

Friday, June 12, 2020

RE: Message of solidarity in light of concerns raised by the UCR Black Student Union

Dear BSU Students and Allies,

The faculty and staff of the Chemical and Environmental Engineering Department acknowledge the gravity of the national uprising against racism and anti-Black policies and cultures that are pervasive in the United States. The untimely and unjust murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd are despicable, and we firmly denounce the perpetration and complicity of criminal acts such as these. We also recognize the trauma and disruption brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, and we especially take notice of the impacts on your Winter/Spring 2020 academic experience, health, safety, and security. Your continued resilience to date is remarkable, and we understand that the news of protests, police brutality, and community responses compound the existing challenges of online learning.

In response to these events and the BSU Call to Action, the CEE Department commits to implementing immediate actions to support student academic success this quarter and long-term actions to provide an enriching and safe learning environment for our Black students and other marginalized student groups. Our responses to the BSU requests are as follows:

1. ***The immediate implementation of a modified grade change policy for the Spring Quarter 2020.***

In alignment with BCOE recommendations, the CEE Department will allow all students to drop or change the grading basis for Spring 2020 classes until this Friday, June 12, 2020. Students will be given until the beginning of the Fall 2020 quarter to complete all necessary coursework including the final exam, if receiving a grade of Incomplete for Spring 2020 courses. At this time, we will not implement a no fail policy, as we should support our students while also ensuring that students master the knowledge required for successful careers in chemical and environmental engineering.

2. ***The campus-wide support for the Black student community regarding accountability, educational equity, and increased support services.***

The CEE Department will invite a representative of the UCR chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers to speak to the CEE faculty at one or two Undergraduate Committee meetings per year, as needed, to discuss concerns regarding educational equity. This invitation is intended to provide space for Black students to raise concerns specifically pertaining to CEE instruction and the continued improvement of the student learning experience.

Long-term actions to support our Black students and other marginalized student groups include the following:

1. ***End-of-year student assessments of the CEE Department climate and inclusivity.***

At the end of each academic year, the CEE Communications Committee will administer an anonymous survey to CEE undergraduate and graduate students to engage with students and hear any concerns regarding classroom, office hour, and study group climate, specifically pertaining to their CEE experience. The survey outcomes will be presented at a Spring faculty meeting, and actions will be taken to address the concerns brought forth. We encourage students to earnestly point out hostile, passive-aggressive, or counter-productive faculty, student, and staff conduct. We cannot change what we do not directly acknowledge and confront.

2. ***Monthly CEE Happy Hour.***

The CEE Department is committed to fostering a friendly, welcoming, and collegial environment for all students, faculty, and staff. Department resources will be allocated for monthly happy hours which will be open to all CEE affiliates. This type of fellowship has great potential to reduce student-faculty communication barriers by providing an informal space to engage.

3. ***Bi-Annual CEE Town Hall Meetings.***

Twice per academic year, the CEE Department will host Town Hall meeting, where students will be allowed to submit concerns ahead of time to be addressed during the live meeting. Concerns may include but are not limited to classroom instruction, supplies, laboratories, facilities, or undergraduate research. The Town Hall meetings are meant to provide a more personal dialogue for expressing student concerns outside of the more rigid and formal quarterly iEval surveys.

In summary, we commend BSU leadership for advocating for student support, and the CEE faculty and staff are committed to initiating and carrying out the proposed plans to improve the student academic experience. We sign this letter in solidarity with our Black students and other marginalized student groups, and we welcome feedback on the proposed plans to promote inclusivity and further foster a culture of respect and reverence for all.

Respectfully,

Prof. David Cocker, Department Chair  
Prof. Cesunica E. Ivey, Communications Chair  
Prof. Don Collins, Undergraduate Chair  
Prof. Ian Wheeldon, Graduate Chair

On behalf of the CEE faculty