A few Words to My Dept. Head

Hello Dr. Watkins,

I just wanted to let you know that your message yesterday was very reassuring to me. Your message has helped break my silence and I feel like I have a few things to say (or in this case write). During my time as a JMU student in the Chem Dept., I never really felt a part of the department. I always felt like I was on the outskirts of the department. I tried to include myself in outreach and even joined AXE my sophomore year at JMU. I will admit that I felt a part of AXE when I was a pledge because it felt more accepting of all students. The next year, there seemed to be division between the people of the organization and everyone joined specific cliques. That was when I realized, that I did not really have a clique except for with the other minorities of the group. So my senior year, I left the group with my little (also a minority student) because she felt the same way. I even tried to rejoin this last year and felt similar feelings from my previous involvement with the group. Thankfully, there were at least six people that made me feel a part of the group, but it did not feel like enough to me and I was less active with the group.

I will admit that even though I normally do not feel a part of the department, there were two professors that fully supported me and made me feel like I was not always alone. These professors are Dr. Kevin Caran and Dr. Iona Black. I found myself often times crying in their office with all of the issues that seemed to affect my success at JMU. Thankfully, they were always there, in some cases lending me a tissue, and listening to my experiences. I cannot express the amount of gratitude and respect I have for these two professors. They truly motivated me to become the best chemist I can be. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for your support.

Recently, I have been going through much internal conflict over the racial injustice and inequalities demonstrated across the nation. It has affected me so much that I find myself driving to the mountains and countryside, listening to calming music and reflecting. Recently, it has been on a daily basis. As a result of these rides, I have come to the conclusion that I cannot be silent anymore. My voice must be heard and things must change, even in the JMU community. Last semester, I was asked by Biology faculty to become a founding member for an organization called Biology Students of Color. This organization has helped me break my silence and tell my story. As of last week, we are tasked with preparing a Bold letter about racial injustices and inequalities and potentially giving a few solutions that can make JMU a safe place for all students, especially students of color. I am trying to gather any stories from JMU students about any racial injustices or inequalities that they experienced or even witnessed. I want this to be a safe area where people can discuss what they went through, without mincing their words. I do not want to limit anything they have to say. With this, I was wondering if you could reach out to the department or even other departments to relay this message. The students with stories can send it to my dukes email and I will make a collective google doc of these stories and it will be accessible to all.

I am tired and frustrated with the inequalities that I and my skinfolk have faced in the country and even here in the JMU community. Now is the time to **Break the Silence**so that we can progress to a more accepting future. Now is the time for action. Never give up because giving up is NOT AN OPTION. I stand by these words because if I did not, I would not be where I am today. I say this all with a heavy heart, but I mean every word. CHANGE IS ON THE HORIZON. WE JUST HAVE TO WALK TOWARDS IT, TOGETHER.

*I wish you all peace, love, and prosperity!*

Thank you for taking the time to read this and I hope to hear from you soon,

Brenden Wimbish