

Dear Dean Brett Steele and the Office of the Dean,

Receiving the letters from the department of Art, the School of Arts and Architecture, and UCLA as a whole has been underwhelming and at times nearly offensive. The town hall on Wednesday was a helpful step forward by outlining ideas for real and positive change, and we are writing this letter to once again call upon the SoAA to take concrete steps in combating racism and supporting our community. We have selected specific statements from the Dean's letter on June 1st in order to guide our discussion.

1. *"This horrific act is just one of a seemingly endless stream of inhumane acts against Blacks and other people of color—a troubled history dating back to the founding of this nation."*

The language of your letter reveals, on more levels than one, a misunderstanding of the situation. It is inappropriate to refer to Black people as "Blacks", especially within the same sentence that identifies "people of color". You effectively highlight the inhumanity of one group and humanity of the other.

2. *"I am struck by the metaphor that UCLA alumnus Kareem Abdul-Jabbar invoked in his Op-Ed for the Los Angeles Times this weekend likening racism in America to a 'dust in the air. It seems invisible—even if you're choking on it—until you let the sun in. Then you see it's everywhere."*

Your recognition of the all-encompassing nature of racism, the manner in which it infiltrates and dictates the structure of our lives, is a helpful starting point to reckoning with the forms of institutional racism that exist within the SoAA. For Black people and people of color in the SoAA, racism exists in utterly banal, easily identifiable forms. We witness it in predominantly white, historically inaccurate art course curriculums; in the queasiness, boredom, or saviorism of white professors around discussions of race; in the absence of Black students in many classrooms; in the lack of initiative by the school to commit to actively anti-racist practices until there is nation-wide pressure to enact change; et cetera.

3. *"I recognize the profound impact that all of this is having on all of you, on our communities, and on our country. I also recognize that it is more important than ever that we stand in solidarity, with compassion and empathy, and commit—no, insist—on enacting positive and real change."*

We acknowledge the promise of this statement and ask you to define this commitment into actionable items that the SoAA will undergo. If the SoAA is truly insisting that positive and real change must take place on all levels of and spheres of power, from interpersonal to communal to institutional, we as a school must produce a structured plan of action in identifying and executing anti-racist actions.

**Below we outline potential antiracist steps forward for the SoAA. We realize the execution of these methods will require organized collaboration between the Office of the Dean, faculty, staff, and the student body of each department, and we are committed to problem-solving as a unified school.** If anything, we see this as a crucial opportunity to create a more robust model of student feedback and engagement in shifting the methodology of SoAA toward an anti-racist praxis.

## **Student Body and Resources**

- Commit to accepting more non-white students, specifically Black students.
- Provide adequate academic, creative, and financial support. In order to identify these forms of support, create an organized format for students to evaluate their access to necessary resources and outline their needs. This may take the form of town halls, online surveys, interviews, and other forms of structured formats that culminate in a rigorous, accessible report and plan of implementation.
- As a separate school we require satellite resources or a more thorough guide to connect us with CAPS, Un-docuBruins, and other organisations on campus which actively support students of color and students of other marginalised identities.
  - In the SoAA, Black students and students of color face a uniquely intimate environment of vulnerability in having to receive and be received by a majority white artist peer group. All too often, non-white students must be subjected to their classmates' racist artwork, or have their artwork received with racism, and are left with no structure through which to confide in, process, or report this experience with a non-white professional who is trained on issues of race. This is especially the case within classrooms taught by white professors.
- Provide active platforms between administration, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. All students, staff, and faculty should be made aware of on-going discussions, decisions, and should be able to easily reach each other for discussion. These platforms should be made available to all members of the SoAA, so that decision-making is not narrowed to a select number of people.
  - It is telling that prior to our attempts in 2020 to interface with the Art student body, nearly no student was aware that the Dean's Student Council existed, let alone what its practical function is. Also, there is no digital infrastructure for students to reach one another, apart from the mediated method of sending a forwarded email through their department's counselor, which disables fluid conversation.

## Curriculum

- Commit to developing courses which de-center whiteness, maleness, cis-ness, Euro-America, e.t.c., which adequately discuss the rich historical *and* contemporary practices of art all around the world and in our communities, and which engages in critical race theory, queer and trans theory, feminist approaches, intersectionality, colonial and imperial histories, and more. These subject matters reflect the concerns and lived experiences of the student body and are the basis of the “*creative, innovative, and collaborative approaches*” to education that the SoAA claims to provide. Curriculum that omits these matters is not only inaccurate and narrow-minded, it violently white-washes art histories, research, and practices.
  - It is critical to embed these approaches and values into the SoAA at the departmental level. We cannot simply rely on students to voluntarily take critical cultural classes outside of the art department. Outsourcing classes which engage in ethnic studies, non-art histories, feminism, critical race theory, e.t.c., sends the message that the arts are fundamentally separate from these matters. Recognising the reality of racism and structural inequity is to recognise that these values and approaches are not discrete fields of study, but intrinsically involved in our lives and the arts.
  - Require students to partake in above-mentioned courses just as they do modernism or other eurocentric history classes. Continuously relegating non-white and non-male histories as “optional” functions to center white and male dominated narratives. Furthermore, given the university’s main job is to educate their students, it is imperative that all students are involved and held accountable to learn and reflect, as encouraged in the letter from the Department of Art chair.

## Hiring and Staff Training

- Commit to hiring more people of color, specifically Black artists and staff and providing the time, space, and resources to support faculty and staff of color.
- Provide anti-racism training to existing and new faculty and staff, including teaching assistants and administration to be better equipped to advocate, appropriately de-escalate, and create learning spaces which actively engage everyone. We have witnessed this training be implemented in the form of optional, voluntary workshops, rather than as a required, integral component of onboarding in the SoAA. We have provided resources and teaching guides at the end of the letter.
- In developing new curriculum, hire professors whose training are aligned with the anti-racist values and de-centered approaches expected. As mentioned above, there have been too many instances of white professors who have expressed uneasiness, fetishisation, white savior complexes, and outright boredom in

discussions of race and cultures outside of their own. There are many eligible artists and educators who excel in their field and are not racist. Furthermore, our attempts to report on the harmful, racist conduct of many professors through UCLA's CCLE instructor evaluation program has yielded no visible change or evidence that professors are held accountable for their conduct.

### **Financial Ties**

- Strongly advocate for UCLA to immediately cut ties with LAPD, defund UCLA PD, and reinvest this money into a Black Student Resource Center. Do everything within the SoAA's power to demand these changes of the university and take initiative by cutting any existing ties between SoAA and police.
4. *I also recognize that I cannot truly know—we as a community cannot know—how this is impacting you without a space to hear your voices. To that end, I have scheduled a time for us all to come together as a community to begin to share, to listen, and to heal.*

While we support this event as an active conversation between students and the SoAA, we cannot help but understand this gesture as a form of performative allyship when the options toward combating racism that we have listed above have been steps that we have continuously asked you to take, long before this week.

- While the work to make real change is challenging, we have seen the school fund and maintain numerous practices which directly go against the statement of values by the school such as: the increased privatization of the public university; ignoring accusations under Title IX and rehiring accused professors; not taking steps to create a hospitable environment for Black professors; not advocating for reduced tuition or housing fees; not providing support for protesting graduate students and union workers; and much more. The lack of commitment to anti-racism prior to today demonstrates that historically there have been shortfalls of leadership and willingness to support or listen to the needs of non-white students.

As you have mentioned in your letter, *“We all have a role to play to properly confront and undo these inequities and injustices. It starts with each one of us. We must demand changes.”*

We are indeed demanding changes. This is your role. We are asking you to, honestly, do better.

Signed,

Sai Tripathi, Art Major, fourth year, Undergraduate Student Representative to the Dean's Council

Anna Cho Son, Art Major, fourth year

Below are valuable resources and guides we have found and use ourselves. This is not an extensive list, but contains vital information for transforming university practices, from classroom to administrative spaces.

[Anti-Racist Resource Guide](#)

[Antiracist Classroom](#)

[RESOURCES FOR. ORGANISING WORK AND CREATING CHANGE](#)

[Abolition of Policing Workshop](#)

[Teaching and Learning about Race and Racism with Young Children and Their Families](#)

[Justice for Black Lives: Petition to University of California](#)

[List of community mutual aids, organisations to look out for and uplift, and bail out funds and legal services by state and city](#)

[@NationalResourcesList](#)

[Resources for Black Lives Matter](#): includes ways to support BLM, ways specifically for non-black people to support BLM, resources for protestors, and support for facing trauma and healing.