CSUMB Office of Inclusive Excellence Statement on George Floyd and Systemic Racism

June 1, 2020

Otter Family:

The disturbing video of the death of George Floyd and the resulting demonstrations across this country is sadly another stark reminder of our continuing national failure to address issues of racial injustice.  Racism remains a dominant force in the United States. The jarring images of George Floyd’s last moments coupled with the senseless deaths of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, are a reminder of racism’s continuing grip on this country. The horrifying video images from Minneapolis have been seared into our collective memory and remind us that we have work to do to end this scourge of systemic racism.

In order to confront racism and finally move to an authentically just society requires all of us to take ownership and responsibility in its eradication. In this regard, we must not be afraid to confront our own complicity in our silence, and we must be willing to confront manifestations of racism wherever it emerges. Living with a horrible pandemic in our midst that has taken over 100,000 lives - with a disproportionate impact on communities of color - creates a new sense of urgency for us to address these systemic issues of racial inequities and injustice. The display of social unrest in the U.S. and around the world demonstrates the critical nature of racial injustice, and how it affects each of us in a real way.

Our task at CSUMB is to meet the ideas expressed in our founding mission statement. As President Ochoa points out in his statement, the founders of this university expressed a commitment to producing graduates that will have “the social responsibility and skills to be community builders.” To erase the scourge of systemic racism requires that we are fully committed to providing our students with the capacity and commitment to be community builders and leaders in moving this society to a new day, a day in which the killing of an unarmed Black man by a member of law enforcement would be a disturbing relic of our past.  These times also call for each of us within the CSUMB campus community to model the type of university community where everyone is valued, respected, and fully engaged in the life of CSUMB.

To help our university community move forward, we should start accessing resources to help us understand the nature and scope of the racism we face in this country. On **Friday, June 5, 2020**, **12:00 – 1:30 pm**, the Building Community Through Dialogue (BTCD) Co-Op will facilitate a **voluntary roundtable discussion** for those who want to discuss the recent events in a safe/brave space. Information on the BCTD discussion will be made available to the community in the coming days. This upcoming academic year, the President’s Committee on Equity and Inclusion (PCEI) will make **Ibram Kendi’s *How to Be an Antiracist***  book part of an ongoing university-wide discussion and will sponsor related activities to the book.  The Office of Inclusive Excellence (OIE) will offer its **Diversity Learning Series** virtually in the fall; we will also be expanding our offerings to provide a forum for broader discussions and presentations on issues related to systemic racism. Both the OIE and PCEI stand ready to **partner and support** any member of the university community who wants to sponsor programs and activities that help us as we move forward, addressing the issue of systemic racism.

During these times, I am reminded of James Baldwin’s *Letter to My Nephew*.  In the essay, Baldwin addresses the burden that African Americans have carried in a country that has never seen them as equals. Baldwin says, “Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your inferiority, but to their inhumanity and fear.” The law enforcement officer who took George Floyd’s life displayed his inhumanity when he ignored Mr. Floyd’s pleas and continued to suffocate the life out of him. While we don’t know the police officer’s motives for his treatment of George Floyd, we must reject the callous disregard for human life, Black lives in particular, with every ounce of humanity we possess. We must actively embrace the belief that we are all equally endowed with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is far beyond time for us to finally live up to that founding ideal.

I appreciate the support of the President and Cabinet in this statement and in the work of OIE and PCEI. I wish all of us peace and safety during these very troubling times. We must and will do the seriously hard work to make the change that gives us a better world, in which we can all be proud. It will not be easy, but it will be necessary.

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