

Dean's Statement on Racial Injustice, June 3, 2020

Many across our country are hurting. These are dark days and although I have sometimes found myself at a loss, I *must* find words to share with you and others. The deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd bring to the forefront issues that have divided Americans for a long time. As Interim Provost Richard Starnes shared with us this week, the answer to what we can do is both simple and complex. I believe that in the College of Education and Allied Professions modeling empathy and inclusion is at the very core of who we are and what we do. Like many of you, I am sad and I am angry, bearing witness, yet again, to the workings of systemic oppression, racism, and racial injustice. The legacy of violence, inequality, and inequity has been directed at and endured by people of color, particularly Black people and Black communities, for the entirety of history in our country. If we do nothing, remain silent, then our inaction is complicit in the shaping of a future that mirrors our past and present. I ask that you stand with me and intervene. Our efforts to gather and share resources, join organizations, collaborate with others, and build partnerships that are anti-racist and work to educate people is key. Like you, I have read much over the past days, including the thoughts of our WCU Provost and Chancellor. I would like to also take this opportunity to share statements from other UNC System leaders:

UNC Greensboro Chancellor Frank Gilliam said "to sustain our democracy, and enact our shared values of freedom, prosperity, equality, safety, and a brighter future for our children, we must solve our problems collaboratively. People are mistaken if they believe the outcry over the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis is the singular cause of protests across the country. Rather the protests are the expression of mounting frustration over the country's inability to solve the systemic inequities central to quality of life."

N.C. A&T University Chancellor Harold Martin wrote about the vantage point of the university, and the tools and knowledge our faculty and students can bring. "If the aftermath of George Floyd's death is, indeed, not to be mere protest but a predicate for change in which minds, hearts, policies and practices are forever altered, it will only do so if it is nourished by knowledge and truth. Let us commit ourselves collectively to surfacing those invaluable ingredients of change."

We have the opportunity ... no, we have the *responsibility* to educate ourselves and our students. We can do better. I can do better as a leader, and we can do better as individuals and as a campus, to provide a safe environment, re-examine our practices, and ensure we continue to implement the recommendations of the WCU Joint Task Force on Racism, our own Diversity Committee, and continue to engage in ongoing and new work together*.

I write this message to everyone in the College of Education and Allied Professions, but I want to specifically say to our WCU Black faculty, staff, and students ... I hear your pain, my words may not be enough but know that I understand this moment to be bigger than Breonna, Ahmaud, and George. I also understand that your Black Lives Matter at no cost to mine or anyone else's.

*See below for the Psychology Department Social Justice Scholarship Series and the HESA open discussion as examples. Look [here](#) for an overview of the eight recommendations of the Joint Task Force on Racism, or [here](#) for the full report. And, visit the [WCU Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Programs](#) to learn more about the mission and vision of its work and our Chief Diversity Office, Ricardo Nazario y Colon. Additionally, I am proud to share three examples of departmental and program-level work. The first is a statement created by the Psychology Department and, like you, look forward to participating in the Social Justice Scholarship Series (SJSS) mentioned below. This statement will be emailed to all psychology majors, minors, and graduate students, in addition to being posted on the departmental website and social media platforms.

The Psychology Department strives to create a supportive and inclusive environment for faculty, staff, and students of all backgrounds. As such, we are saddened by the most recent racist events targeting the Black community and we recognize the negative impact of disparate treatment in communities of color. The unjust and traumatic effects of discrimination have been present for centuries and continue to this day. We acknowledge the trauma to the Black community of witnessing these events repeatedly and we stand against all acts of oppression, including harassment and isolation.

We will purposefully challenge ourselves to identify and discuss issues of race, color, and ethnicity, and the impact(s) these have on students, faculty, and staff. To this end, the Psychology Department will start the "Social Justice Scholarship Series (SJSS)" this coming fall semester to discuss societal problems related to race, discrimination, and injustice. This series is open to all faculty, staff, and students. We believe that one of the best ways to fight discrimination, hatred, and ignorance is through education and earnest dialogue.

The second example are two open discussions on zoom hosted by the Higher Education Student Affairs (HESA) program faculty as a means to reaffirm commitment to creating a more just world and to caring for those around us. These conversations are informal times for students to come and talk or listen, to discuss any thoughts and/or feelings related to the death of George Floyd or the response to that death. These are times for dialogue (if desired) but also to just be in community.

The third example is a statement created by the Parks and Recreation Management (PRM) and Experiential and Outdoor Education (EOE) program faculty, sent to students, and posted to alumni social media pages.

We have felt the gamut of emotions over the past few weeks, from immense sadness to anger. What we know is that the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd are not isolated events, but products of a system that actively perpetuates racism and has been woven into the fabric of our nation for hundreds of years. In silence and inaction, we become a part of that system; therefore, what we want you to know is the PRM & EOE faculty and programs strongly stand against racism. We also want to say, to our Black students, alumni, and community, we see you, we hear you, we stand with you and we recognize the negative impact of disparate treatment in communities of color. Black lives do matter. Your lives matter.

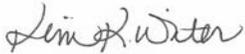
There is no room for discrimination, hate, oppression, or racism in our program, in our broader field, or in our beloved "Green Room." In our various careers, parks and recreation managers and experiential and outdoor educators most often serve the public, and frequently manage or work in leisure spaces (public parks, pools, gyms, camps, ropes courses, trails, rivers, etc.). One trend that we can see, especially in recent events, is the death, attack, or assault of Black women and men while enjoying public parks, or participating in leisure activities. Ahmaud Arbery was killed by a white man while jogging. Christian Cooper had the police called on him by a white woman while bird watching in Central Park. The examples are, quite frankly, endless.

We believe that PRM and EOE professionals have a responsibility to make our leisure spaces, our parks, our programs more just, inclusive, and welcoming spaces. We can do better, we need to do better, and as a PRM and EOE program we commit to doing better. Our starting place will be education. As educators, we believe that we have the responsibility to educate ourselves and our students about white privilege, racism, how to be actively anti-racist and "best practices" to make our spaces more inclusive and socially just. The work of justice takes self-reflection and self-work as we understand our places in the racialized environments in which we exist, while considering the changes we need to make in an effort to dismantle racial discrimination and hate. We are challenging ourselves as faculty members to become more educated and take steps towards becoming anti-racist; we will intentionally include more race, ethnicity, and social justice-focused material in our courses. We invite you to join us in ongoing education, open intentional dialogue, and action. Below are some resources we have

gathered to help educate ourselves. These are just a select few that we find especially powerful. While we do our personal work and revamp our courses to be more justice-focused, we encourage you to engage in your own education. Should you wish to get more resources, please contact any faculty member who will be happy to assist.

Last, the CEAP Diversity Committee has collected a set of resources to aid members of the CEAP family educate, learn, reflect, and strategize around racial justice in direct response to the murder of George Floyd and the racialized incidents across the nation and globe. Co-Chairs Yancey Gulley and Brandi Hinnant-Crawford are working with representatives of the full spectrum of academic program areas in the college. These resources will be uploaded to the [CEAP Diversity Committee website](#) shortly and should be viewed as a living document. If faculty or staff are interested in joining the committee, please email ceapdiversity@wcu.edu.

I appreciate all of you and invite you to join me in this work.



Kim K. Winter, Ph.D.
Dean & Professor