

Statement on Racial Justice and Solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives

September 2020

The faculty of the Department of Social Sciences at Michigan Technological University supports the Movement for Black Lives and liberation. We stand against structures of white supremacy and ongoing systemic violence, including the militarization of police and associated brutality. We recognize that words are not enough. We share this statement as a beginning of a renewed and ongoing commitment to anti-racism and equity in our teaching, service, and research, and to be publicly accountable to this commitment.

This statement is inspired by national and local events during the summer of 2020 that make clear how ongoing racial injustice results in and compounds the marginalization and inequitable treatment of people in everyday life. These injustices impact people across racial and ethnic identities as well as sexual and gender identities, cognitive and physical abilities, class, and other categories of social exclusion.

We as faculty, in alignment with [Michigan Tech's vision](https://www.mtu.edu/stratplan/) [link:<https://www.mtu.edu/stratplan/>] “to improve the quality of life and to promote mutual respect and equity for all people within the state, the nation, and the global community,” are committed to studying and teaching about social issues with the hopes of improving lives and wellbeing. We are committed to supporting our students and our colleagues in ways that are inclusive, equitable, and socially just. This statement is intended to highlight steps we as a faculty can take to actualize these commitments.

In reflecting on our role in shaping the disciplines and institutions in which we are members, we acknowledge:

- Our institution is located within the historic, traditional, and contemporary homelands of Indigenous peoples and on lands ceded by the Anishinaabeg in the [Treaty of 1842](#). As such, the mentorship, research, and teaching in our department must honor equitable relations with our human and more-than-human relatives. We must do better as teachers and researchers in honoring the reciprocity of the relationship between our university and our Indigenous neighbors.
- Our disciplines have been integral to the perpetuation of racial injustice and racial violence. Indeed, many of our canonical works and early theoretical foundations were born from those efforts. White supremacy has weaponized knowledge-production and used it to systematically oppress Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities and BIPOC scholars, and that injustice is ongoing. Higher education continues to exclude BIPOC scholars and exploits their labor through tokenization and marginalization. Despite this, our disciplines each have rich histories of BIPOC scholars whose work has supported the advancement of our fields and contributes to historic and ongoing struggles for social justice. We invite all faculty to consider ways to diversify curricula at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

- Industrialization played a fundamental role in the founding of our university, as the commodification and extraction of minerals, land, and labor shaped the capitalist driven copper boom in the Keweenaw; we, as a university, continue to benefit from relationships with industry. Social science research documents how past and present processes of industrialization, and the socioeconomic, technological, and environmental changes they inflict, have disproportionately threatened the lifeways and well-being of BIPOC communities both locally and globally. As a faculty, we commit ourselves to working in collaboration with BIPOC and marginalized groups in building knowledge, promoting understanding, and in supporting the continuation of social movements for racial justice as part of a critical dialogue concerning our shared past, present, and future.
- As a majority-white faculty on a majority-white campus, we recognize the need to cultivate authentic relationships with BIPOC scholars through our professional networks so that we might encourage more diverse application pools, and thus more diverse hiring opportunities, when positions open in our department.
- There are several structural factors embedded in the promotion process that disincentivize the most basic affirmation of the fact that Black lives matter. The heavy service load of BIPOC scholars at white-majority institutions is often devalued in tenure and promotion evaluation, as is the work of women and non-binary scholars. We can do more to make this fact, and our support of Indigenous peoples and BIPOC colleagues, evident in our administrative processes, and commit to leading the conversations that will change those processes.

In recognition of the statements above, our faculty will fully integrate racial justice and equity initiatives within departmental and committee work beginning with the academic year 2020-21. As part of our collective accountability, each departmental committee will annually conduct a reflection activity at the beginning of the Fall semester to identify how we can actualize the goals within this statement in our collective work. Throughout the academic year committees and departmental leadership will document and provide updates on the progress of this work at monthly departmental meetings, and these updates will be archived in an accessible location. At the final departmental meeting of the Spring semester, each committee will summarize all actions, accomplishments, work in progress, and future planned initiatives related to this work.

The following working list presents potential action items to be undertaken by the faculty of the Department of Social Sciences, pending further departmental discussion and approval:

- **Identify strategies for ensuring that our programs honor the Treaty of 1842 and provide equitable educational opportunities to BIPOC and all students, including**

valuing research that is informed by and informs Indigenous knowledge. Potential actions include: developing a fund for compensating external graduate committee members who serve as mentors; developing a mentorship network or program of BIPOC alumni and organizations; and building relationships with the Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College and other regional colleges to better support transfer students to our programs.

- **Request the department integrate facilitation to help us identify and recognize the ways in which we are complicit in a culture of racism and white supremacy and how we can embed anti-racism within our teaching, research, service, and department operations.** Potential actions include: engaging paid facilitators to help us recognize ways we are complicit in perpetuating racism; auditing our own course syllabi and program curriculum with the goal of including scholarship *by* BIPOC and a diversity of scholars not just *about* BIPOC and underrepresented communities; developing sets of discipline-specific readings about epistemology, power, and equitable research design for the comprehensive exam reading lists for graduate students; and ensuring that our departmental policies are transparent and readily available for all staff, students, and faculty.
- **Identify actions that support the inclusion of students, staff, and faculty in our department who identify as BIPOC or a member of underrepresented groups based on other racial, ethnic, gender and sexual identities, cognitive and physical abilities, class, and other categories of social exclusion,** such as by obtaining funding for a diversity postdoctoral position; establishing a regularly updated list of conference scholarship funding opportunities for BIPOC and other students from sources both internal to Michigan Tech and external; and holding potential hires and current faculty accountable to diversifying scholarship through the inclusion of viewpoints of BIPOC scholars.
- **Engage in active reflection, discussion, and change to address the action items detailed in this statement** by diversifying curricula, teaching, and research portfolios in ways that enhance visibility and inclusive of diverse contributions, and considering ways to change teaching, research, and service to more proactively work against social processes of oppression and exclusion and/or for those of liberation and equity.
- **Improve transparency in internal evaluation of requests for funding and other accommodations,** recognizing that asking for and receiving internal funding and accommodations through individual requests disproportionately harms through exclusion. Improved transparency may involve identifying a transparent funding mechanism to which students and faculty could apply to obtain funding for the inclusion of community members in conference presentations (registration fees, per diem, travel costs); developing a fund for compensating external graduate committee members from outside the university, recognizing that this work is a currently unpaid contribution to the professional development of our students; establishing a shared and regularly updated list of all conference scholarship funding opportunities for BIPOC and other underrepresented students from sources both internal to MTU and external (e.g., professional societies);

and/or establishing an internal and transparent committee with rotating student/faculty representation to review internal dept funding requests and awards.

- **Develop a faculty values statement** that affirms our commitment to anti-oppression and equity and revisit this statement annually as an act of accountability; this will also include developing processes of accountability from BIPOC communities to evaluate our progress in these efforts and compensate them for their time.

This statement is a living document, to be improved upon and revised as we continue to move forward with this work. At the same time, we recognize the need for public accountability. To this end, this statement and this list of action items will be shared and accessible as a working document and will be updated frequently as our efforts evolve.

Last updated 11/30/20