

University of Rochester leadership and administration,

On May 25, 2020, a black man, George Floyd, was murdered by a white police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This marked the most recent death in a string of unjustified murders of unarmed minorities, further compounding the psychological distress of the current pandemic. It is deeply disappointing that the university was unable to provide, at minimum, a message of reassurance to its community until late May 30, 2020—five days past the unfortunate passing of George Floyd, five days past the wake of national protests, and twenty days past the beginning of the recent onslaught of nationalized tragedies of several other unarmed minorities (i.e. Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery). We would like to make clear that logistical reasons are not satisfactory justifications for delaying a message of support, while some of our most vulnerable community members are left feeling unsafe, unseen, and lost. Thus, we ask that the university take prompt and continued actions that bear witness to the commitment of providing safety and support for its underrepresented community members. The Alliance for Diversity in Science and Engineering, in coordination with a number of graduate students of all backgrounds who were personally affected by the current events, have come together to outline the following requirements for addressing these commitments.

### **1. Improved accountability and transparency for bias-related incident reporting**

Much of the current national unrest is due to the continued unjust and opaque systems of accountability for authority figures. Throughout the years, countless students have been victims of race-related harassment at the university, including some of our own members. We need to see that this university takes these experiences and bias-related outcomes seriously. Section 1.c. of the November 20, 2015 petition by minority student leaders, in response to racially-motivated incidents, demanded that the “University put as much emphasis and funding in promoting the ‘Bias-Related Incidents’ reporting program as they have the CARE Program.” Based on data from “The College: 2016–2018 Bias-Related Incident Report” showing that the majority of incident reports came from undergraduates in the months after the system was implemented, we do not believe that this demand has been met. In many cases, people have been consoled with kind words, left to deal with the harassment on their own, and the responsibility is left on the victim to warn others about perpetrators who are still working within the university system. This is unacceptable. Our recommendations for improving this issue are below:

- A. We would like to see serious improvements in onboarding for bias-related incident reporting. Faculty, students, and staff members should know exactly where to go if and when an incident occurs. Many of these onboarding tactics have been addressed for combating sexual harassment; there is no excuse for not extending these same efforts to other forms of harassment and discrimination.
- B. We want to see transparency in the assessment of outcomes of bias-related incidents. The current system for reporting bias-related incidents invokes little confidence that each case will be investigated and addressed adequately. It is stated on the Bias-Related Incident webpage by the Paul J. Burgett Intercultural Center that they will “support those who are harmed and educate those who cause the harm” without any further clarifications on what this support will entail for the affected person, or how those who caused the harm will be educated. Moreover, there are no additional

resources available for affected individuals, such as who to contact for counseling/questions outside of the reporting form. If any of these resources do exist, they should be given more visibility and each department should communicate to students that these resources are available.

## **2. Investing in cultural competency training for counseling services**

Given the heightened vulnerability for minorities to experience mental health distress, providing adequate counseling and treatment is vital during these traumatic times. Those who seek counseling through the CARE network should not have to spend most of their sessions explaining cultural sensitivities and values to their assigned therapist. This is an inefficient use of valuable counseling time and it dissuades others from the same background from using these resources. Our recommendations for improving this issue are below:

- A. We need continued in-person cultural competency training for counselors. It is no longer acceptable to assign simple online training to address these complicated and sensitive issues. This model is not indicative of an institution that is committed to dramatic and long-lasting change in fostering a healthy and inclusive community.
- B. We want to see more therapists, and group therapy sessions that reflect the diversity of experiences that we have as a campus community. Group therapy sessions bring people together from similar backgrounds, show community members that they are not alone, and allows them to give and receive support from one another. However, victims of traumatic and sensitive incidents should not be subject to group therapy due to a shortage of appropriate therapists. This has been the reality for some counsel-seekers, and this shortage needs to be addressed.

We ask that you take these recommendations seriously and work to improve the experiences of all members of the university community. To quote the 2015 petition by underrepresented students in response to racially-motivated incidents on campus, “We can’t be Ever Better if we’re not together.”

With respect,

Raven M. Osborn  
Katherine Andersh  
Briaunna Minor  
Ferralita Madere  
Jimin Han  
Marian Ackun-Frammer  
Antonio Tinoco Valencia  
Zanah Francis  
Adrián Moisés Molina Vargas  
Shyanthony Synigal