

Dear Wofford Mathematics Students,

Like many of you, we Math Department faculty members have watched media coverage of the deaths of George Floyd, who was killed by police officers as he pleaded for his life for eight minutes and forty-six seconds; of Breonna Taylor, an emergency room technician who was killed by police officers who used a battering ram to enter her home without warning or introduction; and of Ahmaud Arbery, who was shot and killed by white men who chased and tried to detain him for ‘matching a description’ while jogging. We recognize that these are just a few examples of a long history in our country of violence against Black people, and that our country and society have been marred by over 400 years of racism. We hope that the recent protests and this moment of national awareness will result in positive systemic and interpersonal change in our society.

The field of mathematics boasts many examples of brilliant Black mathematicians: Benjamin Banneker, David Blackwell, Annie Easley, Euphemia Lofton Haynes, Trachette Jackson, Mae Carol Jemison, Katherine Johnson, Lonnie Johnson, William Massey, Katherine Okikiolu, Arlie Petters, and J. Ernest Wilkins, to name just a few. However, we acknowledge that our field has not always been welcoming to people of color, and Black scholars in particular. [This 2019 NY Times article](#) describes the experience of Black mathematician Edray Goins and the detrimental impact that a hostile environment, racial exclusion, and unconscious bias have on Black mathematicians and students, and on the entire field of mathematics.

Wofford’s Math Department commits to teaching in ways that are anti-racist, recognizing that for many of us this will involve seeking out resources for self-education, reflecting on our teaching practices, and speaking out against racism. We wish to be more intentional in demonstrating our understanding that equal is not necessarily equitable. To this end, we will ensure that students are aware of workshops and conferences that promote diversity and that are designed for students of color, and we will do our best to provide or find funding for students who wish to attend them. We will seek out diverse speakers to bring to campus. We will obtain an institutional membership to the National Association of Mathematicians, which has as a goal promoting the mathematical development of underrepresented minorities, to provide additional resources to faculty and students in our department.

We encourage you to find ways that you can self-educate, reflect, and speak out against racism. As a starting point, you could read the NY Times article linked above, look up any of the Black mathematicians listed above, check out the National Association of Mathematics website, or attend the Anti-Racism 101: An Anti-Racist Toolkit session via Zoom, 1-2pm, on Thursday June 11 (see Wofford’s Daily Announcements or contact Wofford’s Office for Diversity and Inclusion for more details).

This letter was initiated and composed by the faculty of the Math Department. We would like to thank Taifha Alexander, Assistant Dean of Students for Diversity & Leadership, for her helpful suggestions in the revision process, and we commit to continuing discussions with her office about ways to support our students of color.

Sincerely,

Brian Pigott, Matthew Cathey, Anne Catllá, Deidra Coleman, Rachel Grotheer, Charlotte Knotts-Zides, Joseph Spivey, Thomas Wright