

Message from President Daniels Regarding the Garland Hall Protest, May 3, 2019

Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff:

As you may know, protesters have occupied Garland Hall on the Homewood campus since the afternoon of April 3. What started as a strong expression of disagreement with university positions and policies has since been dramatically escalated by the protesters and now involves a number of serious health and safety issues.

In the last 24 hours, the protesters declared a takeover of the full building, forced the evacuation of employees, blocked ingress and egress, and, in contravention of the express direction of the city fire marshal, chained shut all exterior doors. Yesterday, the university had no choice but to close the building and suspend or relocate a broad range of crucial student services—financial aid, disability services (including administration of exams), academic advising, and international services (such as student visas), among others. We have also had to take steps to support the many staff who were subject to unacceptable harassment and intimidation by protesters.

Throughout the protest, the university has gone to great lengths to accommodate our students' free expression. We are steadfast in our commitment to free expression through protest and demonstration. Although the issues raised by the protesters have been debated and explored by our university community over the past year, we remain open to further dialogue on these and other important issues.

Regrettably, the occupation of Garland has moved beyond peaceful protest and civil disobedience. Safety and security are imperiled by protesters' refusal to comply with fire safety and emergency protocols and to respect the needs of their fellow students in accessing university services.

This is a troubling and untenable situation, and one that we must work together to bring to an end.

At the beginning of the occupation, I talked directly with the protesters about their demands. I discussed why the university holds the position that it does on the need for a sworn university police department and the paramount role of our faculty in pursuing sponsored research and training contracts—even in cases where they decide to work with an agency like ICE that has been subject to vociferous criticism. At that time, I also attempted to highlight the degree to which the intensive advocacy of many individuals and groups substantively influenced the legislation to authorize a university police department. The legislation became much better as a consequence of the robust debate and deliberation.

I have repeatedly made it clear that I am willing to meet with students to have a serious conversation about issues that are of concern to them. But I cannot, and will not, meet while students are occupying Garland Hall, particularly given some of the serious violations of our

policies, and state and municipal laws, that have occurred during their occupation. As I have frequently said, to get a meeting with me, students need not make an occupation, only an appointment.

My willingness to meet and to have a constructive discussion is firm and unequivocal. We can meet as soon as this weekend if that is helpful for students in advance of final exams. But before we meet, the students must remove their belongings from Garland, vacate the building, and bring their protest activities back in line with legal requirements and university guidelines. Reasoned, analytical, and open debate is the hallmark of our university community. As this academic year comes to a close, we have an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to these ideals, even when it appears that the differences in our positions on the issues we care about seem large and unbridgeable. Perhaps through open, generous conversation we can find glimmers of understanding that surprise us all. In a time of so much national discord and polarization, that would be truly uplifting.

Sincerely,

Ronald J. Daniels
President