

Dear Community of the College of Humanities & Fine Arts (HFA),

I write to you today as I reckon with the sorrow and outrage brought on by recent unconscionable acts of racial violence and institutional racism. The deep anxiety already experienced by Black communities during the ongoing pandemic has been compounded by the killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor—only the latest in a centuries-long line of brutal acts of racial violence. As Chancellor Subbaswamy issued a statement to the larger campus community, I wanted our HFA community to know that we hear you and support you during this troubling time. Silence is not the answer.

Many of us are still processing the Covid-19 pandemic, the transition to remote learning and work, and the effect on us individually and collectively. This pandemic had already exposed our nation's entrenched and systemic inequities. The disproportionate blow of Covid-19 to Black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities, the rise in xenophobia, and anti-Asian harassment and violence have underscored the fact that institutional racism is a scourge on our society. Our own alumna, [Rana Zoe Mungin '15MFA](#), lost her life to Covid-19—and we learned through gut-wrenching reports that she was turned away twice for coronavirus testing and did not receive ambulance service to the hospital after being assessed as suffering from only a panic attack. The dismissal of her symptoms reflects the long history of economic and racial barriers to healthcare faced by Black women in this country.

Cities are erupting. Our nation is divided. We are living through a chapter in a history book. As writers and artists, as scholars of history, literature, culture, philosophy, gender, race, and identity, as students of revolutionary art movements, of banned books, and of the voices of the oppressed—it is our responsibility to ensure that what will be written is resonant, clear, and just.

Self-reflection and education can activate positive change. I encourage you to consider these questions: How you can leverage your connections, skills, experience, and knowledge to contribute to a better society? How might unconscious bias affect your judgments?

Hate, bigotry, prejudice, and racism have no home in HFA or at UMass Amherst. We speak of diversity and inclusion in our mission and our vision, but that is not enough. We must embrace the values of justice, hope, equality, and critique espoused by the authors, scholars, thinkers, artists, and activists whose work we teach and study. We must bring these values to life in our work, our academic and curricular activities, and our everyday interactions. As humanists, artists, and scholars, we are dedicated to advancing equity and justice for all; our work should serve as an example and a sign of hope for the campus and our communities.

In peace, compassion, and solidarity,

Julie Candler Hayes

Dean, College of Humanities & Fine Arts  
UMass Amherst