UNITED ACADEMICS

June 4, 2020 UVM United Academics Statement on Racial Justice

The murder of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer was yet another reminder of the violence enacted on Black lives every day. Across the country, communities are responding with understandable grief and rage. The outpouring of pain is born of the unrelenting surveillance and structural oppression that black and brown communities continue to face.

This was not an isolated incident. George Floyd's name joins the growing list of Black citizens who have lost their lives, including Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Philando Castile, Sandra Bland, Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, and many more. These horrific acts of violence stem from a deeply-rooted systemic racism that has pervaded this nation since its very formation. From police abuse of power and disparities in the criminal justice system, to limiting access to adequate schools, jobs, and health care, structural racism continues to enable the infliction of violence, pain, and trauma on communities of color. The global pandemic has thrown these inequalities into stark relief across the nation.

These events are not "someplace else," but affect our own Vermont communities and campuses. It is easy to think that in our "Brave Little State" we can somehow rise above the divisions and bigotry, but we must recognize that even here there is racism and discrimination. We stand with Black Lives Matter of Greater Burlington, the Peace and Justice Center, Migrant Justice and other groups and individuals who are willing to stand up and confront the tactics of fear and intimidation fostered by leadership in the highest national offices, and engage in verbal confrontation and dialogue with local law enforcement. We applaud especially the youth who are determined to make change when faced with injustice.

As educators, we are committed to teaching our students to learn the history and the consequences of systematic and institutionalized racism against black and brown people in all sectors of society. By our own individual example, we are committed to teaching our students to nurture empathy and solidarity with communities of color, and to acknowledge the uneven impact of these events on our students of color. UVM's core values of respect, integrity, justice, and responsibility are enshrined in Our Common Good, and engraved in stone on our campus, and as faculty these are more than just words, they are written in every syllabus, and found in interactions between students and faculty across our campus. We stand against racial violence, injustice and other acts of white supremacy. This means calling on people to dismantle all systems of oppression: racism, homo/transphobia, xenophobia, religious, and gender discrimination, and any systems that question or disregard the full humanity of every person.

We demand change, and we are committed to taking action that disrupts and dismantles the injustices that plague our institutions and our wider society. In the words of Angela Davis, "In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist. We must be anti-racist."