

September 15, 2020

Dear students,

My thoughts turn daily to what we can do to further address diversity, equity and inclusion, and the work we have done to this point, but more importantly, to the work that lies ahead.

Many conversations over the summer with students, alumni and other friends of the college have reinforced that mere conversation is not enough. We must act. That is why, today, we make a number of commitments regarding the changes we will make. I welcome your feedback and commitment to hold us accountable as we change.

As a college, we must commit to listening, learning and acknowledging the role we play as professional communicators holding a mirror up to our society. This includes examining our efforts in key areas, including curriculum, hiring practices, and support for all of our students, staff, faculty, and alumni who identify as BIPOC or are from underrepresented groups. In addition, we take responsibility for training future communicators to do a better job of supporting diverse voices and perspectives, recognizing implicit biases, and communicating anti-racist values.

To further support the educational experiences of Black students and other students of color, we commit to the following:

- Spending the next few months and beyond engaged in addressing these issues in our curricula, research, administration, and all student and community engagement activities.
- Increasing our clear guidance for instructors to be mindful of diversity and inclusion issues in course design and delivery and in interactions with you.
- Ensuring we have diversity in course content throughout our program, including the selection of topics, readings, assignments and examples and guest speakers by providing an array of resources for instructors.
- Engaging a trainer to conduct implicit bias training for all faculty and staff.
- Increasing recruitment, development, and retention of diverse job candidates as soon as the UGA hiring freeze ends and we are able to conduct faculty and staff searches.
- Identifying donor funds and resources to allocate to Black student groups and projects as well as other student groups underrepresented in our professions.
- Strengthening our existing experiential learning programs and develop new programs focused on the challenges and aspirations of underrepresented and marginalized student populations.
- Working with partner organizations to increase funding to secure scholarships, fellowships, internships, mentorships, and jobs for Black students and other students of color.
- Increasing financial support to student chapters of organizations dedicated to the concerns of Black professionals.

- Tasking the Diversity Committee with developing and reviewing initiatives that address racial and social injustices and inequities, human rights, and systemic racism.
- Continuing to increase efforts to bring diverse guests and alumni to speak in our courses, co-curricular activities, and the college's signature events and awards.
- Increasing diverse representations on our boards, advisory boards and other such bodies.

These are but a few of what I hope will be an ongoing series of actions by the college aimed at elevating the voices and increasing opportunities for students of color and creating an environment where all our students feel valued and have the support to grow and succeed in our professions. We can and must do better as educators.

We acknowledge that this is a long-term issue, one that will not be solved by one-off solutions. Being a part of change means taking actionable steps and this work will continue. The college's Standing Committee on Diversity, which helped with the creation of this document, will report annually on our progress, led by the college's chief diversity officer, Associate Dean María Len-Ríos, and myself. You may always reach out to us with concerns. We do meet with students and student groups--and are willing to meet with additional students and student groups--to discuss ideas, concerns, and additional steps.

While we don't have all the answers for solving the systemic racism that continues to plague our society, we are committed to working together to be part of the solution. I ask you to join us in this work, the most important thing we can do as a college to move forward together.

Respectfully,

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To set up a meeting: 706-542-1704