

June 2020

To our communities:

The following statement represents the views of dance faculty and staff who are committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in our work and addressing white supremacy and racism in our classrooms, practices, pedagogies, institutions, and the field more broadly.

In January, some of us began a process of self-education, equity training, and visioning future engagements with our students. This week has laid bare the necessity of moving into action. Righteous anger and protest are sweeping the world. We acknowledge the many layers of trauma, grief, violence, and inequity facing our Black and brown students and colleagues as well as others in our community of historically marginalized identities.

We firmly support the uprisings led by BIPOC and their allies/accomplices, and we condemn all anti-Black violence, police violence, and the lack of community accountability that has led to this moment. We join the urgent call for justice for George Floyd (MN), Breonna Taylor (KY), Ahmaud Arbery (GA), Tony McDade (FL), and thousands of others whose names have echoed in the streets over this decade and long before. We acknowledge that these recent murders also follow months of inaction and inequity during the Covid-19 pandemic, leading to disproportionate rates of illness and death in communities of color.

Regrettably, it took students writing to us to abandon the safety of silence and face the difficulty of raising our voices. Our students' trust in us drives us to be better teachers, and we are sorry for not showing up for them when it was most urgent. This was a mistake, and we are grateful that our students held us accountable when we veered off course or failed to live our values through explicit action.

Dance is political. It has the potential to engender new knowledge, communicate symbolically, empower, activate, and set in motion. Dance and embodied action has long been a part of Black protest and uprisings in the U.S. and beyond. Dance can also support existing power structures and uphold white supremacy. We see this in the choreography of Derek Chauvin employing the body as murder weapon, police sending protesters into spaces where they cannot escape and rounding them up for arrest, and embodied states of white apathy and inaction.

White supremacy culture persists in dance pedagogy, and, as a result, through the field at large. It shows up in our classrooms through meritocracy, privileging linear or empirical thinking, perfectionism, and overemphasizing mastery over process. By not identifying and correcting this we have reinscribed these patterns, and we must reimagine the ways we teach, make, and relate.

In higher education, we have been slow to dismantle the systems that continue to disenfranchise, marginalize, and exploit Black life and Black lives, thereby upholding the very systems that ultimately resulted in the death of George Floyd, and others before him. While advocating that all of the officers involved in Floyd's death be brought to justice, we also acknowledge that this violence thrives in a broader climate of racism, inaction, and willful ignorance in which we play a part. In this regard, we promise to do better.

We are committed to looking squarely at ourselves first, and interrogating our curriculum, artistic choices, practices, who gets to dance/study dance, and what dance studies is about. How might our dance classes look and feel different? How might we engage dance practice to dismantle white supremacy? Since dance has the capacity to engender new knowledge, what kind of knowledge can we work to bring forth?

We are committed to:

- Interrogating our syllabi and redesigning our courses in order to amplify BIPOC voices, and calling attention to the impact and influence of black and indigenous knowledge in our forms, including those labeled as western or eurocentric.
- De-centering whiteness in our course requirements.
- Valuing students and colleagues of color, their work, and their voices without tokenizing or utilizing their contributions in place of making needed changes.
- Recognizing the burden that POC face in navigating our white dominant institutions and thinking about how this labor can be made visible and compensated.
- Devoting our teaching to our black and brown students' growth and well-being, rather than using their likeness to promote events at our institutions.
- Moving resources toward programming and opportunities for students of color to work with one another and guest artists.
- Developing resources and opportunities for white students to work together to address, understand, and dismantle white supremacy.
- Continuing to train and learn together, engage with shared readings, and examine bias, white supremacy, and inequity in our respective communities.

This might not happen quickly, but we will continue to fight for it. **As a concrete next step, we invite all interested to gather with us in a town hall on Tuesday, June 9, at 2:00pm-4:00pm ETD.** In this space and ongoing, we commit to elevating student voices, listening deeply, and working to be accountable to student needs. Please join us for "Listening to Understand: A Town Hall": <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89575242239> . Please email us with any additional questions or accessibility needs at deborah@scapegoatgarden.org.

Each of us acknowledge that our relationships with individuals, communities, and institutions have shaped our understandings of the ideas above. We have invited our colleagues to put their weight behind the actions and concerns detailed in this letter, and [they have endorsed it at this link](#). We will hold each other accountable as we take up this work together.

Sincerely,

Paul Dennis (Associate Professor, UMass Amherst)

Barbie Diewald (Assistant Professor Dance, Mount Holyoke College)

Deborah Goffe (Assistant Professor of Modern-Contemporary Dance, Hampshire College)

Shakia Johnson (Five College Lecturer in Dance)

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Jenna Riegel (Assistant Professor of Theater and Dance, Amherst College)

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