

[DATE]

Dear [Administrator],

I write as a follow up to [insert something here to acknowledge your institution's ongoing efforts, updates, and/or initiatives to address anti-Black racism and white supremacist culture.] While your previous messaging and ongoing efforts address the crisis that face our academic community broadly, I write with my discipline specific knowledge and expertise in dance studies and dance practice to address how [institution's name] must also urgently adapt and reckon with the White supremacist culture that directs curriculum building, hiring practices, departmental structures, performance opportunities, and ideologies about the body that ground this field specifically.

Dance studies is a field that centers the body itself as a cultural product and a cultural producer, a subject of research and a method of research, carrying and producing histories through movement on stage and off. While I understand the significant work that this letter suggests, I have also included resources and examples of anti-racist dance epistemologies already being employed successfully in various departments. I will take on the work of this equitable restructuring alongside [institution's name], [department chair's name], and my colleagues across departments. Dance studies and dance practice are not ancillary to the Black Lives Matter movement, our campus response to it, or global anti-Black racism. Within our classrooms and studios, my colleagues and I study and shape the movement of bodies and its meaning. To carry out an ethical pedagogical and scholarly practice in dance, we must be at the forefront of undoing systems of racism existing within [institution's name].

To this end, I ask that you consider all of the following points. A long-term plan of action for departmental anti-racist action would be a next step. I look forward to your prompt reply [before the end of the quarter, or by a certain date] on each of these listed items. As an example, [Muhlenberg College put out a Theatre and Dance Anti-Racism Action Plan](#) in early June 2020 to make "anti-racism central to how we [the Dance Department] functions." This plan touches on many of the items bulleted below. Additionally, Joy Connolly (President, American Council on Learned Societies) recently published an article, "[Six Ways to Speed Up Inclusion and Positive Change in Higher Education Culture NOW,](#)" focusing on structural change at the departmental level to improve the experience of Black people in academia. These kinds of practical and immediate changes are both possible and essential.

#### Faculty Hiring Practices & Support:

- Commit to hire, retain, mentor, tenure, and pay BIPOC faculty equitably. As institutions of higher education brace for impending budget cuts and hiring freezes due to the global pandemic, act consciously and explicitly about the ways in which these financial changes might be used to evade accountability around hiring practices. Implement procedure and policy for the hiring and retention of BIPOC faculty now, in anticipation of the coming recession. As an example, [Ontario College of Art & Design University \(Toronto, CA\) recently hired five new permanent faculty who self-identify as Black peoples of African](#)

[Descent](#), as a special program under the Ontario Human Rights Code. This is part of a university-wide academic plan (2017-2022) called [Transforming Student Experience](#).

- Create tenure-track lines to support BIPOC faculty and BIPOC dance across genres. Many institutions bring in an outside Diversity Advocate to all TT search committees, a person who reports to the Dean and the Provost directly. While this position is often viewed as service, and thus not compensated, this financial agreement is also worth reexamining as it has the potential to overburden BIPOC faculty from across departments.
- Re-examine terminal degree mandates for hiring, as not all dance styles (hip-hop, tap, jazz, additional African diasporic forms, among others) have the same historical opportunity/inclusion in higher education and therefore researchers and teachers in these styles are not credentialed by masters or doctoral degrees. By requiring validation through a conferred degree, hiring practices perpetuate an exclusion of these forms from higher education. Careers in academic or professional dance require dedication to a particular skill set fairly early in an artist's career. In academia, there is an adhesion to institutional protocol and expectation of academic literacy that is not always part of the professional dancers' experience, but is necessary to work in an academic environment. This results in a fractured divide within the greater profession of dance, and may prevent some candidates from being considered for TT positions. Recognize value in people before value in institutions.

Possible alternate credentials include guest teaching/residencies at academic or art institutions; professional performance experience with established national, international, or local companies; private or public sector teaching experience; affiliation with professional organizations; experience in writing curriculum and preparing course materials; community recognition; experience as a rehearsal director for an established dance organization; a body of choreographic work; and other practical theater experience.

When hiring faculty, some questions to consider might be: what kind of dance leadership or experiences are we teaching the students to value? What kind of artists or teachers are we training students to become? And, with what knowledge of the dance profession are we arming young adults so that they may succeed as artists and community leaders? Undergraduates seek degrees to arm themselves for future success. Finding the artists who have done so themselves, with or without terminal degrees, can help provide a foundation and network for the success of future generations.

- Support BIPOC faculty beyond their capacity to "increase institutional diversity" or fill adjunct positions. This includes: expansion of the parameters for research funding and allotted time to include creative research projects and performance; mentorship for BIPOC faculty; compensation for anti-racist work often asked of BIPOC faculty.

#### Pedagogical and Curricular Change:

- Integrate African diasporic dance epistemologies, not as electives to dance studies curricula, but as an irrefutable foundation to the field. [Columbia of College of Chicago, led by then-chair Onye Ozuzu](#), is an example of a curriculum that investigates the

contemporary forms of ballet, hip hop, modern, and West African dance equally - as an anti-racist project.

- Offer multiple levels for all offered dance genres, not just ballet/modern techniques. Examine how placement protocols for dance genres are reifying white supremacist values across codified techniques and genres.
- Re-examine and recreate curricular structures that support creative practice in dance, as improvisation and choreography courses are often taught from white, western perspectives without acknowledgement.
- Center BIPOC voices in/as scholarship and histories. Teach Black dance scholarship by Black dance scholars. Do this work with an eye toward specificity - specific figures, cultures, histories of Latinx, Asian-American, First Nations/Native peoples, and beyond. Many scholars have been doing the work of re-examining and recreating dance pedagogy to this end. De-centering whiteness is about bringing even more attention to this work. Call out the whiteness embedded in early dance history and early dance scholarship.

The Dance Studies Association has begun work to compile resources for culturally diverse dance pedagogy. It includes a growing list of [Black Dance Scholarship by Black Dance Scholars](#), Nyama McCarthy-Brown's book *Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World*, Takiyah Nur Amin's essay "Beyond Hierarchy: Reimagining African Diasporic Dance in Higher Education Curricula," Raquel Monroe's "'I Don't Want to do African... What About My Technique?': Transforming Dancing Places into Spaces in the Academy," and larger conversations on *decolonizing* syllabi (Tuck & Yang's "Decolonization is not a metaphor"), the limits of inclusivity (Dylan Robinson's "Welcoming Sovereignty" in *Performing Indigeneity*), and the racial frameworks of *choreography* (Marta Savigliano's "Worlding Dance and Dancing the World"). Find the full resource [HERE](#).

#### Staff and Student Hiring Practices & Support

- Commit to hire, retain, and pay Black staff equitably. This includes administrative support, lighting designers, stage management, technical theater workers, and work-study hires.
- Eliminate unpaid labor/internships.
- Integrate anti-racist learning/work into regular departmental labor. We recognize this invites questions about funding anti-racist workshops, ability to require this work, and so on. We invite departments to tackle these questions head on, instead of avoiding the anti-racist work because of logistical and financial obstacles. As a creative thinking field, there must be workable solutions. As mentioned earlier, Onye Ozuz at Columbia College Chicago engaged the [People's Institute for Survival and Beyond](#). Other organizations offering workshops, readings, and implicit bias training include [Crossroads Anti-Racism Organizing & Training](#), [Cultivating Better Tomorrows](#) (dance specific), and many local organizations specific to individual cities.
- Make space and allocate resources for Black student initiatives. Examples include [Arts in Color at the University of Michigan](#), [Black Movements Dance Theatre at Georgetown University](#), [Ma'Frisah at University of Rochester](#), [Dark Arts Performing Company at the University of Delaware](#), and so on.

### Departmental Policy and Procedure:

- Re-evaluate admission/audition policies and practices. To this end, [Arizona State University](#) no longer holds ballet and modern audition classes. Rather, this dance department has prospective students perform solos in their own preferred styles, take a creative practice class, and engage in interviews.
- Re-evaluate casting practices in order to unpack the white hegemonic value systems that are perpetuated and proliferated through these practices. This includes the valorization of certain body types, and of the concept of ballet as the basis for technical mastery of dance more broadly. Put policy and procedure in place for anti-racist casting practices to be used by faculty, students, and guest artists.
- Change color requirements for ballet tights and shoes, and re-evaluate other clothing and hair requirements that similarly reinforce a white supremacist value of the ideal body shape and color.
- Investigate how your BIPOC faculty and students are asked to represent *diversity* by using the one Black or Brown person on your poster or recruitment literature. This cultural labor is not the responsibility of one person, or one kind of person. Allow your anti-racist practices and policies to speak more loudly than your photographs.
- Work towards active pursuit of fund development to attract (recruitment) and mentor (matriculate) BIPOC students, locating economic and human resources to guarantee student success. This includes an anti-racist re-evaluation of scholarship practices: who is financially awarded and why? These kinds of development initiatives happen frequently at the school-wide level, but this does not save departments or programs from similar work, forwarding to administration the need to reduce the debt ceiling outright as a major barrier to degree completion.

During my [number] years at [institution's name], I have witnessed and experienced [insert example of either anti-racist work currently engaged in your workplace, or (on the converse) institutional racism that you have worked beside/within]. My call to action here joins the voices of my dance colleagues at my home institution and around the world. On June 16<sup>th</sup>, the Dance Studies Association (DSA) shared a [statement](#) “strongly and unequivocally condemn[ing] global anti-Blackness and white supremacy.” In this activist-oriented statement, DSA called on dance departments specifically to actively engage in anti-Black racism rebuilding of the field alongside it. I trust [institution's name] will commit to this new vision of dance in the academy, as well as the structural, procedural, and economic changes that must be instituted in order to affect an undoing of a historical de-valuing of BIPOC bodies and their labor.

With respect,

[NAME, Title, Contact information]