

This letter serves as a call to action to President Cauce and the University of Washington Faculty (Deans, Department Chairs, and Professors),

Trigger Warning: Police Brutality/Violence, Death/Illness, Racism.

The spring quarter has been an unprecedented one for students, especially many Black students. In the face of a pandemic, many students are displaced, unemployed, lost loved ones, and struggle to maintain the focus required of full-time students during the shift to remote learning. This pandemic highlights how institutions designed to protect us, perpetuate inequalities, failing the most vulnerable people in our community. It's important to acknowledge the ways in which the pandemic disproportionately affects the Black community. Black people are a significant percentage of deaths related to COVID-19. They also represent a significant portion of essential workers, placing them at higher risk for exposure to COVID-19. Furthermore, compounded by the effects of environmental racism, Black people are not afforded equal access to healthcare — a notable cause for the amount of deaths across the nation. Not only is there a disparity in health outcomes, on the economic level, but they are also fired from their jobs at much faster rates than their non-Black co-workers. In addition to the hardships associated with COVID-19, the Black community is fighting against the institutional racism that is claiming Black lives daily.

The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless other Black people have sparked nationwide outrage. Black students are witnessing the blatant killing of their peers by historically anti-Black institutions while trying to ensure that they don't fall behind or fail classes. Frankly, we think it inhumane that the University of Washington asks

these students to set their fears and emotions aside to focus on final exams and assignments. The University has not listened to the needs of its student body throughout this outbreak. Classes remain work-intensive, and many professors refuse to accommodate our needs during these challenging times.

The University has a legal duty to provide academic accommodations to its students with disabilities. The public slaying of Black bodies across our screens, the state-issued violence on our Black men and women, coupled with the disparate COVID-19 related impacts on Black health have left our Black student body psychologically debilitated and disabled. It is nearly impossible to divert energy and attention to anything else other than the attack on our Black community.

Disability Resources for Students (DRS) vows to “serve as a partner in fostering an inclusive and equitable environment for all University of Washington students.” We ask that you recognize that Black students, in particular, are experiencing disability and trauma in a way that other students cannot and will not.

DRS’ mission statement “recognizes disability as an aspect of diversity that is integral to society and to our campus community”. We ask that you consider the psychological disability of our trauma as a byproduct of the diversity you find so integral to the University. That is what Black students have to carry every day. Failing to recognize this and act on behalf of your Black student body undermines the University’s commitment to inclusivity and social consciousness. DRS commits to offering academic accommodations “for the purpose of eliminating the environmental barriers impacting students...” As we know, the Black student body’s

environment looks different than that of others. Our fathers, uncles, mothers, sisters, and brothers are getting murdered via state-sanctioned violence in front of our eyes. While we recognize that there is a process for acquiring DRS accommodations, which requires proof, we are asking for leniency due to the magnitude of the situation, the time constraint, and the lack of access to resources makes it virtually impossible to obtain documentation. These accommodations are outlined below.

In response to the current state of affairs, we demand that the University of Washington:

- **Encourage faculty to revisit/cancel all finals/assignments** for the rest of the quarter. Exams and assignments will not be a true reflection of many students' capabilities considering the circumstances that have surrounded them this quarter. Although we recognize that students are being encouraged to reach out to their professors, it is incredibly insensitive to put the burden on students to recount their trauma and prove that their needs are legitimate. Students have always had the option to reach out to their professors individually; however, this has proven to be an ineffective approach time and time again. Besides the dismissal of students' concerns, it also disregards the experiences of the Black student community by reducing this issue to an individual level.
- **Account for the individual biases of professors**, some of whom have sent personal email responses to students that downplay their concerns and are not willing to accommodate their students. Professors have their own perspectives and political stances that inadvertently affect their decisions and treatment of students. There is sufficient evidence of this. "We understand professors are given freedom in grading choices, but to

ensure equality among all students, there must be one overarching policy each professor must enforce. This accounts for pre-existing biases that highly influence their decisions, often done without administrative oversight.”

- Ensure that **no student will receive a failing grade** this quarter. It is cruel to allow students to worry about failing classes in the midst of global and national chaos. The UW claims to foster equity, in the Diversity and Equity for All Initiative stating, “Many deeply rooted institutional policies and practices ignore the social issues of the present,” however by allowing for any students to fail this quarter you are doing just that.
- Allow for **all S/NS classes to be counted toward general requirements or major credits**. S/NS courses this quarter should not impact any student’s degree path. Many students felt it was necessary to S/NS classes so they wouldn’t impact their GPAs forgoing the ability for classes to count toward general requirements as well as major requirements. The Associated Students of the University of Washington (ASUW), a representation of students’ needs, has already voted in favor of this.
- **Extend dates for students to S/NS courses** without charging them a fee.

President Cauce acknowledged the many grievances affecting our student body in her *Lifting the veil: understanding the clarity this moment offers* post expressing, “Periods of upheaval and crisis both test and reveal our character, as individuals, communities, and nations.” The University of Washington is being tested in a period of upheaval and crisis. This acknowledgment is an important step, however, the university is accountable for the success of all of their students. This statement means nothing without a plan of action. The University of

Washington will be complicit in the failure of their students, causing further disparities among Black students. Recognizing the problem is not enough, the university needs to actively listen to the communities they have committed to serving. Will you support your Black students or will you continue to perpetuate the violence that they face?

We expect a response no later than noon (12 p.m. PST) on Wednesday, June 3, 2020.

In solidarity,

Black Student Union, African Student Association, Students United for Palestinian Equal Rights and Solidarity for Black Student Needs Coalition

P.S. This is a *change.org* petition that highlights the wide-reaching support of the community.

Do not ignore these voices.

<https://www.change.org/p/university-of-washington-uw-give-black-students-leniency-for-finals>