

To: The University of San Diego

From: Undergraduate Black Students at USD

For many students, a university that prides itself on being at the forefront of humanity's most pressing issues represents freedom. Freedom to exercise our faith, freedom to live authentically, freedom to make change, freedom to be. And yet, once experiencing the supposed beacon of freedom that is USD, we found ourselves in the position we least hoped and most feared: suppressed by policy, pedagogy, ignorance, and racism.

In this world, we face so many dangers. In truth, there are too many to count. However we will point you to just a few recent examples. George Floyd, a man murdered by agents of the state all for an alleged crime that called for no such punishment. Breonna Taylor, a woman murdered by white police officers in a human's most vulnerable state, while sleeping, because of mistaken identity. Tony McDade, a Black trans man executed by police officers for an alleged crime, against which he was not given the chance to defend himself. Ahmaud Arbery, a man hunted down by white vigilantes for being Black. So many more murders have happened since these four; too few publicized and too many unresolved.

Any of these names could have easily been that of a student from the University of San Diego. In addition, Black people are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and enduring economic instability. These events did not skip the Black community at USD but further hinder the Black educational advancement at USD.

These unresolved cases are also seen at USD. Not cases of murder, specifically, but cases of ignorance and prejudice, such as YikYak in 2015 and the whiteatusd Instagram pages in 2020. Both of these pages are used to belittle and discredit Black voices and Black experiences. It's easy to hide behind an anonymous platform, but for Black students, hiding our Blackness is impossible. These pages show just how USD fails to properly educate its students on privilege and racial tensions. Moreover, USD's repeated failures to properly address these issues leads to them being repeated time and time again. It is also concerning that students could be attending class with students who hold white supremacist ideals. Imagine being the singular Black student in a class, and not knowing who shares those ideologies. Failing to address white supremacy in USD's higher education system reflects the systems beyond our institution.

This is a truth that Black students live with – the fragility of our lives, the constant disregard for our being. We must beg the question, does USD recognize this truth? As a university that expresses and embraces their Catholic Identity, it is important that we continue to do so in every aspect of our lives. It is within our beliefs and practices that we stand with the oppressed and marginalized in our society, and especially in our community at USD. Let us not forget that the University of San Diego emphasizes the importance of faith and reason to be implemented in its education. That being said, this institution's mission statement should acknowledge as well as learn to embrace the lives of Black students on campus based on your teachings of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

Does this university acknowledge the burden that its Black community bears? Does USD care to alleviate that burden? Moreover, does USD work to eliminate that burden? As a university that prides itself on being at the forefront of humanity's most pressing issues, in our time of crisis, we must ask: USD, who do you stand with? We are not asking the university to be responsible for our lived experiences outside of USD, but instead to be held accountable for fostering a positive educational experience.

The Black students of USD need to know that the university, to which we have contributed so much, is ready to stand with us. We must hear you say, have you believe, and see you put into practice the idea of anti-racism, on and off our campus. We need to hear from you a clear declaration against white supremacy. If you truly believe that Black Lives Matter, why does the institution not operate accordingly. This 'you' we speak of is not an individual, nor a particular group of administrators; it is the resounding collective that is the University of San Diego institution. In every office, in every classroom, in every residence hall, and every student space, there must be overwhelming support of Black people, uplifting of Black voices, and advocacy for Black lives.

Black students do not need members of the University of San Diego community to say that you are "diverse and inclusive," but rather we need you to *show* us through actions. We seek not to discredit any other race but to hear that we are just as important, just as viable, and just as deserving of equitable treatment as others. It is said that the university is where many of society's most transformative ideas are born. The apolitical idea that "Black Lives Matter" must be emphatically embraced, such that the sadly transformative, yet the not-so-radical topic of conversation is that everyone's life matters. How can we, Black students, fully give ourselves over to the brilliant ideas inside of us if we are constantly fighting just to be seen or heard? We long for our energy to be focused on learning, expanding, inventing, and loving. Yes, we do these things already in the face of adversity but imagine what our unfettered potential would look like if freedom truly resounded in our university.

As a Catholic University, our beliefs and traditions branch from religious faith, ethical conduct, compassionate service, and social justice. But how can we commit to work towards a better society in our San Diego community without solving the injustices on our own campus? Without addressing and exposing the racism, from the largest to smallest forms, that some of our students experience on a daily basis? The meaning of the word Catholic is to be all embracing. If the Black community at the University of San Diego does not feel embraced, then you are not embodying the literal meaning of the word you profess so much to uphold. Therefore, with the regards of faith and ethical reasoning, we are requesting your act of compassionate service to make change and thoroughly read our demands lists on behalf of the Black student community at USD.

Accountability

1. We ask that there be the creation and improvement of a reporting system for prejudice in the classroom and workplace. This reporting system must be treated with the utmost importance by all university administrators, though most importantly the Executive Council. As such, all students, staff, faculty, and administrators who commit prejudice acts shall be held accountable for their actions by the university, in consultation with students, faculty, and alumni of marginalized identities.
2. We ask that an anti-black racism course be administered to every person working at and attending the university. Professors must also engage in racial justice training prior to the beginning of school to learn how to be allies for Black students in classroom settings. This shall be done each semester, with this we ask there be an added section in regards to racial injustices to the end of the semester evaluation.

Community Safety and Well Being

3. We ask that the public safety protocol be made public and easily accessible for anyone to refer to. We also ask that Public Safety work with a committee of admin, faculty, and mostly students that are majority POC to meet weekly to discuss current events going on in the community and on campus.
4. We ask that all current and future Residential Staff (RAs, Community Directors, ect.), Public Safety, and the Athletics department receive mandatory cultural competency training from an experienced person in the field.
5. We ask that all current staff of Counseling Services undergo mandatory racial trauma training each semester to improve their services for students of color. We also ask that there be an immediate hiring of more Black and POC counselors in the Counseling Center and the DLDRC.

Student Leadership and Auxiliaries

6. We ask that all student leaders (ASG and E-boards) do semesterly anti-Blackness seminars facilitated by an external facilitator in partnership with Black Faculty and the BSRC. These seminars will include dialogue around queer and transphobia, xenophobia, ableism, intersectionality, and microaggressions.
7. We ask that Dining & Hospitality integrate African and Black Diasporic cultural food and products into Tu Mercado, SLP, and other dining services. We ask this be done by supporting local Black and African owned businesses and companies.

Recruitment and Retention

8. We ask that the Black student population increase to a seven percent total Black student population by 2024.
9. We ask that there be more Scholarship and Grant opportunities both merit and need based for Black students to help offset tuition and school related expenses.
10. We ask there be a concerted effort to hire more Black faculty in every college and department. Highlighting hires that are crucial to the support and progression of Black students, staff, and faculty across academic programs, mental health, and support services.

11. We ask for more Black representation in admissions and in the reading of the appeal process in financial aid.
12. We ask admissions to develop specific programs and fund Black Transfer students to be included in the experience associated with Me@USD.

Access

13. We ask that more scholarships and grant opportunities be available for Black students to be able to attend study abroad programs.
14. We ask the study abroad programs to require training around the impact of colonialism and imperialism and celebrate the origins of Black and African culture.

This letter and demands list is supported by USD's:

Black Student Union
African Student Union
National Society of Black Engineers
Black Student Resource Commons
Black Faculty
Black Alumni Network
Black Graduate Students Association
Black Law Students Association