

Dear UMaine Community,

The staff of the Counseling Center acknowledges that individual, systemic, and structural racism exists in the United States and, yes, even on this campus. Systemic racism has existed in this country for over 400 years and has manifested in dramatic and increasing disparities in health, education, economic condition; incarceration; and the denial of basic rights of safety and even the ability to breathe. The recent murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, Riah Milton, Dominique Rem'mie-Fells are all examples of inhumane brutality. The list of names affected by violence could go on for pages and would also have to include millions of deaths due to racism and violence toward indigenous persons, non binary, queer and trans persons of color, and other humans who do not hold white privilege.

While this short list is dominated primarily by the names of men and male youth, we must acknowledge how black cis gender and black trans women have the highest rates of homicide in this country and often go unnoticed. We must acknowledge the life-threatening cumulative stress and distress to the many black women and youth who have worked diligently for justice while grieving with rage and hurt that has been dismissed, minimized and silenced.

We want the University Community to know that the entire staff at the Counseling Center are experiencing deep sadness and grief. We are listening, learning and we stand firmly with all you who suffer in the system that led to such egregious behavior. Our long standing commitment to social justice is reinvigorated.

We are mental health providers whose mission is to ease pain, promote the health, engagement, and success of all members of our UMaine community and empower our students in their struggles. We believe mental health problems and mental illness are exacerbated and even created by contextual issues that suppress human beings. We affirm that our work includes locating the source of the injustice in the socio-political context rather than focusing simply on the individual or group.

Consequently, we will work to dismantle racism and inequity individually, collectively and systemically within our community and beyond. We are energized and committed to engaging in the sometimes messy work of anti-racism, no matter how difficult it feels. This includes challenging oppression, speaking up against complicity, and breaking the silence when it comes to the wellbeing of our students and more specifically our students who do not hold the advantages of cis gender, or white privilege. It is our aim to contribute to creating lasting changes at the individual and systemic level.

We also acknowledge that there is a more sustained and additional need for facilitating the difficult (and often painful) honest examination of our own individual biases in thoughts and actions, and how they impact our work with students, counseling center staff and other colleagues, our campuses, communities, friends and family. This includes recognizing how relationships have the potential to either recapitulate oppressive dynamics or provide opportunities for healing and liberation.

In our role as therapists, we talk with our students about healing, growth and change. Transformation is non-linear and often happens when we are engaged, present and open; particularly when we are not comfortable. The type of change we need right now calls for us to tolerate the turbulence and move onward in order to individually and collectively emerge from both past and present societal upheaval. Right now we choose to pay attention. We choose to listen more closely to one another. We choose to

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empathize and connect. We can use this momentum to align our behavior with our visions of humility, justice and equity and nurture our present state-of-the-world into a kinder and more equitable and socially-just world. We can do this together.

We want to acknowledge that we were inspired by three documents that we reviewed and from which we used concepts and words.

1. The Association of University and College Counseling Center Directors (AUCCCD) statement [AUCCCD Statement Against Racism and Racial Violence](#) | June 2020.
2. Blackwell, D. (2007) Oppression and freedom in therapeutic space, *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling*, 9:3, 255-265, DOI: [10.1080/13642530701496856](https://doi.org/10.1080/13642530701496856)
3. Karcher, O. (2017) Sociopolitical Oppression, Trauma, and Healing: Moving Toward a Social Justice Art Therapy Framework, *Art Therapy*, 34:3, 123-128, DOI: [10.1080/07421656.2017.1358024](https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2017.1358024).

In Solidarity and Love,

UMaine Counseling Center Staff