



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

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June 2, 2020

Dear Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Graduate Students and Postdocs,

The past three months have been an exceptionally challenging and stressful time. The COVID19 pandemic swept across the nation, and, overnight, you were asked to socially isolate from family and friends, to shelter in place, and to reduce or stop your research. The economic fallout from the pandemic has affected many of your friends and family. These experiences produce anxiety and often frustrating as the institutional response has been fluid and sometimes uncertain. Anti-Asian xenophobia and news about sudden changes to Chinese visa rules have added to these anxieties for many of our students and postdocs. Then seven days ago, anti-black racism led to the tragic and unnecessary death of George Floyd, causing despair, anger, and rage towards a system in which xenophobia and racism are often woven into the very fabric of our institutions and society.

These events directly affect our physical and mental health, as we struggle to understand them and how to fix them and bring about a more just and equitable society. Today, the immediate economic, social, and political issues feel overwhelming and can be paralyzing. As leaders within the department, we can focus on those issues that we can control directly. We strongly reaffirm that the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology is committed to all of our graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. We pledge to oppose bias and racism in the department, the university, and the academy. We continue to be committed to the building of an inclusive department and to providing a safe, supportive, and respectful environment so that all graduate students and postdocs are free to pursue their passion for biology. We encourage open communication to discuss any of the issues with the DECADE mentor, the Graduate Advisor, your mentors, and the Chair. We will listen to you, our students and trainees, and hear your stories, understand where you are coming from, and do our best to create an environment where you can discuss racism and bias without fear of being judged.

In the coming weeks and months, we will work to implement concrete steps to reaffirm these values. We will consider, among other things, a visible anti-racist statement on the department website, expanding faculty training on implicit bias, developing a departmental climate survey, and leveraging departmental resources to support new diversity, equity, and inclusion activities. We will humbly ask for your input on these and other ideas, and we promise to listen with compassion and understanding.

Sincerely,
Jim, Donovan, and Jen