

Dr. Heidi Macpherson
President
The College at Brockport
State University of New York

Thursday, February 13, 2020

Dear President Macpherson:

We, the Faculty/Staff of Color (FSOC) at The College of Brockport, write this letter of complaint in hope that you will address and correct systemic racist inequalities at The College. We direct this letter to you, Madame President, since you are empowered to initiate transformational change and affect foundational restructuring. The structural and systemic racism we have observed and experienced is deeply rooted and goes beyond particular personalities and distressing anecdotes. It is manifested in differences in the application of policies, employee evaluation processes, compensation disparities, campus governance, hiring and search processes, distribution of resources, and most vitally- the lack of focused critical support to increase the academic success of underrepresented students - particularly students of color.

Throughout decades of FSOC service, it has become evident that a system and practice of racially based disparities exists, which excludes and/or renders non-whites, particularly Blacks and Hispanics, invisible, steadily neglecting and suppressing the needs and interests of persons of color. This negligence trivializes persons of color and the great potential within each of them. There is no shortage of evidence of these biased practices from our collective years at The College. The trivialization of our complaints and verified experiences is borne of apparent contempt for things and people that are seen as necessary “evils.” For the sake of the university and students of color, we call upon you to correct these injustices and commit to genuine change. We act today, requesting that you and the Administration make substantial policy changes, to reaffirm the importance of our presence, position, voice, and values at this worthy institute.

As a representative group of the employees and students of color, we register the following complaints and demand that actions be taken to address them immediately:

First, we demand the reinstatement of Dr. Cephas Archie’s position. Dr. Archie’s tenure here was remarkable in his success despite seemingly insurmountable odds. Over the past two weeks it has been repeatedly documented by students, faculty, staff, alumni and community members that Dr. Archie admirably fulfilled his role as Chief Diversity Officer by fostering the spirit of equity and diversity and challenging you and members of Cabinet when he noted

unethical, biased, racially-focused decisions, practices, and behaviors which negatively impacted the institution and underrepresented groups. His diligence and wise insights actively contributed to fostering an environment that cultivated inclusiveness for all - even as many students and employees witnessed the intentional barriers erected by the private interests of Cabinet members and Administration officials. It appears undeniable that his termination was a consequence of his successful complaints and efforts to resolve them. Retaliation against individuals pursuing their own or other's complaints of unethical disparity is itself unethical. Although the structural issues highlighted below continued, his successful efforts at correcting issues case by case cannot be disputed or denied. His work matters and his absence is now an acute and gaping hole in the fabric of this institution. Because our community continues to suffer, we will not stand for such an action. If we are not heard, unfortunately, as in times past, we will register an official complaint, starting with the separation of Dr. Cephas Archie from service to the College.

Second, we call for substantial mental health support for our students of color. Given the extreme forms of open discrimination our students face, appropriate mental health care is needed. Complex PTSD is a reality on our campus, and many students suffer from this as a result of hyper campus police surveillance and other forms of discrimination the system inadequately addresses. The inherent biases of investigators also contribute to this situation and were plainly revealed in the town hall meeting. To date, there is one counseling center professional of color. Institutes across the nation have fortified their students of color population with adequate numbers of personnel who create programming and who visibly identify with a racial minority student population. This staff is critical infrastructure for retaining astute students of color and maintaining their good academic standing.

Third, we implore you to retain all current staff and faculty of color who are in good standing with the College based on their annual written performance evaluations. If persons of color have been notified and/or scheduled for formal dismissal at the close of the academic year, we ask that a separate committee be formed immediately to investigate the rationale behind such administrative actions. It appears that some of these individuals may have also been the subject of wrongful retaliation for voicing complaints of racial disparities. In the spirit of retention that has been espoused recently, management cannot continue to waste valuable resources such as new hire investment costs and additional professional development costs by firing high performing persons of color or hoping that they leave on their own due to a persistent injurious work culture. Also, in the spirit of retention we cannot engage them in punitive measures if they raise questions privately and/or openly related to practices that contradict institutional and human values of equity and anti-racism.

Fourth, we strongly urge you to rapidly move towards equitable distribution of diverse leadership in Administration based on College census data for our students. Here we must stress the continued exclusion of qualified people of color from powerful decision-making roles

on this campus. Since the days of Fannie Barrier Williams (Class of 1870), Blacks were deemed unsuitable for leadership roles at this institution. Over a century and a half later, this practice has continued mostly unabated and unchallenged. A dean of color here, a department chair of color there, serves to satisfy a false sense of equity and inclusion, but results in the gross exclusion of non-whites in the larger scheme of college governance. If a person of color can perform successfully a senior leadership role, we implore you to reinstate, retain, and/or promote them within the system. According to the most recent data, students who identify as a racial minority in our enrollment account for 23% of the student population while people of color account for only 1% of the College's management staff, 6% of the faculty and only 6% of the general staff. These statistics clearly show the under-representation of minority faculty, staff and Administration compared to minority students. In order to successfully serve our students, there should be visible and proportionate leadership in offices across the campus, including senior administration, Deans, Chairs, and Directors. And these leaders should be unfettered by forms of intimidation to offer advice, wisdom, policies, etc. that empower the Administration to manifest and to enhance the College's values and needs to maintain excellent accreditation standards.

Fifth, we demand immediate intervention from an external agency that can provide ongoing diversity and bias training for every department. Dr. Archie began this tradition in partnership with the President's Council on Diversity and Inclusion (PCDI) but discrimination continues to be pervasive. Thus an external agency managed by Dr. Archie may be a better solution. Historically and presently, the College suffers from a grander structural issue: the climate of permissible hazing, bullying, and direct cruelty to students, faculty, and staff of color. We are fully aware of and appreciative of non minority staff and faculty who have been trusted allies for many of us. However, because there are no safe reporting mechanisms, the offenders are protected with a wall of silence. Many victims of this behavior often bear it in silence. Other victims speak out and become the immediate targets of retaliation or termination. The culture of the institution minimizes and trivializes the complaints of non-whites while harboring and protecting the perpetrators of overt racism. To our white and other non minority colleagues, please join us as we cannot reverse the conditions without your support. We strongly urge everyone, including Leadership, to remain accountable to the values espoused by this worthy Institute.

Sixth, in order to further our efforts to create a better Brockport under your leadership, we demand an unredacted and unedited copy of the Campus Climate report submitted to you by Mr. Curtis Lloyd in the fall of 2019. We have yet to receive the report which only causes further concerns over transparency and institutional distrust among all stakeholders. We have wondered why there was not a meeting, preventative in nature, with the staff and faculty of color, Dr. Archie, and other effected community members who face open discrimination after the climate report, which listed mild to aggregious abuses, was submitted to you. We demand the

immediate release of the unredacted, unedited report which reveals the extent of the troubling dimensions of systemic racism and other isms on our campus.

President MacPherson, we call upon you to respond to these serious grievances and demands by February 19th and to hold meaningful dialogues with delegates from our group. Opting to continue the elitist and exclusionary system of norms and precedents established by the current leadership is unacceptable and, we, the Faculty/Staff of Color at The College of Brockport, are prepared to present our case and to make official petitions to SUNY Administration for further actions - including and up to an individual's removal due to a vote of "no confidence". This letter, therefore, stands as an open letter to the Press as well.

Madame President, we strongly desire to work together with you and your Administration to end the discrimination that is prevalent at our College so that *everyone* has the signature experience we can and should afford them,

Faculty/Staff of Color

The College at Brockport