

Greetings to the Bakersfield College senate,

November 26, 202

My name is Tom DeWit, I am one of the co-founders of the Umoja Community statewide, and I have been blessed to teach in an Umoja English classroom for over thirty years at Chabot College. I first met Dr. Paula Parks at a conference more than a decade ago. Since then we have not only stayed in contact, we have grown as colleagues and friends. I have worked for many years with hundreds of faculty and staff from colleges across the whole state, sometimes regarding Umoja, sometimes regarding leadership on campus, sometimes regarding transforming developmental education. Hands down, Paula Parks is one of the most thoughtful, reflective, conscientious and astute instructors I have ever had the chance to work with. Besides being brilliant, Paula is kind, reliable and accountable. Anyone who knows Dr. Parks, even for a short while, knows that she has the utmost integrity. It is nothing short of shameful that Dr. Parks and her students are being slandered and attacked at Bakersfield College by members of the Renegade Institute for Liberty.

I have read the misrepresentations and false claims directed at Umoja from members of the Renegade Institute for Liberty, and I would like to correct a few of them:

- They claim that Umoja is only open to Black students; the truth is that there are hundreds of students-- LatinX, Asian Pacific Islander, Filipino, Indian, Native American, White, Middle Eastern, European, you name it--in Umoja programs right now and there are every single year. These students are invited, embraced, fully integrated and engaged, and these students deeply appreciate their Umoja learning experience.
- They claim that Umoja is segregationist and anti-white, this is simply not true.
- They claim that Umoja encourages militancy; find me an Umoja classroom that does this, a program that does this, you can't and won't.
- They claim that safe spaces do more harm than good; Umoja includes a village space in our MOU with the colleges because it has been demonstrated in practice and the literature that a place on campus for cohorts to study and gather has a positive impact on academic outcomes

Umoja was created in response to Black students not thriving in our institutions. Umoja is intentional and deliberate about Black Excellence and supporting Black students to achieve their dreams and goals. Likewise, Umoja practitioners are intentional and deliberate about supporting the excellence, dreams and goals of all the non-Black students they serve. There is no contradiction in this intentionality. There is no exclusion in this intentionality. There is no hate in this intentionality.

The hundreds, thousands of people I have met and worked with over the last three decades in our California community colleges love this work because we serve our communities, because we are able to make higher education available to students of all ages, students at all stages of life, students of all races, students who speak languages from all over the world in their homes, students who represent a wide variety of religious and political beliefs, students who are able to express their sexual orientation and gender identity. And at my college and many others I am familiar with, students actively participate in shared governance committees, and I have for many years included Umoja students in college committees so their

perspectives are shared, and so they are empowered by learning how the institution works. In fact in the last decade, two of the student body presidents have been Umoja students. Umoja practitioners are trained and encouraged to teach through an ethic of love, it is one of our core practices. I encourage you to check out the Umoja Practices, you can google them. Love for our students runs deep in Umoja and in many faculty and staff working in our colleges.

Foremost, why I am speaking to you is out of love for our students, and in particular, in this situation created by the Renegade Institute for Liberty, for our Black students. Many of our Black students come to us already vulnerable, seeking community in our colleges and a place to experience belonging and encouragement. If you are listening or reading this and your goal is for our students, for our Black students, to thrive at Bakersfield College, then you need to stand up, speak up and reject the harmful words and actions of the Renegade Institute for Liberty. If you work here and don't love our Black students, or any particular group of students, then why do you work here? To the members of the Renegade Institute for Liberty, I don't know you personally, but if you are not here to harm students, then you need to rectify this situation, and do what you know is right.

I sincerely request that the classified, faculty and administrative leadership at Bakersfield College speak up against this purposeful and harmful slander. Many of our community college leaders, faculty and staff, including academic senates, around the state are aware of what is happening here at Bakersfield College, and frankly they are aghast that this has gone on and continues to go on.

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