

Dear SAIC Community,

Across the United States and the world, sustained, soul-stirring protests are underway, calling for racial equity, an end to police brutality, and justice for the brutal, senseless killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and too many others. **While the world is gripped with a fervor to recognize and take decisive action against systemic racism, we cannot fail to act as an institution.** As we sincerely hope that the momentum towards racial justice will lead to progressive action throughout our shared society, we can ensure that the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) takes steps today, both on campus and beyond, towards ending systemic racism.

This conviction is informed by my conversations with individuals throughout the SAIC community. A number of you have written or spoken to members of my cabinet and me with your ideas about how SAIC could be a more anti-racist institution and better serve people of color in our community. Thank you for reaching out and sharing your thoughts. I appreciate them and welcome continuing to learn from our community. **We will soon create additional forums for sharing and learning among all of us who are eager to participate.** It must be noted, however, that the greatest share of the work to create these spaces, listen, and enact change must be undertaken by beneficiaries of white privilege, like me, and not just by those disadvantaged by systemic racism. We must also take some immediate actions as we continue work on long-range initiatives, and we will.

Today SAIC will take the following actions as part of our renewed emphasis on supporting anti-racism efforts on our campus and in our world. **SAIC will:**

- **Expand the scope of the Student Emergency Relief Fund** to help alleviate financial hardships incurred during recent protests and governmental response, including food insecurity, transportation needs, and health care. The School is still matching contributions to this fund until June 30, and students enrolled this summer and coming fall may apply to the fund [here](#).
- **Empower a new anti-racism action committee** to amplify the needs of our community, especially its Black and Brown members, design further initiatives, and see to fruition sustained action toward an anti-racist, diverse, equitable, and inclusive campus. This committee will report directly to me as president of the School, members will be solicited widely and will include faculty, staff, students, and alums. Incoming Director of

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for Academic Affairs Jefferson Pinder has agreed to provide leadership in these efforts; he is identifying a cochair now, finding group members, and beginning this work.

- **Appoint the director of diversity, equity, and inclusion for academic affairs to my cabinet**, and establish frequent meetings with me.
- **Complete the in-process external assessment of equity in faculty and staff compensation**, share the results campus-wide, and if necessary make needed salary adjustments.
- **Hold a day of mourning**, during which all staff members are encouraged to take time for self-care and self-directed education, rather than their usual job duties. Those who wish to seek time and space for healing may do so. Alternatively, Flaxman Library staff have compiled a list of [resources](#) to learn more about racism, social justice, the Black experience, and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. The date for the day of mourning will be determined shortly. Once announced, employees should make arrangements with their supervisors to ensure essential functions are covered; however, employees will not need to use PTO to participate.
- **Donate \$25,000** total among Free Spirit Media, Lawndale Business Renaissance Association, Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago, North Lawndale Employment Network, Options for Youth, Turning the Page, and the Foundation for Homan Square. All of these nonprofit organizations are our neighbors in the Nichols Tower. Seven years ago, SAIC was invited by the Foundation for Homan Square to establish a satellite campus in the tower and design programming in partnership with community organizations and residents of the predominantly Black, West Side neighborhood. The Chicago Food Depository, active throughout the city, will also receive a portion of this donation at this time of heightened food insecurity in many Chicago neighborhoods. **SAIC will also match all faculty, staff, student, board member, or alum contributions to these organizations up to \$10,000**; to request a match, please send your donation receipt to the Office of Advancement at givetosaic@saic.edu.
- **Make meeting spaces available to community partners** for meetings and events free-of-charge once the campus reopens and health guidelines again permit such meetings.
- **Continue our current practice that the School does not have contracts with the Chicago Police Department.**
- **Continue efforts to build diverse hiring pools for positions throughout the institution**, especially among full-time, tenure-track faculty.

In addition to these new initiatives and continued practices, **the School will also continue to dedicate both funding and resources to our ongoing commitments that support the Black and Brown members of our campus and city as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts more broadly**, including: scholarships that benefit diverse populations, including the Walter and Shirley Massey Chicago Scholarship and the Chicago Scholars programs for

Chicago Public School graduates, and the Denise and Gary Gardner Scholarship for a student from Chicago's South Side; classes, artist-in-residency programs, and community-based projects in North Lawndale; participation in the Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design's Post-Graduate Teaching Fellowship, an exchange program designed to give diverse recent graduates teaching experience at peer art colleges; and sponsoring Diversity Infusion Grants, which encourage diverse content in the curriculum, and Compassion and Belonging Grants, which support diverse projects of the campus community.

Please also be reassured, as several of you have asked, that there will be no institutional consequence for community members' participation in protests. Civil disobedience has played an essential role in social justice movements, and you are encouraged to participate in a safe and informed manner.

In closing, I want to personally thank everyone in the SAIC community who has long been working in your departments, classrooms, and offices and through School-wide efforts to make our institution and world more anti-racist. In particular, I want to recognize those of you who acted these past two weeks by reaching out to our Black and Brown students, helping community partners in North Lawndale clean-up efforts, and much more. In taking these new, initial institutional actions, restating our commitment to longstanding work, and creating new structures to plan further initiatives and mobilize efforts towards enacting them, I hope each of us—particularly those for whom privilege encourages us to ignore systemic racism—are inspired to adopt or continue an anti-racist mindset and pursue anti-racist actions in our work and lives. We can do better, and we will; these actions are our next step.

With hope and action,

Elissa Tenny
President

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