

Dear Faculty of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology,

Now is a time of great grief, mourning, frustration, and rage. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and Ahmaud Arbery are just the most recent and most visible victims of racist violence in the United States of America. We write to you today as graduate students and fellow scientists of EEB, asking you, our faculty, to stand in solidarity in the fight against racism. **We ask that you use the power and privilege afforded by your position to support and uplift the EEB community.**

We appreciate those of you who have signed the [South Campus Sciences and IoES Antiracism Letter](#). By signing this letter, you recognize that “systems of oppression are deeply rooted in the origins of this country - from the expulsion and murder of Native Americans, the kidnapping and enslavement of Black peoples for almost 250 years, to generations of Black and Brown communities disregarded and destroyed by settler colonialism and the idea of white supremacy.” Further, the oppression of Black people and the disregard for Black lives has persisted long beyond the end of enslavement, resulting in a 400-year legacy of oppression that plagues the present day. **It is well past the time to be explicitly anti-racist in *all* of our actions and not only when convenient.**

As scientists, we are not insulated from, nor are we immune to, the machinations of systemic racism, and to believe otherwise is to reject the material reality of the most vulnerable members of our community. Just 3.5% of [biology PhDs in the United States in 2017](#) were earned by Black people, with rates even lower for ecology and evolutionary biology. [Research at UCLA](#) shows that while 70% of non-URM students were able to complete their STEM degree in 5 yr, the degree-completion rate of URM students in STEM was only 39%. A 2017 survey of graduate students in Integrative Biology department at Berkeley demonstrated that 82.8% of graduate students (N=64) do not feel that the department prioritizes issues of equity, with over half of the same students reporting regularly observing or directly experiencing instances of inequity and discrimination in the department. Cases of discrimination are as frequent and widespread in our department as they are in ecology and evolution as a whole ([#BlackintheIvory](#); [@SpeakUpEEB](#)).

It is essential for us to prioritize using the resources we have to build a scientific community that is more equitable, fair, and accountable for students of color. [The UC system takes almost twice as much funding per student than the CSU system](#), but its student body is [half as diverse](#). We know [diversity is invaluable for the advancement of scientific inquiry](#), so when high-achieving African-American students [reject attending a UC campus due to lack of diversity and poor climate](#), our research suffers as [well](#).

We ask not just for a simple denunciation of racism, but a full commitment to actively fight against and oppose racism in all aspects of our work, at UCLA and beyond, with concrete steps. Specifically, we ask that the department take the following actions **this week** to support **Black and minority students**:

1. Publicly voice support for the demands put forward by the Afrikan Student Union and Black Graduate Student Association at UCLA ([itemized below](#)).
2. Publicly voice [support for efforts on campus to cut relations to the police state](#) and have a representative at the [Divestment Working Group organized by the Executive Committee of Concerned Faculty](#).
3. Encourage all department members to observe the [Strike for Justice](#) on Wednesday, 10 June. On this day, rather than doing “business as [usual](#)” science, [all](#) non-Black members

of our department should be encouraged to spend all day learning and working to advance anti-racism in our community (see [here](#) for a list of resources). Black students, postdocs, faculty, and staff should be encouraged to take the day off, should they choose.

4. Extend all graduate time to degree and funding packages by one year, as has been done for untenured faculty at several UC campuses, to account for the severe work disruptions over the past few months.

We also encourage EEB faculty to take the following actions **this week** to support the national **Black Lives Matter movement**:

1. Donate to memorial funds for Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and many more [HERE](#)
2. Donate to [bail funds around the country](#)
3. Donate to the national [Black Lives Matter](#) organization and to the [Los Angeles chapter](#) of Black Lives Matter
4. Sign these petitions: [Justice for George Floyd](#), [Justice for Ahmaud](#), [Justice for Breonna Taylor](#), [Justice for Tamir Rice](#), and many more [HERE](#).
5. Support the People's Budget LA by following the actions on [this page](#)

The recent murders and the nation-wide protests that followed have highlighted the urgency of fighting against racism, but this fight will also last well beyond this moment. **We expect the UCLA EEB Department to remain committed in this fight.** We ask that you consider each of the changes **listed in the attached document** -- changes that we believe will be essential for improving Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in our department and our scientific community more generally. We invite Black and other minority faculty members to supplement this list with other concrete changes that would help ensure their wellbeing and success as faculty in our department. **We request that the EEB faculty send the EEB graduate students a letter before the Fall 2020 quarter that itemizes the faculty response** to the changes proposed in the document linked above.

Finally, to hold the Department accountable to its commitment to fighting racism in our department and beyond, we **request the establishment of a new Diversity Committee**, tasked specifically with ensuring that the Department is taking meaningful, concrete steps towards fostering a community that ensures the success and wellbeing of Black and other minority students, staff, postdocs, and faculty. Such a committee should be empowered to implement its own recommendations at the departmental level, and its members should be paid an honorarium commensurate with the gravity of their work. This committee should consist primarily of departmental graduate students, and also include departmental staff, postdocs, faculty, and alumni, as well as representatives from outside EEB. Members should receive appropriate training prior to their initial appointment. **We welcome a more thorough conversation about what such a committee could look like.**

We appreciate the substantial work that many of you do individually to make the ecology and evolution community more inclusive and diverse. We also recognize that the removal of the GRE requirement is one of many steps that has made access to our department more equitable. It is now time to make fighting racism a departmental priority and **we strongly encourage UCLA's EEB to be at the forefront of change.** Making our collective voice heard will send a message to broader communities, both general and scientific, of our commitment to oppose racism and systemic injustice. We also hope that our voice will further ignite more people to speak up and take action.

With this letter, we hope that we can have the support and allyship of the EEB faculty during these difficult times. It will take all of us giving our full attention and efforts to change this regressive and racist system, and to create a community where Black people feel safe.

This is a list of changes we (the signed UCLA EEB graduate students) would like to see the UCLA EEB faculty implement in our department to actively dismantle the racist structures in our department and increase support for Black faculty/staff/students and other faculty/staff/students of color. The items in this list come from conversations between UCLA EEB graduate students, demands from the Afrikan Student Union and Black Graduate Student Association at UCLA, the [Black Scientists Matter movement](#), and calls/recommendations for changes to academic programs written by Black scientists and scholars on Twitter (e.g. [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). We note that this list is NOT (a) a list of changes that, even if done correctly, would eventually cure racism in EEB; (b) a comprehensive list of all practical things the department can do; nor (c) a list of changes that, even if done correctly, satisfy us for now. It is an incomplete and imperfect list of specific actions the department can take to move in the right direction. We invite faculty members of color to supplement this list with other concrete changes that would help ensure their wellbeing and success as faculty in our department. Furthermore, we request that the EEB faculty send the EEB graduate students a letter before the Fall 2020 quarter that itemizes the faculty response to the following proposed changes.

Actions that the department can take immediately and over the next few months that translate the announced commitment to our current Black and minority students into action:

1. Actively fund and support organizations that develop a community for Black and other minority EEB students at UCLA and elsewhere: [SACNAS](#); [AMEBA](#); Black Graduate Students Association; [Afrikan Students Union](#); ESA Black Ecology section; ESA Latin American Ecologists Chapter.
2. Increase the visibility and accessibility of the Equity Advisors as the designated faculty to receive reports of racism and discrimination in the department and discuss how the Equity Advisor role can be expanded to meet student needs.
3. Revise the core EEB curriculum at the graduate level (and the EBE undergraduate curriculum) to ensure that all students are educated about how racist policies and ideas shape our field--and how ideas from ecology and evolution have in turn been used to perpetrate and justify racism. Also include curriculum about social and environmental justice, to help ensure that students are equipped to lead anti-racism efforts.
4. Revise EEB and EBE curricula to ensure that courses highlight the scientific contributions of prominent historical and contemporary Black and other minority scientists.
5. Mandate each lab to develop anti-discrimination policies and make these policies publicly available (e.g., on the lab website, on the lab door). Hold regular lab meetings about racism, the racist history of science and ecology/evolution specifically, and/or what members of the lab can/are doing to make EEB a more just community, keeping in mind that the meeting must serve the Black and other minority members of the lab (**e.g, don't burden minority lab members**

- to lead these conversations;** select readings and conversations based on the needs of the lab membership)
6. Establish departmental book clubs for discussing the history and philosophy of science, with a focus on the racist history of science and ways for non-Black allies to advance anti-racism in science.
 7. Require meaningful annual training for racial justice (such as those run by [California Conference for Equality and Justice](#) and [AWARE-LA](#)), microaggression training, and regular implicit bias tests for all department members.
 8. Begin every departmental seminar by [acknowledging our presence on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples](#).
 9. Ensure that the UCLA EEB Seminar series is more inclusive and diverse: highlight researchers from a variety of personal backgrounds, from various institutions, and researchers working on a diverse set of topics including environmental justice, urban ecology, and environmental health.

Actions that the department can take to recruit more diverse graduate students, with the long-term goal of increasing the demographic diversity within EEB:

1. Advertise all available undergraduate research opportunities through SACNAS, PEERS, ASU, McNairs Scholars, LSMRCE, Academic Advancement Program at UCLA, and other minority student organizations at UCLA
2. Recruit undergraduate students into the UCLA EBE Major and EEB research labs from regional community colleges
3. Establish a departmental fund to support undergraduate research assistants, with the ultimate goal that all undergraduates in EEB labs work either for course credit or for pay.
4. Fund and organize social events/activities that bring together EEB Graduate students and EBE undergraduates (e.g. organize Fall and Spring picnics/brown bag lunches for EEB grads, undergrads, faculty, staff).
5. Send staff representatives to operate booths at the SACNAS conference and other minority-serving venues to actively recruit graduate students and provide application fee waivers at these events.
6. Actively recruit graduate students from Cal State Universities.
7. Reinvalidate the UCLA Chapter of the Ecological Society of America's [SEEDS program](#).
8. Advocate at the state-level for fair funding to the Cal State system, where students get much less per capita funding though these universities are far more diverse than UCs.
9. Build meaningful, long-term relationships with HBCUs and recruit students from these schools.
10. Add a link on the EEB Graduate Application page to the [EEB Mentor Match program](#) (TBA for 2020)
11. Offer to waive the graduate application fee for Black and other minority students, as well as anyone who has a financial need.

12. Thoroughly re-evaluate the EEB Graduate Admissions guidelines, with an explicit goal of identifying and eliminating sources of implicit and explicit bias in the admissions process.
13. Advocate at the University and State level for a UC-Wide Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) so that graduate students are not severely rent burdened.
14. Thoroughly re-evaluate the EEB faculty hiring guidelines, with an explicit goal of identifying and eliminating sources of implicit and explicit bias in the hiring process. Also re-establish the Graduate Student Representative position on faculty hiring committees, including an equal voting power, to ensure that the graduate student body has a meaningful say throughout the faculty hiring process.
15. Organize department-wide community engagement events, in which members of the broader Los Angeles community are invited to join UCLA EEB in volunteering for an environmental justice initiative (e.g. [cleaning the LA river](#)). Encourage participation by faculty, staff, graduate students, postdocs, and their families. Provide financial support for folks to be able to come and participate.
16. Establish institutional partnerships with the [IoES Center for Diverse Leadership](#) in Science, and encourage EEB students to contribute to ongoing environmental justice efforts--especially those led through the Bunche Center for African American Studies, American Indian Studies Center, Chicano Studies Research Center, and Asian American Studies Center.

Actions that reduce the power dynamics between faculty and graduate students, and that make our departments' operations more transparent and explicit:

1. Conduct a Departmental Climate Survey annually. Use the results of this survey to identify and implement concrete changes that will improve the wellbeing and success of Black and other minority graduate students.
2. Institute an annual *anonymous* evaluation of the professors submitted by the grad students to an *external trained evaluator*. This may be part of the annual Departmental Climate Survey above.
3. Mandate regular mentorship training for faculty from *trained facilitators outside of the department*
4. Eliminate letters of recommendation for departmental grant and fellowship applications (and advocate for removal of this requirement from other applications at UCLA and societies, especially for small things like travel awards)
5. Thoroughly re-evaluate the advisor-student mentoring relationship, with an explicit goal of identifying other changes that reduce the power imbalance between advisors and students.
6. Thoroughly re-evaluate the nomination scheme for departmental awards (and nominations for University-wide awards) , with an explicit goal of identifying potential sources for biases. We particularly wish to see broader participation from the EEB community, including undergraduate students, especially for the Distinguished Faculty Teaching and TA award.

7. Clarify (on the EEB website and/or in the EEB graduate handbook) the roles and purviews of the faculty leadership positions (e.g., Vice Chairs) and the Graduate Advisor. List and update committee membership on the EEB website.
8. Clarify (on the EEB website and/or in the EEB graduate handbook) who is in charge of various funds available to EEB students, and make transparent how applications for these funds are evaluated
9. Explain the process of switching research labs in the EEB graduate handbook and institute policies to protect students from retaliation from their former advisor.
10. Institute mentorship compacts between graduate students and advisors to align expectations throughout the mentorship relationship, including avenues to handle issues brought up in above points (switching labs, avenues of anonymous support, avenues of evaluation, etc.)