Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff,

Friday afternoon I attended the student organized rally on the Rabb steps where hundreds of our community gathered to protest against racial injustice on our campus and to read the list of demands from the Concerned Students 2015. Our students’ activism is part of a national movement of students who are determined to accelerate social change. At this rally students spoke about their experience with racism on our campus and how this has resulted in their sense of being excluded, dismissed and isolated in our community. In spite of their anger and frustration our students also shared how they have felt support on this campus, especially from faculty members in our African and Afro-American Studies department, and also in other departments. It is important to highlight that even as our students have shared their own pain, they have expressed their concerns for the burden imposed on faculty and staff who have reached out to support them. The atmosphere described by our students is painful to hear and calls on all of us to address these issues.

After the rally on the Rabb steps, a group of students marched to Bernstein-Marcus and began a sit-in in the hallway in front of my office. The list of demands was again read to me there. Members of the academic leadership and I then met with representatives of the students for more than five
hours. The conversation was deep, constructive and respectful on all sides. I appreciate the willingness of our students to not only bring forward their concerns but to engage in dialogue about these deeply complex issues. Students remained in the hallway overnight and continue to remain in the hallway through this evening.

As someone who has worked on these issues over my career and came to Brandeis because of its historical commitment to advancing social justice and free speech and expression, I am committed to working with the Board of Trustees and the broader community to further advance our diversity which is one of our founding principles. Yet this must be done in ways that are consistent with Presidential and Board governance and within the context and culture of collaborative engagement at Brandeis. The issues raised by our students have been the subject of a weekend meeting of the Board of Trustees which fully supports this letter.

As was discussed in our meeting with students, Brandeis has a long history of taking action to support diversity and inclusion and it continues in earnest to this day. But we recognize that we must go further to fulfill our founding ideals. However, reacting to immediate timetables and ultimata is not something that is productive or does justice to the work that needs to be done. And it does not allow for engagement of all members of our community. This deep engagement is critical to ensure that the course we follow takes account of the many important interests that are involved or implicated in any initiative and has broad support. It also makes it more likely that these initiatives will be long lasting and effective.

As a university founded on the principle that admission and employment are based solely on qualifications and merit, we must find ways to uphold these principles as we recruit and support a more diverse community of students, faculty and staff that is more reflective of our society as a whole. Through this commitment to diversity and inclusion, we will enhance the excellence of our university, and continue what which has been a hallmark of our school from the beginning.

However, successfully recruiting a more diverse community to Brandeis is not enough. If under-represented students, faculty, or staff feel isolated, excluded or unsafe on our campus and as a result leave, their missing voices in our classrooms, labs, in the production of our scholarship and creative works, and in our social interactions limits our excellence and our impact on the world.

Achieving a diverse and supportive campus requires a multi-faceted strategy that broadly engages every part of our university. I propose – and the Board supports -- that we use town halls, teach-ins and our existing structures (e.g. the student union, the graduate student association, the Faculty Senate, the Provost’s steering committee on diversity, and the University Advisory Committee) to identify additional ways to accelerate our current efforts to increase diversity and inclusion on our campus.
The remaining part of this letter details measures that Brandeis is already undertaking to advance diversity and inclusion and how we can and will do even more to achieve our shared goals. I organize my discussion below by general topics.

Appoint a Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion. This person will serve as the senior Brandeis official responsible for leading and coordinating efforts to create a diverse, inclusive and welcoming environment for all students, staff, faculty, alumni and community partners.

Earlier this term the Provost formed a subcommittee to prepare a job description for this position. The description will include roles and responsibilities for this new position including the need to establish an independent, neutral and confidential place for students, faculty and staff to discuss their academic and workplace issues and concerns. A search will be launched with an expectation of the position being filled by July 1, 2016.

Working to increase the percentage of under-represented faculty of color to align with the pool of academically qualified candidates.

We now employ several mechanisms to increase the numbers of under-represented groups hired into faculty positions (see the appendix for more details). These include reaching out to professional groups and recruiting organizations that support under-represented doctoral students and faculty of color and ensuring that every search committee includes a diversity representative and a chair who are trained to monitor the recruitment and search process with particular attention to increasing the pool of under-represented candidates in the pool and calling out unconscious assumptions (implicit bias) about personal characteristics related to race, gender and ethnicity, and stereotypes of certain fields, institutions, and job descriptions that may limit the proper consideration of qualified under-represented faculty.

Moreover, beginning this term, diversity representatives from all current searches will meet monthly to compare practices and issues that have arisen in their individual search committees and present a summary update to their respective Academic Dean.

Finally, in response to the findings of the recent faculty work life survey, in spring 2016 each Academic Dean will enhance their formal mentoring program for their junior faculty to increase the probability of retention. Each Academic Dean has also been tasked with developing ways to acknowledge and support the work done by those staff and faculty who are primary sources of support for students of color and first generation attending college students by the end of the spring term 2016.

Building and retaining a staff that more closely reflects the demographic characteristics of the population as a whole.
One of the subcommittees of the Provost’s Diversity Steering Committee is focused on developing recommendations for increasing the successful recruitment of staff of color. This includes examining best practices at other colleges and universities and a full set of recommendations that will be presented in the Spring of 2016 to the senior administration as well as the soon to be appointed new Vice President for Human Resources. To support the successful recruitment of new employees Brandeis, on July 1, 2015, the University established a minimum wage of $15.05 per hour for all full time employees. This rate will be reviewed annually to ensure that it meets or exceeds the economic-independence wage for Waltham, as determined by the Economic Independence Calculator.

Supporting our faculty as they develop new and innovative ways of teaching our students. This includes strengthening our pedagogy and curricular offerings that increase racial awareness and inclusion as well as reviewing general university requirements.

Last spring the Provost’s office introduced teaching innovation awards that gave priority to proposals that would develop new teaching methods or courses that addressed issues of race and inequality. In addition, the newly established Center for Teaching and Learning at Brandeis has introduced a study group for faculty “Discussing Race and Inequality in Our Classrooms”.

Going forward the Provost’s office is again providing teaching innovation funds to support this area of priority, and the Center for Teaching and Learning will expand its work with faculty groups on campus to develop their analysis and understanding of the issues are students are raising.

Expanding current required online diversity training for all faculty and staff as well as expanding and evaluating in person training workshops offered during the academic year.

The University Advisory Committee, working with members of the Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies program, are assessing the availability, content and form of our diversity training options on campus. Concerns have been raised that there needs to be more serious attention to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, and nationality, in our current training programs based on the findings of current research. I have asked the Provost to work with the UAC, WGS, and HR to verify that the training we have in place is effective and if not how to revise it.

Increasing the percentage of under-represented students of color at both the undergraduate and graduate level and support their retention at Brandeis.

Undergraduate enrollment efforts in diversity have met with some limited success (see the appendix for more details). Over the past four years this has resulted in a dramatic increase in diverse students expressing active interest in Brandeis and we hope that applications will continue to follow this trend. Our admission of diverse students has followed this trend, with admissions offered
to Black/African students growing 39 percent, and to Latino/Hispanic students by 22 percent.

Despite these efforts, enrollment of new Black/African and Latino/Hispanic students has remained flat. In simple terms, while there has been slow progress on inquiring, applying, and admitted students, the number of diverse students accepting our offer of undergraduate admission has been in steady decline during the same period.

We continue to expand our efforts to reverse this trend. Along with enlarging our outreach, we have expanded several targeted recruitment programs. This includes insuring that hundreds of diverse high schools are included in our high school visits and college fairs we attend each year, in addition to a range of Brandeis specific programs including the Myra Kraft TYP program established in 1968 and the POSSE program (see the appendix for more details).

At the graduate level we have recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the Posse Foundation to create a pipeline into our masters programs. This program also strives to provide an early action that will support increased numbers of under-represented students of color in Ph.D. programs and faculty search pools. This year, we are seeking to recruit a first cohort of students and the graduate school is reaching out to HBCU's as part of our new, active, recruitment plan.

We are also examining the current offerings from student services and career services at the undergraduate and graduate level to make appropriate adjustments so that our student support and professional development workshops are designed to meet the specific needs of our increasingly diverse student body. Recruitment and training of staff in Student Support Services and Health Services will be done to ensure that they have the cultural competency and ability to address the needs of our students. Finally, but importantly, we must and will develop more co-curricular opportunities for dialogue, collaboration and engagement for students from different backgrounds across our campus.

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I am sure that there are additional ideas in our community of how to make further progress in achieving our goals. However, as we engage in wider discussion we will need to recognize that the available resources at Brandeis are not unlimited, and even with substantial new resources and top-level commitment, change will take longer than we all would like. But I remain optimistic that we will identify ways to take our existing resources and more effectively utilize them to advance our shared goals.

Brandeis’s Diversity statement, which is a corollary of the Brandeis University mission statement, recognizes that excellence is enhanced when we have an academic community whose members have diverse cultures,
backgrounds and life experiences. In order to do this we need to work together to achieve a just and inclusive culture that embraces all dimensions of diversity and identity of the larger society. I know our community’s commitment to addressing these issues honestly and passionately will result in significant and positive change on our campus and in our society.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Lynch

Appendix - additional information

*Increasing the percentage of under-represented faculty of color to align with the pool of academically qualified candidates as well as increase the number in that pool.*

In the past two years in Arts and Sciences there has been a successful recruitment effort of faculty of color via a “cluster hiring” approach that has focused on the African diaspora. This year, as part of our Materials Research Science and Engineering Center and with $3 million in funding support from the National Science Foundation, we have committed to bring six junior research faculty from Hampton University, a HBCU, to Brandeis for one year to provide high level research training and career development. The goal is to recruit some of the participants to stay at Brandeis and become a tenure-track faculty member here (or at any other institution of higher education) and serve as a role model to our under-represented students.

*Increasing the percentage of under-represented students of color at both the undergraduate and graduate level and support their retention at Brandeis.*

Undergraduate enrollment efforts in diversity have met with some limited success. In just the past four admission cycles, Black/African American prospective students have expanded from just 7,838 students to 15,307, while Hispanic and Latino prospective students have grown from 14,832 to 26,269. This has resulted in a dramatic increase in diverse students expressing active interest in Brandeis, growing from 965 Black/African American students in the 2013 cycle to 3,102 for the coming year, and from 843 Hispanic/Latino students to 3,309 in the same period. We hope that applications will continue to follow this trend, as applications from Black/African students expanded from 745 to 997 students while Hispanic/Latino applications grew from 537 to 675.

Our admission of diverse students has followed this trend, with admissions offered to Black/African students growing from 175 to 243, and to Latino/Hispanic students from 220 to 269.

Despite these efforts, enrollment of new Black/African and Latino/Hispanic
students has remained flat. In simple terms, while there has been slow progress on inquiring, applying, and admitted students, the number of diverse students accepting our offer of undergraduate admission has been in steady decline during the same period.

We continue to expand our efforts to reverse this trend. Along with expanding our outreach as noted in the expanded prospective student pool above, we have expanded several targeted recruitment programs. This includes insuring that hundreds of diverse high schools are included in our high school visits and college fairs we attend each year, in addition to a range of Brandeis specific programs:

The SEED program (Student Exploring and Embracing Diversity) identified diverse students through an active recruitment and application process. All meals are provided, and full and partial travel scholarships are available to cover students' transportation costs to and from Brandeis. Programming includes sample classes, alumni interviews, campus tours, application workshops and performances by student groups. This serves as a primary recruitment tool for underrepresented and first-generation students.

To try and expand Brandeis’ connection with diverse communities, we have developed a major effort of outreach to Community Based Organizations (CBO’s). This is one of the most effective ways of crossing cultural, socio-economic and regional barriers in partnership with CBO’s who work directly with these students to support college access. Both during recruitment travel and on-campus, the counseling staff conducts application workshops, interview days, and case-studies programs. Among our important and lasting partnerships are with the TEAK Fellowship and Prep for Prep in Manhattan, The Chicago Scholars Program, CollegeAIM in Atlanta, Uplift Education in Dallas, Let’s Get Ready in Boston, and College Visions in Providence.

One primary example of a key CBO relationship is with Emerge, a group from Houston, Texas, whose mission is to develop underserved students to be the next generation of leaders and agents of change in their communities by preparing them to successfully attend and graduate from the nation’s top colleges. Brandeis hosted 85 of their top scholars on campus for a week in June at a discounted rate, and provided extensive academic and community-oriented programming during their stay.

Of course Brandeis continues its historic partnership with The POSSE Foundation, the nationally renowned merit-based cohort-model program founded by Brandeis alumna Debbie Bial, ’87. A group of 10 Brandeis Posse Scholars are selected from thousands of nominees in their city, for their academic, leadership and communication skills. These students receive four-year full tuition leadership scholarships to their city’s partner college. Brandeis has two Posse partner cities, Atlanta and New York. The New York Posse is STEM-focused and has become a national model for the growing STEM POSSE initiative. In addition to the many benefits of the scholarship, both Posse cohorts are flown to campus in April for a special overnight
program.

This year we were invited to become one of 107 partner schools in the Chicago Scholars Foundation. The Chicago Scholars Foundation selects, trains and mentors academically ambitious students from under-resourced communities in the Chicago area to complete college, Brandeis staff members attend a college fair they host in the summer (July) and an onsite admissions forum in the fall (October) where we will interview all applicants interested in applying to Brandeis and complete a pre-read on their file.

We also proudly offer the Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarships each year. This scholarship is awarded to entering first-year students from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds on the basis of academic performance and extracurricular participation in secondary school, outstanding community involvement and demonstrated financial need.

The Myra Kraft Transitional year program is a one of a kind 5-year, cohort-model access program, established in 1968, with a deep commitment to social justice. Each year roughly 200 students apply to Brandeis via the Myra Kraft Program, and 20 are enrolled through this process. MKTYP scholars benefit from small, intensive seminars and strong support. Students admitted through the program demonstrate tremendous potential. This year, two information sessions were held specifically for the MKTYP program.

In seeking to reverse the trend on yield, the CommUNITY program brings approximately 60 admitted students from underrepresented backgrounds in tandem with the Admitted Student Day programming. This is also a fly-in program, funding many students the opportunity to visit our campus who otherwise might not otherwise be able to do so.