

Pat Pitney

Interim President

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Black History Month: An opportunity to understand and celebrate in solidarity

Every February, we celebrate Black History Month to reflect on our nation's past and recognize the transformative contributions that Black and African-Americans have made to our country. Through this observance, we are provided an inspiring context for better understanding our history and where we are today.

I stand in solidarity with higher education leaders across our universities and the country in condemning the recent threats made against historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Depriving students of their sense of safety, and interrupting their learning, strikes at the heart of any university community.

Black history is America's history and Alaska's history. We honor this through the values we hold for our university system, and our renewed commitment to increasing diversity and becoming more welcoming to all people. Innovation is born from diversity. Supporting diversity is paramount to our success.

Here are some actions we can take to understand why Black History Month matters:

- Learn about stories and life-changing contributions of Black Americans
- Attend your university's Black History Month events
- Reflect on areas of personal growth and how to strengthen community and empathy

As we promote diversity across the university system, I encourage everyone to move beyond spreading awareness to a place of celebration. *Diversity makes us who we are* and we must convey this message and take a stand against those who would obstruct progress. We can use Black History Month and other cultural celebrations as opportunities to engage in honest dialogue, with open ears and minds, to reach a level of appreciation to build solidarity and move toward prosperity for all.

Sincerely,

Pat Pitney, Interim President
University of Alaska