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June 8, 2020

AUCCCD Board Statement Against Racism and Racial Violence

The Association for University and College Counseling Directors (AUCCCD) condemns the racial violence continuing to claim the lives of unarmed persons who identify as Black or African-American. This shameful 400-year history of discrimination, degradation and death must stop -- and it will require the commitment of each of us.

George Floyd. Breonna Taylor, David McAtee. Ahmaud Arbery. Bothem Jean. Atatiana Jefferson. Jonathan Ferrell. Renisha McBride. Stephon Clark. Jordan Edwards. Jordan Davis. Alton Sterling. Aiyana Jones. Mike Brown. Tamir Rice. Clementa C. Pinckney, Cynthia Marie Graham Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lee Lance, Depayne Middleton-Doctor, Tywanza Sanders, Daniel L. Simmons, Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, Myra Thompson (all nine murdered in their Charleston, SC church). Trayvon Martin. Sean Bell. Oscar Grant. Sandra Bland. Philando Castile. Corey Jones. John Crawford. Terrence Crutcher. Keith Scott. Clifford Glover. Claude Reese. Randy Evans. Yvonne Smallwood. Walter Scott. Eric Garner. Freddie Gray. Alberta Spruill. Amadou Diallo. Timothy Thomas.

This list represents the names of those whose murders were brought to the attention of this nation only as a result of citizens confronting the silence and invisibility of many more murders and assaults in the past two decades -- the same decades that witnessed an unprecedented surge of demand for mental health services on college campuses across the country. It is imperative that we connect the dots that tell the story of the work we all still have to do, as these deaths also impact those who survive to grieve the loss of loved ones, who fear losing more, and who daily experience the inherent collective trauma of injustice.

We must also acknowledge that this list is an ongoing list, one that includes those names in history books that have failed to tell the complete truth reflecting the voices and experiences of those who have moved us forward through their actions of speaking truth to power, either through organized activism or simply through living their humanity. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. Malcolm X. Medgar Evers. Emmett Till. And while the list is dominated by the names of men and male youth, we must acknowledge the life-threatening stress and distress to the many women and female youth who have worked for justice while grieving with dismissed and minimized rage and hurt -- while further oppressed by expectations that they merely continue being Strong Black Women in narrations of "resilience" that carry their own hidden cruelties.

Say their names, out loud. Say the names of these, our African-American brothers and sisters, who were murdered because Black lives have not mattered in the United States. This list could go on for pages and would also have to include millions of deaths due to racism toward indigenous persons, trans persons of color, and others who do not hold white privilege. And we offer a pause of remembrance, daily, for the countless names that remain cloaked by the racism we still confront.

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We join numerous higher education and mental health professional organizations and institutions in condemning racism and racist acts. We also commit to employing our unique perspectives on the process of change toward revealing and dismantling the institutionalized racism found in every aspect of American life -- from educational systems to houses of worship to elected officials and those sworn to protect. Now is the time for action -- for unless we are part of the solution, we are part of the problem. We must create change through our roles as therapists with the students we serve, as consultants to various campus and societal arenas where we have influence, and as citizens of a country that has failed to honor the concept that all truly are created equal.

As professionals who oversee the work of healing and empowering students in their struggles, we recognize the importance of taking a stand and offering support by naming and addressing what causes the illness, wounds, and impairment. This refers, increasingly, to the systemic forces and institutional structures of white supremacy; all forms of racism (and specifically anti-Black racism); and its manifestations in police brutality, dramatic and increasing disparities in health, education, economic condition; incarceration; and the denial of basic rights of safety and the ability to breathe.

We also acknowledge that there is a more sustained and additional need for facilitating the difficult (and often painful) honest examination and self-work around our individual biases in thought and action, and how that impacts our work with students, counseling center staff and other colleagues, our campuses, communities, friends and family.

Particularly for those who identify as white, consider involvement in an accountability group (for example, see information at <https://drkathyobear.com/> and books such as “. . . But I’m NOT Racist!”) and consider how white supremacy culture may be interwoven in your patterns of perfectionism, sense of urgency, defensiveness, quantity over quality, worship of the written word, paternalism, either/or thinking, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, individualism, objectivity, the right to comfort, and the belief that progress is bigger and more (from Jones and Okun’s 2001 “Dismantling Racism”).

Some other suggestions for immediate action:

- Join local and national efforts for societal reform, social justice and peace.
- Connect with colleagues for support, encouragement, resources.
- Last and so important -- be aware of, and responsive to, the impact of current and historical trauma on colleagues of color (specifically those who identify as Black) -- don’t default to them to lead conversations around racism or to educate on how to be a better ally. In addition to their work life, Black people have individual lives and families and friends; the emotional exhaustion is real. Lighten the burden, however you can.

AUCCCD is a professional community that fosters director development and success. To advance the mission of higher education, we innovate, educate and advocate for collegiate mental health. We are committed to inclusive excellence and the promotion of social justice.

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