

BIPoC Students List of Demands:

RISD Photography Department

July 2020

We demand that every promise, statement, and plan of action made by the administration of the photography department in response to our demands here be written, shared or announced to all students, so that they can hold the department accountable for its commitments to the students in the future.

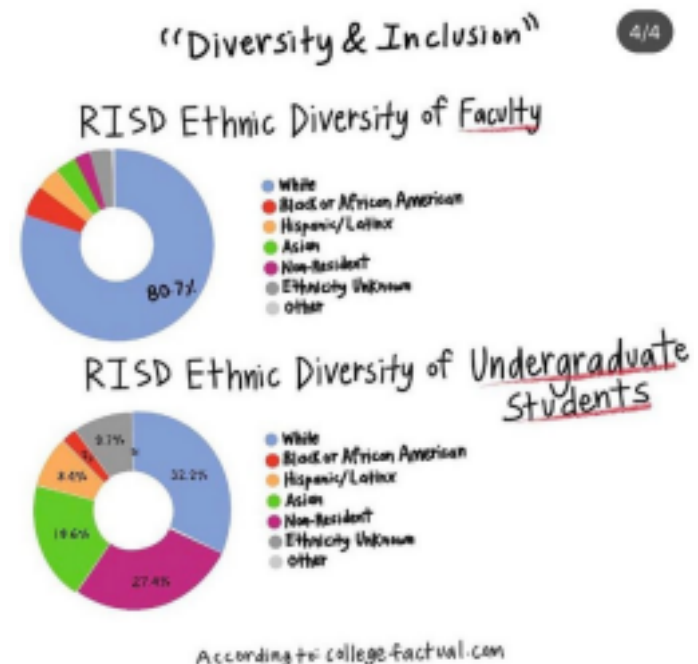
POINT 1: ADMISSIONS, FACULTY HIRING & CURRICULUM

DIVERSIFY THE STUDENT BODY AND FACULTY(BIPoC, NON-CIS-GENDERED MEN) ACROSS THE DEPARTMENT

1. **Recruit diverse members to the department continuously.** RISD's Photography department is known for its lack of diversity in BIPoC students, faculty and staff. It is important to increase the inclusion of BIPoC members of the department not only in the classroom environment, but in the administration as well, to foster diversity and to avoid tokenism.

- a. Tokenism is the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of sexual or racial equality within a workforce.

2. **Equip students with the tools to deal with race and racism.** Working actively within the department, with EFS, the Dean of Fine Arts, Student Affairs, the Center for Social Equity & Inclusion and the Curriculum Committee to better equip *all students* with the vocabulary to engage race and racism in discussion, and in connection with student's



work. Create platforms or opportunities to foster open dialogue supporting BIPOC students and faculty.

POINT 2: MAJORS' EXPERIENCE IN FOUNDATIONS & BEYOND

HOLD THE EFS DEPARTMENT ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE LACK OF REPRESENTATION OF PHOTOGRAPHY WITHIN THE PROGRAM

1. Significantly strengthen photographic education in Foundations. Build real links between upperclassmen in the major and freshmen students. Make meaningful connections to local area high school students and the Providence community. There is little to no photography or image-based learning within EFS curricula, art history courses, nor studios, which would allow students to be introduced to the medium early on. There are very few EFS professors who are themselves photographers.

- a. Our admissions team here at RISD is not supportive of students submitting photography-exclusive portfolio applications. This devalues our medium before students even get to RISD, and shows a bias within enrollment.
- b. Host portfolio discussion with applying/prospective/accepted students to help build connections between them and current students in the department, and to encourage and support their declaration of photography as a major.
- c. Create an undergraduate integration team within the photography department to help encourage and facilitate dialogue with freshmen, and to create opportunities for incoming students with questions about what it means to major in photography.
- d. Generate meaningful outreach to prospective students from our area. We have an obligation to serve our community, and to create programming (possibly in collaboration with the Museum) that introduces minority students to the art of image-making from a variety of perspectives. See, for example:
<https://studiomuseum.org/expanding-walls>
- e. Create more substantive connections between current students (BFA/MFA) and RISD alumni from each program, to help students to identify more professional opportunities

POINT 3: TRANSFORM THE CURRICULUM

DIVERSIFY AND MODERNIZE THE CURRICULUM THROUGHOUT THE DEPARTMENT

Diversify the curricula across the department. Allow students to contribute *regularly* to reimagining the curricula in ways that will be more beneficial to students' ability to develop careers after they complete their degrees. Continuous return to [*The Room of Silence*](#) in all department pedagogy, to support BIPOC and minority students.

We note that the department describes the photography major and department as follows [on the RISD website](#):

“RISD approaches photography as an ever-changing set of technical, conceptual and aesthetic conditions that exist within a broad social and cultural context. Students delve into the making, presentation and interpretation of photographic images, exploring photography as both a language and a craft. Ultimately, they learn how to use cultural signifiers, symbols and metaphors in the content and structure of image-making.”

However, we argue that the photography department has not met its own standards, as well as the standards of the current students, and therefore that the website creates a falsified/outdated image:

- 1. Reimagine the Professional Practices class so that it supports student's learning about career opportunities, and demonstrates a wide range of practices to consider after graduation.** Consider involving MFA students with meaningful expertise/experience in the photography industry to lead, aid, and contribute to the reimagining of the Professional Practices class from both a commercial and fine art standpoint.
- 2. Create a student representative supportive of BIPOC students to meet regularly with the department to discuss curriculum, programming and support for careers after degrees have been completed.** The photography department needs a model to create urgent and sustainable change that supports students
- 3. Re-design every curriculum in the major to include at least 75% non-white artists and non cis-gendered male artists as references for students.** Less than half of the classes offered by the photography department include BIPOC artists and writers in their curricula for students to engage with.

POINT 4: DEPARTMENTAL SPACES

UPDATE, RENOVATE AND REPLACE ALL BROKEN AND OUTDATED EQUIPMENT AND SPACES

The Photography department suffers from a lack of facilities and space in which to work. The physical department does not seem equipped to meet its stated goal of addressing “photography as an ever-changing set of technical, conceptual and aesthetic conditions.”

1. Our lack of facilities and **narrow aesthetics** will continue to make this a less attractive and less competitive photography program relative to others around the country, and RISD’s reputation will not strengthen and lift up our own as students and alumni of the program.
 - a. Student’s inability to develop color film on campus as well as the inability to work with colorful studio backdrops also hurts our students, and places a major financial burden on them. Making the students leagues behind the commercial photography industry, which, as we all know, is incredibly saturated with colorful studio work, with many publications making this a standard.

POINT 5: VISITING ARTISTS & GUEST CRITICS

THE STUDENT BODY WILL BE GIVEN MORE POWER FOR DEMOCRATIC CHOICES WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT

1. **Democratize the choice of visiting artists and guest critics, as one of our biggest assets as a department.** Students want to exercise agency in their education, and the department should encourage them to do so.
 - a. Create a method for our student body to curate the yearly selection of visiting artists and guest critics.
 - b. If the faculty chooses an artist/guest critic autonomously, the student body asks for transparent announcements that reveal the intention or rationale behind the department's choice.
2. **The photography department should bring no white-identifying visiting artist to lecture throughout one academic year.** This would make up for previous underrepresentation of BIPoC artists, no matter who may be “better,” or “more qualified” than them.

POINT 6: CAREERS

The department must create more opportunities for students throughout the majors to see,

learn from, participate in professional photographic practice, whether fine art, fashion, commercial or otherwise. This should include a larger number of studio visits, or extra-curricular trips, conversations with artists, photo editors, curators, agency reps or other figures in professional life.

The photography department must make a stronger connection with the RISD Careers Center to create more opportunities geared directly towards students majoring in Photography. The lack of professional development in the program leaves our students disconnected from the industry as they graduate. The RISD Careers Center offers few resources or solutions or opportunities for our students, and our alumni cannot bear the full responsibility of creating professional experiences for our students on their own. The 21st-century photographer is in need of many more tools under their belt, including the following:

1. Social Media training
2. Online portfolio/web design
3. Basics for running a business/studio
4. Etiquette for professional correspondence
5. Grant writing and application training
6. Industry-standard editing techniques
7. Budgeting
8. Aesthetic development & personal branding
9. Understanding Image compilation & animation