

Anti-Racism Action Steps

Department of Communication, University of Maryland

We, as the tenure-track faculty of the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland, stand in solidarity against the systematic violence targeting the Black and African American community. We grieve the tragic killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery that extends the history of systemic violence against Blacks and African Americans from 1619 forward. We have experienced such acts of violence and systemic racism on our own campus in recent years with the murder of Richard Collins III by a UMD student, prompted by racism and hate, and the untimely and preventable death of UMD student Jordan McNair from heat stroke during football practice. White supremacists have also distributed fliers on our campus and hung nooses in fraternity houses. We have been listening to students who have shared their experiences and organized for change, so we understand that our Black students and colleagues shoulder a particular burden while enduring these and other incidents and learning and working on our campus. The events capture the pervasive racism at work on our campus and throughout the United States. We acknowledge that these issues are not simply individual acts of racism and violence but that our university and department must actively work toward undoing systemic racism embedded in our society and within our walls.

We stand ready as partners and as a resource for students on campus in addressing the climate and culture in which these acts take place. We understand that our work must be guided throughout with a commitment to listening, self-reflection, and adopting the perspectives of others. We begin by acknowledging that we must do better. We renew and affirm our commitment to turning productive communication into constructive action. We acknowledge our specific role as scholars of communication in dismantling systems of oppression through our research, teaching, and public scholarship.

As educators and teachers, we recommit to our departmental principles of promoting diversity and inclusion. We insist that justice be at the center of our department's guiding principle: *Communication for the Public Good*. In support of our departmental mission, we commit to the following actions steps:

- (1) Ensure that every student, graduate and undergraduate, graduating from the Department of Communication will study the role of communication in perpetuating racism and violence and in promoting equity, progress, inclusion, and justice. Create new modules for existing departmental courses, and verify that every course counting toward our "diversity and inclusion" requirement has anti-racist content. Work to identify where such social justice issues are being addressed in our courses and share such teaching-learning materials as models for others to follow. Support the addition of new courses over the next five years to the undergraduate curriculum that grapples with anti-Black racism, racial inequalities and social injustices. (Fall 2020 through Spring of 2025).
- (2) Advance public dialogue pedagogy and practice by initiating public dialogues about anti-Black racism on campus. Develop course work in public dialogue so that our students gain

experience and confidence in facilitating productive public dialogues around social injustices, hate, violence, and microaggressions across intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and nationality (Summer and Fall 2020, Spring 2021).

- (3) Develop classes on political advocacy to mentor students interested in social justice activism. Students will have opportunities to participate in internships and community-based projects associated with social justice advocacy. Provide access to these course materials in an open source way so that people outside our university community may also benefit from the knowledge created in these spaces. (Fall 2020 and Spring 2021).
- (4) Conduct engaged, community interventions that put our research expertise in service of racial justice (Fall 2020 and beyond).
- (5) Recommit to our mission of nurturing diverse communities of faculty for higher education. We will equip BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) graduate students and postdoctoral associates for faculty positions and leadership in higher education. We seek more applications for [Maryland's President's Postdoctoral Fellowship Program](#) designed to “contribute to diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunity in higher education and at the University of Maryland.” We recognize an obligation to mentor postdoctoral associates for a tenure-track positions (at Maryland or another institution) or for a career track of their choosing. We also will seek to nominate more Black faculty as part of the Office of Faculty Affairs’ [Assistant Professor Diversity Initiative](#) and the [Senior Targeted Hire Initiative](#). We also commit to developing a list of tangible ways to ensure that more Black faculty are hired over the next five years in consultation with graduate students and faculty. As we complete such work, we pledge to seek continued mentoring from campus resources, including the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Consortium on Race, Gender and Ethnicity, and Advance among other groups (Beginning Fall 2020 and continuing indefinitely).
- (6) Create a colloquium series designed to feature the social justice research of departmental scholars with a focus on anti-Black racism in 2020-2021 (Summer and Fall 2020 and continuing into Spring 2021).
- (7) Invigorate the work of our new undergraduate student group--the Black Communication Society--as another means of continuing to reshape our curriculum, develop an inclusive department, address systemic issues in the department, and support career goals (Fall 2020 and Spring 2021).
- (8) Re-evaluate our admissions practices for graduate students and propose, for example, the elimination of GREs as a requirement for admission and efforts to provide greater fellowship funding support for students of color. We will also challenge our recruitment process to specifically target students of color traditionally overlooked by graduate programs, ensuring that a graduate student cohort reflects the diversity we hope to see in the profession going forward (Fall 2020 and Spring 2021).

- (9) Establish a working group that continues to explore departmental and university systems that promote racism. The group's aim is to propose more action steps to promote greater equity and inclusion and to promote the safety and wellbeing for students of color on our campus. This working group will also seek out ways to listen to students, staff, and faculty in our department about their experience with racism in the department with an eye toward creating a more supportive space and challenging our department to be a part of the solution at the University of Maryland. The working group will plan two externally-facilitated conversations that will be held in the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021 during the departmental assembly meetings. The working group will develop a set of criteria to establish firm progress on these goals that meets the approval of faculty, staff, and graduate students (Fall 2020 and Spring 2021).

We look forward to working with colleagues across the department on implementing these action steps and discussing additional ones proposed through other action-oriented statements and our forthcoming conversations. Our aim is to strengthen COMMunity through our solidarity.

Tenure-Track Faculty in COMM at UMD