Dear students,

Welcome to the new academic year!

Social Work is a profession that requires passion and determination to help make the world a better place. Ours is the only profession that can articulate that “Social Justice is a verb”. It is a profession that stands up to and takes action on the myriad injustices that we see playing out before our eyes.

We have all signed up to a noble career steeped in history, principles and values of social justice...simply...a career of responsible & empowering stewardship of our individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations to promote and maintain a just, global society.

The events in Charlottesville, VA on 8/11-12/2017, that claimed the life of a brave soul, Heather Heyer, is a call for our profession to “engage” to right wrong wherever we see it. This is not an issue of Democrat/Republican; Conservative/Liberal; Urban/Rural; Inner cities/suburbs, or any other false dichotomies society creates for a false narrative of certain vulnerable individuals/groups. This is an issue of common decency in civil life & discourse. These acts, done in the pretext of protecting “history”, statues, monuments or symbols, exist only for two purposes. Power and Control. To subjugate, belittle, hurt, injure and, honestly, terrorize the population we are called to serve with respect, dignity, and purpose. These injustices are a human rights issue that we CANNOT afford to ignore, but challenge wherever and whenever we see it: in classrooms; in communities; in policies; within our friends, professional and family circles. We are responsible to CALL IT out.

You and your classmates have a responsibility that I want you all to take very seriously. It is easy to claim the right of the 1st amendment of the constitution, which includes:

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<th>Freedom of Speech</th>
<th>Freedom to Assemble Peaceably</th>
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<td>Freedom of Religion</td>
<td>Freedom to Petition the Government for a</td>
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<td>Freedom of the Press</td>
<td>Redress of Grievances</td>
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*But it comes with a responsibility also.* Some scholars highlight that there are some categories of speech that are not protected. These being:

- Obscenity
- Defamation (including libel and slander)
- Perjury
- Incitement to imminent lawless action
- Solicitations to commit crimes
- Fighting words
- Child Pornography
- Blackmail
- True Threats
- Treason (if committed verbally)
Plagiarism (of copyrighted material)

Loyola University Chicago’s mission goes on to state: “Jesuit education strives to seek the truth and to form each student into a whole person of solidarity who will take responsibility for the real world. Our students must have an educated awareness of society and culture, a sense of being interrelated and interconnected, and a commitment to act for the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged and the oppressed”. http://www.luc.edu/mission/index.shtml (Global Solidarity)

So, what is my “ask” of you? I ask that, YOU:

- Listen to understand, not to respond for respond sake
- Challenge ideas to grow intellectually & professionally, not to prove a point
- Respect diversity in all its hues
- Invite the “quiet” one in your class to the discussions
- Engage to learn, to understand, to teach, to challenge...to grow
- Learn to make your point & walk away. Today will not solve all problems, there is always work for tomorrow. Be & stay safe to take on the next day.
- Stand up to hate, to racism, to sexism, to antisemitism, to intolerance, to bigotry, and to all forms of discriminatory actions that has just one purpose: To make someone feel inferior and to injure the very essence of life
- Create a learning experience that is full of lived experiences and myriad worldviews
- Be humble and kind

Our promise to you is that we will always provide an educational environment where intellectual curiosity is nurtured, where you will have a safe place to explore, articulate, debate, and empower yourself for the journey ahead. You are a valued member of the Loyola family.

We will keep our promise to you as faculty, staff, field instructors, and other stakeholders every day. Every day. I ask, that you do so also for our profession and the communities we serve.

I am looking forward to meeting many of you during your time with us. I leave you with a prayer that I listen to on days I am troubled with what I see around me. I call it an anthem for our profession.

Wishing you the best in your journey through the complexities of life...

With much regards and sincerity,
Goutham Menon

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