

Department of Communication Studies at Towson University
Statement of Solidarity and Action

The Department of Communication Studies at Towson University stands in solidarity against systemic racism and anti-Blackness, which continues to affect Black people in so many tragic ways. The department faculty and staff recognize the brutal deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd in just the past few months, the 2015 death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, and thousands of Black people killed by police and white supremacists across the United States throughout history. We also recognize that the state of Maryland confines the highest percentage of African Americans in the nation and that 1 out of every 3 residents of Baltimore City are incarcerated. We continue to frame the police brutality and murder of Black people within the context of anti-Blackness and systemic racism and acknowledge that People of Color face inequalities in employment, housing, health care, education, and the criminal justice system. The department faculty understand that many of our colleagues, students, and members of the larger TU community are angry, upset, frustrated, distressed, and rightly so. We have witnessed massive protests in more than 140 cities across the nation and the world and we are deeply committed to our right to protest. We have also witnessed police aggression toward numerous journalists covering the protests and we rebuke these actions toward our colleagues who are working for the public good to televise and cover these monumental and impactful protests. We continue to witness police and governmental aggression against protesters, and we stand against these tactics that attempt to silence the pain being expressed vis-à-vis protest.

We stand in solidarity with each other and our students and we commit to using our expertise to effect change. The Department of Communication Studies serves nearly 500 majors and minors and is home to fifteen full-time faculty and staff. Our students are more than 50% students of color and the faculty and staff stand with our students in the effort to alter the vectors of systemic racism to dismantle white cisheteropatriarchy.

The Department of Communication Studies reinforces its commitment to anti-racist pedagogy. In the classroom we stand with our students with an anti-racist pedagogy that:

- Necessitates that white professors bear the responsibility to guide white students in discussing and enacting socially responsible and anti-racist communication practices.
- Affirms that Black students will not be burdened to speak on behalf of People of Color in the COMM classroom.
- Works to recognize and develop a critically conscious communication practice amongst all students that questions white privilege and performative allyship in all communication contexts (media, rhetoric, organizational, health, performance, interpersonal, etc.).
- Recognizes the disproportionate threat of discrimination and violence aimed at LGBTQ+ students of color, particularly transgender students of color. The intersection of racism and homo/bi/transphobia adds pressure on the employment, housing, healthcare, and wellbeing of our LGBTQ+ students.

- Asks COMM faculty members to reflect on their anti-racist pedagogy in two ways—as part of our self-reflection on teaching and as a component of a collective faculty reflection on teaching during faculty retreats.
- Values language variation and a broad articulation of knowledge that moves beyond formal knowledge and Standard American English as the standard for knowledge production.
- Calls out members of our community who engage in racist speech and calls in members of our community who have questions about anti-racism and that need help understanding the complex system of racism and oppression in the United States.
- Recognizes anti-Blackness exists in communities of color and non-Black COMM faculty of color must continue to be self-reflexive of their own pedagogical practices and to call out anti-Blackness in their own communities of color.

Further, we are committed to taking the following actions to affirm our commitment to our Black students:

1. We commit to providing an academic experience in the COMM classroom that utilizes a diversity of scholarly voices, including Black voices.
2. We recognize that equal access to affordable healthcare is an intersectional issue that impacts Black students disproportionately. We pledge to recognize that doctor and medical notes are, therefore, not always an option for our students and align our course policies with this recognition as our guide.
3. We reaffirm that we are ready to listen and act when our Black students encounter racial bias or experience microaggressions within the COMM classroom. This includes our commitment to hold each other accountable for our own implicit bias in the classroom and in faculty meetings.
4. We will advocate for increasing the number of Black professors within the COMM faculty and across the campus and will ensure that all COMM search committees prioritize diversifying our faculty and our curriculum. This advocacy work will happen through committee channels, diversity and inclusion work, and shared governance.
5. We pledge to host department-wide programming around issues of anti-blackness, systemic racism, and white supremacy with a focus on anti-racism advocacy work during each semester.
6. We commit to inviting and paying equitably COMM scholars of color to speak, perform, workshop, write, and stand in solidarity with our students on topics that intersect with the work in COMM classrooms. We pledge that we will actively and intentionally diversify the pool of speakers and panelists to always involve scholars, activists, practitioners, and artists who are able to speak to the issues most important to our Black students.
7. We recognize that pursuing racial justice is a process and we will continue to actively seek opportunities to address challenges faced by our Black students and other students of color.

In solidarity,

The Department of Communication Studies at Towson University

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