation, scholarships, etc. Unfortunately, the definition of DEIA was vague and confusing, leading to legal challenges and uncertainty within higher education.

On March 1, 2025, the Department of Education released Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) with the purpose of facilitating compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Protection Clause. The FAQ offered helpful clarifications, and the key points of these clarifications include:

School Curricular:
The current Federal laws prohibit the Department of Education from exercising control over curricular content. In other words, curricular prerogatives remain with states and local schools, and teaching diversity as a subject matter is protected as long as the teaching, learning, and programming do not violate Title VI or create hostile environments through race-based policies and stereotypes.

DEIA Programs and Terminology:
As a terminology or initiative, college DEIA programs focused on interests in particular cultures, heritages, and areas of the world would not in and of themselves violate Title VI if they are open to all students regardless of race. The critical point is that colleges may not discriminate based on race, color, or national origin in their programs or activities.

Extracurricular Activities:
Consistent with prior guidance offered by the Office of Civil Rights, extracurricular activities, such as honors, awards, educational, cultural, and historical observances or events, are permitted as long as they do not segregate, exclude, or discriminate against students by race.

As a public community college, YCCD has always been an open-access institution, dedicated to serving all students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or national origin. In a recent retreat, the District Governing Board reaffirmed that commitment. The recent updates by the Department of Education are crucial as we continue to foster an inclusive and supportive environment for all members of our District community. We remain committed to upholding the principles of DEIA and ensuring that every student has the opportunity to succeed.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. As we navigate the changing landscape, let's remain steadfast in promoting student success and practicing inclusive excellence.

Sincerely,



Shouan Pan, Ph.D.
Chancellor