

# Propositions from Printmaking Class '21

## Statement of Intent:

Given the lackluster departmental response, in essence shifting much blame to lack of funding and bureaucratic difficulties, we the undergraduate class of 2021 would like to work towards facilitating departmental longevity and remedy a number of issues that currently ail our institutional experience, specifically with the aim of prioritizing BIPOC voices and their involvement. The following contains a short list of potential initiatives, some of which require zero funding and simply the continued effort of faculty. However, others will take real time, work, and reallocation of funds. We must reflect on the ways in which we have harmed Black people and act by redistributing the resources, power, and security that privilege has rewarded us. We expect and require continued transparency and dialogue moving forward to ensure that we can make progress given the current circumstances and limitations set by the global pandemic.

We cannot support the department's response, which shifts culpability and involvement in systems that actively exclude Black, Indigenous, and people of color at this institution. Pointing to an overall institutional lack of BIPOC representation as an excuse for an all white, full-time printmaking faculty is an inadequate justification.

## Proposed Initiatives:

- 1. Hiring More BIPOC Professors:** The lack of BIPOC faculty should not be reduced to a lack of local "qualified" BIPOC, which is likely untrue. If this were the case, the department should consider teaching technical skills to potential hires, because it is evident that neither experience nor titles guarantee a good professor. For example, grad students with varying levels of experience are allowed to and often excel in teaching printmaking technique specific courses. Separate training should be offered to newly hired professors regardless of "qualifications" to unify the technical curriculum that is taught to the students in addition to SEI training. Most importantly, we should be actively seeking out and contacting Black printmakers rather than waiting for them to find and respond to job openings.
- 2. Introduction of Required Print Histories/Contexts Course:** With the aim of addressing inequities in academic representation, much of our current print instruction is centered around a western canon that does not include the histories of BIPOC and Queer individuals, or recognize their contributions or advancements to the medium. Furthermore, the curriculum does not acknowledge the medium's weaponization against enslaved Black people, involvement in a culture of incarceration, and importance as a tool for antislavery and protest. A lack of BIPOC faculty is not a valid justification for the omission of these significant facets of print history. Although our department has recently introduced the course "Print Cultures: Learning Print-History through Object-based Study" we do not feel this course outline speaks specifically enough to the values we wish to see from our education. While object-based focus is an approach to print history, it should not be the sole focus of our instruction, which should also

look upon an inclusive, and holistic approach to history. Additionally, though this course was offered, it did not run during the spring semester, and we must stress its absolute necessity and requirement for majors.

In reference to Andrew's request for exemplary curricula, we have looked to other print programs and institutions (Yale, SUNY Purchase, Pratt, etc.) for ideas to recontextualize this course, and propose the following working list of suggestions and materials:

- **Global Print Histories**

- encompassing different cultural and societal approaches to the medium as well as addressing its shifting role in society over time
- acknowledging the prominence of a western canon in academia and consciously working to educate us on other nations' histories within printed media
- recognition of and education on individuals who furthered print processes

- **Printmaking and Power Structures**

- encompassing race, class, gender, and so forth
- printmaking as used by white enslavers to create posters also referred to as "fugitive slave posters" in pursuit of enslaved Black people who fled from their torturers, which developed into more popularized wanted posters and contributed to the normalization of a culture of incarceration
- printmaking utilized for propaganda
- printmaking as a catalyst for developing and disseminating iconographic symbols

- **Printmaking and Activism**

- Emory Douglas: printmaker for Black Panther newspaper
- Taller de Gráfica Popular (The People's Print Workshop): revolutionary print collective founded by artists Leopoldo Méndez, Pablo O'Higgins, and Luis Arenal in Mexico in 1937
- printmaking as used by abolitionists to print and distribute posters, books, images, etc.
- JustSeeds is a contemporary example of a print collective that supports grassroots struggles for justice through open source graphics, publications etc.

- **Printmaking and Accessibility**

- recognizing accessibility issues within printmaking
- used to reach a larger audience but also can be inaccessible with regards to equipment and skill

- **Other Materials**

- Pitseolak Ashoona and Kinngait Studios
- Taller 99

- 3. Equipping Students & Faculty to Critically Reflect on Identity-based Work:** The department must establish a close and continuous relationship with RISD's Center for Social Equity & Inclusion or the Center for Reconciliation, a non-profit based in Providence, and require all faculty to attend public programs and workshops. Furthermore, all syllabi and course outlines should include resources and designated time within class discussion centered around educating students on how to properly and respectfully engage identity-based work. While the proposed Print Histories course can function in tandem to these actions, it is in no way a placeholder for the continued critical dialogues that will educate students and teachers alike. Too often that burden falls on uncomfortable and uncompensated students in the form of silence or traumatic exchanges disguised as "learning moments" during their own critiques.
- 4. Recontextualizing Shop Monitor Responsibilities:** While the department has made space for out of major engagement, access is still limited to those who can afford studio lab fees. While we are aware of the financial necessity of these fees, we propose creating a system that prioritizes BIPOC and underprivileged students, and puts an end to structural gatekeeping. Rather than turning out-of-major students away, monitors should be directing them to 1:1 demos, sharing diy resources, providing a list of local printing presses, and so forth. Additionally, technician-monitor meetings should be actualized and more often to better train monitors and facilitate this outreach.
- 5. One on One Instruction:** Create a system that allows for a thorough introduction to printmaking techniques for nonmajors or underclassmen, with priority given to BIPOC students, through individual demonstrations given by studio monitors or volunteering members of the department once a week. Additionally, we can emphasize resources through which students may learn DIY methodologies or continue their print explorations beyond studio hours/access.
- 6. Examination of the RISD Editions Program:** As it stands, this program only benefits outside artists and the RISD Museum. Often, these editions are printed with the unpaid labour of Graduate or Senior students with the ruse of making professional connections. As it functions now, this program does not benefit students, and the resources we invest in this program could be better allocated elsewhere. If this program is to continue, it must focus on bolstering BIPOC and underprivileged voices in the print world. Local activist groups or groups committed to community enrichment could benefit from our labor and resources (i.e Amor Network, Black and Pink Providence, Providence Youth Student Movement).
- 7. Examination or Consolidation of Courses:** A number of supposedly-advanced technique courses exist under the guise of teaching new technical skills to students when in actuality they are simply open studio projects. These courses should be eliminated, reformatted to more specifically instruct students, or replaced altogether to make space for courses taught by BIPOC. Additionally, Light To Ink should be consolidated into the respective introductory courses, while it's degree requirement accreditation could be relieved by our proposed, required history course.

- 8. Introduction of Student-Teacher Review Panel:** While students are given the opportunity to give feedback to their teachers at the end of a course, this feedback is often never addressed or tangibly shown to elicit change. We the students would like to personally hold our professors accountable for improving their teaching. This can be done in an anonymous manner with teachers reading feedback to the class or through open dialogues with faculty members. Our educational and personal concerns have continuously been ignored and they must be addressed.

**Initiatives That Address Issues of Engagement:**

To be clear, the following initiatives work to address issues of engagement/membership which the Printmaking Department has outlined as contributing factors to the lack of BIPOC within our major. Therefore, we recognize that these propositions ultimately serve our department and that there remains a need for larger initiatives that center BIPOC—initiatives that directly address and challenge the institutional frameworks that alienate BIPOC and protect those who harm them, Printmaking included. These proposed measures cannot serve as a long term stand in for the racial equity demands of the RISD Anti-Racism Coalition, because they are not solutions to the root of the problem. They should only be implemented in addition to the initiatives above, which more directly serve BIPOC, as soon as safety can be guaranteed given that we are currently facing a global pandemic. While we do not wish to justify the reasoning that the majority white student population is reflected in the Printmaking department by no fault of its own, we propose these initiatives with the intention of proving how easy some of these problems can be to address.

- 1. Student Involvement in Departmental Processes:** Students are left out of crucial departmental processes that affect them the most. Opportunities for transparency and communication can be established through student representation alongside faculty at department meetings, in the hiring process, and in the selection of guest critics or speakers.
- 2. Better Outreach & Utilization of Department Social Media:** We would like to emphasize the necessity of social media as a legitimate tool for broadcasting, recruiting, and supporting the efforts of students and the print world. Social Media accounts should be better implemented to spotlight current student work, as well as alumni and their accomplishments. Additionally they should be used to share information on upcoming events, artist talks/lectures. This responsibility can easily be and should be shared among students and faculty.
- 3. Reintroduction of the Benson Hall Gallery:** The Benson Hall Gallery and the student-run exhibitions it facilitated are a vital part of the printmaking education, which has much to do with curation and presentation. If Printmaking wishes to laud the achievements of its alumni who pursue curation, it must acknowledge the role a gallery space has played in laying that foundation. Given our knowledge of Benson's space, we believe at least half of the Tech Lab could be reformatted to run as a small, student gallery space. Additionally, the printmaking department should consider moving the plotter and laser cutter to senior studio spaces.
- 4. Junior/Senior Open Studios and Open Critiques:** Regularly advertise open studios and critiques to better inform freshmen and sophomores of the types of work made in the

department and familiarize them with printmaking critique spaces and focuses. Additionally, we would like to encourage the reintroduction of Sophomore and Junior reviews as well as Shows.

**5. Establishment of Cross-Year Partnerships/Mentorships:** Given the open and cross disciplinary approach to studio work our major and building facilitates, we would like to establish more concrete interactions between students within the Printmaking department. The Sophomore experience is primarily a technical introduction to printmaking, and these students need to be exposed to the experimental and exploratory approach upperclassmen embody. This can be done through cross-year critiques, print exchanges, or partner/mentorship practices.

**6. Inclusion of Teaching Assistants for Graduate-Run Wintersession Courses:** Wintersession courses play a fundamental role in establishing freshman and out of major connections with the printmaking department. If these courses are run by unengaged graduate students, our enrollment directly suffers. We propose that all Graduate students teaching Wintersession courses opt for a junior/senior Teaching Assistant to ensure shop protocol is followed and that students taking these courses feel well equipped, instructed, and acknowledged.

### **Acknowledgements:**

While this list of potential initiatives encompasses an immediate approach to restructuring departmental approaches, we recognize the institutional failures that make serious change and redistribution of equity to BIPOC difficult, specifically RISD's recent stance on halting hiring processes, their pattern of depriving BIPOC of fair contracts and legitimate positions of leadership, and tokenizing them. In order to move forward as a department, we must also demand the continuing support and uplifting of BIPOC voices in academia. When it comes time to hire new faculty members, both part-time and full, the Printmaking Department must acknowledge its historic whiteness and nepotism, and engage student feedback when hiring instructors.

These propositions were drafted by the Printmaking Undergraduate Class of 2021.

### **Copy of Email to Department:**

Subject: '21 BFA Printmaking Departmental Propositions

Dear RISD Printmaking Faculty and Students,

As members of this institution, and both witnesses and victims to its violence, the Printmaking Class of 2021 recognizes our complacency in waiting to break our silence. We need to be more alert and proactive so that Black, Indigenous, and non-Black people of color, who are already vulnerable to systemic oppression, aren't forced to speak out at their own risk. We are grateful for the students advocating for BIPOC through the RISD & Race Forum, RISD Anti-Racism Coalition, BlackAtRisd,

and all other organizations challenging institutional racism. We will continue to support their work and demand transparency and action from our specific department in addition to RISD as a whole. Attached is our group statement which proposes a number of solutions, both short term and long term, with the intention of supporting our BIPOC faculty and students as well as addressing departmental ailments.

**Statement of Intent:**

Given the lackluster departmental response, in essence shifting much blame to lack of funding and bureaucratic difficulties, we, the undergraduate Class of 2021, would like to work towards facilitating departmental longevity and remedy a number of issues that currently ail our institutional experience, specifically with the aim of prioritizing BIPOC voices and their involvement. The following contains a short list of potential initiatives, some of which require zero funding and simply the continued effort of faculty. However, others will take real time, work, and reallocation of funds. We must reflect on the ways in which we have harmed Black people and act by redistributing the resources, power, and security that privilege has rewarded us. We expect and require continued transparency and dialogue moving forward to ensure that we can make progress given the current circumstances and limitations set by the global pandemic.

We cannot support the department's response, which shifts culpability and involvement in systems that actively exclude Black, Indigenous, and people of color at this institution. Pointing to an overall institutional lack of BIPOC representation as an excuse for an all white, full-time printmaking faculty is an inadequate justification.