

Sociology and Interdisciplinary Social Sciences Diversity and Anti-Racist Action Statement

June 19, 2020

The University of South Florida Department of Sociology and the Interdisciplinary Social Sciences program stand in solidarity with those who are protesting the killing of Mr. George Floyd on May 25, 2020. Mr. Floyd's murder by Minneapolis police officers was not only the result of an individual racist act but also the result of interlocking systems of oppression found throughout the institutions of our country; systems of oppression that have validated police violence directed at Black and Brown people for centuries. We condemn all forms of racism and injustice, including the murders of Mr. Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and countless other people of color. The fact that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affects the physical and economic health of communities of color also points to broader race-based economic inequality and health disparities in our country. We recognize that racism also intersects with other axes of oppression such as disability, religion, sexuality, trans identity, and migration status to reduce the life chances of a large and diverse segment of the population. We stand with the Black Lives Matter movement, and other organizations calling for justice and the eradication of systemic racism in our institutions.

As students, staff, and scholars in the social sciences, we recognize that this country, and by extension its institutions, were founded on racist principles. Accordingly, we understand that racism is deeply embedded in our lives. We endorse the American Sociological Association's statement: *"Institutional racism in all its forms must be condemned in the strongest possible terms. As sociological scholars and citizens, we have a responsibility to study and speak out regarding all forms of racism and injustice."* We also acknowledge, however, that the discipline of sociology, our university, and our department are part of a system that has created barriers for many groups of people while simultaneously privileging others.

We acknowledge that racism is often unseen and unexamined, and that even well-meaning intentions and well-meant actions can be racist. As actors within our own institution, we are committed to looking inward to assess ourselves, our department and its policies and practices, ensuring it grows into a committed and inclusive department that engages in intentional anti-racist actions that will dismantle the inequalities endemic to our own operation. We will strive to model anti-racism in our work environment, through our research, within the classroom, and in our interactions.

Over the coming months, we pledge to engage in a process of meaningful self-reflection about how we can implement USF's Principles of Community in ways that redress racism, injustice and inequities and ensure that students, faculty, and staff from all backgrounds are treated with dignity and respect. To this end, we support the USF Black Employees 2020 Call to Action (<https://www.tampabay.com/news/education/2020/06/10/usf-hears-from-black-faculty-staff-do-more-to-end-systemic-racism/>), and propose to take the following concrete steps within our department to further the goals it lays out for the university as a whole:

1. We will create a Diversity Committee of students (undergraduate and graduate), staff and faculty that includes representatives from our standing committees to ensure that anti-racist practices are effectively and meaningfully translated to our curriculum, recruitment and retention efforts, our policies and practices, and our working environment.
2. We will conduct a Department Climate Survey to better understand the views and experiences (within the department and other units at USF) of our students, staff and faculty and to serve as baseline against which the effectiveness of our work can be measured.
3. We will initiate a series of regular and normalized anti-racist and multi-cultural competency training sessions and community events for students, staff and faculty, to help us reflect on and challenge our own racist actions, and to better understand anti-racist strategies and practices in the academy so that we may implement them in our everyday lives.
4. We will work with the college to identify and redress any instances of race-based salary discrepancy for faculty and staff.
5. We will review departmental policies and increase the transparency of the criteria that are used for faculty, staff, and graduate student annual evaluations and for faculty and TA assignments in order to build trust and guard against implicit and explicit bias.
6. We will develop a system for the intentional mentoring of faculty and staff of color as they move toward promotion.
7. We will provide opportunities for faculty and students of color to serve in administrative positions and leadership roles in the department and mentor them in these roles.
8. We will develop robust strategies for the recruitment of students and faculty of color.
9. We will work to increase our offerings of courses that address issues of race and ethnicity, racial and ethnic inequality, and racism and anti-racism.
10. We will encourage faculty to include the scholarship of Black and Brown scholars in their courses.
11. We will develop a plan to acknowledge the informal labor often performed by women in the department and university. We recognize that the demands placed on women of color and those occupying other minoritized positions are often especially intense.
12. We will take the complaints of students and faculty seriously and conduct regular, focused and safe discussions about ways to hold ourselves and others accountable for microaggressions and insensitive actions. We believe a healthy department can engage in such dialogue in a vigorous and safe way, and that when we can, issues should be resolved in-house, thereby strengthening our community. We also realize that some actions may need to be escalated where appropriate and that such escalation will not be met with retaliation or marginalization. When this happens, we will follow the recommendations of the office by which the issue is evaluated.
13. We will continually build on these initial efforts and not be tempted to look for quick fixes or easy answers.

To accomplish these goals, we must first recognize that no individual or community simply “becomes” anti-racist by desiring to do so. We must commit ourselves to the ongoing work that

is required. We must educate ourselves, and not rely on people of color to educate us. We must continually reflect, assess, and act; and we must recognize our privileges where they exist and intentionally act to dismantle them. Through these deliberative actions, we intend to build a culture of anti-racism in our department and develop mechanisms that will strengthen this culture through our actions, policies, and practices at all levels.

This statement was created in a collaboration between the department leadership team and the newly constituted Diversity Committee.

James Cavendish, Chair, Department of Sociology

Sara Green, Director, Interdisciplinary Social Sciences Program (incoming Sociology Chair)

Will Tyson, Executive Committee Chair

Beatriz Padilla, Diversity Committee Chair