

# Union Alumni Call to Action Letter for Institutional and Infrastructural Changes



Union Alumni Against Racism

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To President Harris and the Union College Board of Trustees:

It has come to the attention of a concerned group of Union College alumni that a student organization under “Young Americans for Freedom” has recently been approved through the Student Forum. This group is using their platform to espouse racist and inflammatory statements which are dangerous and unrepresentative of the Union College community. The organization is spreading rhetoric that not only denies the lived experiences of Black students but is also factually incorrect and should not be tolerated at an institution of higher learning. The

statements made by this group must not be taken as outliers or brushed aside as simply “diverse viewpoints”; Union’s response to the formation of this group is just one example of the ways in which white supremacy has been permitted at the College.

Union College does not provide an anti-racist education and should use this student organization, this letter, and the voices of alumni who are tired of the administration’s consistent neglect of students of color as a call to action. Union has failed to integrate anti-racist teaching and education about systemic racism into the curriculum, therefore failing to be a model institution for the ways in which universities teach about and address systemic racism in the United States. As a direct result, part of the student population leaves without an understanding of the importance of cultural competency, institutionalized racism in the United States, or the ability to determine fact from fiction as it relates to the experiences of BIPOC in the United States.

There is a stark difference between “difficult conversations” and racist rhetoric. We find the current response from the College unacceptable, and are both disturbed and disappointed by the vague statements made in response to public outcry from students and alumni. As no recognizable steps have been taken to meaningfully address systemic racism and white supremacy on Union’s campus, you are failing to protect and aid communities that expect support from their college.

We should not need to plead with the administration to implement policies and programs that have already been put into place by peer liberal arts institutions. Providing opportunities for growth and education among all Union students means recognizing its tremendous role in building racial equity. Beyond discussions with students, we demand that specific and actionable plans be made to support the community during what the College describes as “trying times.”

We, the undersigned, are demanding Union College make the following changes:

1. Administration

- a. Denounce the statements made by the Young Americans for Freedom under the banner of Union College, and establish a more comprehensive application and review process for groups seeking student organization status and potential campus speakers.

- b. Create and execute a detailed plan outlining the College’s intention to recruit and hire faculty, financial aid counselors, and administrative staff of color with the integration of input from current students of color.

- c. Issue a plan detailing how BIPOC students will be supported once they return to campus, including but not limited to:

centering race into decisions which impact the college community, requiring a comprehensive anti-racist training at the beginning of every academic year, and establishing a student led review board that addresses racial equity and inclusion at Union College (for example, monitoring instances of racial profiling).

## 2. Curriculum

a. Restructure freshman preceptorial courses to center on race and inequality and modify the Language and Cultural Competency requirement to require one class that focuses on systemic racism and systems of oppression.

b. Require faculty to submit plans detailing how they intend to incorporate race into their courses in the coming academic year.

c. Dedicate one class day to have the entire school engage in conversations centering around race and inequality (for example, Bates College shuts down classes on MLK day and brings in speakers and trainers to facilitate discussions).

## 3. Student Life

a. Require all students to undergo cultural competency training as a part of Orientation that shows students how to engage in anti-racist practices; this should include addressing microaggressions

on campus, use of the term DOID to refer to Schenectady residents, and a required summer reading that addresses race on college campuses.

b. Build an Alumni of Color Network to expand resources and mentorship opportunities for undergraduates.

c. Prioritize BIPOC representation on all student hearing committees that can impose punishments on students to ensure that all sanctions are standardized regardless of race.

d. Hold Greek organizations accountable for parties that are racist or harmful to students of color by requiring the Multicultural Liaison Committee's approval of themes.

e. Create a bridge program between the Multicultural Greek Council and the Panhellenic and Interfraternity Councils to increase community relations, resting on student agreement.

f. Allow a student review board for any complaints against campus safety's mistreatment towards BIPOC students.

*Under the Laws of the Minerva, we all become brothers and sisters;* we believe that the lack of policies and practices to address white supremacy on Union College's campus directly conflicts with the stated motto of the school. We understand that standing up for

what is right requires wisdom, empathy, and courage. We also believe in the strength and power of a Union College education. We hope, however, that this letter urges Union's leadership to re-evaluate their core values in order to work towards a curriculum and institutional practices that are more intentional, empowering, and supportive for students of color.

*Please sign here and your name will be added to the petition.*

For questions and comments please contact  
[unionalumniagainstracism@gmail.com](mailto:unionalumniagainstracism@gmail.com)

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**We have asked alumni of color to share their personal experiences at Union as a way of centering the voices of those who have been ignored, harassed, and harmed by the Union community. These are the responses we received. Those who asked for their name to not be included are listed as anonymous.**

*Alumni of color interested in submitting a story may do so here.*

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If not for my brother's and sisters of color... ~ *Joey Kotright, 1994*

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I was a queer biracial student at Union. While I have no distinct moments of racism to share (esp as a non Black poc) I do want to say this: in the 12 months since I graduated and left campus, I have finally felt free to be who I am. To be unapologetically queer and unapologetically biracial, and to take up space in those identities. At Union, I always felt massive pressure to put those parts of myself away or make them small. It has been CATHARTIC to leave Union College and experience the true intersection of my identities. ~ *Molly Brogie, 2019*

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Hearing the word ‘N\*\*\*\*r’ used by an SRS prof without any warning was triggering. In a predominantly white institution hearing that word from a white professor, regardless of how applicable it is to class, without first reaching out to students of color to tell them it will be used and the context in which it will be used is traumatizing. Campus safety constantly harassed me because I did not look white. I had to dress from head toe at Union with Union gear so that they could easily identify me as a student and stop harassing me. Also, hearing white students refer to Schenectady residents that looked like me as ‘doids’ made me think of everything that meant they thought of me. ~ *Troy Williams, 2017*

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So many stories. Here are the ones that scarred me the most:

1. Prof. Berk in the Holocaust class telling me and a group of black girls in front of the whole auditorium that “MLK should be turning in his grave” because we did not know what the Middle Passage was. Why is it that Professors hold POC to a different standard when it comes to knowing ‘our’ history? Why not hold white students accountable for knowing their history so that they do not continue perpetrating the same aggressions their ancestors did? It’s slavery its not just our history. It was deeply traumatic to be called out in a room of white students. Professors like Berk continue to publicly humiliate POC while white students are nurtured.

2. Being told that “people like me are always asking for financial help” by financial aid staff when I advocated for scholarships so I could go abroad. I remember going home and resenting my parents for being unable to financially support me while I was at Union. I will never will be able to not feel guilty for even having that thought run through my head. I have a faced many racist comments from the student body but nothing hurt me as much as being in an environment where the very own people entrusted to protect me continuously did this me and countless others. ~

*Genesis Guerra, 2018*

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Union does have an area for growth in educating all students about people of color. Take this as an opportunity to help educate those who may have never been taught the right way. ~

*Anonymous*

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At Union, I've felt the need to constantly be identified as black, or a woman. And within this, I've struggled a lot, especially with the student body and administration. I feel so much that I've had to teach my peers and others around me about how to be a decent person just because I'm a black woman. and I shouldn't have to have done that, especially since I was a college student still figuring things out around me. I came up with an idea for classes and precepts focused on multiculturalism, honing in on intersectional topics based on identity (think classes focusing on Black women, Latinx community, Indigenous lives today, or a combo of all of them!), with a focus on these classes being requirements for students. Consistently, the administration has denied my suggestion, which I'm sure many other students (esp those of color) have made. We need to start taking in people's experiences into account. I love Union, and truly grew during my 4 years there. However, the lack of acknowledgement towards students of color, and their problems consistently faced Year after year has become a matter I feel is important for the school to acknowledge. Please prove that you care about your students of color, and make some effective change to the constant lack of knowledge and education, Union College. ~ *Dalila Haden, 2019*

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It is abhorrent that there are multiple departments on campus with zero Black or Latinx professors. As a Black woman I had to take a class about Black women writers with a white woman professor. As a double major at Union, the only Black professor I had, man or woman, was Professor Butler, in the sociology department. She should not have to bear that burden. As a student leader in BSU, I witnessed firsthand discrimination from administration. Our event ideas and titles more heavily scrutinized funding denied for events “too focused on food” while that was the sole agenda of other ethnic affinity organizations on campus. As a member of multicultural greek life, I have been personally discriminated against by administration in the Greek life office: called “spicy and hot,” and seen white men on campus get praised after verbally abusing administrators. ~ *Katie Casado, 2019*

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“Wow. I’ve never met a minority before.” This was the first interaction with my roommate during move in day. I was overcome by shock. This sense of shock became eerily familiar over the years as my interactions with white people accumulated. “We shouldn’t be forced to talk about Trayvon” was the response of one student when Jason Benitez proposed a town hall shortly after his murder. “Let me call up to verify you really go here” was the response of a campus safety officer while I fumbled to find my ID to return back to Davidson. I was an RA there. And a handful of students silently creeped by me during that interaction and didn’t vouch for me. Shock. As if I needed a voucher. As if a wrongful death didn’t need much explanation to warrant a simple discussion. As if meeting a BIPOC for the first time didn’t happen at the age of 18. The litany could go on then. Still goes on today. And yet Union provides protections and comfortabilities to its White, affluent population as if they were the ones under constant emotional, psychological and sometimes physical threat. ~ *Alvaro Peters, 2010*

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I was a sophomore 2015 at Union College. I was pledging to join a Multicultural Greek organization. Mary Ellen Burt, the head of Varsity Women’s Basketball team calls me in her office. She gave

me an ultimatum and said “basketball or sorority” my response was “alright Sorority” she then proceeds to ask “why?” My response “I need another group to be a part of for support” Marty Ellen says “you have basketball team” I said “I’m the only Black player on the team... the other girls on the team can not relate to me like that” Mary Ellen then responds and says “ I don’t want 14 Clones TRU!” My immediate thoughts were “Am I here to play basketball or be your token black.” This eventually turned into a 3 day conversation with one of the founders of the chapter at Union-college and eventually I was able to do both basketball and pledging. However, my playing time was reduced to the point I didn’t play at all.

I was in class my junior year 2016. The topic was Eugenics! The teach asked the simple question “does this experiment make America Bad” the white students say there piece.. As I speak and say “America is a terrible country because not everyone has has the fruits of America!” A white student cuts me off and says “If America is so bad why don’t YOU just leave” then her white counterpart proceeds and says “yeah if America is so bad why does everyone want to come here!?” The professor did not handle the situation that was at hand. I stopped attending the class for about 4 days. When I go back to class the students “apology” is “ I don’t take back what I said, I’m entitled to say what I want but yeah sorry” ... not handled the right way...

In 2017 I invited my twin sister and best friend over for a weekend at Union College. We head over to attend a party. We get denied at the door because they ask for student ID. I told them I'm a senior here and they are my best friend and sister from home. They then form a group of guys at the top of the porch and they say "is there a problem" I told them we would like to join the party" they say "women only.. "I said great we are lol," then he says "you know what we mean"... I simply take this to the Greek Council Liz Artz... "I ask can we all just a have a conversation" they deny that and ask to write I letter ... nothing was done ... ~ *Krystal TRU Edwards, 2017*

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I remember one incident — as a first year student — where I was attending a Union sponsored social gathering with other Union students. While there, I had a upperclassman approach me and say “Schenectady residents are not welcome here. You can see your way out.” That made a profound impact on how I later viewed many of the white students at Union College. Their implicitly bias thoughts and notions revealed to me that many students did not see me as someone that was capable of being able to attend an institution such as Union, and spoke depths to the underlying racial biases that prevailed within the student body. While this may, at the surface, seem to be an isolated incident, that was not an uncommon sentiment to be expressed to many of my POC peers that attended Union and had to engage in blatantly ignorant conversations such as that. While this may not have taken a toll on my educational experience at Union, it definitely took a toll on the way I viewed the values of Union College as a whole. ~ *Ayanah Dowdye, 2018*

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I believe that there should be a diversity course woven into the general education curriculum. Not only is it vital for the understanding of different cultures that exist but also essential for educating the people who would have otherwise no experience/teaching with this matter. ~ *Anonymous*

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When I was a junior, living in CPH, I was hanging out with my friends on a Friday night doing some things we were not supposed to be doing. I start the story like this because I understand that drinking underage and especially playing beer pong were not allowed. So, an RA, who was with a campus safety officer, knocked on my door because of a “noise complaint”. They immediately saw what we were doing and we should’ve gotten points and that been the end of the story. Instead, the officer came in, and clearly asked the three students in the room who were black if they were students at Union. They all were. He did not ask my fellow white students. We all showed him our students IDs and he told me that he couldn’t read my ID number and that he was going to confiscate it and I’d have to pay \$25 to get a new one. My ID card was not in the best shape, but you could see my ID number, and even if not, I was happy to also just say it aloud to him. After a little back and forth, he let me keep my ID card. We

were all written up, and he told everyone to leave the room, except for myself and my roommate, but it was almost time for us all to head out anyways, so we all left and the officer and RA walked us out of the building. For whatever reason, I felt like I should speak up to him. I told him I didn't like the way that he asked only the black students if they went to union. Had he apologized quickly, and said something along the lines of "I'm sorry, those weren't my intentions, I needed to know if all of you were students", this probably wouldn't have been a memory of mine that I felt I needed to share. Instead, he became very defensive and, I quote, said "You think I'm some racist skinhead?!" The officer did happen to be bald. I don't really remember what followed that, but I know that my friends told me to calm down and just leave the situation alone. When I received my notice of how many points I would be receiving for this interaction, it was 20. For all people who go to Union, I don't even know what the penalty was for anything over 10 points. Some of the reasons that I was getting specific points were completely made up, like showing a fake ID, not complying with the officer, etc. After talking with the head of res life and explaining the situation, I was charged with 3 points. I felt that was justified, as I wasn't 100% following the Union handbook. I also saw that campus safety officer on campus several times after that, not that we ever talked again, but it didn't seem that any action had been taken against him. Of course, maybe he had received a stern talking to, I can't know for sure. Honestly, as far as issues with

campus safety officers and black students go, my story isn't winning any awards. But I wonder how many small stories like this one students have. I'm sure I'm not the only one. ~

*Christopher Klein, 2019*

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While attending Union, I have personally seen and heard of many stories of racism on campus. Here are only a couple of examples.

1. While passing by a friend studying at a desk in Shaffer Library, she pointed out very racist graffiti on it. Written on the desk was “Chi Psi > Black People” and on another part of the desk, “Profits (n): the forfeitures of slaves to their masters”. I still have pictures. When I read this I was completely horrified. I brought this to the attention of Jason Benitez, the Director of Multicultural Affairs, and nothing productive was done. Only a sign was posted where the graffiti was, saying something along the lines of “This was the site of racist vandalism and we denounce it.” No actions were taken against Chi Psi, nothing.

2. The racial profiling of BIPOC on campus needs to end. While walking across campus students of color have been called “doids”, a derogatory term used to describe locals. In addition to this, profiling happens at the doorsteps of Frats. Multiple friends have shared with me that they have been asked to show their student

IDs at the door while their white counterparts just got to walk through. This is disgraceful. If a group on campus wants to ensure that only students are in attendance then they should be IDing everyone, not just targeting students of color.

3. A racist that I had to walk past every day was the statue of Chester Arthur, who is, unfortunately, significant to the Union community and signed the Chinese Exclusion Act into law in 1882. As a Chinese immigrant, I am absolutely disgusted that Union continues to display his statue at the school. It is a blatant disregard for Asian students on campus and this racist man should not be celebrated. Just as cities have been removing their Confederate statues, Union needs to follow suit and remove the racist, Chester Arthur.

I am tired of Union twiddling their thumbs and not taking an actual stand against the racism that its students face. Words of solidarity mean nothing until we see the change that this Call to Action highlights. ~ *Anna Klug, 2018*

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Numerous times throughout my four year experience, I felt marginalized and discriminated against after being referred to by racist and/or classist slurs by fellow students. ~ *Anonymous*

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Being the only person (and only Black person in the line) not let into parties (on multiple occasions) even if the party was for your sorority; being written up for “loitering” at the residence hall I lived in (how can you be written up for loitering in the place you live?) — and only the Black students were written up (no white students who were present were written up) AND the housing staff stated we were in a room of a Black student who wasn’t even on that floor that night; having the Greek life director not care about cultural concerns and instead only cared about getting chapters in trouble for alcohol; experiencing emotional trauma from Union students daily (examples: simply asking one for lotion and their snarky response was I don’t own lotion I’m not Black; being called “exotic” and asked what are you as if I’m not American; endless jungle fever jokes when I was with a white partner; being told I can’t wear my hair straight because that appropriates “white culture” when Black people are taught since day one that straight hair is better and natural hair gets made fun of; having to explain why the n-word is hurtful — some students didn’t even know the origin of this word...) etc. There’s more but basically I was reminded I was a Black person at Union every single day. ~ *Anonymous*

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Everyone is entitled to their beliefs yes but if you look at the content this group is posting, it is beyond just conservative groups (look at that post about China and Mexico on the YAF page) which begins to seep into a racist bucket. Furthermore, Union already makes POC on campus feel uncomfortable, in and out of the classroom — — — example, going through rush and when we got our bids to our sororities, a lot of initial reactions were not congratulatory but more ‘how did someone like you manage to get into this sorority’ WHY SHOULD THAT HAVE EVEN BEEN A QUESTION. Not to mention, sitting in classes with some professors that would make black students feel like the token black person.... ~ *Shreya Chowdhury, 2015*

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I am mixed-race Asian and grew up overseas. When I told a student I came from Kenya (where I went to high school) they told me “I didn’t look Kenyan.” I’ve had people tell me I was didn’t understand what it was like to be an international student, I’ve had people tell me I’m “basically white” so there was no need to worry about Asian racism during the coronavirus. I’ve heard many white students use racial, homophobic, and ableist slurs in campus. In a class discussion a student my Freshman year told us it was “easier to come out as Republican than gay on Union campus.” I’ve witnessed students not be allowed into parties because because of their sexual orientation and race. I’ve seen people wrongly assume fellow students are just Schenectady residents because they are black. POC students are told to make their organizations more inclusive than other clubs, which I also frankly don’t think is fair when so many other organizations don’t have to make explicit statements that “everyone is welcome.” ~ *Marisa Peters, 2020*

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Union college has always been viewed in two halves: the “white side” and the “black side”. On the white side you have the affluent white kids joining frats and sororities like TDX and SDT while the kids of color join the multicultural frats and sororities whose names I can’t even remember sadly, because people rarely talked about them. As a former student (of color) I happened to join one of the “white” frats. Throughout my 4 years at Union a sort of segregation was always present. The black kids hung out and partied with the black kids and the white kids hung out and partied with the white kids. Rarely did one side or the other ever invite or hangout with the other. Mainly because (seen through personal experience), people of color weren’t ever allowed inside (waited in line indefinitely) to party or invited. The divide was so prevalent that whenever the multicultural frats or sororities hosted a party it would be known as “the black people dance party”. Social life at Union played and still plays a large part of the Union college experience and this segregation would leak out into the rest of the day and not just the party scene. I’ve heard some of my own fraternity brothers say racist remarks such as “oh isn’t that one of the black frat kids that hosts the African dance parties”. You can see where this leads to. It would be so bad at times that some white kids would think that if they attended one of these “Dance parties” or befriended somebody from the multicultural Greek life they could even say the N word. ~

*Anonymous*



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I'm happy to elaborate more if needed, but I almost transferred from Union due to how out of place I felt. And yes, the underlying issues were race related. ~ *Raj Dhaliwal, 2015*

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I was racially profiled once by Campo and another time by a student when they wouldn't let me in my own dorm room when I forgot or lost my key fob. Imagine trying to convince someone that this is the place you live. Another example, is most of Greek life. These fraternities are solely based on your class, sport you play, and wealth. All entry barriers to POC. Some of us don't have boats and boat shoes, or play lacrosse because our parents couldn't afford it. Even entry to their parties were racist; all the white girls were instantly let in while POC and black females were often left waiting outside...it was disgusting racism disguised as Greek life parties/events. ~ *Anonymous*

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Not allowed into a fraternity party because I was not light skin enough — very scarring experience, in my life... ~ *Emmanuela Oppong, 2019*

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When I was at Union College, I had a Black boyfriend my freshman year. Whenever he came to visit i heard a great deal of racist comments about our relationship. For several years people after made comments as if having a black boyfriend was taboo. During my time in a sorority I listened to members of the sorority make remarks about black pledges and referring to them as “diversity votes”. I am MexicanAmerican and was told by a student to go back to where I came from. I had a professor “jokingly” single me out and say that they didn’t want to hear of anyone with my last name out during the Jewish holidays when I am actually of Jewish and Mexican descent. This is just the tip of the iceberg. ~ *Anonymous*

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As an AOP Alumnae from the incredible Union College I am sad to say that of course during my time at Union, there were little to no faculty or students of color. I took African American history and was lucky to have Professor Aslakson, who would outright start the class saying he knows he's not a black man and will do everything in his power to help us understand, although he himself could never. Not all professors would do this, and to make it worse, some professors would encourage students to stay AWAY from the Schenectady community.

Students of color on campus would be “mistaken” as “locals” and get discriminated against. As if being a “local” was crime worthy... my opinion in class lost weight a lot and was often overlooked, not only because I am a woman but because I am LatinX. Kids in my class would really try and tell me otherwise about my own real experiences... imagine that privilege... and do not get me started on the amount of kids who talked down on me simply because “DAD HAS MONEY” and could “buy me out of the school”

I could go on and on about how elitist it can be at times but rather take this time to shout out the amazing AOP program that BRINGS THE LIFE AND DIVERSITY to Unions campus. Without them Union literally wouldn't be Union. That's a fact! ~ *Angelica Rivera, 2018*

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A political science class I took my sophomore year was group based. While the group I was assigned to and worked with the entire semester did not explicitly make any remarks, their lack of interest in listening to my ideas and opinions was intimidating. It was clear that these senior men probably did not have to interact with a POC before and it was not until we started receiving individual grades back, that they then took the time to listen and include me in the work we were being assigned. It was clear to me that at that point that I needed to “prove myself” first before they considered what I had to say. I’m sure this is an experience many POC on campus have experienced, and I believe it is something the college should be holding space for and addressing. ~ *Melissa Rodriguez, 2016*

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As a Native American women, I was surprised to find that Union did not educate their students on Native American heritage. Multiple times during my time at Union, students called me Indian, asked if I lived in a teepee, thought I rode horses, assumed I received everything free from the government, didn’t know “Indians” were still alive (assumed we all died), etc.

I also witnessed multiple accounts cultural appropriation around Halloween and throughout the year (students dressing as “Indians” (headdresses, feathers, face paint, etc.) and students choosing to wear black face).

This made me realize that Union fell short in educating their students in racial and cultural awareness. Please, do more to educate all students in these areas. By incorporating this, there will be change.

For example, one of my Caucasian classmates in my Russian class apologized to me around Halloween because she did not know that dressing up as an “Indian” was cultural appropriation. She then asked me what term I was most comfortable with; Native American, Diné, First People, First Nations, etc. I let her know that I preferred Native American. This happened because we opened up a discussion about culture in my Russian class (shoutout to Professor Bidoshi)! We had a very healthy and productive conversation! ~ *Anonymous*

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I am sure the administration will make sure to review this THOROUGHLY and do their best to implement as many reasonable points as possible. I'm sure that they will NOT just talk and talk and discuss and do videos... I'm sure this will be the first of many guidance and policy reform. Please, Union, do better, be better, be U. ~ *Natali Torres, 2007*

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It's not safe being a black/brown man on Union's campus! Campus Safety consistently target and racially profile our black/brown men in ways that make us feel uncomfortable, unsafe, and not welcomed. We leave our communities' in hopes to be part of a larger community that will help us find solace, that will help us heal from our traumatic experiences with law enforcement. However, when we arrive to Union, it's evident that we cannot run from our past experiences with law enforcement because our very own campus safety perpetuate systemic practices that are harmful and have an everlasting impact on our academic/social development whilst on campus. I remember asking a campus safety to open one of the classrooms for me (which was available) during finals so that I can study, and he simply responded with "I cannot let you in here because I don't know if you will rob anything." I was in complete shock, triggered,

and walked away. I attempted to bring this and other incidents to administration, but simply felt unheard and nothing never got done — these problems just continued all throughout my four years, making my experience not the greatest. It's experiences like these that make the black/brown community unsafe and not welcomed; it's experiences like these for why we are demanding for institutional change, so that future black/brown students feel heard, safe and comfortable being part of a predominately white institution.

Union lacks black/brown mental health counselors! I personally did not take advantage of accessing the counselors available at the Wicker Wellness Center because it is largely composed of white women whose lived experiences differ from mine.

Representation Matters! Therefore, I believe that if I saw a counselor who was a person of color while I attended Union, I would have been more vocal about my traumatic experiences that were an impediment towards excelling academically. ~ *Michael Vallejo, 2016*

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I walked into my intro to Africana Studies class the day after Trump was elected to be asked by the student who sat next to me if I was ready to be deported. The class was taught by a white male who would consistently mix up me and the only other Latina in the class. I'm pretty sure it was as far as grading because I had to speak to him privately about how I had yet to do my presentation even though he had already given me a grade and not her. ~ *Anonymous*

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As an international Mexican student I often felt completely alone. Since when in international orientation we were repeatedly spoken like children and told to shower and wear deodorantz as if we were some sort of slow dirty children. ~ *Darcia Datshkovsky, 2010*

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Three separate instances come to mind.

1. One night, while walking towards my room in Davidson, a campus safety officer stopped me in front of the building and asked me what I was doing? I told him I was going to my room and he insisted I showed ID. I flashed my card from afar and buzzed into the building. At that moment, I realized campus safety was not there to protect me. It was there to protect white students from people that looked like me.

2. I was walking the halls of the Social Science building after class when a white male student shoved me out of the way to open the door of a white female student I assume he was trying to court. Once they both passed the doorway, the guy turned, looked me in the eyes and slammed the door in my face. I guess I wasn't worth the same kind of respect.

3. During a Sociology course discussion of gang activity in impoverished neighborhoods, several white classmates made extremely ignorant blanket statements. The one that stuck with me most was "if people in these communities didn't want to end up as drug dealers or in jail, they should have moved." The one black person in the class, a friend of mine, was visibly upset and no one did anything about it or tried to understand her reaction.

~ *Yohanny Vargas, 2012*

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I was walking to the Campus Center one time and saw a co resident at the dorm I was living in. He was a white male and he was sitting with other white males. I passed by and waved hello to him and he waved back to me (a hijabi muslim american woman). Later on that day I saw him at the dorm. He asked if I can act like I don't know him because his other white male friends made fun of him and discouraged him from being friends with a "terrorist". This happened a few weeks after 9/11. It was my freshman year of college. ~ *Anonymous*

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My first encounter with racism at Union occurred two weeks into my first term. My roommate had blasted music filled with racist rhetoric. Up until that point in my life I had never heard the N-word used so many times in a way that referred to lynching. Immediately I asked for a room change.

Sadly, every person of color during my stay at Union knew about the corner in West Dining Hall that every person of color felt was safer than the other parts of the dining hall. That wasn't by accident and it could easily be dismissed, that people often feel more comfortable with those they can relate with. However, the separation still existed.

The Class of 2004 was tasked with reading “Savage Inequalities.” During orientation we were split up into classrooms to have discussions about the book. I remember reading the book intently as I read about some of the truths I already knew about my hometown in NYC. The author Kozol described the stark differences in the quality and inequities that existed between people based on their social location. It was something that you think would spark a conversation and be used to talk about where we all come from and share our own experiences. Yet, it fell short and the silence was deafening in the room. The opportunity to talk about the important issues were lost and I only remembered someone mentioning a party everyone was headed to later that evening.

In the latter years of my experience on campus, the one incident that ignited change, the blackface incident — a white student had shown up to a halloween party dressed as what he thought was amusing...a pimp in a purple suit and the white student had painted his face with black/brown makeup and accentuated the lips and other features into what he felt was the representation of a Black pimp. It was very offensive and he was told by some Black students about the history and why that was offensive as he had gone to the campus center wearing the outfit. After hearing the plea of the Black students in the campus center, the white student said he was going to remove the face makeup and outfit. Later that night, the same student had not changed his attire or

removed the makeup. Instead he attended a party that night without changing anything. Following the incident the administration did not do much to resolve the many issues that this brought to light. They instead tried to sweep the incident under the carpet, even discrediting voices that spoke to the media about this incident. From this, the formation of UNITAS began. I, as a founding student member, remember only students and faculty of color attending the meetings at first. Fighting for things that the campus should have already had in place, such as an office of multi-cultural affairs.

It is for these many reason I have rarely given back to Union or come to Alumni events. It was a place I never truly felt accepted in the same way my white counterparts were. ~ *Anonymous*

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I am a transgender alumni of Union College, and I am deeply disturbed by Young Americans for Freedom and their hateful rhetoric. I realized that I am transgender less than six months after I graduated, and the memories I had of Union and its students were still fresh in my mind. I recalled my freshman year, during which the anonymous message board app Yik Yak had its Union College board taken down for platforming racist hate speech, but only following the protest and collective action by Union's students of color. I also remembered my senior year,

when a student endured homophobic slurs for trying to attend a party. In my mind, these instances show the true colors of Union's culture and send a strong message that if I had been open about my transgender identity on Union's campus, I would have faced the very same harassment and degradation.

I stand with Union's students of color in support of a curriculum that teaches students about America's long history of systemic racism, because systemic racism is a fact, and cannot be considered a matter of opinion as YAF does. The speakers this organization promotes use falsehoods and lies to fabricate the need for debate on subjects that already have reached broad academic consensus. Consider the work of Ben Shapiro, a popular speaker who has been invited to campuses by YAF during previous tours. He frequently cites *The Bell Curve* by Charles A. Murray as his primary source on the subject of race and genetics. Academic geneticists and sociologists have denounced *The Bell Curve* since its publication in 1994 for its blatant falsehoods and racism. One New York Times reviewer went as far as to describe the book as "a scabrous piece of racial pornography masquerading as serious scholarship." We cannot allow such hateful writing to be presented on our campus and treated as legitimate science, even if an outside speaker is presenting it. To do so would be to degrade the personhood of the people of color on Union's campus who deserve an academic environment that does not consider their intelligence a matter of debate.

I stand with Union's students of color in support of a curriculum that advocates for anti-racism, because I recognize that the very same methods that are used to deny the lived experience of Union's BIPOC will also be used to deny the lived experience of Union's LGBTQ students as well. Hate has no place on any college campus, and we would be naive to assume that the people spreading hateful rhetoric aren't aware of that. Just as YAF and its associated speakers would seek to turn conversations on race into debates on the existence of racism, they would also seek to turn a student's sexuality, gender identity, or experience with sexism into debates on the authenticity of their experiences. Though the administration may fear that the student body may interpret their disavowal of YAF as an attack on "free speech," the administration should also be assured in the fact that YAF explicitly seeks to silence those vital conversations aforementioned.

I stand with Union's students of color in ensuring that our remains a place where all students can share their personal experiences and identities without judgement or harassment. While I know that my identity would have been a divisive subject on Union's campus, I also know that it doesn't have to be that way. Union has an abundance of well-informed students and professors who are uniquely equipped to combat hate on our campus. I know that if the administration implemented anti-racist policies to both educate students and hold them accountable for racism that Union's culture would vastly change for the better. Denouncing

YAF and monitoring student culture for hateful rhetoric and actions is an important first step to this end. Fighting against hate of any kind help all students pursue legitimate scholarship and create a safe environment for those students who are most likely to face prejudice on Union's campus. ~ *Eloise Yang, 2019*

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Experiences that most minorities have at Union: 1. Your walking towards Reamer from Davidson, walking in the opposite direction towards you is a Caucasian student, they notice you, grab their bag tight and either put their heads down, speed up or makes an obvious change in their path. 2. You're sitting at West beach, many other students are at that same location...campus safety comes to you and asks you for your student ID. When asked why, their response is that they're asking everyone. After you hand out your ID. They proceed to walk away, not asking another single student. These are only two of the experiences that 95–99% of minority students have had at Union. It seems that these are the traditions imposed by Union to us, just as the painting of the statue or the Knott run is for other. ~ *Anonymous*

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The overwhelming amount of discrimination and prejudice I witnessed my friends, POC, have to endure during their time at Union was overwhelming. From being turned down at frats to blatant racist comments about why they “managed” to get into Union was startling. It’s prominent through the campus and doesn’t evoke a sense of safety or inclusion at all! The worst part is that because of the lack of education and awareness about this matter it has become an accepted “norm” a part of Union College “culture” and something to just accept and turn a blind eye to. This is a liberal arts college, there should not be ANY room for hate or discrimination of such kind, there should be proper education, awareness and repercussions for such acts. By allowing things like this to continue and be swept under the rug as an educational institution you’re allowing yourselves to train racist doctors, engineers, politicians, ect. You’re contribution to a corrupt and racist system. ~ *Anonymous*

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I loved the education, friends and experiences I had not just because I went to college but uniquely Union. However, ultimately a person can only be defined by the choices they make, the world they are open to seeing and comfort zones they decide to step out of. At Union I played ice hockey, minored in dance, participated in



the performing arts, joined a sorority, oversaw student activities and went abroad multiple times. This isn't some achievement list; this is a testimony of how my choices exposed me to different people and groups. Union can not exist without criticism — it's day to day was full of insular social groups, living amongst the same race, socio-economic class and sexual orientation. One of my first friends was from Scarsdale, NY (I love him to this day) but I remember him telling me about his town and school system and I said, "So basically you have never met a poor person."

This isn't passing judgement, but it is interesting to address. Who needed financial aid, who fulfilled the exciting rite of passage to finally live off campus (because they could) was always prevalent. Diversity, as we know, directly correlated. At Union If you didn't choose to step out, you never had to.

Majoring in Anthropology was my favorite. I loved picking out my classes and the interesting groups of people the curriculum attracted. Professor Pardue (an ethnomusicologist in Brazilian hip-hop) taught courses on the rumination of violence, introspecting the act of violence as a thing. His other classes focused on race relations, this discourse around levels of blackness as well as social disparity amongst Brazil's marginalized communities. Professor Tierney taught me about East Asian Identity, the significance of food in each culture. Neither of these professors were tenured. The ones that were took me to worlds I

would never have seen. Karen Brison brought me to Fiji, placed us in villages and families — guided me through my thesis on women's rights in third world countries while Vicky Martinez and I went to Juarez, interviewing women with nothing, in danger for their lives but still fighting for their communities anyway they could. These professors taught me that it starts with recognition to understand why things are the way they are and until recognition happens change can not occur.

What if I didn't make these choices? Do most students do? I question Union to ask these hard questions, identify the college's privilege — rethink its system to make sure every student walks away open-minded, exposed. No matter where someone lands professionally, it's these values they take with them and in the end every individual, all companies, each institutional system plays a role in implicit bias and racism. This is the time for self admission. This is where we have to change. ~ *Carly Aimi, 2008*

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9/11 took place my freshman year. There was a massive toll that this took on the campus. There were hateful things said to so many people from different nations who I still consider to be dear friends. We didn't spend enough time myth busting. We didn't spend enough time ensuring that all members of our community were okay. We saw the defacement of different theme houses

because of ignorance and hate in the following years. Personally, I was stopped after 9/11 by security because I had cut my hair and to them I looked like a “terrorist suspect.” My sophomore year in Richmond was my worst residential experience. For everything that I loved about Union, and still do, nothing could truly take away the fact that I had food smashed on my door and derogatory terms relating to my sexuality written on my door on a regular basis. People were even sexually abused on our campus and nothing was done. That says something and it’s not something good. I loved the relationships that I built at Union. I loved my education. But coming through AOP and being told by a professor that people would treat us differently because we were minorities was not the right message. And it was even more unfortunate because he was right. When we give a platform to ignorance, it becomes an acceptance of things that are not equal, things that are not right, and things that should not be tolerated for the sake of the campus community. I didn’t say enough when I was there. I have to own that. But Union has to own something to. Diversity and Inclusion is everyone. It is not just the jobs of the minority communities to speak up and be a visual representation of these ideals. It is the duty of everyone to stand up for what is right. That’s part of the credo of integrity. We need a commitment from every single person to embody the ideals and the vision of Diversity & Inclusion. ~ *Anchia Kinard, 2005*

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I entered as an electrical engineering major. Throughout the 3 years before changing majors, I was always the only female of color in my labs. Students never partnered with me because of this and I often worked with either a professor or another student of color which was male. In my first year, I had a Caucasian student ask me if I was part of a gang because of my nationality. As offensive as this was, I took the higher road and simply answered no. I also informed her that it was clear she viewed me different because I was different. In the midst of joining my organization, students often made negative comments as I walked to class. It was clear not only did they view me as different but inferior to the point of being disrespectful. Once I joined my sorority, Union struggled at first to just incorporate any organization into its Panhellenic Council without fully understanding how other fraternities and sororities functioned. Historically, there were plenty of multicultural organizations who were on the campus but never survived. That same year, we worked very diligently with other multicultural organization to establish the Multicultural Greek council which I am sure undergone many changes since. It would have been great to have a Dean of Students who would have been invested in diversifying Greek Life where we would have had the support of administration. A lot of the ground work was solely undergrads. However, I am a very proud women of color. This drove me to continue diving into the history course that focused on Latin America and Africana. In my 3rd year, I struggled academically

because the environment in those classes were not motivating for me to remain engaged. I often felt singled out. However, I developed a passion to become more educated in why this was happening. I changed my major to African history. Today, I am a teacher who focused on educating my students beyond what the basic curriculum states. I often struggled with why we didn't have more professors and faculty that reflected ALL students. ~ *Arlene Ruiz, 2007*

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1. campus safety only (and rudely) approaching students of color and asking us, students of color, for our id and not our white peers
2. campus safety only stopping students of color, mainly black students, and asking them if they “really” students at Union and asking them to produce their student id's and tell them where on campus they lives — they never did this to our white peers
3. campus safety shutting down the parties at Sympoisum and Bronner house during the weekends when the white fraternities would be allowed to have parties and would be blasting incredibly loud music with beer cans and kegs in plain sight
4. multiple requests to have an African American studies department only to be told it wasn't possible at the time

5. lack of professors of color and administrators of color- the only ones I can think of during my time at Union were Deidre Hill-Butler (Sociology), Ashraf Ghaly (Engineering), William Garcia (LACS/Spanish Department), Gretchel Hathoway Tyson (President's Office), and Tim Dunn (Greek Life), Teran Tadal (AOP)

6. the lack of what felt like true inclusion and diversity amongst admitted students- racially and socio-economically

7. the mis-education to the entire Union College community on the purpose and differences between POSSE and AOP and that not all students were poor or didn't meet the academic metrics to be admitted like their white counterparts

8. Residential Life dealing with parents who were clear that they didn't want their child(ren) rooming with a black student

~ *Deanna Cox, 2010*

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Greek life was especially exclusive to people of color and people of classes that were below the wealthy elite. More needs to be done to diversify the race and class of those in sororities and fraternities. ~ *Samantha Seide, 2007*

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The nurses in Wicker are extremely unprofessional. I left crying several times because they made me feel small. But only was I asked if I was wearing a wig, but my medical information was discussed loudly while another student was near by and while I was being examined the door was left open. I would like to be anonymous. Also can we add for Union to add cultural food to their dinning menu and to have hair and make up products for POC in the reamer store. ~ *Anonymous*

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There were various occasions where some friends and I would be walking back to our dorm from a party or just hanging out, and on the way back, some white students would see us and visibly run away. Sadly, this is just one of numerous of situations where you question if this a place where you are truly welcomed. I have also had the experience of speaking to career counselors, looking for advice, and being told “maybe you just don’t belong here”. As an institution, which is supposedly built for inclusion and acceptance, scenarios like these are where you are able to see the true colors of the school. ~ *Khaleef Knowles, 2015*

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I always felt ostracized because of my skin color. I was consistently the only person of color in my friend groups, my classes, and extracurriculars. I was partially enticed to come to Union through a “multicultural recruitment” pre-college visit. It was amazing, surrounded by Black and other IPOC folks who were vibrant and intelligent. That weekend made me decide to come to Union... and after arriving to campus, I was incredibly disappointed for the next four years. I remember being referred to and being defined by my ethnicity by many people — instead of people bothering to know my name or identify me based on other personality traits. I cannot even go into how many microaggressions and racist comments I have endured. BIPOC are not embraced by administration or the campus community. They are labeled as other, and therefore BIPOC stick to their own social and academic groups in which people look and act similarly to them. Then, these groups are thought to be cliquey or insular, and the cycle continues — BIPOC are isolated even more from campus. Union shamefully has little to no safe spaces for BIPOC. Additionally, many students exploit the Schenectady community for feel-good community service projects, coming across as white savior-like instead of genuine. I truly hope that Union makes anti-racist structural changes to their administration and culture. ~

*Anonymous*

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I remember going to Rathskellar on a Saturday night to visit my coworkers and get some mozzarella sticks to go. As I waited for my order, a group of white girls came in wearing oversized orange shirts with a rip at the collar to reveal their cleavage and heels, which I thought was an odd combination. However, when I looked closer, I was perplexed to see hoop earrings dangling from their ears, failed attempts at cornrow braids on the side of their head, drawn on teardrops near their eyes (meant to represent tattoos associated with gang/prison culture to show a person has served time or killed), and numbers across their back that mimicked the numbers you see on a prison inmate uniform. I had to do a double take to realize that they put together an outfit based on Latinx and black stereotypes. My white friend who was working that night told me they were going to a party on Union Street and the theme was focused on a “prison lockdown”. After this realization and discovering the theme, I took a picture of one girl who made me angry looking at her because it is my understanding that this is what she thinks of my family members who have gone to prison and others who have been oppressed by these stereotypes. I decided to take this image to the Office of Greek Life when I found out they were a part of SDT, and a meeting was scheduled to go over this experience. My friend (who attended the party and was appalled as a Latinx woman involved in Greek Life) and I spoke about how we felt about this situation and proposed actions that the Greek office can partake in to educate Greek members about stereotypes, biases and

microaggressions. After that meeting, I spoke to friends involved in Greek life if they had any trainings that talked about this party or attended events similar to my proposed actions, but no one could recall any conversations or events about this situation.

As a student that was a part of AOP, this is only one of many stories that I have which depict the inaction and ignorance of Union in protecting communities of color as they do the white, affluent students on campus. But as a white-passing, Latinx woman, this story hurt the most because this is a reminder of what people think of my family who have a darker complexion than me and POC around the world. Thank you to the individuals who brought the YAF group to the alumni's attention and creating this platform for alumni to speak our stories/feedback into existence! ~ *Cassandra Padilla, 2017*

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During my freshman year, a police car stopped me and my friends (who were also men of color) for no reason and threaten to beat us.

Many times inside a frat, I was asked to show my student ID because I was a person of color. ~ *Anonymous*

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I was in a sorority (Delta Delta Delta) during my time at union. I identify as an Indian woman (she/her) of Indian heritage and decent. I was one of the 3 BIPOC in my sorority along with two other Black women and one half Puerto Rican woman. There's something wrong with this picture.... Oh and I should probably mention that on more than one occasion I was told that had I not rushed during a time when my big (also an Indian woman) was not in delta, I wouldn't have gotten in. This was probably correct as the recruitment chairs (all white !!!) did nothing in terms of addressing diversity and inclusion. Also please don't get me started on the homo phobia in the recruitment process as well. My sophomore research Seminar focused on colonialism in India. My teacher was Indian and would GO OUT OF HER WAY to avoid Picking on me to contribute to class. She did absolutely nothing to cultivate my curiosity to learn more about my heritage. In my opinion, She taught an extremely COLONIZED version of Indian history. ~ *Anonymous*

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I was in my friends dorm room in fox, just chilling in the common room. My friends roommate also had her friends in the room. I wasn't paying attention to their conversation much but I understand the gist of it. The friends of the roommate was ranting about her boy problems. In the middle of her ranting, she says the n word in regard to the boy she was ranting about. The boy was white but in no way shape or form should that word come out of her mouth. I was shocked because 1) did that just come out of a white girls mouth and 2) if she says it so freely with her speech, it would not surprise me if she says the word during songs. The amount of ignorance that so many kids have at union is crazy. They all live in a bubble and never have been held accountable for their actions. The administration at Union College needs to do a better job at protecting their black and students of color because right now, they are not safe. The black students are extremely vulnerable and that is not okay. ~ *Anonymous*

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I distinctly recall an interaction I had with Professor Witsoe after class my sophomore year. I had a question I wanted to ask him, and as one of the few Anthropology majors on campus, he asked me about my studies. He followed up by asking how it is to be in LIM and studying Anthro. I told him that I was not in LIM. He responded “no c’mon, you’re in LIM.” It was clear to me that he assumed I was a LIM student because I’m of Indian origin, probably because he assumed Asian-American students wouldn’t be taking a social science class otherwise. This was particularly appalling given that he teaches Anthropology — a discipline that has tried to steer away from its racist origin to instead teach about cultural differences and acceptance. ~ *Nealay Vasavda, 2016*

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I felt entirely out of place during my four years at Union College and I believe part of this was due to race. As a biracial female, I felt the stark division between students of color and the white majority on campus. It was really hard to find a place to belong especially when I technically had memberships to both groups. Throughout my experience, people (both students and faculty) were often shocked that I was a BIPOC who was not part of AOP/Posse programs. Further, I received comments from other white students asking what I was or saying things like “I knew that you were not fully white.” Additionally, I struggled with realizing that I was sometimes the only BIPOC in certain classes, clubs, and activities. It was really hard existing on a campus that did not feel fully integrated. ~ *Marley Weig-Pickering, 2017*

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Being a member of the swimming and diving team, I watched my head coach make fun of members of our team because English is not their first language. He made jokes saying that ‘they’re lost in translation’ or would blatantly call them dumb. Both the men’s and women’s team had several meetings with the Athletic Director (Jim McLaughlin) and the Assistant Athletic Director (Beth Tiffany) where they said they would ‘fix’ this problem. My coach fulfilled ‘diversity training’ with Jason Benitez and is still coaching to this day. ~ *Anonymous*

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I remember once, a group of orientation advisors were asked to welcome a group of early decision students in the Nott. As the OA's, myself included, were waiting for the new students to filter in, I looked around the room and saw no color. I saw no one who looked like me, a non-black POC. I only saw a sea of white with no shades of melanin dispersed throughout. I felt "other" in that moment. Not only was I the only "representation of diversity" amongst the current OAs, which upset me as well, but I watched as Union, once again, accepted the same demographic of students. I told our advisor about the lack of color and she was just as appalled as I was, but at that point there was nothing we could do. Later on as I looked around the room more carefully, I could count the number of non-white students on 1 hand of the 70 or so people in that room. ~ *Anonymous*

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My freshmen year I took a class in the psych department and I didn't participate as much as I should because I simply didn't want to. One day I received an email from my professor telling me to participate more and that it seems like (to her) students with diverse background tend to be quiet in class in comparison to their white peers. At first, I thought it was like not a big deal and that I should be participating more but something was NOT sitting well with me about the way she said it. Why is it that you have to talk about MY diverse background through email? Why is that something you HAVE to say? How is that even helpful? How is that OKAY? Honestly it blew my mind. I don't think it was racist but it definitely affected the way I feel like professors see me now, do all they see is my diverse background that they know nothing of? How did this professor think that sharing this information with me would make me want to participate more, how is she actually helping me by saying that? I went to the Dean of diversity and nothing came out of it. All she told me was she was going to sit down and have a conversation with her... how do I know that even happened? ~ *Anonymous*

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