



June 19, 2020

To Chancellor Block and EVC and Provost Carter,

We write as the directors of the ethnic studies centers and chairs of ethnic studies departments at UCLA. Thank you for your letter outlining your intention to pursue actions that represent, as you state, “the beginning of our commitments to ensuring lasting change” for UCLA. While we acknowledge your gesture of support on some of the issues that have been raised, such as an expanded Black Student Resource Center and increased Black faculty recruitment, as well as additional ideas such as dedicated staff in development and communications, we are concerned that your letter misses the core precepts at the heart of the proposals that have been brought to your attention.

The movement that has unfolded around the country and around the world is crying for structural change. The demands presented to you by various constituencies at UCLA are no different. Structural change is needed at UCLA to achieve a more just and representative university that supports the flourishing of Black life and an end to inequality and injustice. This vision of change goes far beyond dedicated staff in existing units in the Office of the Chancellor, a sprinkling of additional faculty across the campus, and limited funding opportunities or expanded roles of existing bodies, including the Public Safety Advisory Council. The demands center on a vision of a university where Black faculty, scholars, students, staff and alumni have a meaningful voice in the shared governance of the university and that administrative structures are strengthened or created to ensure a more central role for Black voices accountable to their Black constituencies in decision-making at our public university.

The letter you released conveys no commitment to ensuring greater empowerment of Black faculty, staff, students and alumni in university affairs, divesting from UCPD and reinvesting those funds into appropriate methods to ensure community safety, or any major investments in existing entities that have led major advancements in Black scholarship and teaching, as well as diversity initiatives, over the last 50 years of UCLA’s history, including specifically the Ralph Bunche Center for African American Studies and the African American Studies Department. For over 50 years, these entities have been responsible for making UCLA one of the premier institutions in the world for the advancement of Black life through research, teaching, and public engagement and continue to pioneer that work. To sideline these institutions and what they represent in terms of their affiliated faculty, global network of scholars and alumni, impact on public policy and community development, mountains of scholarly contributions, mentoring of students, and collective expertise in the bodies of knowledge about the Black experience in the US is insulting and reflects a sore lack of understanding of the vital role that our legacy institutions play as part of the existing infrastructure of UCLA.

The problem with your statement of intentions is that, rather than advancing the goals put forth by many of those you have heard from, the potential offerings instead undermine the larger demands for more structural change that lie at the heart of the movement for Black lives and they also shift focus away from the existing networks and structures that we already have at UCLA.

They are a misplaced band aid on a gaping wound. We do not understand how a set of proposed solutions could be issued without open and true dialogue and collaboration with Black constituent groups on campus and their allies. We also note that in past experience, such minimal concessions have not worked. Based on these concerns, we must publicly oppose the set of intentions for actions you have released and hope that you will retract them in favor of more thoughtful, thorough, and substantive deliberation.

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