

Statement from the Students and Alumni of the Nutrition Department Regarding Ongoing Racial Injustice and Violence Against Black Lives

The students and alumni of the Nutrition Department stand in solidarity with Black Lives Matter (BLM), [Black Liberation Collective](#), [UNC Black Student Movement](#), and the protestors supporting BLM to honor and recognize the lives of individuals we have lost throughout history as a result of inequitable and racist systems and institutions. We honor the lives of **Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Sean Reed, George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, Elijah McClain, Tony McDade, and Riah Milton**— some of the most recent known victims, among countless others, of racist violence.

Systemic racial injustice also manifests itself in inequitable education, housing, health systems, economic disparities, xenophobic immigration policy, and the violence executed on lands stolen from Indigenous peoples. Scientists, nutritionists, dietitians, academics, and public health professionals must acknowledge complicity, intentional or not, in upholding a system that too often promotes anti-Blackness and creates an environment in which Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and other communities are marginalized. The lives of BIPOC, and other marginalized groups, matter. Uplifting, supporting, amplifying, and reinforcing their voices in the spaces we inhabit is the least we can do.

In this transformative moment, prominent institutions are examining the ways in which racism impacts them and public health. **One of the top-ranked nutrition departments in the U.S. must be at the forefront of this movement.** With a vision to provide “optimal nutrition for all people around the globe,” it is imperative that the Department examine and address how racial inequity negatively affects BIPOC both within the Department and the broader community. Racism in the Department includes but is not limited to: microaggressions ([racist abuse](#)) that BIPOC endure ([#BlackInTheIvory](#) on Twitter), the lack of BIPOC representation and voices within the department and curriculum, the inability or refusal of faculty to address issues of race and racism, the discussion of science without acknowledging the ingrained colonialist and racist ideologies, the [invisible labor](#) of faculty, students and alumni of color, the pressure BIPOC feel to educate and conform to suit the comfort of others, and the continued silence/inaction by peers. We have a responsibility to commit to meaningful, actionable, anti-racist change. The burden of advancing racial justice in the department cannot rest solely on [BIPOC](#). It is an effort ALL must be involved in.

The recent ICE policy has also significantly affected our international peers and this must be acknowledged. Even though the student visa decision was rescinded, xenophobic policies disproportionately affect BIPOC and we stand in solidarity with them. The rescinded ICE directive, like the Muslim ban and the family separation policy before it, is wholly unacceptable. We must take action against ALL such policies.

We, the students and alumni of the Nutrition Department, recognize that the Nutrition Department has been complicit in creating an environment that perpetuates racial injustice. The

Nutrition Department must address structural racism and the resulting hostile environment for any BIPOC. To facilitate a mechanism of accountability, we have come together to form a collective. Our primary goal is to advance racial justice and equity within the Nutrition Department. We must stop being racist or “non-racist” and become anti-racist ([Angela Davis](#)).

We are here. We will raise our voices.

We look forward to hearing from and working with Department leaders to stand against racial inequity. Our proposal is enclosed below.

Sincerely,

The Nutri-Collective*

**Some students and/or alumni have decided not to sign their individual names and be represented by the Nutri-Collective name (i.e. out of fear of retaliation or other reasons).*

1. Laetitia Meyrueix, PhD Candidate
2. Courtney George, MPH-RD Graduate
3. Abrar Al-Shaer, PhD Candidate
4. Ashley Aguiard, PhD Student
5. Khristopher Nicholas, PhD Candidate
6. Natalia Rebolledo Fuentealba, PhD Candidate
7. Emily Duffy, MPH-RD alumna, PhD student
8. Trevor Hamlett, MPH-RD Student
9. Erin Coffman, PhD Candidate
10. Kaylee Helfrich, PhD Candidate
11. Kendra Nelson, MPH-RD Graduate, PhD Student
12. Emily Seiger, PhD Student
13. Anandita Pal, PhD Candidate
14. AV, MPH-RD alumna
15. Asta Feng, MPH-RD alumna
16. Chelsie Kolberg, MPH-RD Alumna
17. Sophia Lind, MPH-RD Candidate
18. Julie Hooper, MPH-RD alumna
19. Mariela Arias, MPH-RD alumna
20. Shannon Applegate, MPH-RD Candidate
21. Julia Baker, MPH-RD candidate
22. Caitlin Martinez, PhD Candidate
23. Ximena Perez-Velazco, PhD Student
24. Afroditi Papantoni, PhD Student
25. Carmen Prestemon, BSPH alumna
26. Graham Booth, BSPH graduate
27. SR, MPH-RD graduate
28. Billie Karel, MPH-RD program alumna

29. Jessica Beattie, MPH-RD alumna
30. Jacquelyn Supplee, MPH-RD alumna
31. Kaki McNeel, BSPH Student
32. Sabrina Rehman, BSPH student
33. Hannah Rayala BSPH student
34. Thanh Tran, BSPH student
35. Serena Mahalingam, BSPH alumna
36. Elizabeth Alexy, MPH-RD alumna
37. Rebecca Scothorn, BSPH student
38. Claire Dixon, BSPH student
39. Isabel Rodriguez, BSPH alumna, MPH-RD candidate
40. Rachel Slee, BSPH student
41. Isabel Lu, MPH-RD candidate
42. Belén Rogers, MPH-RD candidate
43. Celeste Kurz, MPH-RD candidate
44. Meredith Carson, PhD Student
45. Ruwaydah Sideek, BSPH alumna
46. Emily Busey, MPH-RD alumna
47. Allison Lacko, PhD alumna
48. Sarah Tian, BSPH student
49. Kayla Warechowski, BSPH alumna, MPH-RD candidate
50. Kati Scruggs, MPH-RD candidate
51. Emily Devericks, PhD Student
52. Jen Funsten, MPH-RD candidate
53. Grace Foster, BSPH alumna
54. Jessica Davis Ostrowski, MPH-RD graduate
55. Alexandra Ross, PhD Student
56. Bridget Hollingsworth, MPH-RD alumna
57. Melissa L. Jensen, PhD Alumna
58. Elizabeth Strawbridge, MPH Alumna
59. Gabriella Hernandez, MPH/RD student
60. McKenzie Caldwell, MPH/RD alumna
61. Elizabeth Hutchins, MS graduate
62. Alberto Vargas, MS alumnus
63. Ryesa Mansoor, BSPH alumna
64. Natashia Rogers, PhD Student
65. Jennifer Sadler, PhD alumna
66. Student Alumni, alumna
67. Michael Essman, PhD graduate
68. Angela Fruik, MPH-RD alumna
69. Sarah Frank, PhD Student
70. Natalie Ostrowski, MPH/RD Candidate
71. Christine Byrne, MPH/RD Student
72. Daria Igudesman, PhD Candidate

73. Leah Chapman, PhD Candidate
74. Daniela Pimentel, MPH-RD alumna
75. Tara Gregory, MPH-RD Alumna
76. Kayla Ferro, MPH/RD Student
77. David Gaviria, MPH/RD Student
78. Nicole Buddenbaum, MS Student
79. Lydia Eisenbeis, MS Student
80. Meredith Edelman, MPH/RD Student
81. Catie Drawdy, BSPH undergraduate
82. Carrie Reid, Alumni
83. Alyssa Ho, BSPH-MS Student
84. Dalton Craven, BSPH Student
85. Nicole Betor, BSPH Student
86. Barkley Browder, BSPH undergraduate
87. Caity Ashley, MPH/RD Student
88. Nancy Lopez Olmedo, PhD alumna
89. Mia Fishkin, MPH-RD Candidate
90. Katie Treece, MPH-RD
91. Katherine Nethers, MPH alumni
92. Ella Stephan, MPH alumni
93. Elle Glenny, PhD alumnus
94. Natasha Vos, MPH-RD Alumna
95. Melecia Wright, PhD alumna
96. Kristina Camp, PhD Candidate
97. M P, BSPH undergraduate
98. Samantha Grounds, BSPH Student
99. Nooshin Ghazi-Moghaddam, MPH-RD Alumna
100. Sara Bernate, BSPH Student
101. Tania Aburto, PhD Alumni
102. Lilia Pedraza, PhD Alumni
103. Grace Ratley, BSPH Student
104. Abby Rollison, MPH/RD Student
105. Cassandra Maria Johnson, PhD alumna
106. Jessica Soldavini, PhD Candidate
107. Jessica Wallis, MPD/RD Alumni

Nutri-Collective Proposal for Anti-Racist Action in the Nutrition Department

This action plan was written using recommendations written by the [Equity Collective Report](#) and the [Inclusive Excellence Action Plan](#) from Gillings. Nutrition student and alumni feedback was gathered to tailor the recommendations to the Nutrition Department.

Student feedback and involvement in implementing the below recommendations is essential. In order for these recommendations to achieve the goal of advancing racial justice and equity within the department, all must be actively involved.

Disclaimer: These recommendations are ever-evolving and will be revisited and updated as more learning and action is taken by the Collective and the rest of the Nutrition Department.

Recommendation 1: Require inclusive excellence training, including a strong anti-racist training component, for faculty, staff, TAs, and students.

- a. It is our understanding that new faculty, staff, and students will be required to take the REI Groundwater Training starting Fall 2020. However, this does not include current faculty, staff, and students. All current faculty, staff, and students must be required to take anti-racist training (e.g. REI Groundwater Training).
 - i. One introductory training, such as REI Groundwater Training, is not sufficient. All faculty should also be required to go through REI Phase 1 training. Additional training opportunities should be identified and required of faculty.
 1. [The Equity Paradigm](#)
- b. Reallocating funds to provide more trainings as necessary and providing access to anti-racist training materials and pedagogy for faculty and TAs.
- c. Restructure faculty departmental service requirements to ensure faculty engage in enrichment opportunities focused on racism and racial equity.
- d. Develop enrichment opportunities for faculty to engage in learning skills on how to: facilitate conversations about race in the classroom, create a supportive culture for all students in the classroom, and learn how to build trust with students to skillfully handle conversations around racism.
 - i. Faculty and staff must be trained to be able to lead discussions around race & racism in the classroom. BIPOC students should not be continually burdened to do the majority of the work in facilitating these conversations.
 - ii. Consider hiring an individual external to the department who is an expert in racial equity to help train faculty and discuss best practices.

Recommendation 2: Invest in higher levels of accountability for both faculty and students around racialized experiences.

- a. Improve mechanisms/processes through which students experiencing aggression or oppression can safely and anonymously report.
 - i. Specifically, there needs to be mechanisms/processes by which BIPOC can identify and report racism or racialized experiences they've experienced within the department. This includes a mechanism/process for addressing them. Lack of such initiatives silences students, staff, and faculty.

- ii. The point of contact for reporting incidents must be someone BIPOC trust and select themselves to ensure that further microaggressions (racist abuse) are not endured by BIPOC during the reporting process.
- b. Make perpetrators of bias aware they are not meeting departmental expectations and hold them accountable for their actions in a manner commensurate with the impact of infractions.

Recommendation 3: Create norms around acknowledging the role of race and racism in institutions and in public health.

- a. It is our understanding that there is a push to require all syllabi of courses in the Nutrition Department to include a statement of anti-racism. This should be a requirement only if the department commits to being fully anti-racist in substantive action and not just in writing.
 - i. The statement of anti-racism should only be included after faculty members have gone through at least the REI Groundwater training. Including an anti-racism statement in syllabi before faculty have completed basic training and taken other actions can seem disingenuous. Additionally, this can put faculty in a position of causing more harm than good.
 - ii. This statement should also cover explicit language naming the role of racism in nutrition and public health.
 - iii. Individual(s) external to the department (e.g. Inclusive Excellence Committee) should review the syllabi and funds should be reallocated to pay for this work.
- b. Set explicit norms around talking about race. This may be incorporated into orientation, or pre-arrival preparation materials, and should be revisited frequently (i.e. department-wide town halls).
- c. Provide decompression sessions following classes with potentially triggering topics with mental health professionals who are not faculty or students in the department. Provide group and one-on-one options for students and faculty to process their experience and trauma.
 - i. Suggestion: Provide sessions in coordination with Student Wellness (Shahnaz Khawaja), CAPS, and Student Affairs for decompression sessions.
- d. Meaningfully incorporate theories and frameworks developed by BIPOC and marginalized communities into classroom discussions and assignments throughout Nutrition students' training.
 - i. A course on nutrition and equity needs to be developed by, and/or with input from, BIPOC and required for all students. All courses must take into account equity, but these topics should not be marginalized to trainings and single lectures within the framework of the current courses offered.
 - ii. Include theories such as: Critical Race Theory, Black pessimism, Black optimism, decolonizing methodologies, queer theory, necropolitical theory, crip theory, intersectionality (specifically that which originates from Black legal and feminist studies), and others that go beyond the standard psychosocial theories.
 - iii. Create a repository of resources that can be shared with faculty so they can incorporate them into their courses.

1. Suggestion: Hire an RA to help with the creation of materials to support faculty and TAs.
- e. Provide faculty the necessary training and support to facilitate conversations on the role of race and racism.
 - i. A majority of the Nutrition Department may not be comfortable or capable of facilitating the necessary conversations on the role of race and racism. We cannot expect the BIPOC faculty to be solely responsible for this initiative. Thus, training and materials must be provided to ensure that all faculty can have these conversations in the classroom.
 - f. Invite guest speakers for topical conversations outside of faculty members' comfort zone.
 - i. Develop a priori criteria or specific questions to thoughtfully determine the appropriate member of the teaching team (faculty or TA) or guest lecturer (other faculty, staff, professional) to facilitate or co-facilitate conversations on race and racism.
 - ii. Lecturers/guest speakers should be compensated for their work. The labor of BIPOC is often underpaid and undervalued. We cannot have these seminars without properly valuing and remunerating the work of BIPOC.

Recommendation 4: Increase departmental transparency.

- a. Greater transparency with the selection of student representatives for Nutrition Department committees/meetings and for the selection of TAs.
 - i. There should not be a limit on the number of students who can be involved in departmental committees/meetings.
 - ii. The process of selecting TAs is not clear and TAs receive little or no pay. Given lack of TA diversity in the department, greater transparency in selection process and equity in TA pay should be addressed.
- b. Access to the meeting notes of the various Nutrition Department committees/meetings. We know that the Diversity and Inclusion Committee has been working on these issues, but the general Nutrition student body remains generally unaware of the topics discussed during these meetings and departmental action items.
- c. Significantly improve our approaches to communicating about our inclusion, equity, and anti-racism efforts. There should be regular meetings throughout the semester between the Nutri-Collective and department leadership to discuss progress.
- d. Greater transparency regarding employment opportunities for faculty, staff, and students. This includes previous notice of future job postings within the Nutrition Department, and student involvement in faculty and staff selection and hiring process.
- e. Statistics on the demographics of the faculty, teaching assistants, staff, and students within the department.
 - i. This should include data on the faculty, staff, and students who have left, dropped out, etc. Specifically for students, demographics on those who dropped out of departmental programs. This includes those who may have mastered out of the Ph.D. program.

- ii. This should include data on tenured faculty. Specifically how many BIPOC receive tenure, the length of time before receiving tenure for all faculty, and who are given the opportunity to teach courses within the programs.
- f. Posting of more explicit information about the criteria and processes used to select who receives faculty and student awards.

Suggestion: Create a Microsoft Team, Sakai site, or another team-based tool that will provide a centralized location where all faculty, staff, and students can access meeting notes, be aware of the various key meeting dates, and have access to raw departmental demographic data.

Recommendation 5: Improve recruitment and retention of Nutrition faculty, staff, and students from diverse backgrounds.

- a. Treat BIPOC faculty equitably. Value current BIPOC faculty and their insight on these issues. For example, being cognizant of the disproportionate number of “asks” BIPOC faculty have to be on diversity committees, search committees, and general service requests.
- b. Improve efforts in mentorship and investment in students of color.
 - i. Set clear expectations for faculty advisor engagement with students to improve communication and transparency between faculty and students.
 - ii. Develop concise and concrete steps to connect students to accurate and appropriate resources, interests, and career assistance during the program.
 - iii. Create accountability measures and consequences for faculty and instructors who do not fulfill their advisor/mentor requirements.
- c. Anonymizing applications and letters of recommendation and eliminating the GRE requirement ([as was done for MPH programs](#)).
- d. A majority of [RDs are white women](#), as one of the best schools in nutrition and public health, we must prioritize the training of BIPOC RDs.
 - i. Part of the recruitment effort is transforming the Nutrition Department into a space in which BIPOC feel safe and can be successful. This means that the department must change the culture internally to ensure that any BIPOC student who attends will not be subject to racist abuse.
 - 1. Recommendation 1 & 2 provide some starting points on how to change the internal culture within the department. More recommendations will be developed as progress is made through Recommendations 1 & 2.
 - ii. Fund awards specifically to recruit and retain BIPOC students in the MPH/RD program.
- e. Recruit faculty of color to apply to the departmental openings by advertising in targeted job posts, going beyond existing social networks, being more transparent on the requirements for consideration, and expanding the research areas typically hired in the department.
 - i. Prioritize hiring and retaining faculty of color.
 - ii. Cluster hiring for minority faculty to increase interdepartmental support.
 - iii. Hire additional faculty who specialize in research and practice around racism and health to help build out this research line within the department and better support students interested in this area of study.

- f. Prioritize retaining, supporting, and treating faculty of color equitably regarding research, mentorship, tenure, and teaching. Do not impose additional responsibilities not asked or required of other faculty. If additional responsibilities are taken on, balance workload, and provide acknowledgment during the tenure process and/or remuneration.