June 01, 2020

RE: Statement on George Floyd and Black Lives

Dear Community Partners, Faculty, Staff, and Students:

The callous murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020 has galvanized protests across the nation and world to contest the perpetual devaluation of Black lives in the United States. For me personally, this recent news struck particularly hard as a former resident of the Twin Cities where Philando Castile was also unjustly murdered in 2016 in front of his partner and young daughter by law enforcement before I moved to Tacoma (and as everyone is likely aware, Minnesota’s law-enforcement entities, as is true across the United States, have a long history of brutalizing racialized bodies, especially Black boys and men).

Words have been difficult for me to express, but I write to offer a couple of points of reflection.

First, the anger, hurt, pain, and re/living racialized trauma is something that our Black colleagues, communities, families, neighbors, and students have had to endure in a society that continues to devalue Black lives. Yet, as we all know, it is not new news that Black bodies have been disproportionately criminalized and racialized in our schools and society. It is not new news that our laws and systems tend to benefit some but not all. It is not new news that Black lives are exploited by many for self-serving purposes. Despite ongoing claims that we have experienced substantial racial progress over the past several decades, the reality is that our nation is enmeshed in over four centuries of anti-Black racism and racialized trauma that has remained unresolved.

Second, I invite all of us, as educators and leaders, to find ways, big and small, to carry out our social responsibility to educate and empower others to eradicate inequities and injustices in our schools and society. There are ways that we, as a collective and as individuals, could take action beyond simply repeating tired platitudes such as “This has to stop.” Continuing to share information, knowledge, and resources is one of many ways that we all could step up to interrupt these cycles of racial injustice, racialized violence, and White supremacy. There are many great articles and resources out there, but “11 Things to Do Besides Say ’This Has To Stop’ in the Wake of Police Brutality” could be a starting point to take concrete action.

Our Center for Equity & Inclusion at UW Tacoma is hosting various community events and healing circles and there will be many more community dialogues -please join as you are able. I also will continue to push UW Tacoma leadership to take explicit action to dismantle anti-Blackness and other forms of individual and institutional racism as it manifests on this campus through everyday behaviors, as well as through various policies and practices. Moving forward
and toward various institutional actions such as fostering inclusive learning and working environments; instituting more equitable hiring and retention practices to move beyond so-called “good-faith efforts” to diversify the faculty, leadership, and staff; and supporting BIPOC-owned businesses in Tacoma and beyond are just a few examples of what we as a campus community could do to show our commitment to equity and social justice.

The School of Education will continue to stand in community and solidarity with our Black community and neighbors as justice is served for all and not just some. More than ever, now is the time for us to step up to dismantle racial inequities at all levels wherever we go and whatever we do. While there is still much work to be done (as the work is never-ending), I am proud of the School of Education’s faculty, staff, and students, as well as our community partners, for largely living up to our promise as an anti-racist community through our actions, behaviors, and words. As a collective and as individuals, we fully understand our moral and social responsibility; we urge others to also step up as we engage in long-overdue conversations about institutional and societal reparations.

Respectfully Yours,

Rachel
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