Philosophy Department Statement in Response to the Murder of George Floyd and Ensuing Protests

We, the faculty of the Philosophy Department at Wofford College, write to declare our solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and to express our anger and sadness at the murder of George Floyd by four Minneapolis Police officers and the recent murders of Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery. We are anguished by our nation’s longstanding history of the brutalizing, terrorizing, and murdering of Black men, women, and children by police and white civilians, which very often results in little or no legal consequence. We condemn these injustices and we condemn the ongoing police persecution of people of color, and more specifically Black people, in the peaceful protests across our nation.

We acknowledge that these recent murders are not isolated incidents but connected by systemic white supremacy which is present not only in our country and our police forces, but also on our campus and in our classrooms. The history of our country is one of continued and intentional racist oppression: the repeated breaking of treaties with Indigenous nations, the constitutional encoding of racial inequality, the post-Reconstruction imposition of Jim Crow laws, the internment of American citizens of Japanese descent, and many more. Wofford’s history is similar: Wofford’s Main building was built by enslaved people, Wofford educated (white) students for 110 years before admitting its first student of color, and many of Wofford’s buildings sit on land that was once home to a thriving community of color.¹ Our own discipline of philosophy has an exclusionist history and a continuing underrepresentation of people of color.²

We acknowledge this racist and exclusionist history of our discipline, our college, and our nation with the belief that many of the current injustices faced by Black communities and communities of color reflect not only persisting white supremacist attitudes, but a systemic entrenchment of this legacy. Today, these injustices are compounded as Black communities and their allies march to save their lives, knowing full well the risks of violence and the health risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, which is reexposing the known structural inequities in affordable, accessible, quality health care as the virus continues to disproportionately affect Black and Indigenous communities. We recognize that our acknowledgment of the racism in our history and institutions must be ongoing – not just stated and done – and must come with obligations for action.

Ours is an academic discipline that teaches ethics and justice. We are accordingly obligated to practice what we teach in our classrooms, on campus, and in our community. To that end we, the faculty of the Philosophy Department, commit ourselves to teaching and learning in ways that are anti-racist, including ensuring that all of our syllabi promote equitable policies and include diverse voices in course content, and cultivating safe spaces in our classrooms to ensure that all present are listened to and included in the ongoing conversation. In place of bigotry and racial hatred, we are committed to teaching the values of

¹ Thank you to the English Department statement for highlighting these facts about Wofford.
² As of 2014, traditionally underrepresented minorities earned only 17% of bachelor’s degrees in philosophy: https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/higher-education/racialethnic-distribution-degrees-philosophy
diversity, tolerance, understanding, and non-violence. In addition, we commit to the following specific actions. We will:

- Establish and support a chapter of Minorities and Philosophy (MAP) on Wofford’s campus
- Request a review of our department by outside evaluators to give feedback on improving the climate for underrepresented groups³
- Connect our students to resources that can facilitate their participation in existing undergraduate diversity institutes in philosophy⁴
- Teach students how the philosophical theories and arguments they learn can serve as tools to help them be ethical, intentional, conscious citizens of the world, in alignment with the mission of the College
- Use our training in ethics and argumentation to question, challenge, and call out racist structures and practices in our community
- Use our privilege as professors at an elite, predominantly white institution to amplify Black voices and the voices of others fighting for a more just and equitable world.

What You Can Do Now

- Attend the “Anti-Racism Teach-In Series”: from 1PM-2:30PM Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, June 9-11. See Daily Announcements for more information or contact the Office of Diversity and Inclusion⁵
- Support Black organizations and Black businesses
- Educate yourself on our nation’s racist history and ongoing structural racism, including in institutions of higher education.⁶
- Commit to a year of anti-racism work by doing these activities compiled by philosopher Michelle Panchuk.

Signed:

Taifha Alexander (Assistant Dean of Students for Diversity and Leadership Development), James Bednar, Christine Sorrell Dinkins, Tim Fisher, Jeremy Henkel, Stephen Michelman, Katherine Valde, Nancy Williams

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³ For instance through a program such as: [http://www.apaonlinecsw.org/home/site-visit-program](http://www.apaonlinecsw.org/home/site-visit-program)
⁴ Such as: [https://www.apaonline.org/page/diversityinstitutes](https://www.apaonline.org/page/diversityinstitutes)
⁵ Please note that the Wednesday session is a Black autonomous space for Wofford's Black Students, but the Tuesday and Thursday sessions are open to everyone.
⁶ For resources specific to issues of diversity and inclusion in our discipline and opportunities for action, see this [document](https://www.apaonline.org/page/diversityinstitutes).