



2400 Chew Street
Allentown PA 18104-5586

9 June 2020

Dear Muhlenberg Community Members,

We, the undersigned Black Faculty of Muhlenberg College, write today to stand with Black communities across the nation who are crying out against this country's genocide against Black people. We write to express our unshakable support for the revolutionary Black Lives Matter Movement and unequivocally declare the priceless value of all Black lives; to stand in deep, sustained solidarity with Black students, staff, and administrators calling for change at Muhlenberg College and across the country; and to put forth active steps that Muhlenberg can take to become an anti-racist, genuinely inclusive institution that every single member of the community can safely and joyfully call home.

We mourn Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Tony McDade, and countless other Black victims of police brutality, white supremacist violence, and government-sanctioned murder whose names we will never know because they have been forced into the system of anti-Black erasure, which has been centuries in the making. We indict that system, which is soaked in Black and Indigenous blood and built upon rendering that bleeding invisible. We denounce the erasure of the connections between historical lynchings and today's, between the poisonous water in Black communities and the disproportionate number of Black and Brown deaths from COVID-19, and between the refusal to discuss the racism coursing through the country's commitment to holding up Confederate monuments while tearing down infrastructure in Black neighborhoods. We write today bearing the pain of these histories and of this present – and, yet, with a hope inspired by the demonstrated refusal of people across the nation to allow this to be the future.

As we imagine that better future, we first honor the resilience of our ancestors who endured brutal histories, who asserted their humanity when they were told they were objects, and who spent centuries telling the world that Black Lives Matter. We stand proudly as the descendants of people who created art, literature, schools, homes, and businesses with minimal resources; who re-built time and again when those communities were burned and bombed; and who created families and joy in the death grip of a nation that told them they didn't deserve either. We are the children of Africa who know that revolution comes in many forms, including education. As faculty members, we write today to advocate for tangible, transformative, and permanent change in higher education – and, in particular, at Muhlenberg.

We stand with and support Muhlenberg's Black students in their demands for an institutional home that fully supports and advocates for them. They deserve their College's commitment to take deliberate and consistent steps to do right by them in every way. We recognize their pain, and we affirm that their experiences, cries, dreams, hopes, and lives matter. We know that the best way we can advocate for them is to keep working to make Muhlenberg a place that is actively committed to anti-racist practices in every facet of the institution. To that end, we have appended below this letter concrete steps to move the College toward an authentically inclusive and equitable future. The administration has reached out to faculty in Africana Studies and to faculty, staff, and administration in positions dedicated to enhancing inclusion at the College; they have committed to addressing the issues regarding racial equity on campus, and they are looking forward to discussing and realizing many of the plans we put forth below.

We look forward to making Muhlenberg a place where Black students, faculty, staff, and administrators feel that the College's stated values of acceptance and inclusion are reflected in their experiences in the classrooms, dormitories, dining halls, offices, and other spaces that comprise our campus. We call on the College to work with us to dismantle current systems of power, racism, and inequality and build just, fully equitable systems in their place.

In solidarity,

Dr. Emanuela Kucik

Co-Director, Africana Studies Program
Assistant Professor of English and Africana Studies

Professor Roberta Meek

Lecturer, Media & Communication and Africana Studies

Dr. Dana Francisco Miranda

Assistant Professor of Philosophy

Dr. Elena FitzPatrick Sifford

Assistant Professor of Art History

Professor Heidi Cruz-Austin

Lecturer, Theatre & Dance

Professor Randall Smith

Assistant Professor of Dance

Professor Frederick Wright Jones

Assistant Professor of Art

Dr. S. Brooke Vick

Associate Provost for Faculty and Diversity Initiatives
Associate Professor of Psychology

Action Plan

It is important to note that the following Action Plan does not represent our belief that these are the only changes that need to be made or the only concerns that need to be addressed regarding racial justice; rather, the Plan presents some of the initiatives we believe are most urgent and capable of producing significant change. Overall, the Plan is intended to provide a foundation for continued, consistent work in creating an anti-racist, inclusive atmosphere.

We call upon the College's support in the following areas and for the following actions and initiatives:

Recruitment and Retention of Black Students and Students of Color

-We call on the College to commit to a written plan that is dedicated to increasing recruitment efforts to admit and retain higher numbers of Black students and students of color. Muhlenberg's current student body population does not adequately reflect the diversity of the country. For instance, only 4.3% (approximately) of current students identify as Black or African American, and less than 1% identify as Native American. It is crucial to note that recruitment and retention efforts must be carried out in concerted collaboration with other initiatives described throughout this Plan that are geared toward improving the experiences of Black students and students of color on campus. Increasing the number of underrepresented students on campus will help to improve their experiences by providing them with a larger community; however, that increase cannot happen in a vacuum devoid of embodied commitments to ensuring that these students are fully supported in every way. The best way to ensure that support is by listening to the demands of students.

Hiring and Retention of Black Faculty and Faculty of Color

-We need immediate hires of tenure-track Black faculty and faculty of color across the College and a written commitment to continued hires from these demographic groups. Currently, approximately 3.4% of the total faculty identify as Black or African American. This percentage includes tenure-track professors, lecturers, and instructors. We call on the College to commit to cohort hires to increase total numbers and improve retention by providing new faculty of color with robust support networks.

-We call on the College to invest in supporting Black faculty and faculty of color who are not in

tenure-track positions by further supporting their work in the ways that they deem necessary, including converting positions into tenure-track lines.

-We call on the College to create a grant for faculty members from underrepresented groups who engage in a multitude of activities beyond the classroom related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The grant would provide direct support for their work in the aforementioned areas. The specific parameters of the grant will be determined in further conversations in which faculty can outline their specific needs, which may include, but are not limited to, course releases, research funds, and professional development support.

-We call on the College to include faculty mentorship of students in the evaluation standards for tenure and promotion. It is crucial that students of color are able to find secure, consistent mentorship among their faculty, and providing that support is deeply important to faculty of color across campus – it is one of the most rewarding aspects of our work. It is critical that the College recognizes this support in evaluative criteria so that faculty of color can continue to provide essential, comprehensive support for students from underrepresented groups who face various challenges on a predominantly white campus.

Institutional Leadership and Capacity in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

-We call on the College to invest in broad and empowered leadership in anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion. We need anti-racist and DEI expertise in a Vice Presidential role, situated on the Senior Staff, and empowered to institute change. The VP should have a staff to support, develop, and carry out the work within an established and well-funded office of Equity and Inclusion, rather than operate as an office of one.

Support for and Expansion of the Africana Studies Program

The Africana Studies Program is the central academic Program to which Black students turn to find a sense of community on a predominantly white campus. The Program is the College's main vehicle for classes that center the histories, contributions, and legacies of Black populations, along with discussions of the history of anti-Black racism and its contemporary reverberations. These courses are crucial for all students, as they prepare them to identify and dismantle racist systems and contribute to our diverse world in ethical and empathetic ways. Considering all of the above, it is essential that Africana Studies is provided with the institutional support necessary for it to thrive, including the following:

-The College needs to hire additional faculty who are jointly appointed in Africana Studies. Currently, Dr. Emanuela Kucik is the only faculty member with a joint appointment in Africana Studies. The College has committed to hiring for the Africana Studies Program, and we look forward to working with them on the upcoming search.

-The College needs to invest in making an Africana Studies major (it is currently only offered as a minor). As noted in the description of the importance of Africana Studies at the beginning of this section, the Program provides essential education for all students, and a major would allow students to receive even more robust, in-depth training in the discipline. The Africana Studies Program equips students with knowledge that is crucial for multiple career paths and life experiences – and for being empathetic, ethically-minded global citizens who are committed to social change. Providing students with the option to pursue a major in Africana Studies would allow for further development in these areas.

-The Africana Studies Program is committed to expanding its community engagement, honoring the discipline's traditional dedication to intertwining scholarship and activism. **To that end, we call on the College to support a community engagement component of the Africana Studies curriculum.** We are developing multiple options from which students could choose to fulfill that component, including an option that would partner Muhlenberg Africana Studies students with younger students in underserved communities of color in Allentown, with the goal of increasing access to higher education for students in those communities.

-Last week, Dr. Ruth Simmons, President of Prairie View A&M University, committed to creating a Center for Race and Justice that will be housed in the university's African American Studies Department. **In the spirit of this model and others across the country, we call on the College to support the creation of a Muhlenberg College Center for Anti-Racism, which will be housed in the Africana Studies Program. All Muhlenberg students will be required to take a minimum of two courses in the Center during their time on campus, including one that focuses on members of Black populations whose narratives are often further erased, such as Black trans communities, Black women, undocumented Black immigrants, and others.**

Initiatives that Support Black Students and Students of Color

-We call on the College to support the expansion of the Emerging Leaders Program to extend to all four years of a participant's time in College. Many students of color on campus report that the Emerging Leaders Program, housed in the Office of Multicultural Life, is the highlight of their Muhlenberg experience, as it provides them with a sense of community that they have been unable to find elsewhere on campus. Currently, the Program centers mostly on their first two years at Muhlenberg, and institutional support for expanding the Program's reach to encompass all four of the students' years at Muhlenberg would allow for that sense of community to continue throughout the duration of their time at the College.

-Dr. Giancarlo Cuadra and Dr. Emanuela Kucik are finalizing a proposal for a fellowship program that will focus on preparing students from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups for applying to and succeeding in graduate and professional programs. **We call on the College to support the creation of this Graduate School Preparation Fellowship Program and to assist with related funding, the details of which will be contained in the finalized proposal.**

-In Spring of 2020, the Office of Multicultural Life created the Professor Roberta Meek Office of Multicultural Life and Africana Studies Scholarship to continue Professor Meek's invaluable work supporting students from underrepresented backgrounds. Institutional support for the Professor Meek Scholarship would be used to meet the needs of these students, including through support for many of the aforementioned initiatives in this section and in the section regarding Africana Studies. **We call on the College to provide this institutional support, including, but not limited to, start-up funds to financially launch the scholarship. Additionally, the scholarship needs to be made visible through clear options for donations online and other methods of calling attention to ways to donate to and support the fund.**

Curricular Change and Extracurricular Event Support

-The College needs to pass a curricular requirement stating that all students must take two courses in race and power structures, separate from the DE requirements. The courses mentioned in the description of the proposed Center for Anti-Racism would count as part of this requirement.

-The College also needs to pass a requirement stating that students must attend one extracurricular event per semester that is centered around racial justice. This requirement will expand attendance at these events beyond students who are already enrolled in courses about racial justice. Additionally, it will take students' education about anti-racism beyond the classroom. As an example of what we envision for this requirement, this summer, Africana Studies and the Office of Multicultural Life are putting on a series of events about the intersections of COVID-19 and systemic racism. Attendance at any of these events would satisfy this requirement (and, based on circumstance, virtual attendance would satisfy this requirement).

-The institution needs to adopt a College-wide policy that bans the use of the n-word in classes. The effects of the dehumanizing, hateful roots of the word are still felt today, and, as such, speaking it aloud is inherently destructive to the creation of a welcoming, safe atmosphere for all students.

-We call on the College to offer continued funding and support for the Black Students Association and events that they put on throughout the school year. This moment requires that the College's stated commitment to "diversity, equity and humanity" is realized through concrete programs. **To that end, we call on the College to support the establishment of the following initiatives: 1) *The Disorientation Program* and 2) *The Civil Disobedience Workshop*.** *The Disorientation Program* would allow students of color and allies to decolonize their college experience. This program would include deeper interrogations into land acknowledgements, enslavement and colonization, racism and antiracism, and other related topics. *The Civil Disobedience Workshop*, in collaboration with the Center for Ethics, would allow students to study and be trained in activist theories and tactics.

-We call on the College to make more substantive efforts to center the experiences, theories, and activism of Black people, particularly regarding their efforts combating racism, coloniality, and anti-Blackness. Institutional support for increased collaboration between the Africana Studies Program, the Office of Multicultural Life, and the Center for Ethics for the 2020-21 academic year would allow for interdisciplinary programming that could help students to better understand the protests and movements for Black liberation happening globally.

Local and National Support

It is important to note that colleges are embedded within communities, and, as such, dismantling racism cannot be limited to the boundaries of a campus. We call on the College to support the aforementioned causes and following anti-racist organizations and initiatives, among others listed here: <https://www.muhlenberg.edu/diversityatmuhlenberg/anti-racistresources>. Institutional support includes, but is not limited to, issuing verbal statements, providing invitations to campus, working toward collaborations, and related efforts.

- LVAIC Africa Symposium
- Black Lives Matter
- Black Heritage Association of the Lehigh Valley
- The African American Business Leaders Council of the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce
- The Black News E-bulletin
- Lehigh Valley Mutual Aid
- Black Trans Fund
- Project NIA