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Literacy Studies at USF Statement on Anti-racism

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June 12, 2020

To Our USF Students and Colleagues,

As the Literacy Studies faculty at the University of South Florida, we write to share our feelings of outrage and grief in the loss of life at the hands of racialized policing and violence in the United States, most recently and visibly the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Tony McDade. We support and amplify the message of the recent letter shared by USF Black faculty members calling for widespread changes at USF and for the implementation of anti-racist practices that are needed to enable Black people to feel and experience safety and, importantly, to thrive. We affirm our support for the rights of protestors demanding justice in the face of systematic discrimination and racism. We feel and believe that justice is long overdue.

As Literacy scholars, we seek to understand and educate about the historical and systematic oppression of Black people through racialized initiatives that enforce segregation, create separate schools, libraries, curricula, and result in unequal educational opportunities. These policies and practices, which also affect Brown people, Native peoples, Asian people, LGBTQIA+ people, immigrants, multilingual learners, and other long-marginalized groups, have yielded a pandemic of illiteracy and corresponding poverty that continues to significantly limit access to education, create disparities in healthcare, and obstruct employment opportunities among many other social ills. As literacy scholars and educators, we take seriously our responsibility to advocate for and improve literacy outcomes for Black children, Black families, and Black students as well as eradicate all forms of racism and oppression from the systems in which marginalized people live, work and study.

Moving forward, we commit to identifying implicit and explicit racial inequities in our own program by planning and implementing concrete action steps that will contribute to the anti-racist practices which foster equity, safety, security, and care for Black people in general, and specifically, for Black faculty, students, and staff in our USF community. In doing so, we acknowledge the diversity within our Black community that includes attention to specific challenges faced by Black international students, faculty, and staff, and which arises from the intersection of race, immigration, and language.

Prior to the Fall 2020 semester, we, as Literacy Studies faculty, will take the following action steps:

- Develop anti-racism modules and create guided learning activities that promote anti-racist teaching and literacy practices in all literacy courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels;
- Create literacy course assignments where course credit will be possible through volunteering in anti-racist initiatives as individuals and/or in small groups;
- Celebrate and expand faculty and student service in local and national anti-racist initiatives;
- Conduct equity and access audits of the Literacy Studies program including courses, recruiting methods, reading materials, and teaching practices, among other factors with a specific focus on how these elements may inadvertently promote and support systemic racism.

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A longer term goal includes, but is not limited to, creating a Literacy Center focused on the following:

- Developing advocacy programs for parents such as a literacy ad litem program that helps parents navigate and challenge systematic racism inherent in practices such as high-stakes testing and third-grade retention for children and youth;
- Providing research-based anti-racist teacher training in literacy conducted by Literacy faculty;
- Creating out-of-school opportunities for children and adolescents to engage in anti-racist and community-facing literacy activities, such as community mapping, multimodal writing, and dramatic performance;
- Curating a list of recommended anti-racist readings, scholarly writings, and literature written by Black people and representing Black people for the USF Library to purchase;
- Collaborating with the USF Library to promote anti-racist children's, adolescent, and young adult literature;
- Building little libraries across the USF campus with children's, adolescent, and young adult literature relevant to each discipline that promote anti-racist stances toward women in science and portrayals of Black people and other people of color.

In addition to the action steps above, we urge the USF administration to make a concrete commitment to anti-racist policies through the following initiatives:

- Develop an anti-racist institute at USF where the research from all efforts towards anti-racism can be housed. Appoint individuals who are Black African, Black American, and Black Caribbean to develop and coordinate the institute. Features of the institute might include:
 - A monthly education initiative that invites K-12 teachers and students to learn about the experiences of Black K-12 learners and teachers and that enables teachers to implement anti-racist practices and promote them in schools;
 - A monthly business initiative that invites local business owners and their employees to learn about anti-racist practices from Black employees and Black business owners;
 - Create sanctuary spaces where Black students and faculty can “hang out” and have access to a sense of community and to discuss challenging topics as a form of safety on the campus.
- Appoint a task force that jointly addresses anti-racist practices affecting the needs of Black American, Black African, and Black Caribbean faculty, students, and communities based on surveys from these populations at and beyond USF. Include representatives of each of these sub-populations on the task force as well as White faculty and staff. Challenge the task force to reduce intraracial, intralinguistic and intracultural discrimination that prevents the needs of all Black faculty and students from being heard. Use items emerging from the task force to guide and implement change in department policies and governance documents;
- Identify Black faculty at USF who focus on anti-racist research and allocate special funding for this research. Identify Black students who wish to work with or be mentored by these faculty and pair them with such faculty;

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- Create a mentorship system for Black international and American students and faculty who arrive at USF and provide opportunities for networking;
- Perform an equity audit in each college and department with a specific focus on identifying how systemic racism is reflected in governance policies and practices;
- Identify USF policies that impede the recruitment and hiring of Black administrators;
- Revise policies to reflect the research base concerning the absence of Black faculty in higher education, in the administration at Predominantly White Institutions, particularly as deans, chairs, and provosts;
- Revisit Black faculty hires, particularly women, and examine disparities in pay for these hires. This is especially critical for retaining new hires with significant pay disparities;
- Develop an ongoing Black faculty and staff spotlight that keeps the stories, challenges, and successes of these individuals in college, department and university newsletters.
- Revise all university statements concerning 'diversity and inclusion' to reflect that one can only be anti-racist or racist. There is no middle ground.

Signed,

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