

Dear Director Kareiva of the Institute of the Environment and Sustainability,

We are upset, enraged, and exhausted from all that we've seen in the past two weeks. Black students at UCLA are experiencing the collective trauma of the inequalities of COVID, the economic crash, and the state of police brutality— some of these students are under your purview. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade and so many more at the hand of police brutality are inexcusable. These murders represent the centuries of racism and colonialism that perpetuate violence and stark inequities in our society.

The mission statement of the Institute of the Environment and Sustainability is to “move science to action on the front lines of environmental progress.” Yet any attempt at environmental progress without first addressing the systemic oppression and inequities that are so deeply rooted in our society will not bring about long-lasting change. Academia has a responsibility to address these issues. The Institute prides itself in extending our research to benefit communities outside of the ivory tower -- an endeavor that cannot be fulfilled until we strive fully to understand and address the issues that the communities we work with face. However, if we do not fully understand or address the issues the communities we work with face, we are doing them an extreme disservice and actively contributing to their oppression. We are past the point of hoping for and talking about change; we must take action now.

We are strong in our conviction that Black Lives Matter. We received the IoES's statement on the above. We, too, offer our solidarity in the current movement and denounce racism in any form, but words are simply not enough. We are frustrated that it took many days and a student email before the IoES addressed the trauma that has been produced during the past two weeks. The lack of accountability and reliable leadership from the Institute as a whole is not something new. Students have expressed the Institute's lack of reliability in research and class settings, demonstrating that this is not an isolated instance but a part of a pattern. Danielle Hoague's letter, which was sent June 8th, demonstrates how harmful this lack of accountability and reliability can truly be, and we stress our support for her powerful letter. These actions, or rather lack thereof, have been attributed to being busy and having too many things on your plate. This is a poor excuse in any setting, especially pertaining to the safety and active violence against students in the Institute.

We are angry and frustrated by the lack of diversity and racial climate of IoES. We are concerned about the low morale, the program losing a fellow graduate student, the potential loss of more, and the repeated rejection of highly qualified Black and underrepresented minority prospective students from our program. Among the sea of solidarity messaging published in recent days have been numerous statements from various members of the UCLA leadership. This talk may have good intent, but words are not actions. We believe that the IoES can and must do better.

We ask that you immediately address the following points in order for IoES to be a department we want to remain a part of:

- 1. Support the immediate diversification of the graduate student body. Including providing the option to transfer in Black and URM students who have applied to IoES with funding and admitting Black and URM prospective students with funding.**
- 2. Get written input and approval from a committee of students and faculty from under-represented groups before sending messages, organizing, or fundraising on racial justice issues on behalf of the Institute.**
- 3. Stop tokenism and the exploitation of race for fundraising, communication, and photo opportunities.**
4. Communicate solidarity and anti-racism messages first to undergraduates, graduate students, staff, faculty, and alumni prior to sharing messages to the public or to donors.
5. Add Black and Native members to the IoES advisory board.
6. Make a statement demanding that UCLA divest from the UC Police Department, both in practice and with regards to funding, have leadership of IoES join the newly-formed UCLA police divestment task force, and create an explicit IoES safety and accountability policy that does not involve the UCP in any capacity.
7. Include anti-racism and environmental justice texts and discussions as a required component of the undergraduate and graduate course curriculum (for example, Issues and Methods).
8. Make public departmental ties with all outside organizations, all sources and amounts of funding received by the Institute, and partner and donor commitments to equity, inclusion and diversity, for transparency.
9. Mandate that faculty and staff and students participate in workshops that focus on Equity, Inclusion and Diversity and anti-racism minimally once a year, with those in leadership roles participating in additional training commensurate with their degree of responsibility.
10. Improve racial diversity at all levels without alienating Black and Brown students when they are admitted to IoES.

We also ask for specific commitments to:

1. Conduct an external review of the racial climate in IoES this summer, with actionable findings.
2. Use of our social media presence, alumni network, and email listservs to amplify Black voices that highlight and address inequities.
3. Prioritize the use of Institute, university, board, and donor funding and resources to diversify IoES leadership by hiring Black faculty.
4. Raise funds for fellowships specifically designated for Black students and postdoctoral researchers.

5. Support and encourage equity, inclusion and diversity-focused research and activities, including through the Environmental Justice Working Group and the Center for Diverse Leadership in Science.
6. Create an external oversight commission to develop and adopt an Anti-Racism-In-All-Policies approach that governs the full spectrum of investment, recruitment, hiring, and other decisions made at the IoES
7. Support Black businesses, including using Black food vendors.
8. Make public the graduation rate and time to degree for all students broken down by demographics.
9. Push for change and justice at the division and university level.

As signatories to this letter, we acknowledge that we find ourselves in a dynamic and quickly changing situation. We acknowledge that we have each been impacted in different ways, and that, even with open dialogue, we cannot each fully know another's experience with the racial climate. We nevertheless offer this collection of thoughts, reflections, and demands as a group of students who believe that communication, transparency, action, accountability, commitment, and tenacity can and will bring about sorely needed shifts toward justice.

The Institute of the Environment and Sustainability serves as a model for interdisciplinary research and is an entity that is looked to by other scientific and environmental institutions. Currently it represents a model that perpetuates racism and therefore we must make addressing inequity a priority. By doing so, we can serve as a model for others. As graduate students, we acknowledge that action is going to require a joint effort from the Director, board, faculty, staff, and students and we are committed to doing our part. Now we ask that you commit to doing yours.

Signed,

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