

UCLA Department of European Languages and Transcultural Studies

June 9, 2020

Statement in support of Black Lives Matter, Black students, scholars, and instructors at UCLA, and other Black members of the UCLA community

We, the Faculty in the Department of European Languages and Transcultural Studies, are writing to demand from UCLA that it divest from any association with LAPD and/or UCPD in light of the disturbing news that UCLA partnered with the LAPD to use the Jackie Robinson Stadium as a field prison and a processing center for protestors against police brutality. We also commit ourselves to create more space and new opportunities for members of marginalized or underrepresented groups. We stand in solidarity with Black scholars and scholars of color and in support of Black Lives Matter, Black students, and other Black members of the UCLA community.

We have already started our work towards these goals. Our initial response included advocating for *no-harm, shortened exams, and extended deadlines* for Spring quarter 2020 courses, in recognition of how institutional racism and the latest murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and others have deeply affected our community and have disproportionately impacted Black students. Several faculty members have also spoken up individually and through signed letters in opposition to racism and white supremacy.

Together, we have also been working towards improving undergraduate and graduate education while devoting considerable resources for quite some time to hiring new and diverse faculty and committing to innovative new areas in the Experimental Humanities that include the Digital, Environmental, Medical, and Urban. All of them foreground humanities leadership in addressing systemic and recalcitrant problems on a global scale. This is important, and it is a step forward, but it is not enough. *Together*, and in solidarity with the students in our department, we believe that the establishment of the new Department of European Languages and Transcultural Studies (ELTS) demands more, and presents us with an extraordinary opportunity to do things right, to be proactive and not reactive, and to make sure that our curriculum openly and vigorously fights racism and fosters critical thinking around racial and gender discrimination and exclusion.

Our new department will focus on Europe but also transcend it as a geographic space and entity, and critically reflect upon its history as exploiter and colonizer. We are deeply engaged with combatting the racist histories of Europe that are marked by the global impact of slavery, colonialism, white supremacy, totalitarianism, postcolonialism, immigration, extractive capitalism, and globalization. One cannot work on “European” cultural traditions without considering a longer history and the multiple ways in which the cultural production and history of Europe have been *redefined* by Africa, the Middle East, and so on. As such, the emphasis on our shared European roots allows us to complicate the very idea of “Europe” by underscoring the “transcultural” and “transnational” qualities of this geopolitical space and how it has emerged as a center of gravity for thinking about human rights, diversity, religious tolerance, and reparative justice.

Along with many departments and institutions worldwide, we have been actively engaged in the process of “decolonizing the curriculum.” In fact, many of our students joined our department because of our reputation for the inclusive study of the globe from late antiquity to today and for promoting new methodologies in areas that have been underrepresented, and because of our focus on the history of racism, white supremacy, and the racial state. We will continue the process of revising course requirements and existing offerings, while also encouraging faculty to reimagine their courses in order to include or expand primary and/or secondary sources from Black thinkers as well as other thinkers of color. Our syllabi at the undergraduate and graduate level will continue to aim to be inclusive, and to incorporate a social justice framework. Recognizing the irreducible diversity of our world through a linguistic lens, we commit ourselves to transforming undergraduate and graduate courses on the basis of the latest compelling scholarship on community engagement, and will also continue to encourage our students to diversify the bibliographies in their own research papers and doctoral dissertations. Similarly, our incredibly dynamic and pioneering team of faculty will continue to revisit language acquisition pedagogy and endeavor to find new ways of reworking the curriculum.

We look forward to continuing to work with our students and the UCLA community and to the chance of developing more opportunities for concrete action, change, and education, including new curricula, new syllabi, and new spaces for supporting Black scholars and scholars of color. We all want to work together to create an anti-racist future for ELTS and UCLA; we have made important steps towards achieving greater diversity and inclusion, and towards exploring how economic, environmental, and health inequalities are profoundly intertwined with racial inequalities, but we will be doing even more. We will be scheduling a Town Hall meeting in our department so that we can hear from everyone, and plan on launching a lecture series (initially via Zoom and later in-person) in 2020-2021 that will engage with questions of racial justice, gender equality, and social inclusion in the classroom and beyond.

We look forward to hearing from you about how we can continue to support collective efforts.

In solidarity,

The Faculty of ELTS