

FEBRUARY 23, 2021

President Dr. Jo Allen

President
Meredith College
3800 Hillsborough Street
Raleigh, NC 27601

Dear President Jo Allen:

On November 18, 2021, Dr. Veronique Machedelion made the deplorable decision to intentionally incorporate racial slurs into the curriculum of her course. The professor proceeded to state aloud violent racial slurs, including the “N” word and several others, to describe Black and Afro-Creole American peoples. Once her inappropriate use of these terms was flagged by multiple students, she continued to repeatedly badger the students with the “N” word, causing even more students to begin to plead with her to stop.

Following this student-professor interaction, students followed proper protocol and filed a complaint with the professor’s superior, Dean Sarah Roth. Unfortunately, Dean Roth, rather than expediting this urgent report, she intentionally slowed the process and offered no resolve. Instead, she placed the burden on the students to attempt to have a conversation with the professor and explain to her why these terms are inappropriate.

On Tuesday, February 9th, 2021 an Instagram account unaffiliated with Meredith College, [@dearmereco](#), posted a student’s anonymous account of a professor repeatedly using a racial slur rooted in anti-Blackness in class, and further justifying this behavior because of her nationality.

*“Last semester, I had a prof use the n-word in class - as in she said the word, n****r. The class was shook. It was reported to a Dean. Dean didn’t do anything. Then during the next class, the prof justified her actions by saying she wasn’t “from America”, and “a lot of ppl don’t know the n-word.” I told her that she could use other words to get her point across, but she kept gaslighting me saying, “but I’m not from America.” By the end of class, she said that I made a “good point” by telling her to use the “n-word” instead of saying it. Afterward, she sent an “apology email”, but the damage [had] already been done. She furthermore accused me of cheating on an assignment, also last semester.” -Class of ‘22*

This is one of many egregious stories of racism and bigotry shared by current students and alumni on the Instagram account. Stories of mental and psychological harm caused by college faculty, staff, and students. Stories of academic violence and educational spaces that center white supremacy. Black, Indigenous, students of color do not feel safe enough on campus, in academic and social spaces, to share their concerns about racial discrimination in their learning institution without fear of retribution and with little confidence that the matters will be handled

appropriately. This post alone raises suspicion that these matters are not handled in a way that centers the experiences of marginalized students, but rather serves to protect professors, deans, people in positions of power, and ultimately perpetuates systems of racism and inequity.

The faculty member being accused of espousing these racial epithets in class is Dr. Veronique Machelidon, Department Head and Professor of World Languages and Culture. Her bio on the Meredith website says, “she enjoys teaching French language and culture at all levels”. As a scholar with a doctoral degree in comparative literature and expertise in world culture, one would assume Dr. Machelidon would understand how words and language perpetuates systems of oppression. Even when confronted with this truth by a student of color, this professor chose to stand using this racial slur because she “is not from America”. This is unacceptable behavior and pedagogy from a Department Head and Academic Advisor and directly contradicts the expectations outlined in the Faculty Handbook regarding the nondiscrimination policy and statements about academic freedom. Further, the repetitive use of racial epithets like the n-word both aloud in class and when used in curriculum, is psychological and academic violence on Black students. And sends a strong implicit message to other students, particularly those who identify as white, about the college’s core values and beliefs. Institutions of higher education like Meredith College should be safe for students to engage in learning. When students do not feel safe and need support to resolve these issues, they should have equitable access to resources such as mental health professionals of color to support them.

Upon further investigation, there have been formal and informal complaints brought against the Dean of the Arts & Humanities Department where Dr. Machelidon teaches. Dr. Sarah Roth, on numerous occasions, has belittled and silenced the voices of BIPOC students when they have contacted her to receive academic, social, and emotional support as she is in a position of leadership and expected to aid students in need. Unfortunately, this has proven to be far from the truth as Dr. Roth has weaponized her authority through condescension and arrogance.

This letter is being released during Meredith’s Founders’ Week on the eve of the 2021 Giving Day. Meredith College is known for its various traditions, including Giving Day, a day where students, staff, alumni, parents, and community members come together to raise incredible amounts of money for the Meredith Fund. One tradition Meredith College and its leadership continually fails to acknowledge and reconcile is its legacy of exclusion, discrimination, and racism. The only color Meredith seems to care about is green. One is left to wonder if Meredith College does not reckon with its racial past and current oppressive systems, if people of color and historically marginalized folks will continue to voluntarily give dollars to an institution that perpetuates systems of oppression and inequity.

It is important that Meredith College leadership prioritize transparency in the investigations of racist incidents involving faculty and staff, while placing the safety of Black and Brown student

communities above their private interests. **The students-of-color attending Meredith College should be guaranteed an academic and social experience that centers and affirms their identities. The students of color should not be subject to racist language and actions at the hands of professors and staff.** As community members and student advocates we demand the President and Meredith College leadership take the following action to begin to address these ongoing racist incidents and reconcile Meredith's history of systemic racism:

- **Release a public apology from Meredith College, Professor Dr. Machelidon, and Dean Dr. Sarah Roth**
- **Conduct a formal investigation into Dean Sarah Roth**
- **Ensure the immediate re-assignment of all Black, Indigenous, Students of Color from Dr. Machelidon's student advisee roster to the academic advisor of their choosing as appropriate.**
- **Provide restitution of course fees to impacted students as determined by the investigation.**
- **Ensure all impacted students' records are cleared of any impact to grade or status.**
- **Guarantee financial resources for mental health support from licensed Black mental health professionals and ensure these services are accessible to all impacted students.**
- **Require mandatory and ongoing Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion training for all non-BIPOC Meredith College faculty, staff, and employees.**
- **Ensure the immediate firing of Dr. Machelidon without paid leave or severance package.**
- **Institute racial equity & social justice courses and enrichment opportunities as a part of graduation requirements for all students**

We expect President Jo Allen to champion the actions outlined above to ensure transparency into the investigations and ongoing processes for addressing these racist incidents. **We call on you, President Dr. Jo Allen, to commit to these demands and demonstrate to the public Meredith College's efforts to work toward anti-racism beyond efforts and emails.** Meredith College students and community members have the right to fully investigate and hold accountable, where appropriate, professors and stakeholders in positions of power who are derelict in their duties to care for students in their classrooms and campus communities.

Sincerely,

Concerned Meredith College Students,
Alumna and Concerned Community Members