

Following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery in the winter and spring of 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement gained unprecedented support and traction since its initial founding in 2013 after the murders of Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and Eric Garner. On June 6, 2020, a statement in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and against police brutality was released by the Association of Black Anthropologists. A portion of the ABA statement reads as follows<sup>1</sup>:

"We urge our non-Black anthropology colleagues, especially our White colleagues who tend to reproduce the toxic effects of whiteness in anthropology departments, think tanks, research groups, and other spaces where anthropology is practiced across the nation, to move beyond the soul searching, despondency, and white guilt that this moment (and similar other moments) has engendered. Instead, we want members of the discipline to start at 'home,' to accept the ways that anthropology has been and continues to be implicated in the projects of white supremacy (both in its implicit and explicit manifestations) and to lay out a clear path for moving forward. We want members of the discipline of anthropology to see the ways that white supremacy is manifest in their curricula, syllabi, graduate student recruitment and mentoring, hiring, and promotion practices. We want them to see and correct their refusal or inability to teach race, racism, the pathology of whiteness, and the banality of white supremacy; their marginalization of Black scholars and their scholarship. We also challenge them to evaluate their commitment to being, paraphrasing the words of Black anthropologist, William S. Willis, 'a discipline of the subjugated races.' This call to recognition and action is only the first step in the discipline's long journey towards decolonization."

Several graduate students in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Connecticut met over the summer of 2020 to draft the following action items as immediate steps our department could take to "start at home" in order to address systemic racism within our department and the discipline of anthropology at large. In heeding the call to lay out a clear path for moving forward, in support of the Black and Indigenous anthropologists who have paved the way for and demonstrated what an anti-racist, decolonial anthropology looks like, and to echo our graduate colleagues in programs across the country who have authored similar statements and letters, we the undersigned graduate workers and students in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Connecticut, urge the faculty to join us in carrying out the following action items:

1. Support the campaign and lobby to defund the university police and to create alternatives to policing on campus to free up much needed funds for investment in our students.

The UConn Police Department (UCPD) came into being in 1972<sup>2</sup>. This was a time when campuses around the country were establishing their own police departments in response to increased student unrest related to the civil rights movement and Vietnam war.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the original purpose of campus police departments was to impose greater

---

<sup>1</sup> The Association of Black Anthropologists, "ABA Statement Against Police Violence and Anti-Black Racism," <http://aba.americananthro.org>.

<sup>2</sup> Department History. UConn Division of Public Safety. <https://publicsafety.uconn.edu/police/department-organization-noshow/department-history/>

<sup>3</sup> See Sloan, J. (2020). "Race, Violence, Justice, and Campus Police." American Sociological Association. <https://www.asanet.org/news-events/footnotes/jul-aug-2020/features/race-violence-justice-and-campus-police>; Sainato, M. (June 24, 2020). "US students call on universities to dismantle and defund campus

social control and quell just protests rather than to enhance public safety. It is within this context that UCPD was founded and deployed. For example, on April 22-23, 1976, campus police were deployed against 300 Black students and their allies who had staged a sit-in at the library in protest of racism on campus.<sup>4</sup>

The current UCPD Budget is approximately \$15 million, and nearly 89% of UCPD activity is in response to drug or alcohol offenses. We recognize that criminalizing drug use, and the War on Drugs more broadly, have been deeply rooted in white supremacist efforts to subjugate BIPOC. Further, many BIPOC students have anonymously shared their experiences of being racially profiled and mistreated by the UCPD. Still more students have come out to share how the UCPD failed to protect them or follow up when hate crimes, sexual assaults, and other incidents occurred where students were harmed. Meanwhile, UConn's Counseling and Mental Health Services, which includes substance abuse counseling, remains severely underfunded. According to Defund UConn PD, reducing the UCPD budget by 50% would create a cost savings that would be enough to hire 64 new therapists at Counseling and Mental Services<sup>5</sup>.

The UCPD is an institution borne of white supremacy that has harmed students on this campus, especially BIPOC, rather than protecting them. On top of this, it siphons resources away from important social services that make our community healthier and safer, such as mental health services. Our department must be committed to defunding the UCPD and actively lobbying for defunding if it is to truly commit to anti-racism. Further, our department cannot, in good-faith, recruit more BIPOC students and faculty without simultaneously lobbying for defunding the UCPD.

2. Make a commitment to recruit BIPOC students both domestically and internationally. In order to achieve this goal, we must:
  - a. Recruit and admit students from Native American reservations across the United States, with a particular focus on Connecticut's tribes such as the Mashantucket Pequot, Eastern Pequot, Mohegan, Golden Hill Paugussett, Schaghticoke, and others.
  - b. Recruit and admit international students from countries outside of Northern Europe.
  - c. Actively recruit students from communities where faculty have ongoing research initiatives (Armenia, Georgia, Mauritius, Dominican Republic, Colombia, etc).

---

policing." The Guardian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/24/campus-policing-us-university-students-call-to-defund>

<sup>4</sup> Scarmnach, Shaine. "UConn's Black Students Protest in Wilbur Cross Library, April 22-23, 1974." University Library Archives and Special Collections Blog.

<https://blogs.lib.uconn.edu/archives/2018/04/25/uconns-black-students-protest-in-wilbur-cross-library-april-22-23-1974/>

<sup>5</sup> DefundUCPD Steering Committee, "Letter to the Editor: Defund UConn Police; Invest in the community," <https://dailycampus.com/stories/2020/7/16/letter-to-the-editor-defund-uconn-police-invest-in-the-community>.

3. Revise the admissions process to ensure that prospective students are evaluated on holistic metrics that do not reproduce discrimination in terms of language, class, country of origin, etc. Specifically, we are asking the faculty to:
  - a. Eliminate the GRE as a requirement for admission. It is a biased metric that does not reflect many students' true abilities, particularly non-white students and resource-poor students who do not have access to prep courses and the ability to pay the fees to take the test even once (much less multiple times)<sup>6</sup>. For reference, the current cost of the GRE is \$205 and there are additional fees every time a student reports their scores. An in-person prep course can cost upwards of \$2,000.
  - b. Seek out support from Global Affairs or ISSS to learn how to admit and support students from countries outside of Northern Europe.
  - c. Annually devote a portion of the departmental budget to fund visits for prospective graduate students from underrepresented communities. In order to encourage students of color and other marginalized students to apply (e.g. queer and trans, working and low income, students who are caretakers, students with disabilities), we should (1) advertise this funding on the department's website, and (2) clearly state that prospective students should contact faculty member(s) of interest the spring or summer leading up to the semester they intend to submit their application in order to begin the application process. Many underrepresented students do not have the insider knowledge to contact potential advising faculty members in advance, and this is partially how promising, capable marginalized students get overlooked in the application process.
4. Nurture a departmental culture that stimulates ongoing, intentional conversation around racism and anti-racism. While this could take a myriad of forms, we are proposing the following:
  - a. Lab groups, graduate seminars, faculty meetings, and other forums where students and faculty regularly meet should actively encourage anti-racist dialogue. Assigned readings and topics of discussion could and should include the work of BIPOC anthropologists and archaeologists, Black feminist anthropology and archaeology, and other scholars marginalized within anthropology.
  - b. A collective recognition that we are all students as well as scholars, and that our scholarship only becomes more robust when we learn from each other. While we recognize that we have much to learn from the faculty - our mentors and teachers - we also know that the faculty can learn from not only us, but also from their undergraduate

---

<sup>6</sup> Miller and Stassun, "A Test That Fails"; Miller et al., "Typical Physics Ph.D. Admissions Criteria Limit Access to Underrepresented Groups but Fail to Predict Doctoral Completion"; Moneta-Koehler et al., "The Limitations of the GRE in Predicting Success in Biomedical Graduate School"; Petersen et al., "Multi-Institutional Study of GRE Scores as Predictors of STEM PhD Degree Completion."

students, who live the ever-changing realities of discourse on our campus in ways graduate students and faculty members are largely closed off from.

- c. Promote and participate in the Anti-racism Virtual Teach-in Series currently being organized by graduate students in our department and potentially beyond. The goal of this monthly series led by students and postdocs is to educate and provide a safe space for discussion of anti-racist praxis and pedagogy with the Anthropology department and across other university departments.
5. Proactively support BIPOC undergraduates as well as graduate students.
    - a. Many of the action items in this letter would immediately improve the lives of graduate students in our department. We do not assume we can or will understand the needs of UConn anthropology undergrads, and therefore pledge to connect with undergraduates in the fall semester to organize with them and listen to what they specifically need for support.
    - b. Forms of support could include, but certainly not be limited to: funding for undergraduate research, to provide an incentive for both undergraduate and graduate students to participate in mutually beneficial research projects; funding for undergraduates to travel to national conferences such as the AAA (American Anthropological Association), AAPA (American Association of Physical Anthropologists), and SAA (Society of American Archaeologists) annual meetings; a departmental undergraduate research symposium; increased departmental support of the undergraduate organization; increased opportunities for exploring pathways into anthropological careers through both graduate programs and post-undergrad; a deep understanding on behalf of faculty and teaching assistants that we have a responsibility to not perpetuate anti-Black racism in our classrooms, both through curricula and in classroom dialogue.
  6. Confront racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and other discrimination that students may face in the department, classes, clubs, and department sponsored activities<sup>7</sup>. This should take the form of the following:
    - a. Produce action plans for dealing with discrimination that may occur during field schools. These plans should include a normalization of student reporting and executable actions that assure student safety from discrimination that may come from other students, research staff, or the local communities in which they are working. Each field school should have a specific action plan that faculty, staff, GAs, and students are briefed on prior to beginning the program.
    - b. Establish a procedure for graduate students engaged in fieldwork to report incidents of bias or to seek guidance, especially when abroad. There is currently no program or

---

<sup>7</sup> See Clancy et al., "Survey of Academic Field Experiences (SAFE)"; Johansson, "Dangerous Liaisons: Risk, Positionality and Power in Women's Anthropological Fieldwork."

practice in place for preparing researchers for managing conflict, harassment, or other personal rather than research related matters.

- c. Utilize software such as SafeAssign for submission of writing assignments across undergraduate courses to reduce the effect of bias in identifying cases of plagiarism; explicitly state plagiarism policies at the start of courses and in syllabi, as well as assess students' knowledge of plagiarism at the beginning of any courses in which writing is assigned and provide resources to students to learn more.
7. A common barrier to inclusivity in archaeology is the lack of accessibility of field schools<sup>8</sup>. All of UConn's archaeology field schools are currently held during the summer and have a high cost that may not be covered by many forms of financial aid. In order to address this issue we propose the following:
    - a. Invest in or partner with microgrants to help students from underrepresented groups afford summer field school participation.
    - b. Offer a field school during the fall and/or spring semesters for those who cannot afford the additional expense of summer field schools. A committee of graduate students have partnered with the State Archaeologist to develop a course proposal for this field school initiative. Discussions between this committee and the department have already begun.<sup>9</sup>
  8. Revise syllabi and contribute to ongoing efforts to decanonize our discipline - this requires the constant inclusion and centering of Black, Indigenous, and non-white perspectives:
    - a. Our syllabi must reflect the diversity of thought that characterizes our discipline, rather than a fossilized canon of theorists and scholars characterized by Euro-centric, white, colonial and/or anti-Black and racist perspectives. Revising syllabi and decanonizing our courses requires intentional labor. In addition to updating our syllabi each year (a practice we should all already be doing) so that our courses stay abreast with developments within the discipline, we must also decanonize our discipline by intentionally centering the contributions of BIPOC anthropologists.
    - b. We propose a 1- or 2- credit graduate course that will be offered each semester, with faculty taking turns as the instructor-of-record, in which graduate students read and discuss theoretical works and ethnographic studies by BIPOC anthropologists and workshop syllabi and lesson plans. All PhD students would be required to enroll at least two semesters; masters students, one semester. Such a course could also serve as a space to foster a critical anthropological pedagogy, more generally, in which all students and faculty would be encouraged to participate.

---

<sup>8</sup> Heath-Stout and Hannigan, "Affording Archaeology."

<sup>9</sup> This field school should be local and the associated costs (books/materials/transportation) must not exceed that of a normal course at UConn. Additionally, if the field school is located at an Indigenous site, we must conduct it in alliance with a local tribe.

- c. The work of decanonizing is ongoing and collective, and anthropologists from around the world are already engaging in this. The Decanonizing Anthropology Syllabus Project, spearheaded by students at Oregon State University<sup>10</sup>, provides an initial starting place for these efforts. Theorists to include in our syllabi going forward include, but are not limited to, Zora Neale Hurston, Ohíye S'a/Charles Eastman, W.E.B. DuBois, Anténor Firmin, Emma Goldman, Mareketi, Hsiao-t'ung Fei, Ella Deloria, Frantz Fanon, Katherine Dunham, Gina Athena Ulysse, Audra Simpson, Christen Smith, Ashanté Reese, Kim TallBear, Jessica Kolopenuk, Rachel Watkins, Maria Franklin, Courtney Morris, Whitney Battle-Baptiste, Kathleen Sterling, Chandra Mohanty, Edward Said, bell hooks, Sarah Ahmed, J. Kehaulani Kauanui, Vanessa Agard-Jones, Dana Aín-Davis, Theresa Singleton, Sabrina Agarwal, Savannah Shange, Deborah A. Thomas, and many others.
  - d. Introduce an ethic of care to all courses offered within the department. Decanonizing the syllabus is only a first step; the very nature of our relationships with our students and with our colleagues must also reflect our stated values. We must ensure that course policies regarding deadlines, work submitted, and grading are attentive to the diverse needs of our students: International students, students with disabilities, students dealing with racial trauma, student survivors of sexual violence, first generation college students, student caretakers, students who work, etc. We believe we collectively have the intellectual capacity to rethink structures of power within the academy that were not designed to take students coming from diverse backgrounds into consideration.
  - e. Lastly, we reaffirm the department's commitment to make race and racism mandatory components of all ANTH 1000, 1006, 1500, 2501, and 2502 curricula.
9. Invite BIPOC speakers and provide them with honoraria. Invited lectures are one of the means of evaluating academics, both in job applications and career advancements. By predominantly inviting white speakers to our lecture series, UConn has perpetuated a system of harming and slowing the career advancement of BIPOC.
- a. Set aside department funding for honoraria for BIPOC guest speakers in anthropology and archaeology courses, especially Native American and Indigenous Studies courses, to ensure that students hear perspectives other than those of their predominantly white instructors and teaching assistants. These guest speakers must be financially compensated for their time and labor.
  - b. Ensure that those organizing recurring lecture series, such as the Archaeology Seminar Series and Cultural Anthropology Seminar Series, are seeking out BIPOC researchers as speakers.

---

<sup>10</sup> Buell et al., "Reworking the History of Social Theory for 21st Century Anthropology: A Syllabus Project."

10. Provide mandatory anti-racist pedagogical training for all faculty and doctoral students including the following components<sup>11</sup>:
  - a. Anti-racist pedagogy begins with the content of our courses, as such, completion of item 8 of this 'letter' (revise syllabi and contribute to ongoing efforts to "decanonize" our discipline - this requires the constant inclusion and centering of Black, Indigenous, and non-white perspectives) is a necessary initial step.
  - b. The revised theory and syllabi must be complimented by an anti-racist approach to teaching that cultivates courage rather than silence during difficult discussions about race and racism. We want to nurture an environment in which a diversity of perspectives can be shared and challenged in a respectful and productive dialogue. Some critical components of the anti-racist approach to teaching are: "(1) challenge assumptions and foster students' critical analytical skills; (2) develop students' awareness of their social positions; (3) decenter authority in the classroom and have students take responsibility for their learning process; and (4) empower students and apply theory to practice; and (5) create a sense of community in the classroom through collaborative learning."<sup>16</sup>
  - c. Anti-racist pedagogy is amplified by extending learning beyond the classroom through student involvement in university and/or community organizing. We encourage the faculty to include service-learning components and opportunities in their courses.
11. Institute a departmental policy of transparency and regular communication of relevant information, including changes to courses and policies, within the department. Moving forward, we urge the department to substantively take and consider the feedback it receives from all members of our community.
  - a. Collect and act on feedback about the student experience and satisfaction with the department and its program.
  - b. Include students in the department's strategic planning.
  - c. Increase transparency regarding budgetary allocations for recruitment, promotion, training, and speaker honoraria.
  - d. Include graduate student representatives in department meetings and committees. We would like to highlight the commitment made in our departmental solidarity statement with Black Lives Matter to include graduate students in future talks on addressing racial disparities within our department.

---

<sup>11</sup> Blakeney, "Antiracist Pedagogy"; Grosland, "An Examination of the Role of Emotions in Antiracist Pedagogy"; Kishimoto, "Anti-Racist Pedagogy"; Sue, *Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence: Understanding and Facilitating Difficult Dialogues on Race*; Wagner, "Unsettling the Academy."

12. Effective immediately, do away with the stipulation that Summer Research Funding (SRF) monies not be used to support living in Connecticut.

- a. Requiring that these funds not be used to support students living expenses in Connecticut effectively reproduces colonial and imperial structures of anthropological research: graduate students have had to forgo dissertation projects they intended to carry out in the Connecticut/general New England area because they could not receive support from the department for developing those initial research connections. In the spirit of “making the familiar strange,” we should be encouraging future anthropologists to conduct research in our own communities and use anthropological methods to understand the challenges facing ourselves and our neighbors.

13. Intentionally address the colonial legacy within our discipline and work toward rectifying it through:

- a. Fostering and encouraging collaborations with researchers and community members where we do our research (such as co-designing research projects, co-implementing research, and/or co-publishing research articles and other publications).
- b. As stated in item 12, immediately change the policy around Summer Research Fellowships so that students whose fieldsite is in Connecticut or the surrounding areas can apply the funds to their living expenses.
- c. As stated in several items, reflect on who we are citing in our scholarship, who we are listing as co-authors, who we are approaching for initial collaborations and research questions, incorporating BIPOC scholars in our syllabi from the beginning of our courses - not simply having a day or two devoted to “Indigenous perspectives,” for example - and actively inviting BIPOC students and scholars to be a part of our scholarly community.

Signed by:

**Samantha Archer**  
Critical Biocultural Anthropology

**Mary Bugbee**  
Medical Anthropology

**Corrin Laposki**  
Archaeology

**Vivian Laurens**  
Medical Anthropology

**Sara Ailshire**  
Medical Anthropology

**Geoffrey Hedges-Knyrim**  
Archaeology

**Jayson Gill**  
Archaeology

**Krista Dotzel**  
Archaeology

**Alex Brittingham**

Archaeology

**Tanner Kovach**

Archaeology

**Brady Kelsey**

Archaeology

**Lucas Proctor**

Archaeology

**Johan Jarl**

Archaeology

**Travis Rohrer**

Archaeology

**Pamela Acquaro**

Cultural Anthropology

**Danielle J. Nadeau**

Cultural Anthropology

**Dillon Patterson**

Cultural Anthropology

**Katherine Mueller**

Cultural Anthropology

**Christina Balentine**

Critical Biocultural Anthropology

**Ashley Mcleod**

Sociocultural Anthropology

**Elic Weitzel**

Archaeology

**Roxanne Lebenzon**

Archaeology

**Ashley Walters**

Cultural Anthropology

**Kitty O'Riordan**

Cultural Anthropology

**Samuel Johnson**

Archaeology

**Ashley L. Graham**

Medical Anthropology

**Brianna Rae**

Archaeology

**Brandon Zinsious**

Archaeology