



June 08, 2020

To the leadership of the St. John's chapter of the AAUP and of the Faculty Association (FA):

We, members of the faculty, are outraged by the continued and rampant state-sanctioned brutalizing of Black people and their violent murders at the hands of law enforcement. The recent tragic deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade due to police violence and the disproportionate COVID-19 related deaths of Black and Brown people bring to the forefront the socio-economic and political injustices Black Americans and Indigenous peoples have faced for generations. Higher education institutions play a role in these patterns of inequity and violence because they remain a site for the reproduction of white supremacy and racist oppression within our curriculum, within the organization of our structures and within our administrative practices. St. John's University is no exception to this.

On, June 6, 2020, the senior leadership of St. John's University released a [statement](#) of commitment "to doing the work necessary for St. John's to become an antiracist institution," consistent with the university's Catholic and Vincentian mission. This statement outlines the university administration's concrete steps toward actualizing President Gempesaw's [urgent call](#) for transformation of "our hearts and minds" and "to tear down the walls of institutional racism that surround us."

We must truthfully acknowledge the fact that our unions, here at St. John's, have for decades been complicit in helping the university maintain itself as a site for the systematic oppression of minoritized faculty, particularly, Black and Brown faculty. Policies, practices, and procedures which are rooted in white supremacy were put in place to benefit white cisgender male faculty, in particular those from previous generations. These policies continue to perpetuate the inequities that we currently observe amongst our faculty. Furthermore, we as members of the faculty, believe that in order to create a truly benevolent university in which all students can learn and thrive, in particular Black students who have taken on the burden and harm of raising awareness around issues of social injustice and pushing for social change on our campus, we must act deliberately and intentionally. We, as members of the faculty, affirm our commitment to making St. John's University an anti-racist space in the ways we teach, learn, assess, and govern. We acknowledge that accomplishing such goals requires that the union leadership also take this stance in order for true systemic change to occur. **We therefore demand that the leadership of the AAUP and FA affirm their commitment to supporting faculty in creating and supporting the University's position to become an antiracist institution.**

The following action items are ways in which union leaders can begin to demonstrate this commitment:

1. In recognition and appreciation of the need for more diverse perspectives, viewpoints and experiences among our faculty union leadership, prioritize building equitable representation of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups at all levels of union leadership, especially in upper

executive/officer positions. This shift will help to ensure that union representatives are equipped to enact anti-racist policies and negotiate on the behalf of all faculty. Every member of the union leadership must be committed to anti-racism. Further, White union representatives should be educated on the ways that white fragility, white privilege and white supremacy can interfere with the ability to truly represent all faculty and function to uphold systems of oppression.

2. Work closely with the university's [Equity and Inclusion Council](#), which includes faculty representation from all five colleges/schools and is responsible for recommending "institutional policy and practice changes needed to create an equitable and inclusive learning, living, and working environment." Additionally, work closely with the [Academic Center for Equity and Inclusion](#), through which faculty organize "scholarly and pedagogical activities that advance St. John's University's commitment to an inclusive and equitable University community" and fosters "personal and institutional accountability for the University's mission of 'respect for the rights of every person' and advancement of the global common good."
3. Broaden decision-making processes within union leadership. Historically and currently, decision making occurs primarily at the executive/officer level, controlled by a few members of union leadership, who are almost exclusively racially white, cisgender, men.
4. Increase transparency regarding labor contract priorities received from faculty by union leadership and that concern union leadership's chosen contract negotiation priorities. Further, increase transparency surrounding contract negotiation developments, via direct observation at the bargaining table by union members – and specifically Black union members and other union members from historically underrepresented groups - and written communications to all faculty.
5. Strongly encourage all faculty to participate in the University's bias reporting process as complainants, respondents and witnesses. There must be recognition that discouraging faculty participation creates additional obstacles for faculty complainants seeking a just result, making union leadership complicit in harming our most vulnerable faculty. Future bargaining negotiations should advocate for University policy changes to ensure that a finding of intentional discrimination is not required in order to substantiate a bias policy violation.
6. Provide faculty with a web-accessible statement regarding each union's commitment to anti-racism and concrete action steps with regard to the advancement of equity, inclusion, and anti-oppression policies and practices.

Mindful of worldwide mobilizations to end racial inequities in health, economic security, and public safety, we call upon your leadership as we work to faithfully demonstrate that lives of Black students, faculty, staff, and administrators matter.

In solidarity,

St. John's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (159)

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