



*Office of Equity and Inclusion*

February 24, 2021

Dear ETSU community,

The Office of Equity and Inclusion wishes to address the incident that occurred on February 15, 2021, when the ETSU Men's Basketball Team, including the coaching staff, decided to kneel in silent protest during the playing of the national anthem before the Chattanooga game. The team used that time to continue to bring attention to the racial inequities and injustices in this country. The head coach made it perfectly clear that his players did not mean any ill intent or disrespect to our veterans or the American flag.

We believe that 'disrespecting the flag' serves as a red herring fallacy to divert attention away from police brutality, racism, and issues which create much deeper and broader conversations that people just are not ready to have. If 'disrespecting the flag' were the real issue, uproar would have erupted on January 6<sup>th</sup> when violent rioters could be seen beating police officers with the American flag.

The Office of Equity and Inclusion recognizes that there are servicemen and women, veterans, or family members of veterans who may be offended by the actions of our players. Again, their intentions were never to offend or be disrespectful.

The young men on our basketball team are not entertainers; they are living, breathing human beings who once they step off the court, have the potential to be the next George Floyd. They are individuals who represent many families, communities, and lived experiences. They are not one-dimensional, but student-athletes who have dreams, visions, and hopes of leaving this earth better than they found it. They are young men learning that they have voices and are discovering how to best use them. Our student-athletes are not only from various parts of this country but other countries as well. Their very presence represents the diversity and differences that make ETSU a unique and inclusive campus.

As stated in the university's mission and values, "PEOPLE come first, are treated with dignity and respect, and are encouraged to achieve their full potential; RELATIONSHIPS are built on honesty, integrity, and trust; DIVERSITY of people and thought is expected; EXCELLENCE is achieved through teamwork, leadership, creativity, and a strong work ethic; EFFICIENCY is achieved through wise use of human and financial resources; and COMMITMENT to intellectual achievement is embraced."

As a graduate of North Carolina A&T State University, where four college students known as the Greensboro Four, made their voices heard at a downtown Woolworth's counter, I can appreciate the desire and eagerness of young people to influence their community. We the Office of Equity and Inclusion support our student-athletes and will work with them to create a platform to allow them to evoke lasting changes in this region and beyond.

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Vice President for Equity and Inclusion