

June 19, 2020

Dear President Folt,

The Academic Senate Executive Board welcomes your “Call to action” to the USC community on confronting anti-Blackness and systemic racism. We applaud the positive steps you have made and the commitments you offer for the future. We offer the following comments in the spirit of reinforcing your efforts to unite us in this struggle. We address in order the points made in your letter.

Von KleinSmid. We welcome, first, the long overdue decision to remove the name and bust of Rufus Von KleinSmid from a prominent historic building on the University Park Campus. This decision was made after years of advocacy by Black students, faculty, and staff who protested, petitioned, and participated in numerous task forces and committees that called for the removal of the Von KleinSmid name and image from public spaces. We thank you for taking this action, and we urge you to continue to empower the Nomenclature Policy Committee to continue their work.

Going further, we suggest that USC commission a study of the history of USC’s race and community relations. A more thorough accounting of our past would help us take the measure of how deeply racism is built into the fabric of our institution and how best we can go about dealing with that history. USC has extraordinarily talented historians capable of contributing to this task.

Department of Public Safety. The creation of a new Community Advisory Board for the Department of Public Safety (DPS) is a step in the right direction. The Senate’s Campus Climate Committee made this recommendation in 2015, and we continue to support its establishment. The effectiveness of such a body will be determined by (among other things) the charge it is given, what information it has access to, and whether its recommendations are made public. We believe that the Board must have access to all data/information (except information that legally must be kept private), including detailed budgets, incident reports, officer disciplinary records, training protocols, and memoranda of understanding. The charge of the Board should include a full assessment of the current range of DPS’s functions and how well it is fulfilling them. Consistent with the demands of the Black Lives Matter movement, we hope that the Board is encouraged to explore opportunities to dissociate DPS’s policing functions from the various support functions that it has assumed over the years. The Board should also be asked to review and reassess DPS’s relationship and dealings with the

LAPD. Finally, the Board's role should not be merely advisory; it should be empowered and have the authority to provide real oversight.

Taskforce on DEI. We welcome your commitment to reenergize the President's and Provost's Task Force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. But task forces are only effective if their recommendations are implemented. For this group to make a real difference for underrepresented students, staff, and faculty in general--and more specifically for the Black USC community--it will need to have the funding, resources, and personnel to implement in the academic year 2020-2021 the recommendations that have been made by previous task forces and committees. Some more specific suggestions about its charge are included at the end of this letter.

Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer (CDEIO). We welcome the creation of this position. Our DEI efforts span many facets of university functioning, and so this responsibility cannot be devolved to any one of the functions represented in your senior leadership team. As the recent demonstrations have made abundantly clear, DEI is not only a matter of great moral urgency but also of great strategic significance for the future of the university. That said, we hope that the creation of this position will be mirrored by changes within the Provost's office that give greater visibility and urgency to DEI efforts that fall under the Provost's authority—in our faculty composition, our faculty's teaching and research, and our student affairs.

One key responsibility of the CDEIO should be the periodic, rigorous assessment of our DEI initiatives. Campus climate should be regularly assessed for faculty, staff, and students. And the data collected for this purpose should be made publicly available. Clear and accessible data about student experience, retention, and or graduation rates should be available, and disaggregated by student race/ethnicity. Disaggregated data is essential for identifying barriers to student success in ways that a "URM" label cannot. And making such data public will ensure that our various stakeholders can hold us to our commitments.

Space for students. We support the creation of space and additional programming for underserved students. Students have advocated for more and better space for the cultural centers for years. Given the critical role that cultural centers play in supporting not only underserved students but the entire USC community, the next step must be more substantial funding for additional programming, expanding outreach efforts, and hiring the staff required to do this essential work. We need to give these groups better support, and that means concrete investments not only in space but also in funding.

Beyond the creation of these spaces, we urge that USC do more to respond to the needs of Black students for other forms of support. We recommend that, starting in the summer of 2020, USC should:

- Provide one-on-one counseling and access to care in more racially diverse settings with individuals who understand and can more easily empathize with the sociocultural aspects of what Black and students of color endure on a daily basis
- Hire Black counselors/mental health providers with trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practices, as this is essential to supporting our students.
- Support student athletes' health and wellbeing needs, especially African American student athletes, as outlined in the [letter](#) written by the USC Black Student-Athletes & Allies (UBSAA) organization, who have been asked to come back to campus two months before anyone else.

Training. We agree that unconscious bias training should be required for all members of the USC community. However, unconscious bias is not the only form of training useful in addressing racism: we should deploy whatever forms of training are most effective. In particular, faculty should receive training concerning anti-racist pedagogy. We would also urge you to ensure that all training draws upon the expertise that already exists at USC, and that USC faculty who provide this training are fairly compensated for doing so. When appropriate, to not overwhelm USC's experts, training could also be provided by outside experts as long as USC representatives ensure that the outside training is high quality. This training should begin in Fall 2020. Moreover, any online training modules should be embedded within meaningful discussions in each academic unit, and those discussions must address the need for structural and cultural change, rather than focusing only on individual behavior and attitudes.

For the Taskforce on DEI, we offer some further reflections.

Faculty. Only 3% of tenured faculty at USC are Black. This reflects failures in our hiring and retention efforts, as well as deep cultural problems. USC should be a place where all faculty feel represented, supported, and valued. We believe that hiring Black faculty should be made a priority for all units.

We also must improve our retention efforts. The Senate's Campus Climate Committee has made recommendations in its [2019-2020 report](#) that we think will significantly improve retention. These reforms should be enacted immediately.

We urge that this Taskforce also be charged with making recommendations for how USC can recognize the substantial work that Black and other underrepresented faculty

do spearheading and supporting USC's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. These efforts must be more substantially rewarded, both while it is occurring (in the form of stipends, course releases, etc.) as well as during the merit, promotion, and tenure processes. If USC values diversity, equity, and inclusion, we need to show that we value the people doing that work.

Considering USC's commitment to anti-racist scholarship, the urgent need to change the culture of the institution, and the urgent need to recruit and retain black faculty, we also recommend that the Taskforce determine the feasibility of and steps necessary to establish a standalone Black Studies Department to serve as an interdisciplinary home for Black scholars and scholarship. USC's lack of a Black Studies department is confounding given our location in one of the great worldwide hubs of Black culture. The Taskforce should hear testimony from faculty and students, and produce recommendations concerning the size, scope, and funding for such a department.

Curriculum. The Taskforce should examine how DEI is currently addressed in the curriculum. The "Diversity" GE requirement has been modified in recent years to address a wider range of issues: whatever the benefits of that widening, the cost has been considerable in losing focus on the distinctive role of racism in the constitution of US society, its current manifestations, and efforts to overcome it. We urge that the Taskforce examine how better we can express USC's commitment to anti-racism in our teaching mission.

Sincerely,

The Academic Senate Executive Boards of 2019-2020 and 2020-2021

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