To: University of Chicago Students, Faculty and Staff

From: Adam Green, Associate Professor of History and in the College, and Faculty Chair, Diversity Advisory Council

In Re: Diversity Advisory Council Chair’s Note

Greetings and welcome to campus for the start of the academic year. I am writing on behalf of the student and faculty members of the Diversity Advisory Council. The Council was launched in January, 2015 through the charge from President Zimmer and Provost Isaacs calling for thorough inquiry into the campus climate and, where appropriate, recommendations meant to advance and secure our University’s commitment to diversity and inclusion as core values. The Council has also been encouraged by the President and Provost to draft a comprehensive statement regarding diversity and inclusion, one well suited to our University and intended to endure into the future. As we gather for the start of our studies, teaching, research and work, I wanted to recap some initial groundwork the Council has done thus far, and share priorities for the coming year.

The Council met several times in Winter and Spring 2015. These meetings allowed Council members to questions and learn from those who help develop University policies related to Diversity and Inclusion, including Michelle Rasmussen, University Dean of Students, Karlene Burrell-McRae, Director of the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, and President Zimmer and Provost Isaacs. An especially fruitful meeting in May brought the Council together with the Diversity Leadership Committee, a standing body of senior administrators from across the University that focuses on diversity concerns related to staff. Campus staff remains the most diverse component of our community, and we hope to continue their insight and perspective in considering how our institution can best fulfill a leadership role in relation to diversity and inclusion, as it does in relation to other core priorities.

Two significant processes were initiated by the Council this past Spring. In May, the Council convened three evening forums involving the heads of twenty-nine different registered student organizations. Prominent among these were several groups who signed onto the student protest petition submitted to the President and Provost last fall. While the student leaders involved in these forums represented a variety of schools and divisions, as well as personal backgrounds and orientations, many shared the view that the current campus climate raises questions about the capacity of the University to assure all students a valid sense of place and voice. These student leaders encouraged the Council to consider whether curriculum, orientation programs, and social media are appropriately organized to allow the University to realize its aims regarding diversity and inclusion. They also noted the value of frank exchange with peers whom they do not come into frequent contact with. Although the Council will hold at least one open student forum this year, we hope also to return to the format of meeting with large groups of student leaders. I
wish to thank the student members of the DAC – Miguel Barajas, Alita Carbone, Carlos Cardenas-Iniguez, Ruby Garrett and James Kiselik – for their leadership in organizing these forums.

The Council has also begun to consult with administrators and faculty engaged in designing the Diversity Campus Climate Survey, to be administered sometime later this academic year. A subcommittee of the Council will help propose topics of focus for the survey. A priority of that subcommittee will be insuring that student perspective and insight factors appropriately into the overall planning and design of the survey. The Council looks forward to working with Student Government regarding these matters. The Council also hopes to partner with student leaders, the Office of Campus and Student Life, the Deans of Students for the Divisions and Schools, the Office of College Housing, and other campus social networks such as the Inter-Fraternity Council and the Pan-Hellenic Council to insure a robust student response rate, when the survey is administered.

In the coming year, the Council will continue its discussions with key senior administrators and with students, while also beginning inquiry into the specifically academic components of campus diversity and inclusion. This will require meetings with both Deans and faculty, planned for Fall. Programs devoted to faculty hiring, recruitment and retention, consideration of curricular breadth and variety, and investigation into whether forms of bias, implicit as well as expressed, compromise our quality of teaching and mentoring, will each be important areas of inquiry for the Council in the coming year.

As many have noted, the Council faces strong challenges in considering these matters. We are mindful of the fundamental commitment at UChicago to insure diversity of opinion and viewpoint, as well as inclusion of the broadest possible spectrum of peoples, as the best ways to fulfill the unique role of universities in enhancing the societal and civil values we share and live with. At the same time, we view our charge from the President and Provost as compelling this Council to consider whether, in fact, our University embraces, is hospitable to, and encourages the widest diversity of views, as we are currently constituted.

We look forward to the coming academic year, and to continuing to learn from all those who help comprise this great academic campus community. We invite you to contact the Council to learn more about our ongoing work, and to offer suggestions or share concerns, using the portal link provided on this website. Please accept my personal wishes for a fruitful and engaged year, for yourself and for all members of the University community.