

July 6, 2020

President Daniels  
Hovde Hall  
610 Purdue Mall  
West Lafayette, IN 47907

Dear President Daniels,

The horrific killing of Mr. George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25 has rightly shone a bright light on the ongoing injustice of police brutality as well as other forms of anti-Black racism existing in health care, hiring, housing, and higher education. The resulting acts of civil disobedience across the United States and around the world, as well as the long history of student protest on our campus, indicate that we must address these matters here at Purdue as well. I write to you today in my capacity as the Director of African American Studies to emphasize the vital importance of our program and research center to the university's ongoing efforts to uphold our Boilermaker values of equity and inclusion.

I was very encouraged to see that you and Board of Trustees Chair Mike Berghoff endorse the statement from Student Trustee Noah Scott at your June 11 meeting. His bold statement in support of racial justice represents the courage and commitment unique to this emerging generation of leaders, innovators, and thinkers. Further, the move to start a racial inequality task force and your expulsion of a student making threatening racist remarks online affirms how critical it is that we move past talk and toward action.

To that end, I urge you, Provost Akridge, Vice Provost Gates, the Board of Trustees, and the task force to acknowledge and give priority to the following needs:

- Immediately initiate the hiring of faculty of color in African American Studies. As an interdisciplinary field, African American Studies has specialists who work in most of the disciplines represented at Purdue, including STEM fields. Building a strong cohort of faculty who can work across the campus will increase the visibility and impact of African American Studies. These hires can be a mix of 100% appointments in AAS and joint appointments with other departments. We are already working to build a specialization in the growing field of Black Digital/Data Studies, which brings critical studies of race into digital humanities and data science related fields. Data on bias and discrimination could be one of the many possible areas of focus. We have the potential to become a national leader in this area if we are given the proper support.
- Fund a distinguished professorship in African American Studies. Doing so would emphasize the university's deep commitment the scholarship, teaching, and activism that we do and would raise our visibility. A distinguished professorship will signal to any potential new hires, graduate students, and post-docs the compatibility of Purdue with their career goals in African American Studies, which will also bolster recruitment and retention.
- Provide incentives for departments and programs that prioritize hiring Black faculty with specializations in studying race, social justice, and equity. For too long, the study of "race" has been left in the hands of researchers who have no understanding of how to connect their findings

to real-world applications of their data. African American Studies emphasizes the connection between Discovery and Engagement and provides a way to center Black communities as the subjects, not objects, of study. When departments or colleges prioritize these values in their hiring, they should be rewarded.

- Provide needed staff and faculty support to initiate a fully online graduate certificate in African American Studies. In the past three years, I have worked to grow our graduate program through recruitment efforts, and there is a demand. I regularly receive emails requesting access to online graduate courses; however, we cannot meet this demand due to faculty and staff shortfalls. I expect this demand to increase, especially as more companies, school systems, and other institutions begin to seek out the knowledge we produce in our field. Adding an online graduate program will also generate revenue for our unit.

These requests are just a snapshot of our needs. As we speak, Washington University in St. Louis, Rutgers, UCLA, Princeton, and other institutions have responded to the social unrest by considering and implementing similar actions in order to build stronger African American Studies departments, programs, and centers. Even before the summer's tragic events, our peer institutions – notably Penn State, Michigan State, University of Kentucky, and Northwestern University – have overshadowed us in their commitment of significant financial resources to the growth of their African American Studies departments and centers. Purdue is woefully behind, and unfortunately my program has not been given consistent institutional support to keep up with our peers.

I am aware that all of the needs I have outlined will require significant financial commitment, and that the pandemic has placed harsh constraints on the university in the near term. However, I cannot stress enough how important it will be to make this investment in order to bring the best minds to the problem of anti-Black racism and to assure incoming students and families that Purdue is indeed a welcoming and safe place for all. I am confident the university will eventually get back on its feet; the hard work of dedicated faculty and staff and belt-tightening of our administrators will sustain us. But I ask you: What will meet us on the other side? If we neglect repairing our deepest racial rifts, we will remain socially stagnant, morally bereft, and our economic sacrifices will be for naught. This time, more than ever, places upon us the responsibility to move from platitudes to planning.

I hope that we can work together, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Dr. Marlo D. David  
Director, African American Studies and Research Center  
Associate Professor of English and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies  
Cornerstone Fellow