

Black Community Support

Valencia G. Scott (May 30, 2020)

Valencia G. Scott is part of the 2019-2020 Chancellor's Undergraduate Advisory Board, and a 2019-2020 Student Advisor to the Chancellor in the Office of Chancellor Gary S. May, University of California, Davis. Valencia is a member of the Class of 2020, and has served as an Immigration & Civil Rights Clinic Intern in the UC Davis School of Law, a Research Assistant in the Department of Sociology, participated on the Juvenile Detention Docket Team, and served as a Legal Clinic Coordinator for the Imani Clinic, a UC Davis Student-run clinic in the Oak Park neighborhood in South Sacramento. Valencia authored this document and offered it as "Administrative Suggestions for Black Community Support."

Closed conversation & Healing/Support Spaces: The Black community is grieving and devastated. We are also incredibly resilient. While this is the first time many NBPOC and white people are grappling with how violent and anti-Black policing is, we have been fully aware of this for years. While a memorial service is the least the university can do, there should be multiple closed spaces for Black Students, Staff, Faculty, etc... to openly grieve and process amongst themselves without the burden of needing to internalize allies' perspectives or being called to comfort or share experiences in order to support non-Black allies.

Support for Black Mental Health (Especially Mental Health) Professionals on Campus: The continued circulation of these disturbing images and videos of Black death and suffering repeatedly traumatize members of the Black community. Amidst the covid-19 situation (of which there are a disproportionate number of Black people are also affected) it is difficult to organize and we don't have traditional ways of supporting each other. This is a huge moment of collective trauma for the Black community, and our mental health is not okay. I also want to emphasize that the number of Black-identifying Mental health professionals/counselors on campus is small. They are helping members of the UC Davis community process this, but they also need support. The university should find a way to center Black Mental Health moving forward. The university should take steps to establish robust systems of support for the Black mental health professionals taking care of us.

Memorial Service: The University should be accountable to a memorial service or some act of commemoration. This memorial service should also be an opportunity for Black leaders in the community and Black artists to express themselves authentically without fear of repercussion. Please consider consulting members of the community in what the structure and agenda for a memorial service could look like. The university could also refer to the work done by Black student activists in our Cross Cultural Center during [Stephon Clark Action Week](#), and perhaps tap into this network for recommendations.

Incoming Students: The University should also make efforts to reach out to students who have indicated they are choosing UC Davis. During a tumultuous time to start college, they are undoubtedly looking to the administration's response and leadership. Working with the

department of admissions, advising, and the retention centers to brainstorm what comprehensive support/outreach can look like for incoming first-year/transfer students. This is an opportunity to build community and prospective UC Davis students should definitely be included in that.

For Allies:

Undermining Black Agency - All Lives Matter & Blue Lives Matter versus Black Lives

Matter: All Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter are movements/statements that are predicated on the erasure of Black voices. [Black Lives Matter](#) is grounded in the reality that Black lives have never been valued or seen in this country and that the foundations of anti-Blackness are embedded at all levels of our economic, political, social, and educational systems. Blue Lives Matter is beyond complicit of police brutality - it is the basis of the Blue Lives Matter movement. There is always a right time to criticize that, no matter what. Given the University's investments, stakeholders, and previous stances on this issue, it cannot be expected that the university to openly take a position. But we should all reflect on the implications of glossing over this issue, and perhaps we can then change and openly acknowledge Black Lives Matter.

All Lives Matter and Allies taking up Spaces: Allies are necessary for this movement, but there have been repeated issues with allies leveraging the idea that they want to take emotional labor off of the Black community at this time, and therefore step into these spaces to provide suggestions on behalf of the Black community. This is why deeply consulting with our Black leaders (and even adding Black student leaders to this thread) is absolutely vital. Just because members of the Black community are grieving/not okay at this time, doesn't mean that we are not able to do the work. And the reverse is also true: just because a member of the Black community is actively doing the work doesn't mean that they are not, in their own way, devastated and grieving. What we want is for allies to *ask first* and support in the ways the Black community wants to be supported. Allies at the university need to do a better job of moving beyond trying to step up and step back. They need to step *in* and ask the community about what is needed and what they want to see from allies. While it is normal to compare one's own experiences and frame of reference in making suggestions, nothing compares to the lived experience daily trauma that Black people face in this country. And it is too often replicated in university spaces. Excusing the bypassing of Black voices under the guise of taking off the burden of emotional labor, and looking to an ally's perspective, is a subtle way of dismissing Black voice and agency in this situation. It may be unintentional, but it still needs to be actively acknowledged and incorporated into the university's process of responding to these issues. It starts with self-educating and it also starts from within. Allies - both on this thread and in the university - can do a better job of consulting the Black community *first* because that is always the best way to center Black voice and Black agency. While many believe that supporting Black Lives Matter is too political a stance, and not related to higher education, we have to ask ourselves how we are going to support incoming and returning Black students when we are so hesitant to vocalize that their lives matter.

Rethinking "Thugs" - Anti-Black Language when we talk about police brutality and Black resistance: Recently, Trump [tweeted](#) that these rioters/protestors are "thugs" and that ["when the](#)

[looting starts, the shooting starts."](#) This language has deeply racial/violent connotations dating back to the era of Jim Crow in the 1960s. This language only perpetuates the idea that Black people are inherently immoral and criminal, which further validates the extreme and necessarily violent military responses being used to squelch Black protestors.

Analyzing Black Death: With the rise of media, the circulation of videos and pictures of Black people being brutalized and/or murdered by the police has [become more common](#). It's complicated and traumatizing for many - especially Black people who have to see over and over again media depictions of a death that they themselves have a likelihood of facing if they interacted with a police officer. Even more traumatizing is the ways in which a lot of NBPOC and white people (allies or not) re-post, circulate, and analyze these images. Black suffering has been a spectacle in this country for decades, and I believe the university should also find a way to explicitly recognize this trauma. I also believe that this perspective needs to be better communicated to people in the Davis community who want to be allies.

Centering Black Voice & Black Agency/Acknowledging Institutional history: There are great ideas for workshops, memorials, and speakers. It is commendable that allies want to bring forth ideas about who they think the campus can bring to discuss this issue and how the university can make this response more profound. We also need to ask the Black community what is needed and what would be preferable. A diverse range of Black leaders that have the capacity should be involved in every step. Our campus has prided itself as being a [hub for diversity and innovation](#), and it is a reputation that the university needs to better internalize. Again, the institutional history of responding to Black protest and Black Lives Matter has not been the best. Statements from the administration are important, but I also hope that the university takes steps to reflect on how it will take the brutal events of recent weeks and actively make Davis a campus that values Black students, diversity, and inclusion beyond campus branding. We make up less than 3% of the undergraduate population (before graduation), yet have such high rates of incompleting, academic probation, and academic dismissal. Black Lives Matter is national movement, and it is also a retention framework that we need to learn to genuinely incorporate into how we support the Black community - especially students.

The Right to Grieve & Respectability Politics: Rioting is a complex and political response to capitalist frameworks of oppression. It makes structural violence and the true rage that Black communities have for being routinely lynched in public by police visible. It is a divisive issue for some, but Black communities have every right to politically engage and display their anger and pain as we see fit. Many times, it is the only form of agency we have. The divisiveness of "protesting" versus "rioting" and the language we use to describe who inherently has the right to publicly display their anger is inherently racial. The decision to target certain places in the community while rioting is also always valid and [reveals the relationship between the community](#) and different organizations or forms of industry in the area. The idea that Black people should respond in a more "peaceful" way or in a manner that is more palatable to those who have different ideas of politically organizing relies on this idea that Black people need to be respectable before they can politically engage. There is a reason why the National Guard was not deployed when people protesting the shelter-in-place orders decided to blockade the streets or stand at the steps of the capital with guns. There is a reason why even peaceful Black protests are met with military-grade assault weaponry, tear gas, pepper spray, and excessive force. There is a

reason why rioting is criminalized on a level that is not necessarily the case for White communities. We need to talk about this, and allies need to learn that their opinions on Black respectability have profound impacts.

Being an Anti-Racist: I plan to cite additional articles, books, potential speakers, and sources after consulting with Black leaders this week. However, my first recommendation for any ally would be the book titled [How to Be an Anti-Racist by Ibram X. Kendi](#). He is also the founder of the [Antiracist Research & Policy Center](#) at American University. While educating people on racism through workshops and speaker series is important, it is time to expand this model of recognizing and educating NBPOC and white people on these issues. Allies especially need to understand that being an ally requires being an anti-racist. And that is both a choice and a daily commitment. The university should consider incorporating an anti-racist framework into our conversations and responses.

Performative Activism/Social Media: The point made about performative activism on social media was commendable. We should also take this a step further and note that this performative action extends just as much to university statements as it does to individuals' use of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc... This moral posturing does more harm than good because it does not demand follow-up and/or accountability. It often demonstrates the lack of ability to personally commit to anti-racism outside of a platform that garners recognition. The university should also take this into consideration when disseminating any campus messages and be introspective as to how to actively write statements that move beyond acknowledging these issues and demonstrate a commitment and stance against police brutality and racism. This also applies to the earlier point made under "Analyzing Black Death."

Supporting the Movement: Not everyone can protest, especially in these conditions. There are still ways to support the community if protesting is not in your capacity (emotionally, mentally, or health-wise). Below are validated organizations and accounts that people can choose to donate to in order to support this movement. As always, people should be strongly advised to do their own research into organizations taking donations. Unfortunately, [there are examples here:]

[The official George Floyd GoFundMe Account](#)

[Gas Mask Fund](#)

[The Minnesota Freedom Fund](#)

[Additional Resources](#)