



February 5, 2024

Hello, Spartans! Welcome to February. As I considered what to write in this latest message, I thought about how this is Black History Month, a time to celebrate the achievements and acknowledge the contributions of African Americans throughout history.

I also thought about the other Heritage Months that take place throughout the year, including Asian Pacific Islander Desi Americans (May), Hispanics and Latinos (Sept. 15 to Oct. 15), and Native American and Indigenous Peoples (November).

It is crucial that we devote special attention to often-marginalized populations. These observances and associated special events help educate us on overlooked histories and accomplishments, allow us to delve deeper into different identities, and assist in raising voices that are often quieted or silenced.

This year, I'd like to challenge us all to do more as we look at Black History Month and other Heritage Months. Let's look at populations, not in isolation and not only on certain days, but every day and as integral parts of our country's rich tapestry. There is no history without the history of all ethnic, racial, and other groups, so I urge us all to see how we can take a more holistic approach to understanding each other.

America's tapestry of different people, cultures, religions, races, ethnicities, and identities — that is what makes America great. And that tapestry is what makes USC Upstate great too. We want everyone to feel involved, important, represented, and heard.

To that end, our Intercultural Education and Engagement (IEE) office fosters cultural awareness, supports students, and builds an inclusive campus through informative, equity-driven programs. The IEE system helps students develop an understanding of identity and positionality and acts as a liaison to culturally based student organizations by supporting their large-project ideas to promote inclusion and advocate for equity.

We at USC Upstate are also looking outside of our country for insight and perspective.

A team of my USC Upstate colleagues and I recently returned from Germany, where we met with representatives of our partner university, the University of Applied Sciences Landshut, and three industries with North American headquarters or a similarly strong presence in the Upstate of South Carolina: BMW, Draexlmaier Group, and SAR.

Our conversation affirmed the fact that the economy in our region is tied to, and enhanced by, people and companies and cultures located more than 4,000 miles away — and that it's crucial we understand each other, no matter the distance or the differences, in order for us all to succeed.

With all of that in mind, I'd like to challenge you to go deeper during Black History Month, during all Heritage Months, and during every month of the year. Let's do more than share famous quotes on social media. Let's take the opportunity to get to know each other, and reach across cultures, countries, and backgrounds.

Exposure to different people can change us, help us understand and respect each other, and cultivate a culture of inclusivity and equity — and Reach Greater Heights at USC Upstate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bennie L. Harris". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "B".

Dr. Bennie L. Harris

Chancellor