



**Department of Black Studies - UC Santa Barbara**

**Black Student Union Letter to UCSB Faculty and Staff Regarding Anti-Black Genocide**

A letter to all UCSB faculty and staff on behalf of the Black Student Union. The letter serves as the BSU's Academic Statement in light of Anti-Black Genocide

To everyone,

We want to start to address the needs of the Black community of students at UCSB with the following statements. This would allow us to consider how to move forward with changes to this quarter's grading for faculty and staff who have yet to unanimously accommodate Black students at such a difficult and traumatizing time. This letter will be in conjunction with a more generally telling statement by BGSA, Black Quare, and the BSU about the needs of the Black community with structural requests for change.

Student 1:

"I am exhausted. I am physically and emotionally exhausted. I saw the President of the United States tweet and call my people "thugs," I saw him tell the world that he is going to send the military to kill people (it is my people who are going to be the main recipients of this terror) for stealing. I am exhausted. I have seen countless videos of undercover police officers, white supremacists, and proclaimed "allies" defacing and damaging property that my people are getting blamed for. I have seen ten times more of those countless videos of Black bodies continuing to be brutalized by police during these protests, during these protests against police brutality. I am exhausted.

I have marched for miles, I have screamed my throat hoarse, I have shed enough tears to fill a Hydroflask. I am exhausted. I was granted a 48 hour extension on a paper for one class because I was too depressed to write, to speak, to think. I have not experienced this severity of depression since I hated myself and couldn't explain why when I was in middle school. I was granted a weeklong extension on assignments for another class. But even with these extensions, school seems so far away, and is so far from my mind. All I can think about every..single..day is what are the updates? Where are the missing people in police custody? Are my friends safe? Is my family safe? Why are nonBlack people at my school trying to hijack my trauma and get their finals cancelled? My people are fighting, my people are being beaten and attacked with tear gas. My people are risking their lives by gathering and protesting despite this global pandemic that disproportionately affects MY people because we do not receive standard healthcare. I spent an entire day in a blind rage that nonBlack members of AS were spreading a petition to get everyone's finals cancelled. I spent an entire day fighting against the gaslighting and antiBlackness from my own student politicians. I was supposed to start working on my final. I was supposed to be catching up on assignments that I have due but can't even begin to think about. I am exhausted.

My body, my lived experiences, my unique identity that is me, inhabits an intersection of many oppressed or otherwise less privileged identities. I am Black. I am a woman and I am gender fluid. I am queer. I am a first-generation college student. The things that are going on right now are literally sucking the life out of me, I cannot give my all to my schoolwork as I was able to do just a month ago, even with this pandemic. Please, I am exhausted. I should not be forced to continue navigating schoolwork as if my world is not perpetually on edge, and I should not be punished for requesting or receiving the care that I need from this university right now."

Student 2:

"During this very traumatizing time, we have noticed various racist acts committed by UCSB students. A student that currently attends UCSB engaged in the use of the racial slur "the n-word". This was done in a frivolous manner and structured as a challenge. The use of the word was made punishable solely by putting money in a jar. There was also an instance where an admitted student wrote on another student's car "I hate Black people" in Mandarin. We are asking the university not to turn a blind eye, and ensure that these students are facing disciplinary actions for the role they have played in ridiculing Black agony and trauma."

Student 3:

"As a black leader on campus I am exhausted with the burden being put on black students. It is not our job to educate you, it is not our job to advocate and constantly fight to be seen on this campus. We are students like everyone else and should be able to focus on that instead. It is time for those in power on this campus who say they are working for all students, to finally do their jobs."

Student 4:

"I would like the University to do more research into programs that help keep black students on campus and graduate. I sometimes feel like I'm falling through the cracks of this school because there is a general lack of concern for the wellbeing of students, especially black students. These programs exist, so please use your resources. A quick investigation on demographics shows a huge disparity in those who are able to graduate. Even if there are resources being made now, they aren't enough. Never become complacent, otherwise we lose the ability to make progress."

Student 5:

"I would like to see other departments model themselves after a student-centered and empathetic initiative like the Black Studies department, because there would be no department without the students who erected them through demands and protest (i.e. North Hall Takeover in 1968). I have had to fight against white supremacy, and nonBlack student's complacency and performative activism all while trying to complete my assignments and finals. The North Hall Takeover, over fifty years ago doesn't seem too far off and I wonder if we as students still have the agency to enact the same change. Faculty and staff are employed for us, so please be here for us."

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We hope to see action that directly and clearly responds to the issues that are currently weighing on and debilitating Black students that attend this institution. We've had local and global disasters affect our finals weeks in the past- whether it's the Thomas fire or the COVID-19 pandemic-and each crisis was attended to with strategy and utmost attention to the wellbeing of students. So we ask, will you treat this disaster inflicted on the Black community with the same urgency and care? Better yet, will you go above this by acknowledging that this anti-Black genocide is not a one-and-done circumstance? Your actions will indicate whether the systemic attack on Black lives is a crisis that matters to you. We know the system is mutable, because it has been adjusted time and time again for things that mattered to you. With that, we expect your commitment to Black lives mattering.

Our initial request is to the faculty and staff who haven't already, to provide different grading options for Black students off of our principal and pre-existing academic commitments, without us having to fulfill additional strenuous academic work. We understand that adjusting these

courses late in the quarter is not an easy task, and that it may be difficult to achieve depending on deadlines, availability and capacity of TAs, etc... We would also like to acknowledge the efforts that some faculty and TAs have exhausted in order to accommodate the impossible situation that the Black community is currently experiencing. We see your solidarity and appreciate it greatly. We ask that departments across campus extend this same empathy. This can be done by professors making finals optional. With this, we hope for the Black students that choose to take their finals to be given extensions on them. As for the Black students that opt out of their finals, we hope that professors will adjust the grading scale to properly reflect the work they have done up until this point. Black students at UCSB are collectively grieving and this would assist many of us who must now prioritize our mental, physical, spiritual health and safety and don't have the capacity to complete the term. We are well aware that this request may be misconstrued as an opportunity to take advantage of the circumstance, and we expect that your commitment to Black lives would instead consider how it is impossible for Black people to do so while systemic oppression persists. To be clear, we are requesting a safeguard for Black students who are at a mental, physical and spiritual standstill and would like their existing academic commitments to be maintained and honored.

Following this initial request, we feel it is important that Black students' experiences will not be co-opted by everyone to universalize the student's needs academically. We are being doubly devalued in the name of "equal opportunity"– where our lives don't matter and our experience is diminished by conflating it to a singular struggle for all students. Should we use this idea as the model for academic action, the institution would fail to center the Black community who are the very subjects of this anti-Black genocide. We are literally begging for our livelihoods, please consider this as nothing less.

Sincerely,

The Black Student Union 2019-2020



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