**Dear Otter family,**

I write to you today, dismayed and heartbroken, struggling to put into words a message that will be an adequate response to the series of events that have recently occurred in our country. The callous disregard for George Floyd’s life by Minneapolis police is only the most recent one. There was also the killing of Ahmaud Arbery while jogging near his neighborhood, and the killing of Breonna Taylor by Kentucky police in her own home.

And now our cities from coast to coast are experiencing justified protests, as well as unfortunate rioting and chaos. All this is happening during the worst global pandemic in over one hundred years, that has killed over 100,000 Americans and caused the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression.

It is, of course, no accident that in these incidents the victims were African Americans. The systemic racism in American society has been a longstanding stain in our society, one that the more recent prevalence of video devices has now brought to glaring light. Periodically, recorded events like the savage Rodney King beating in Los Angeles or the shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri fuel understandable outrage. But the confluence of events now seems particularly ominous.

We are a society in danger of unraveling. Our politics have gone beyond polarization to demonization. Social media is creating parallel universes in which “realities” are constructed by algorithms to confirm and exacerbate our biases. The coronavirus is exposing structures of socioeconomic and racial inequality as it disproportionately impacts black and brown communities made more vulnerable by underlying health conditions, poor diets, and their overrepresentation in the at-risk occupations that keep the rest of us fed and protected. Many politicians are cynically stoking the fires of racism and xenophobia for personal advantage.

In this disturbing landscape, I turn to our university community as the arena in which, and from which, we can fight to counter these forces of darkness. We will do this by deepening our commitment to our values of respect, inclusion, and empathy. Especially empathy. Developing caring human beings is a fundamental task of education. There is a statue of Confucius on the campus of Cal State LA, which includes this quote: “Among truly educated persons there is no discrimination.” Our own Founding Vision statement commits us to produce graduates that have, “...the social responsibility and skills to be community builders.”

We need to redouble our efforts to meet that commitment together. We will take concrete steps to ensure that all our faculty and staff live by those values. We will also take concrete steps to ensure that the educational experience of our students truly uncovers and eradicates the unconscious (and conscious) biases we all have. Our university and the larger community will be better for it.

I wish all of you the best during these difficult times. Please be safe and know that we are all here for each other.

**Eduardo M. Ochoa**
President
**California State University, Monterey Bay**