



Dear students and community members,

In light of recent events involving the Theta Tau fraternity, the Department of Religion and the Religion Graduate Organization stand in solidarity with Syracuse University students against racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, Islamophobia, settler colonialism, and ableism. In particular, we unequivocally stand with those marginalized students who routinely experience violence too often without community, faculty, and administrative support. In response to the video, we condemn the trivialization of sexual assault, and the use of slurs against disabled, Jewish, Black, LGBTQ2+, Dalit, and Latinx communities. We demand accountability and justice.

Organizations like Theta Tau are created and sustained through ritual – in this case, induction ceremonies for incoming members of the fraternity. Ritual performances of this kind, whether serious or parodic, reaffirm that it is acceptable, commonplace, and even humorous to dehumanize those marginalized in our society. They send a message to others that some people do not belong. These ritual performances normalize forms of violent behavior, including sexual assault, stereotyping, discrimination, dehumanization, exclusion, and physical violence against marginalized peoples.

In response to the proposed actions in Chancellor Syverud’s email on April 19th, 2018, we urge the administration to review the current efficacy of “divisional perspectives requirement” and “critical reflections on ethical and social issues” as curriculum components. Furthermore, while diversity and implicit bias training are important, these are not by themselves sufficient. Such trainings must be rooted in anti-racist, feminist, and decolonial perspectives. We also urge the administration to take swift and decisive action in responding to intolerable behavior. We demand that the administration hold accountable *all* organizations and individuals found guilty of sexual assault or the use of derogatory statements regarding race, ethnicity, class, gender identity/expression, religion, sexual orientation, and/or disabilities. Such accountability includes disciplinary actions including suspension and/or expulsion, as well as ensuring that those students and organizations actively work to make amends for their actions.

In an effort to acknowledge that this issue is not limited to our campus but is prevalent in communities across the nation, we support sustaining critical dialogue regarding these systemic problems. Training within the Humanities, including within the Department of Religion, encourages students to respect and communicate across differences in cultures, religions, ethnicities, and communities. As a department, we stand in solidarity with students working to bring these issues to light and to find solutions that will truly make campus a safe and welcoming environment.

In Solidarity,

The Religion Graduate Student Organization and The Department of Religion