



Dear Students,

The most recent high-profile incidents of violence against Black Americans – the death of George Floyd under a White police officer’s knee in Minnesota, the harassment of bird-watcher Christian Cooper by a White woman in New York City, the death of jogger Ahmaud Arbery at the hands of armed White gunmen in Georgia, the shooting of Breonna Taylor by police as she slept in her bed – are horrific. Following months of a global pandemic that is disproportionately impacting communities of color, we are once again confronted with the reality of systemic racism in our culture that cannot be ignored or denied.

These are extremely difficult times, and these events have impacted all of us. But the people of color in our college community, especially our Black community members, have the right to be angry, disenchanted and fatigued. These feelings are real. And they deserve to be expressed and validated. As a White man, I have never experienced the fear, anger, outrage and despair that people of color know too well. I may feel upset and outraged at the sight of racist violence, and I can try to empathize with the experiences of people of color, but I have never walked in their shoes. That’s why it’s my responsibility to educate myself and my White peers about racism, implicit bias and the experiences of people of color in order to make change.

Every one of us needs to be committed to fighting against racism and discrimination wherever and however it exists. We need to be mindful that bias exists – in **our** community – right now. I ask you to use this opportunity to educate yourself, to listen to experiences of people who don’t share your identities, to become involved in political, educational or community initiatives

that promote justice, education and equity.

As your Dean, I acknowledge that I, too, have work to do. Our college has work to do. When we don't prioritize the critical work of understanding and opposing bias, discrimination and systematic racism - in our classrooms, curriculum, policies and practices - we contribute to the problem. We will change that. We in the college have been working with the Office of Institutional Diversity to create a strategic plan that strengthens our diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, and creates systems of accountability, taking steps that I hope will become lasting changes in our community. This summer, all students will be invited to several sessions to shape how the College implements our diversity, equity and inclusion strategic plan in the coming academic year.

Our greatest priority today is ensuring that all our students have the resources and support you need to finish the spring term successfully. If you need to, switch your spring courses to [S/U grading](#); students have this option through the end of this week. Please reach out to your academic advisor if you have questions on the process. I also encourage you to contact your faculty if you need support or flexibility. You can also always reach out to Sandy Neubaum (sandy.neubaum@bus.oregonstate.edu), executive director of COB student engagement, to discuss your needs for support.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) is also a resource for help during this time ([more info on their website](#)). More than 40% of their therapists identify as people of color, and they share a commitment to understanding and supporting the needs of Black students. If you feel you could benefit from talking with a mental health provider, please consider meeting with a CAPS therapist. They are offering a full range of support services through Zoom. Given these incredibly challenging circumstances that our students of color are navigating, they are now prioritizing access for all students who have been

impacted (directly or indirectly). You will not have to wait.

I believe in our community's resilience and commitment to the values of hard work, courageous inquiry, and inclusion. We can get through this difficult time together. And we will be stronger because of it, precisely because of our values, our willingness to take responsibility when we mess up and our determination to learn. I ask you to join me in enacting these values with each other: listen with humility, empathize, take responsibility, and make changes for the better.

Best,

James R. Coakley, PhD

Interim Dean

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