

The Daily stands in solidarity with the Black community. [Read our editors' statement.](#)

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Opinion: Letter to the President and Provost: Action items for achieving racial equity



(Photo: Fibonacci Blue)

By Op-Ed on June 19, 2020

Dear President Tessier-Lavigne and Provost Drell,

I speak out of direct and particular anger at an academic conference, and a white woman says, “Tell me how you feel but don’t say it too harshly or I cannot hear you.” But is it my manner that keeps her from hearing, or the threat of a message that her life may change?

– Audre Lorde

ACTION ITEMS FOR ACHIEVING RACIAL EQUITY AT STANFORD

We, the Black student and postdoc community members in the Stanford University School of Medicine, are scared. We are exhausted. We don’t feel safe on campus or in our communities. We have waited far too long for action. We have waited as our Black community members have faced continued harassment, discrimination and interactions whose outcomes include bodily harm. We have waited as countless student leaders beseeched the administration for change with no response and, in some cases, no acknowledgement. We have waited as the University pivoted the Long-Range Vision to contribute to recovery in response to the global pandemic, while virtually no action has been taken to address the “racism pandemic” present in our nation and on our campus. In this galvanizing moment, we feel the time for patience has passed. As an elite institution, we believe Stanford University has a duty and obligation to its Black community members to go beyond a statement. To address the backlog of student-led requests for racial equity on campus and truly embody the ideals outlined by the Presidential IDEAL initiative, we believe Stanford University must take immediate action.

We are in unwavering solidarity with and affirm the demands made by Stanford University Minority Medical Alliance (SUMMA), NOBCCHE@Stanford, the coalition of Black student organizations gathered by the Stanford Black Law Students Association (BLSA) and the organizers and participants in the Rally for Racial Justice. To their uplifted voices, we, the Black student and postdoc members of the School of Medicine and our co-conspirators in liberation, add our own call for immediate action.

We ask for a financial commitment from Stanford University of at least \$25 million to be distributed according to the following demands, which were drafted and edited by SOM community members and approved by all signed organizations:

Within 6 months (by Dec 2020)

1. *Hold a University-wide town hall to solicit grievances and requests for actionable items to address and eliminate racial inequity from the broader Stanford community. A transparent record of the progress towards resolution of these grievances and actions should be documented and reviewed annually with the entire University.*

2. *Make transparent and publicly available* an annual report regarding racism and discrimination on campus (e.g., Acts of Intolerance, Ombudsperson reports). Streamline the process of reporting “Acts of Intolerance” and centralize the reporting mechanism to a highly visible, easy to find location on the Stanford website. Protect the anonymity of those who speak out or identify acts of injustice or oppression. Ensure that survivors and whistleblowers are not subject to retaliation or any repercussions that threaten their place, funding, immigration status/clearance and/or position within the University. Ensure access to these reports for prospective students and trainees in a timely manner (i.e., before fellowships/appointments are accepted).
3. *Affirm the protection of Black members of our community as they engage in nonviolent liberatory practices.* Clearly state that members of our community who choose to take part in peaceful protests, regardless of their immigration status, will be supported and provide specific resources and assistance for groups that are more vulnerable. Apologize for previous messaging to the international students regarding protest attendance that was unnecessarily frightening.
4. *Create and disseminate an annual campus-wide Climate Survey assessing racism, injustice, discrimination and oppression within the Stanford campus and by community members.* Use these data as well as past grievances and issues catalogued by the Acts of Intolerance to create a formative strategic plan to be affirmed by the Black, Indigenous and marginalized Stanford community members.
5. *Provide the Infrastructure for Improved Quality of Life and Well-Being of the Black Student Community.* Well-being includes spiritual, mental, emotional and physical infrastructure that should be created within the University to support these activities. A financial commitment of \$3 million should be allocated to achieve this demand. Spiritual infrastructure includes items such as regular, continuous access to Black spiritual/religious leaders and services on campus as well as shuttle service (i.e., stop added to the Marguerite SE line) to off-campus gathering spaces (i.e., University AME Zion Church). Mental and emotional infrastructure should be applied systemically and include items such as hiring one Black therapist per five Black postdocs/post Ph.D. fellow/medical residents (as requested during Long-Range Planning). Mental and emotional infrastructure should also be accessible out-of-state given the global pandemic. Additionally, non-Black therapists at Stanford must complete training to address white privilege and white supremacy, particularly its impact and presence within the University. Physical well-being infrastructure should include items such as more Black fitness instructors, Black-owned restaurants (e.g., Coconuts, Jonathan’s Fish & Fry and Black-owned food trucks on campus) and Black estheticians skilled in caring for and styling Black hair textures *being present on campus*.

Within 12 months (by June 2021)

6. Create a **centralized** Office of Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion with full-time, permanent, experienced and diverse staff to oversee and implement these demands in the form of a forthcoming central Action Plan. This office should be headed by a Chief Equity Officer, that has a history of radical action and critical resistance to achieve justice and equity within an Academic or Industry setting. This office should go beyond the IDEAL initiative and stand as a clear co-conspirator to justice and equity initiatives from marginalized trainees, staff and faculty. This office is tasked with the following responsibilities: 1) manage subsequent responses to annual Climate Surveys; 2) unify Black trainees and offer a centralized office for resources; and 3) receive 'mandatory reports' for discriminatory acts that can ensure anonymity for trainees, staff or faculty experiencing and reporting racial injustice.
7. Ensure that Black faculty and trainees are included in the development and leadership of diversity programs designed to serve our community (e.g., IDEAL). Ensure that Black trainees are financially compensated for the labor and service provided to the University. Concomitant with this financial compensation, recognize the unique contribution of this service during training with a Letter of Recommendation by the Provost to be provided to the student/trainee as they advance to the next stage in Academia or Industry. Black faculty will be recognized for their service through a Letter of Recommendation by the Provost and President to be included within their tenure portfolios. Staff or faculty leaders of Stanford-created diversity task forces and/or programs should have a track record of conducting successful equity work and should be required to engage in additional anti-racist training outside of the University by nationally recognized programs run by Black or Indigenous thought leaders.
8. Publish and renew the commitment to a Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan **annually** to meaningfully address issues that arise locally. This includes reaffirming support through incentives when schools and departments hit targeted milestones to ensure decolonization is a constant process. Targeted training for those schools and departments that demonstrate inadequate racial inclusivity will be mandatory and include consequences as drastic as loss of space and/or funding support.
9. Make mandatory regular and universal **anti-racist** training for the entire Stanford community. This training should be at least 8 hours long and must go beyond traditional training (i.e., implicit bias and microaggression) already available and in use. Anti-racist training must be renewed annually. Any individual that is reported to have committed or been involved with racial injustice must complete an additional **unpaid** 40 hours of anti-racist training as

a first warning. Dismissal from their position should be a tangible and real consequence for faculty and staff that repeatedly engage in or demonstrate intractable discrimination.

10. *Design and maintain Standards of Equity and Cultural Diversity within each School and Department.* There should be a minimum of two Black trainees AND two faculty members in each department and program. Provide transparent resources and support for those persons. Provide evidence of recruitment by departments and programs through mechanisms and organizations that center the marginalized students (e.g. recruitment at HBCUs and within racial affinity professional organizations or conferences). Require schools and departments to report **annually** the number of Black trainees and faculty members employed and outline the specific efforts made to retain these individuals.
11. *Departmentalize African and African American Studies (AAAS).* We fully support and reiterate the demands stated and expanded upon in the [petition](#) to departmentalize the AAAS program. Ensure that this department is eligible for directed endowment funds and is capable of hiring faculty members.

Within 18 months (by Dec 2021)

12. *Recruit and maintain 20% Black/African American (including US- and international-born) and 10% Indigenous students, postdocs, staff and faculty at Stanford.* To assist in increasing recruitment of the aforementioned marginalized groups, we demand the removal of the standardized tests requirement (i.e., SAT and GRE) from the application process at undergraduate and graduate levels. Provide funding to support participation of these students in annual conferences which support marginalized student participation, like SUMMA, Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS) and the SACNAS National Diversity in STEM Conference. Ensure that past and future demographic data collected on faculty, staff, postdocs and students resolves monolithic reporting of “Black/African American.” Specifically, participation of enslaved-descended African American (EDAA), African-American, Afro-Indigenous and Afro-Latinx participation should be collected and publicly reported.
13. *Create an endowment intended for enslaved-descended African American students.* Ensure at least \$5 million in financial support (e.g., scholarships and grants) for EDAA undergraduate, graduate and postdoctoral students in perpetuity. Financial support is commensurate with use of University resources to help people who believe themselves to be descendants of enslaved Africans trace and identify any potential familial roots. Endow one professorship in **each** School for a faculty member who identifies as an EDAA.
14. *Commit to actions that ensure diversification of the research workforce with historically marginalized populations.* Ensure that the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, VPGE and the

multiple Career Services Centers maintain staffing that provides a 2:1 ratio of Black staff to the marginalized graduate student and postdoc population. Ensure the Black staff hired are placed in positions of power and seniority. Commit to a 100% job placement rate for Black postdocs following completion of their last stage of training at Stanford University and ensure this achievement through new infrastructure and resources in the aforementioned offices. At the completion of their training, require Black graduate students and postdocs to complete a mandatory exit survey to follow their career trajectory and assess the quality of training and support received while at Stanford. Provide expert and specialized assistance for Black academics submitting equity- or diversity-specific grants (e.g., diversity K-awards, health disparities grants, administrative supplements, loan repayment programs). Create a PI waiver for Black postdocs and staff to support career development and address historical funding disparities.

15. *Commit to increasing the annual funding support of the Black Community Service Center and Martin Luther King Jr. Institute by a minimum of \$1 million, each.* Ensure that BCSC has the capacity (e.g., staff support and paid student fellowships) and support extension of their services to postdocs, visiting teaching fellows, medical school residents, Mellon fellows and any trainee within the post-PhD/pre-Faculty period of training.
16. *Observe June 19th as a **paid** University-wide holiday. Disseminate anti-racist resources and training activities/modules in commemoration of this day to be contemplated and completed annually.* Recognize and affirm the contributions by the descendants of the enslaved people to the legacy of Stanford University on this day.

We write this letter with full knowledge that future generations of Stanford students, postdocs, staff, faculty, alumni and the wider public will look back on this time and ask, “How did Stanford respond to the Black Lives Matter movement of 2020?” We believe that a just future is obtainable only through our collective action. We believe your leadership, President Tessier-Lavigne and Provost Drell, to be within the arc of a moral universe bending our institution towards justice and that you are willing to act on that belief in this revolutionary moment. Together, we can move towards making Stanford University a space in which Black students, postdocs, staff and faculty feel truly safe, supported and included.

We look forward to your response and committed action to affirm that on Stanford University’s campus, Black Lives more than Matter.

In Righteous and Resounding Solidarity,

Stanford Black Postdoc Association (SBPA)

National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers at Stanford (NOBCCChE@Stanford)