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July 13, 2020

Dear all University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Department of Oceanography Faculty Members,

The upper echelons of the School of Ocean and Earth Sciences and Technology (SOEST), including graduate and post-graduate scholars, faculty, and administration within the Department of Oceanography, are predominantly white (see appendices). Of our 34 Level 3 Regular Graduate Faculty members in the department, only three identify as People of Color, and we have no faculty members who identify as Black (data from Ocean office). This inequity is a disservice to the pursuit of knowledge as we cannot come to understand the natural world with only a narrow Euro- and white-centric worldview. What follows are the policies we need in order for true anti-racism work to take root, and thus for diversity, equity, and inclusion action to be effective.

Attempts to correct racial inequality in our department have been ineffectual. The SOEST Council on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion was established [in response](#) to a condemning [external review](#) that highlighted the inequitable treatment of women and brash dismissal of sexual assault reports within SOEST. The appointment of Anita Lopez as its interim Director was announced on April 12, 2019. Some may consider the establishment of the SOEST council as long-overdue progress in addressing diversity issues, yet intersectionality of systemic sexism and racism at our institution has never been a significant part of the council's discourse. The inaction of the council exemplifies the system that upholds white supremacy within the department, which excludes and thus silences Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) voices on matters of diversity.

We are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color staff, student, and postdoctoral members involved with the Department of Oceanography. We have found the SOEST council to be inadequate at resolving the institutional racism present in our department, and as such, we have decided we must take action into our own hands. There must be an urgency to address institutional racism properly, and there must also be an urgent commitment to implement long-term, lasting solutions that deliver justice to marginalized groups. BIPOC and allies have made significant contributions to the department, including but not limited to GRExit, Maile Mentoring Program, Halau ola Honua, graduate student stipend increase, and SOEST external review. However, more work needs to be done. We insist that our department foster a culture and community that: values and seeks the perspectives and contributions of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; elevates indigenous Hawaiian knowledge and its practitioners; and actively practices anti-racism.

Therefore, we demand that all of our faculty, staff, postdoctoral researchers, and students be fully committed to addressing racism and dismantling the racial hierarchy pervasive within the Department of Oceanography. We make this demand with the understanding that not all members of our department may receive it well; given our group's small numbers and diverse racial backgrounds, we expect there may be dismissal of the severity of our concerns and intense backlash due to underlying racism. The safety and wellbeing of ourselves and our oppressed community members are at stake. We thus look to our supportive faculty, staff, postdocs, and students to use the extent of their privileges to protect members of our group and challenge any and all racism, whether implied or overt, that they may encounter among colleagues.

A [statement](#) was sent out by SOEST on June 3, 2020 signed by several faculty members of the Department of Oceanography. Part of this statement included a commitment:

"We are actively working to build and promote an anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-discriminatory environment within which all persons can feel safe and be safe every day throughout their time in our school."

In the entirety of the statement, there was no accountability taken for the racist, sexist, and discriminatory environment that persists in SOEST. There was also a glaring absence of action items to identify ways in which anti-racism work would proceed. While we will hold accountable those who signed the SOEST statement to active participation in anti-racism work, this burden should not fall only on the faculty members who offered their signatures, but on our entire department. As evidenced in part by the continued consideration and hiring of mostly white faculty, presently in our department, racism and white supremacy are the status quo. This department can only move forward *after* collectively acknowledging its past and present role in upholding a racist hierarchy, and dismantling institutional racism in our department cannot happen without individuals first confronting their own internalized racism. Individuals must also be properly equipped to spot and challenge racist action and inaction as they witness it. A subsequent document is in preparation and will contain examples and definitions of topics related to anti-racism work. Anti-racism work has not been actively practiced and is not an explicit policy set within our department, and this must change. In order to address this in part, we demand a mandatory annual anti-racism training for all faculty, staff, postdocs, and graduate students.

From [Periodic Evaluation of Oceanography Faculty](#):

"The basis for the evaluation is continued professional growth as evidenced by the quality, effectiveness, and continuity of activities in the areas of teaching, research, and service."

Part of the evaluation of Oceanography faculty is based on service contributions to the department, university, the profession, and the community. To further hold faculty accountable, we demand that anti-racism work be explicitly stated in policy as part of the periodic evaluation of faculty criteria under service contributions. Many of our faculty members also serve as mentors to graduate students and postdoctoral researchers. The [Faculty Guide to Mentoring Graduate Students](#) (pp. 10-14), recommends that faculty “4. *Know the common concerns of all graduate students,*” and “5. *Understand the diverse factors that influence students’ mentoring needs.*” As the culture and policies of our department currently stand, we cannot in good faith recommend this department to prospective BIPOC students.

Another portion of the SOEST statement claims:

“We acknowledge our collective history, including the racism underlying the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom, and the need for compassion, understanding and empathy in our daily relationships.”

We are left to assume that all those who have signed the SOEST statement have been provided with sufficient education on the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom. We are also left to assume that the signers wholly understand that the many consequences of this crime, namely racism against Native Hawaiians, are longstanding, far reaching, and broadly occurring to this day. To avoid assumptions and to ensure the proper and sufficient education of faculty, staff, postdocs, and graduate students, we demand that education on the history of Hawai‘i and Native Hawaiian oppression be integrated as part of the mandatory annual anti-racism training.

Our department has benefited from the unique cultural heritage, values, and resources of Native Hawaiians within whose communities we live, work, and study. We acknowledge the many forms of scientific knowledge that are indigenous to Hawai‘i as well as their practitioners. It has been made clear that this department does not aim to foster a [Hawaiian Place of Learning](#) due to its absence of policy directed at upholding this value, despite this being an explicit [value](#) of the University of Hawai‘i. In recognition of the department and the University of Hawai‘i’s historical exclusion of Native Hawaiians, we explicitly stand against racism toward Native Hawaiians in its implied and overt forms, and we demand to see this sentiment reflected in our department’s policies. We further demand the addition of policy that amplifies the importance of Indigenous science and the involvement of Indigenous scientists.

The Black population faces tremendous obstacles in the pursuit of equality due to the history of slavery, segregation, mass incarceration, and prejudice. Lack of representation of Black persons in the sciences is a symptom of both past and present injustices. Within Hawai‘i, the population is only 2% self-identified as Black (see appendices); the second smallest racial demographic in the state. This furthers the Black challenges due to lack of community and isolation. In addition, all cultures in

Hawai'i engage in anti-black discord either through overt racism or colorism. Within the Oceanography Department, Black representation is absent not only in the bodies that walk our halls, but also in the science we study, the cultures we celebrate, and the perspectives we value. Our department is capable of elevating the Black population and we demand a commitment to this goal.

On June 9, 2020, the Oceanography Department pledged to form a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee. While we are appreciative of the anti-racist intention, we do not support this as a permanent solution. The members of a permanent committee would have other primary obligations as well as no formal education or experience in dealing with interpersonal and institutional anti-racism work. We propose instead an interim Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee. We would like to emphasize that this will be a temporary committee and that this is not a permanent solution. This committee will be made up of individuals from faculty, staff, postdocs, and students within the Department of Oceanography. Our recommendations on the formation of this committee are in progress and will be available upon request.

We are supportive of the proposal made by our Department Chair:

“The charge of this committee is to identify concrete, meaningful changes that we can implement to help our department become more welcoming, diverse, representative of, and responsive to the communities we serve. So, as we discuss the formation of this committee it is crucial that we have members who are skilled at proposal writing and private foundation relations, to bring in external funds to establish programs similar to Halau ola Honua and Maile Mentoring.”

We demand a full-time staff position designated to serve in our department. There is precedent for success at other institutions such as [UCSD Scripps](#). The [SOEST external review](#) also recommended the immediate procurement of a full-time position, whereas currently, only a part-time position is filled. We are fully aware that financial resources are scarce, and that the COVID-19 pandemic has further limited potential avenues of funding; however, we do not see this as an excuse to avoid demands for justice. This presents an opportunity for committee members to seek creative financial solutions. Our aforementioned demands will be delegated to this full-time staff position, and they will see to it that our concerns are addressed and solutions are perpetually carried out. This person will prepare anti-racism trainings, aid in drafting anti-racist policy, seek ways to expand equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives, continuously monitor progress, make diversity statistics publicly available, and revise and update procedures as the needs of the department shift. This person must also have an intimate understanding of the culture unique to Hawai'i and Native Hawaiians. Our department should seize this opportunity to serve as an example to other departments, to SOEST, and to our university as a whole.

We understand the formation of an interim committee and subsequent hiring of a full-time staff will not be immediate; however, the department can still take immediate action. We demand an opportunity to ho‘oponopono with all faculty, staff, postdocs, and students facilitated by an external mediator trained in the practices of ho‘oponopono.

Within two weeks, we demand a signed response to this letter from faculty. This response should also include accountability measures for uncooperative faculty. If the faculty are unable to come to a consensus on a singular document, individuals or groups may submit their responses separately.

Finally, the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, the ongoing national protests against anti-Black police brutality, and the Black Lives Matter movement have provided us with the encouragement and opportunity to make these demands. We would like to give proper credit to the contributions of the Black community, whose demands for equality led to the culmination of this document.

Sincerely,

(alphabetically)

Petra Kim Byl
Andrian Gajigan
Keku‘iapōiula Keliipuleole
Andrés Esteban Salazar Estrada
Ashley Hi‘ilani Sanchez
Eric Masa Shimabukuro
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Appendices

We have used language and examples from the [Letter to UCSB EEMB Faculty with Demands Toward Racial Equality](#) written by EEMB graduate students. Detailed examples of how to carry out demands are included in their letter.

Appendix I. Why we used the term demand

Adapted from UCSB [Demands Toward Racial Equality](#):

We use ‘demand’:

- To *elevate* the attitudes and values associated with contemporary liberation movements in solidarity with our Black, Indigenous, and People of Color colleagues, students, staff, and mentors;
- To *authentically center* the [historical struggle](#) that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color experience when fighting for adequate resources against a backdrop of competing interests;
- To *disrupt* the [overt and covert oppressive impacts](#) that academic [research](#) has on marginalized communities around the world; and
- To *highlight* that recognizing the humanity and experiences of our Black, Indigenous, and People of Color colleagues is not something we are willing to compromise on.

Appendix II. Definition of terms

(Note: we are using the contemporary academic definitions of “racism” and “white supremacy.”)

Racism: The belief that a particular group of people is superior over another, based on the social construct of “race,” pervasive both individually and institutionally. Individual racism is easily identifiable, while systemic racism refers to “*rules, practices and customs once rooted in law with residual effects that reverberate throughout society*” (Andra Gillespie) and “*a system of hierarchy and inequity, primarily characterized by white supremacy.*”

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racism>

<https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/Definitions-of%20Racism.pdf>

White supremacy: The “*political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white*

subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.” -
Frances Lee Ansley

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_supremacy

<https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html>

Justice: The collective responsibility of a free and just society, to ensure that civil and human rights are preserved and protected for each individual regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, nation of origin, sexual orientation, class, physical or mental ability, and age.

from UCSB [Demands Toward Racial Equality](#):

Underrepresented: Belonging to an identity group that has been historically and systematically excluded from higher education and other rights or opportunities, and is therefore currently less present or less visible in our department than they would be if the demographics of our community matched those of the broader population.

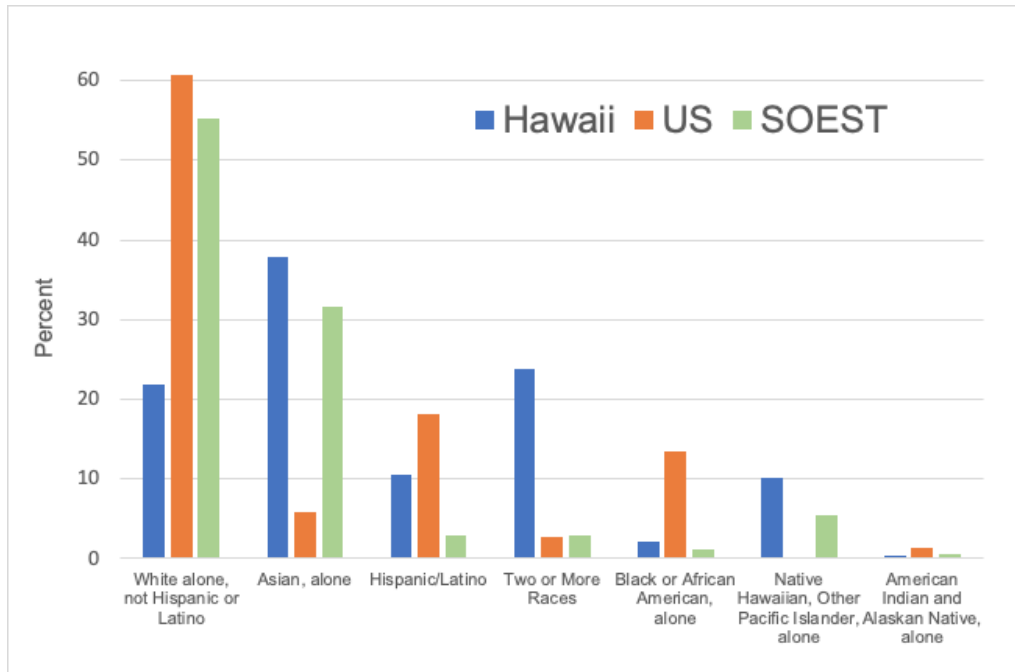
Diverse: A group encompassing those who have a variety of individual and group-social identities, including but not limited to underrepresented gender identities, sexualities, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds; socioeconomic disadvantage; Indigenous status; first-generation status; dis/ability; and neurodivergence. It is important to keep in mind intersectionality ([Crenshaw, 1989](#)), or the interconnected nature of categorizations such as those listed.

Anti-racism: “The active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably.” This definition highlights the importance of anti-racism as a verb, a process that requires consistent attention, internal reflection, and knowledge building.

Equity: Whereas equality indicates that everyone receives the same amount of resources, equity takes into account each person’s starting point or conditions. In an equal distribution, each person might receive one piece of bread regardless of their needs; in an *equitable* distribution, one would take into account whether the person has eaten yet that day, how much food they would need to survive, and allocate an appropriate amount of bread that accounts for these initial imbalances. For example, equity is important when thinking about education and mentorship, as each student comes into the program with a different background and different needs.

Inclusion: The “active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity,” which allows for the creation of a space where all individuals from all groups feel comfortable, safe, respected, and heard.

Appendix III. 2018-2019 racial and ethnic diversity among employees in SOEST



Explanatory note: SOEST racial/ethnic diversity data provided by MIRO (Manoa Institutional Research Office). UH System-wide data is available at IRO. The data used for this graph can be accessed [here](#). If you have questions about this graph contact: agajigan@hawaii.edu. This is employees data so it includes faculty, staff and graduate students with GA/TA/RAs. We have yet to identify a source for undergraduate diversity. We acknowledge that aggregating Asian as well as other “races” in one group is inherently problematic. For instance, Asians are not monolithic but have unequal degrees of oppression.