

To our community of alumni, students, staff, and faculty in the School of Communication at Illinois State University:

Black Lives Matter.

As we begin the spring 2021 semester, we recognize that we have yet to make a statement addressing the facts and feelings about anti-Blackness in American society, not even an acknowledgement during a faculty meeting or an email to the School. Although we have made admirable efforts to diversify our community and curricula, we fully acknowledge that we have much work to do in confronting the historical legacy of anti-Black racism and structural racism in America.

We as the School of Communication acknowledge that our present silence, as well as past inaction, is physically, emotionally, and mentally harmful. As a School, we realize that our silence can be perceived as a link in the structural forces of institutional, implicit, and overt forms of racism. We are complicit in the privilege of our whiteness that may allow for us to neglect, to avoid, and to forget that our failure to make a statement is a signal to the Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) community of ISU students, faculty, staff, and alumni, but especially our current Black students and faculty, that we do not see them. We failed to say anything in public places and in our own faculty meetings that acknowledged the tremendous trauma of last summer. As individual instructors and citizens, perhaps we did; however, the lack of a unified recognition of state-sanctioned murder of Black people and the ensuing summer of protests and collective actions warranted a message not only that supports our students and colleagues, but that states how the School of Communication must do better to address anti-Black racism. Regardless of the excuses and reasons of why we did not make a statement, what is clear by the beginning of February are the interpretations by people in our academic and social spaces who recognize this silence as complicity and undermines the very community of belonging that we aim to achieve.

We could have started last fall semester, after a summer of uprisings in response to the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmed Arbery, Elijah McClain, and others and in light of a year of events in Bloomington-Normal, from the fall 2019 anti-Black ISU movement to the student-led protests about racism in Normal West High School, by stating the necessary commitments we must enact now and in the future to ensure balance and belonging in our School of Communication community. Such commitments include educating ourselves, cultivating empathy, and most crucially, implementing structural changes and practicing institutional anti-racism. We did not.

Overall, we are a community of learners and scholars. But we must recognize the inequities that are built into the very structures of our community. For example, our core curriculum does not require any classes that are overtly and exclusively devoted to issues of race and ethnicity. We have made strides in recruiting diverse students to our undergraduate and graduate programs, but, realizing that racism always intersects with sexism, classism, homophobia, and transmisogyny, if we do not have structural forms of support -- through courses, mentors, programming, and measures for addressing faculty, who engage in or endorse anti-Black sentiments -- then we ourselves could be complicit in a culture of anti-Black racism through our inaction. We make this public statement in an effort to keep ourselves accountable and to encourage transparency regarding issues positively and negatively affecting our community. This statement is a first step in a process, made public to encourage transparency and hold ourselves accountable, as we work toward improving the School of Communication as a site of anti-racism, community, and belonging.

The School is particularly thankful to members of the Anti-Racism, Social Justice, and Coalition Building Committee and others who reached out to offer help in creating this statement. This statement continues our efforts to establish a strong foundation for further action, which we will announce soon.

Accompanying Email Sent by the Director of the School of Communication to all Faculty and Staff

Colleagues: As you know, the Diversity Committee has a new name and mission now. That group has been working for months on a statement about systematic racism and the plan is to post that on the School's website and social media accounts on Tuesday.

I wanted to share this statement with you in advance, in anticipation that you might interact with students and alumni who may have questions or who would like to talk about the issues raised in the statement.

Let me assure all of you that developing this statement has been a long and arduous process. The statement has been carefully vetted by several individuals including the Dean, Assistant to the President (Dr. Doris Houston), and general counsel.

This has been a long time coming and I'm thankful to all of our faculty and staff who provided support and guidance through the process. Our students and faculty are more diverse now than ever—a trend that will continue. They deserve to know that we see and hear them and are committed to their success and well-being. While the road ahead may be rocky, I'm more convinced now than ever that it's one we have to travel. And as the statement acknowledges, we have made progress in several areas; however, we have much more work to do.

There will be many opportunities for us to discuss this statement and strategies for moving the School forward in the future. The Committee has been working diligently on a communication plan as well as suggestions for changes to curriculum and our ASPT document. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to reach out to me with any questions or concerns.

Thank you all for the work you do to make our community a warm and welcoming place for all. One of things that I most appreciate about the alumni, students, faculty, and staff in the School is your commitment to work constantly to make this a better program.

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