



Northern Illinois University

Your Future. Our Focus.

Dear Black Students at NIU,

What an incredible year 2020 has been so far. We understand that many of you are angry, afraid, and frustrated. We, too, are angry, afraid, and frustrated. We write to you as Black faculty members at NIU who feel compelled to address the utter outrage, grief, and despair that is present in the ongoing police violence against Black people and the lack of respect, racial sensitivity and protection we feel as members of the NIU community. We want you to know that we see you and we stand with you. We know that all of you are working hard to just keep going with the political, social, spiritual, physical, psychological emotional, and existential wars that are being waged against us. We also know that all institutions, including ours, have a role to play in the ongoing work focusing on racial and social justice.

In the first several months of this year, many Black people have been shamelessly killed by police officers or white vigilantes. Ahmaud Arbery was jogging around his Brunswick, Georgia, neighborhood when white men chased him down in a pickup truck and shot him multiple times. Breonna Taylor was sleeping in her apartment in Louisville, Kentucky, when police implementing a no-knock search warrant rushed into her home and killed her. George Floyd was confronted by police in Minneapolis and was choked to death as one of the officers knelt on his neck before a crowd of onlookers. These were just some of the many violent deaths at the hands of racist officers and citizens this year giving rise to Black Lives Matter protests and a call for the destruction of systemic racism. This call has been resounded not only in our law enforcement and court systems but within our universities as well.

As we struggle for our lives and dignity, our existence has been further threatened by the invasion of a coronavirus pandemic which has killed more than 200,000 people in America, disproportionately sickening and killing Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people. And, to add to our already uncomfortable, downright terrifying situations, we have had to adapt to a new normalcy of teaching and learning as best we can, only to have it disrupted by racists who sought to damage our cultural space through racist graffiti sprayed on the wall of the Center for Black Studies.

Like you, we are tired of speeches and workshops that are symbolic, at best. What we need is a dismantling of racist policies and practices to allow everyone to exist on a level playing field. What we offer here is an acknowledgment of the historical and current realities,

commitments we make to you as NIU faculty, and suggestions for how to care for yourselves during this time.

Whether you are African-American, African, Caribbean, Black, Afro-Latinx or of partial African descent, we suspect that the recent events in the nation and on campus compounded by COVID-19 have and continue to impact each of you and your families. As such, we are committed to the following actions and hope you will consider making similar commitments as well:

- **Protecting the Environment:** We will join in working to create a safe and inclusive environment for students and faculty of all ethnicities, racial backgrounds, religions, ability status, socioeconomic backgrounds, first-generation status, sexuality, and gender identities.
- **Using our Voices:** We will speak up when we witness acts of racism, sexism, homophobia, oppressive language, ideas, or actions whether these actions come from other faculty, staff, administrators, or students. We encourage you to do the same. We will continue to educate ourselves about our own history as well as the history of white privilege and oppression within this country, our communities, and academia. We will share anti-racism resources with each other and you.
- **Working with Administrators:** We are committed to working with the president, provost, department chairs, college deans, and our colleagues in hiring and retaining additional Black faculty and ensuring that policies and procedures are fair and equal.
- **Working with Others:** We are committed to working with other units on campus to ensure that all students and specifically Black students have equity of access to all educational opportunities at the university.

We encourage you to engage in purposeful practices of caring for yourselves as you also look out for one another. This self-care might look like:

- **Permission:** Give yourself permission to NOT take responsibility to educate the administration about race, equity, or experiences of oppression related to intersectional identities that you hold. It is not your job to help them do theirs.
- **Process:** Find creative, non-threatening opportunities for release and processing of your anger, frustration, and marginalization. Indulge in those activities that nurture your soul i.e. favorite foods, music, dance, watching movies release anger and to feel rejuvenated each day/week. If what you need feels prohibitive (financially or otherwise), pool resources with friends to find creative ways to get these needs met.
- **Affirm:** Find ways to affirm your own identity and reality as a Black person – your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Your voices matter. Your actions matter. Your vote matters. You matter! We stand with you and are here for you.

In closing, as you continue working on your degree, remember –

The strongest actions you can have is to love yourself, be yourself and achieve among those who never believed you could. Walk and Act like you have 3000 ancestors walking behind you.

Respectfully submitted,

Stanley Arnold, Ph.D., History, sarnold@niu.edu

Abu Bah, Ph.D., Sociology, abah@niu.edu

Bobby Broom, M.M., Music, bbroom@niu.edu

Dawn Brown, D.P.T., Allied Health and Communication Disorders, dbrown36@niu.edu

Shondra Clay, Ph.D., Interdisciplinary Health Professions, sclay@niu.edu

Sundiata Djata, Ph.D., History, sdjata@niu.edu

Joseph Flynn, Ph.D., Curriculum, and Instruction; Black Studies, jeflynn@niu.edu

Elisa Fredericks, Ph.D., Marketing, elisa@niu.edu

Laverne Gyant, Ed.D., Counseling, Adult and Higher Education, lgyant@niu.edu

Janice Hamlet, Ph.D., Communication, jhamlet@niu.edu

DeAnna Harris-McVoy, Ph.D., Family and Consumer Sciences, dharrismckoy@niu.edu

Rebecca Hunt, Ph.D., Educational Technology, Research and Assessment, rhunt@niu.edu

Yolanda King, J.D., Law, yking@niu.edu

Ismael Montana, Ph.D., History, montana@niu.edu

Jane Rose Njue, Ph.D., Family and Consumer Science, jnjue@niu.edu

Emerson Sebastiao, Ph.D., Kinesiology and Physical Education, esebastiao@niu.edu

Reggie Thomas, M.M., Music, reggiethomas@niu.edu

Teresa Wasonga, Ph.D., Leadership, Education and Foundation, twasonga@niu.edu

C. Sheldon Woods, Ph.D., Curriculum and Instruction, cswoods@niu.edu

Ronnie Wooten, D.M.A., Music, rwooten@niu.edu

Natalie Young, Ed.D., Special and Early Education, nyoung@niu.edu