

University of Windsor, 4 November 2020

<https://www.uwindsor.ca/president/sites/uwindsor.ca.president/files/responsetouseofanti-blacklanguage.pdf>

The University's Response to Recent Use of Anti-Black Language

Last week, two instructors used anti-Black language (the n-word) as part of their class. We want to thank the students, staff, faculty and community members for speaking out and bringing this to our attention. We understand and acknowledge that this difficult and draining work should not be required in order for anyone to work, learn, and live in an equitable, safe, and respectful community.

The University recognizes the pain, trauma, and violence associated with this word, and the extent to which it is rooted in enslavement, oppression, and colonialism. The University is committed to working with the entire campus community to listen and learn; to develop clear understandings of the history, impact, and implications of using this word. The President has also reached out to the Windsor University Faculty Association to explore a plan to work on these challenges collectively. We need to work towards consensus about structures, procedures, and training that will enable us to develop the minds of students and meet our obligations as an academic institution without causing pain and trauma to members of our community. This process must respect the rights and freedoms that are integral to scholarly practice: it must also uphold our responsibilities as teachers and scholarly colleagues to create safe and respectful spaces for students, learning, and knowledge creation.

Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity, and to feel that they belong. These experiences clearly did not meet that standard. We are sorry for these incidents and for the harm they have caused and continue to cause. However, we are aware that an apology – by an individual professor or by the institution -- is insufficient. An apology does not redress the impact on Black members of this community, or the erosion of confidence and faith that result from multiple incidents of this nature. These incidents are one of many ways that we, as members of this community, have perpetuated systemic anti-Black racism and its impact on our students and colleagues, and we must work together to change these patterns.

We are working to address these incidents and the patterns of oppression that produce them. Both of the instructors involved have apologized and are working with their department head to establish plans for moving forward. They are cognizant of the harm that they have caused and know that they, like the institution, must take steps to try to repair that harm and to make sure that this type of incident does not happen in the future. Students in the courses should also be aware that they always have recourse to a number of institutional processes to support them at this time: if accommodations are not already in place, students are always entitled to seek academic accommodation. Please contact the University Secretariat for more information about these options.

The department has committed to greater engagement with the work of challenging anti-Black racism and the aspects of the institution that allow it to thrive, in order to create more equitable spaces, and of engaging with that work collectively in terms of shared expectations for their own programs and teaching practice. The Faculty will facilitate formal dialogue and learning opportunities to ensure that the implications of these issues and others are well understood, emphasizing the voices of Black students, staff, and faculty in that work. As an institution, we have committed to a series of initiatives

aimed at establishing community-driven priorities for change; collecting data that enables accountability metrics; improving our broader equity, diversity, and inclusion practice; and enriching campus learning about anti-Black racism and the Black experience. Incidents like these demonstrate that we must also continue to develop better and more effective lines of communication both to learn from and respond to those who are experiencing racism. It is essential that all members of our community are more fully aware of the impact of their words, actions, and practices.

The Student Counselling Centre is available to any students who are in need of additional support and need to speak to someone. Please reach out to them at scc@uwindsor.ca for an appointment. Students can also access confidential counselling by licensed counsellors through MySSP 24/7 via phone or text. Students can request a Black counsellor from either service. Faculty and staff can access confidential support through the Employee and Family Assistance Program, which offers professional and confidential counselling and information services. Again, we are very sorry for the pain this incident has caused and we are working, on many fronts and in a consultative manner, to address anti-Black racism on this campus. In these changing and challenging times, expectations for safer learning environments are evolving rapidly. We must therefore create environments where everyone has equal rights to be respected, to disagree and debate, and to learn and create knowledge, based on the fundamental principles of intellectual inquiry. We are committed to finding this common ground. We strongly urge everyone concerned with this issue to engage with the anti-Black Racism Task Force: the issue of anti-Black language in academic settings will be a focus of specific listening sessions leading to concrete Calls to Action, and we hope you will join us in articulating common goals for action.