

Chair Cowles, Trustees, Chancellor Malhotra,

As this is the last Board of Trustees meeting of 2020, I feel it is appropriate to look ahead to 2021 with a small sense of hope and optimism in what has otherwise been a terrible year.

While the pandemic has touched nearly every one of us individually, it has also forced a painful reckoning of who we are as a society, particularly when we ask how well have we been able to take care of one another. This question—or versions of it—have appeared in many other areas, the least of which is the thunderous election we just experienced. Amidst all of that, one thing has become clear: there is still very much a role and a need for public institutions that are capable of delivering what we can broadly understand as public or “collective goods.”

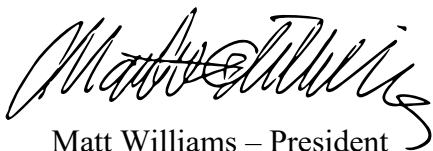
There are two striking examples of this within Minnesota State that are related: the Equity2030 initiative and conversations regarding the role Minnesota State could have in pursuing anti-racism work, especially in light of the death of George Floyd and the important conversations we have had as a country ever since.

Without a doubt, both of these endeavors make a better world for all of us—not just those who are enrolled as students. This work is, in my mind, the definition of a collective good we all benefit from. Similar conversations around how we can create a better world for all, and the role public institutions have in that process, have reached many areas of mainstream discourse unseen in years.

However, this also points to the challenges ahead: while we are seeing increased demands for serving the collective good, we still have a revenue model in higher-education that defines our work largely as a private good that individuals are responsible for—often through student debt. Consider the contradictory situation we could see ourselves in where we take on doing meaningful work that combats racism in our world, but then ask our own students—including our students of color—to substantially fund that work either directly or indirectly through tuition and debt—debt that sustains many of the systemic inequities we desire to rid our world of.

I believe it is time to have that conversation about our commitment to the collective good, and how that may necessitate a new way of talking about revenue and full public funding. I am hopeful we as a system, as a state, and as a country are ready for it, even in these economically distressed times.

Thank you,



Matt Williams – President

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