

BRYN MAWR

COLLEGE

July 1, 2020

To the Authors of the Open Letter:

We write to provide an institution-specific response to the [Open Letter to the Bi-College Community](#). We respond here to each enumerated point, although not in the order presented, to better reflect the coordinated actions that will follow.

We frame this response with a few comments:

We recognize and deeply appreciate the thoughtful work that went into creating the Open Letter, as well as acknowledge the painful experiences and the hope for improvement it reflects. We also affirm that this moment in history calls for us to come together urgently to redress racial injustice, including and especially at Bryn Mawr College.

As we carefully read the Open Letter and listen to students, faculty, staff and alumnae/i, we hear and are pained by the experiences of racism in our community. On behalf of the College, we apologize for the harm that students of color, especially Black students, have experienced at Bryn Mawr because we have not taken enough focused and effective action to address racism on our campus. We are not yet the Bryn Mawr we aspire to be. We are deeply saddened to know that when Black students and alumnae/i think about their Bryn Mawr experience – whether it was 30 years ago or last year – they remember the ways that they have felt disrespected, mistreated, or ignored on our campus. We are deeply sorry, and we are committed to continuing and increasing our collective action against racism.

It is clear that we all share the goal to make Bryn Mawr a place where Black students can thrive. We also agree that, in order to achieve this, we need to acknowledge the racism in the structures of our institution and in individual behaviors, and we need to dismantle it at all levels. Indeed, this has been a particular, mission-inscribed and institution-wide focus of Bryn Mawr in recent years, building on work that certain dedicated members of the community have been doing for decades. While this work has been done in good faith, we also agree that where we are at present is not acceptable, that structural and ongoing change is needed, and that this is an important moment of transformation.

We embrace the opportunity to do this work. We are galvanized by the call to translate our individual, deep-rooted feelings of care and commitment into greater collective action, engaging the community across roles and shared governance in order to make Bryn Mawr College better.

We are also hopeful, because many of the priorities identified in the Open Letter align with initiatives that the College has already launched. We honor the work that has been done -- particularly by our Black students, alumnae/i, faculty, and staff -- and we are determined to build on it and learn from it as we move forward. We will also, as a community, take both new and intensified actions against racism.

With senior staff and the Diversity Leadership Group, I commit to leading continued action to transform Bryn Mawr. It is important to note, however, that presidents and campus leaders do not have the authority to simply decree change. The President's role as a leader is critical, but many forms of leadership and engagement are necessary to make change in an institution with shared governance that includes the Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, and students. This means that some actions need to be reviewed or voted upon by faculty, staff, students, and/or trustees before they can be adopted. The institution is stronger for this shared governance, but it does require accountability and coordinated action by the whole community to enact change. Similarly and very importantly, change making cannot be the primary responsibility of our Black community members, even as white people need to listen to and be guided by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) colleagues and students. Therefore, dialogue and courageous conversations must be an ongoing part of our actions.

We strive to plan and act with focus and follow-through, reflecting on the impact of our actions each year, to create systemic change that is meaningful and sustainable. We will soon invite the full community to participate in open forums, set for at least two dates in July, to begin to engage in this dialogue to prioritize collective actions for the coming academic year and beyond, within a shared institutional framework with clear mechanisms for accountability. We understand that not all community members have access to remote participation, so we will continue these conversations in the fall as well as explore other avenues for input. Actions that require Faculty Committee review or voting by students, faculty, staff, or trustees will be addressed during the upcoming academic year

Regarding the Open Letter's enumerated points:

Many of the recommendations for changes contained in the Open Letter fall under the authority of the faculty, particularly changes in curriculum and in academic programs and requirements. These include the recommended creation of an Africana Studies major and a course on Blackness and white privilege. In recent years, the faculty and staff have created more curricular and co-curricular opportunities for learning, such as THRIVE lectures on the history of racism at Bryn Mawr and a new 360 cluster, "Centering Critical Blackness." In the past, faculty have also discussed the possibility of a required course on racism, but decided to provide educational opportunities across the curriculum and through co-curricular programming. This moment calls us to revisit this question. Faculty are aware of the Open Letter, and they will be meeting to discuss a path forward. We stand ready to be partners in this discussion and to support their efforts. We also note the creation of a new, experimental course at Haverford College, "Belonging and Becoming at Haverford College," and welcome the opportunity to explore a similar course as a possibility for Bryn Mawr.

Based on recommendations in a recent external review of Africana Studies, our faculty in Africana Studies are exploring ways to strengthen and expand the core requirements and further define our capstone experience. The Program is well-poised to develop a major given the breadth of the research and teaching expertise of several new faculty who have joined the Program in recent years in such areas as poetry and prose, dance, urban education in the U.S., and migration patterns and development in East and West Africa. Faculty are planning to discuss this fully in the fall.

We agree that hiring Black faculty and faculty of color is critical to our excellence. It is important to underscore the progress that Provost Mary Osirim and the faculty have made in this area. The percentage of faculty of color has increased from 19% to 30% between 2015-2016 and 2019-2020. This is a substantial change, given the small number of searches each year, and we agree that it is not enough. We hear clearly the feedback that some students go through much of their Bryn Mawr career without being taught by a faculty member of color, and particularly a Black faculty member. In addition, we know that the Black members of our faculty and other faculty members of color do disproportionate work in our current environment supporting and mentoring Black students and other students of color, and that imbalance needs to be acknowledged and rectified as part of addressing structural racism in our institution. In the [2019-20 Report on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Framework for Action](#), we recognized in particular that we need to do better in STEM fields. We have identified this as an institutional priority for the coming year.

To that end, it is critical that we increase the size of the faculty applicant pools in STEM, so beginning this fall we will expand our existing networks and outreach. All faculty searches will be advertised more broadly. Those specifically in STEM fields will be advertised with the Black Doctoral Network, in which we are now an institutional member, and the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS), as well as with other organizations. In addition, all search chairs will increase their direct outreach to HBCUs and Hispanic-Serving Institutions offering doctoral programs. This fall we will also intensify efforts to engage student representatives and student input in all of our searches.

We are mindful that we cannot stop with recruiting faculty of color. We need to make sure that we create an environment where faculty of color can thrive and are not overwhelmed by invisible labor. The Provost and the Committee on Appointments (the faculty committee that oversees faculty hiring, tenure, and promotion) have been reviewing the teaching evaluation form in an effort to reduce racial and gender bias in the content and structure of the teaching evaluation process. At the same time, we are re-working the form to address the importance of faculty creating inclusive classroom environments in which Black and other students of color can thrive. The Committee has also been discussing ways to recognize work that is currently invisible labor in the review of tenure and promotion. This committee work is scheduled to be completed by June 2021.

We are deeply committed to the success of students of color in STEM. A group of faculty and staff have been planning a summer program similar to the one recommended in the Open Letter, informed by study of successful programs throughout the country. These programs require significant resources to be done well. We have already applied for funding from the National Science Foundation and are in active fundraising conversations with individual donors to support this program. We aim to begin this program in summer of 2021.

We are aware that Black students, faculty, and staff experience structural racism on our campus, as well as individual acts of racism, including frequent microaggressions. We understand that these acts inflict harm and those harms can accumulate. We hear the call for mandatory training, and we will review and improve our training on faculty searches, student advising, creating inclusive classrooms, and decolonizing the syllabus. As part of this, this summer the Summer Pedagogical Partnership program, designed to support faculty in considering remote teaching and learning, has evolved to include an explicit focus on anti-racist pedagogy. We have also invested in staff training across multiple departments and programs, and departments have acted on that training to change policies and practices. We are committed to providing resources to extend and deepen that education. We also note that faculty groups are working to create their own plans for faculty accountability.

Shared readings, along with reflection and courageous conversations about the readings, offer a powerful way to learn individually and collectively. The Pensby Center has hosted such gatherings, including reading and discussion groups around white privilege and white supremacy and how we work against these inherited norms; they also host more informal discussions in partnership with other departments. In the open forums, we will explore how we can incorporate common readings or other shared experiences into campus events and gatherings, such as the resources provided by Academics for Black Survival and Wellness, in which a number of Bryn Mawr and Haverford faculty participated last week. Common readings should also be part of ongoing training and could be part of the Community Day of Learning as a shared experience.

Over the past several years, Campus Safety, in particular, has invested in regular anti-bias training. Officers have worked to focus on a mission of safety (versus policing) and to understand the complexity and difficulty of dealing with Campus Safety for Black and Brown students or guests. We are committed to continuing this work. Bryn Mawr does not have any formal contracts with the Lower Merion Police and students do not generally call on them, but we cannot disband all relationships with them, as there are ways in which their services are critical to our safety: for example, in cases of identity theft, where a police report is needed, or to accompany an ambulance, where urgent care is needed. We also cannot categorically refuse to hire former officers, many of whom may be seeking and working toward change. We and Campus Safety are aware of the larger national issue of police violence and the prison system, and we cannot ignore that larger context as we continue to improve our practices to ensure that all community members – especially community members of color -- feel safe.

The Open Letter makes several requests for funding. We are aware of, and need to continue to learn about, the financial challenges students face and the ways in which financial barriers impede thriving. We are committed to increasing funds, like the Dean's Emergency Fund, that address individual students' needs. We have increased programmatic support, including an increase in funding to the ECC, and we look forward to identifying additional avenues for effective use of resources to support programming for student groups.

We also have heard the call to use College resources to support other non-profits and groups. We are eager to use our resources to impact racial justice beyond our campus and to do so in ways that are in keeping with our educational purpose. We recently announced the inauguration of a Racial Justice Fund. Its intent is to invest College resources, both money and time, to support faculty, students and staff in making meaningful impacts in our communities and in organizations of change. Community members will have the opportunity to help shape the use of this fund, which will be available starting in September. We look forward to better recognizing and supporting Bryn Mawr College work in local and national communities.

We welcome the opportunity to take a different approach to Black History Month. Beginning this upcoming academic year, we will initiate official College recognition of the month, provide administrative leadership to ensure full institutional support, and establish a clear, dedicated budget for celebrations and speakers. We would be remiss in not expressing gratitude for the ways that the Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research has been a leader in providing programming for Black History Month and for including the Undergraduate College in these opportunities. We are also grateful to the undergraduate student groups that have partnered in bringing many excellent speakers and programs to campus. We look forward to continuing these partnerships and infusing these efforts with added resources.

We acknowledge the cultural complications built into our African and Indigenous Collections in the College's Special Collections, and we will increase efforts to work with the African Art collections respectfully within our educational mission. Over the past five years, we have developed a Museum Studies Program whose core courses and exhibitions critically engage with issues of race and cultural property, under the direction of Monique Scott, an anthropologist widely respected for her work on the collection histories, treatment, and presentation of African objects in museums. We have also benefited from the expertise of our colleagues in Africana Studies and other scholars in African and African Diaspora art in working with our African Art Collection. Moving forward, we will continue our current practice of seeking information from donors about the source(s) of African art and artifacts, as well as other cultural objects to be added to our collections, and expand our knowledge of previously-acquired collections. We look forward to collaborating with our colleagues in Africana Studies in further integrating research on African and African Diaspora art in our teaching.

Bryn Mawr continues to engage in the ongoing work of addressing our institutional history of racism. We know that these efforts are critical to understanding the legacy of racism and discrimination on our campus today and to creating a sense of belonging for all community members. Several working groups involving students, faculty, alumnae/i, and staff have

undertaken substantial, thoughtful, difficult, and painful work to call the community to reflect on the racist history of the College, including the legacy of M. Carey Thomas. The College is committed to continuing to follow through on the recommendations of these groups with guidance from the History Advisory Committee, a group of faculty, students, and staff charged with stewarding community recommendations and prioritizing these efforts.

In short, there is much to do, and we are determined to do it. All priorities for the coming year will be included in Bryn Mawr College's 2020-21 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Framework for Action, our annual accountability to the intergenerational mission of addressing racism and equity, which will be published in the fall (after robust consultation and input from the community) with details of institutional accountability and relevant timelines. Reports on the outcomes of these efforts will be shared with the full community no later than July 1, 2021.

We end where we began: by emphasizing the common aspirations we have for Bryn Mawr and a shared commitment to action. We want our collective work to make a meaningful difference in the lives of our Black students and alumnae/i. We know that many members of the community share this vision, and we look forward to the community planning and action that is to come.

Sincerely,

Kim Cassidy, President, Bryn Mawr College, in consultation with the Diversity Leadership Group:

Darlyne Bailey, Professor and Dean Emeritus, Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research

Vanessa Christman, Assistant Dean for Access and Community Development

Timothy Harte, Chair and Professor of Russian on the Myra T. Cooley Lectureship in Russian

Cheryl Horsey, Chief Enrollment Officer

Ruth Lindeborg, Chief of Staff and Secretary of the College

Rodney Matthews, Multimedia Coordinator

Mary Osirim, Provost and Professor of Sociology

Ann-Therese Ortíz, Associate Dean for Equity, Inclusion, & Community Life

Gina Siesing, Chief Information Officer and Constance A. Jones Director of Libraries

Janet Shapiro, Dean and Professor, Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research

Kathy Tierney, Director of Athletics, Physical Education, and Recreation

Jennifer Walters, Dean of the Undergraduate College

Correction: July 3, 2020. Edited to change the term "fields" to "areas," to delete one instance of the term "Africana," and to move a comma on page 3.