A Biology Department Statement of Accountability and Commitment in Response to Racism, Inequity, and Injustice

Events of this summer have provided us many opportunities to acknowledge and reflect on oppression of and violence against BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color). George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks, Tony McDade, Oluwatoyin "Toyin" Salau, and Sean Monterrosa were brutally murdered, several by police sworn to protect citizens. Disparities in environmental injustice, wages, and access to affordable, quality healthcare contribute to disproportionately higher death rates from COVID-19 among BIPOC. We observed the 5th anniversary of the massacre by a white supremacist of nine fellow South Carolinians as they worshipped at Mother Emanuel AME church. While these horrific events make the news, less attention is paid to ongoing racist policies that exist in the background of our lives. Policies like redlining, gentrification, and racial profiling, which are based on a false racial and socioeconomic hierarchy, continue to inflict untold harm on communities of color, particularly Black communities.

We, the faculty of the Wofford College Biology department, affirm the inherent value and humanity of BIPOC, and we pledge to work more intently in the service of systemic change and to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Science requires us to listen carefully, think critically, and hold ourselves and our peers accountable. As scientists, we cannot check these principles at the laboratory door. To develop a better understanding of human behavior and the social constructs it creates, we must apply these principles of inquiry to systematic racism and also learn from our peers in the Humanities and Social Sciences. As educators, we must critically evaluate the history of science and its misuse to justify reprehensible practices including enslavement, racism, eugenics, and genocide. We must instill in ourselves and in our students greater vigilance against pseudoscience and the misapplication of science that seeks to lend credibility to colonialism and white supremacy.

To reckon with our own failures to create inclusive learning environments for our students and to increase our contributions to our local, state, national and global communities, we commit ourselves to:

* providing safe, supportive, inclusive, and effective classrooms, laboratories, campus, and community. We will do this by continuing to seek out extramural funding to develop and support initiatives across the sciences, while creating a Diversity & Inclusion Action plan grounded in anti-racism practices.

* conducting an internal review of where and how we, as a department have fallen and continue to fall short, brainstorming potential solutions for redressing and avoiding those shortfalls. We will invite students and other interested parties to participate in this process. However, we recognize that the responsibility for change and institutionalizing solutions rests with members of the Biology Department.

* recognizing that our evolution is an essential component of our success in achieving these goals.
* developing a general education and majors curricula that promote:

  * course content that openly acknowledges the complicity of science in racial disparity and systemic injustice particularly in terms of health, public health, and environmental sustainability.

  * the accurate interpretation and application of scientific data and reasoning to the dismantling of systemic racial oppression and inequity.

  * the development of skills, capabilities, and passions that actively and positively contribute to the health, safety, and sustainability of every human being.

We acknowledge that of all the privileges we hold, the greatest is the opportunity to educate the next generation of citizens who can and must strive to achieve a more equitable society.

Written by the faculty of the Wofford College Biology Department: John Moeller (Chair of Biology), Stefanie Baker, Lisa Cantwell, Lori Cruze, G.R. Davis, Stacey Hettes, Tracie Ivy, Dave Kushner, Geoff Mitchell, Jeremy Morris, Bob Moss, Katie Putney, Chuck Smith, and Natalie Spivey.