

November 25, 2020

Dear UMass Community,

Over the past five weeks, the horrific structural racism that has existed in the SGA for decades has once again been brought to the forefront due to a series of racist statements and actions taken by leadership, as well as the lack of, 1, the following: an adequate response to the harm that was caused; 2, transparency; and 3, commitment to racial justice. These actions are completely unacceptable and we apologize for the continuous harm that has been caused by the SGA to BIPOC students and students granted DACA. We deeply apologize that so much weight and emotional labor is forced onto BIPOC students time and time again to have to take extra steps to be represented and respected by the SGA, by people that were elected and chosen to represent you all. We are disturbed by what has happened. We have failed the students we were elected and chosen to serve and need to change that immediately.

We stand in solidarity with all DACA recipients and undocumented students at UMass. You have a place here and deserve to feel safe and succeed in your education without fear of being deported, harassed by others, or invalidated. The US immigration system is racist and xenophobic and we will never criticize anyone's journey to get to the US and to UMass. We will fight to ensure that UMass continues to "encourage the application and enrollment of undocumented students and students granted DACA" and do better in transforming the campus climate to better support these students.

The SGA has a deeply troubling history of upholding white supremacy and not representing BIPOC students at UMass. In 2004, for instance, SGA leadership was photographed drinking in a University office in front of a caricature of the then SGA Speaker as the Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. For years, SGA culture has resulted in critical issues concerning racism being put up for votes and treated as a debate—this "debate club culture" has minimized the experiences of BIPOC students and made the SGA an incredibly hostile environment for students of color. These are just two examples of the entrenched structural racism that has plagued the SGA for many decades.

We refuse to allow this to be the norm any longer and are committed to dismantling white supremacy within the SGA & UMass and working to create a truly anti-racist SGA that represents all students. President Epstein and Vice President Chang were elected on a platform of racial justice. Basic demands that would ensure that Black students, Indigenous students, and students of color are able to succeed at UMass have been ignored and pushed to the side for far too long. There have been racial justice demands in the 1970s, 2012, 2018, and 2020. They were not prioritized by administration, which

is unacceptable. UMass Amherst has a troubling history of upholding white supremacy but also a powerful past of student activism fighting for equity and justice. We support and are committed to achieving the Racial Justice Coalition's demands. These include: investing in supports for BIPOC students such as counselors of color, the cultural centers, and academic supports and opportunities; defunding and disarming UMPD; increasing funding for recruitment of BIPOC students; improving the University's response to acts of hate; and a new Social Justice gen-ed requirement. We are planning to go forward with these by taking the lead from Black student organizers and doing everything in our power to ensure that BIPOC students are centered throughout this.

Each applicant for the executive cabinet was asked how they saw racial justice being centered in their positions and "What are the challenges faced by members of historically underrepresented groups at UMass and in the SGA? What strategies do you hope to use to change this and ensure these groups are represented and served by the SGA?". Every hired member has been and will continue to be held accountable for carrying out these commitments and embedding racial justice into all of their work. Every cabinet member, committee chair, and leadership is in the process of developing racial justice plans around how all of our work will be done through a racial justice lens, how we can be consistently improving how reaching out to, showing up for, and serving BIPOC students, and how we can critically evaluate the SGA and find ways to start dismantling white supremacy with our organization.

We will not let this be pushed to the side and cannot let this ever be ignored again. We are ready to do this work and will not stop until BIPOC students feel fully supported and represented by the SGA. The SGA has failed BIPOC students for far too long and caused tremendous harm, and it is on us, especially white leaders to do much better and do anything we can to heal that harm and gain the trust of BIPOC students. As Mia Mingus writes, "Apologizing is a fundamental part of the rebuilding of trust... the only way to build trust is through vulnerability. Trust is key in our work to end cycles of violence because when violence or harm happens, trust is one of the first things that gets broken. Because of this, apologizing and repair are often interdependent on each other."

We would like to end with a quote by Assata Shakur, a powerful activist who has spent her life fighting for Black liberation and to dismantle white supremacy in America.

"It is our duty to fight for our freedom.
It is our duty to win.
We must love each other and support each other.
We have nothing to lose but our chains."
- Assata Shakur

In solidarity,

Sonya Epstein, President

Jennie Chang, Vice President

Hunter Cohen, Chief of Staff

Andrew Abramson, Secretary of the Registry

Carla Montilla, Secretary of Diversity Affairs

Adam Lechowicz, Secretary of Technology

Kristal Yee, Secretary of Public Relations and Marketing

Jenny Ngo, Secretary of Finance

Sara McKenna, Secretary of University Policy

Hayden Latimer-Ireland, Attorney General

Solomon Bennett, Secretary of External Affairs

Sean Duddy, Secretary of Veterans Affairs

Anna Morel-Paletta, Secretary of Sustainability

Sean Vo, Advisor to the President on Mental Health

Timothy Scalona, Student Trustee

Audrey Gabriel, Chair of Social Justice and Empowerment Committee (Class of 2023)

Jessika Antinori, Chair of the Undergraduate Services Committee

Michael Suchecki, Senator (Class of 2021)

Hewan Weldai, Senator (Class of 2023)

Madeleine Wilson, Undergraduate Services Committee (USC) Special Assistant

Jack Murray, Senator (Class of 2024)

Zachary Bhattacharjee, Senator (Class of 2024)

Afra Rindani, Senator (Class of 2024)

Patrick Collins, Senator (Class of 2023)

Caroline Tran, Senator (Class of 2024)

Shayan Raza, Senator (Class of 2023)

Isabella Hann, Senator (Class of 2022)

Ivory Moulton, Senator (Class of 2021)

Shelly Singhal, Undersecretary of Sustainability & ODC Special Assistant

Jayda Coren, Senator (Class of 2024)

Ananya Talwar, Senator (Class of 2024)

Chris Brady, Senator (Class of 2024)

Shreya Khettry, Undersecretary of Technology & UROC Special Assistant

Joshua Levine, Senator (Class of 2023)

John “Ian” Harvey, Senator (Class of 2024)