

Social Sciences v COVID-19

Dispatch #6 | 29 June 2020

MSO's: please share this with your faculty, staff & graduate students.

The introductory reflections for our first Dispatch, around the beginning of April, focused on the “underlying conditions” of pervasive structural inequities, which the pandemic had already begun to deepen. We argued that it would be unconscionable for our society, and for our own university, to aspire to rebuild by harking back to that pre-COVID “normal.” Instead, we set our sights on the goal of “rebuilding better”—framing COVID’s effects as an urgent wake-up call. Then came the brutal murder of George Floyd, following on the brutal murder of Breonna Taylor and so many others, and the growing wave of protests against police violence, anti-Black racism, and white supremacy, throughout the nation, with echoes across the globe. This led us to put plans for a final “commencement issue” of the Dispatch on hold, in order to redirect energies to this crisis of racial injustice—both acute, and numbingly chronic.

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Areas for focused action:

- **Administration:** Our priority is the widely endorsed call for swift action in the successful recruitment of the Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. At this critical moment, our campus urgently needs well-resourced, high-level leadership in this office.
- **Recruitment:** Black faculty currently constitute roughly 3% of UC Santa Barbara permanent faculty, which is one-half the percentage of Black Californians. We must do better. We are committed to work with our sister Divisions to revitalize the North Hall Chairs recruitment program, making it part of a larger campus-wide plan not to enhance “diversity,” but rather, to forge and enhance Black-centered educational and research spaces across the campus, showing how R1 Universities can take proactive leadership in institutional change informed by principles of intersectional justice.
- **Curriculum:** We strongly support efforts underway to address the embarrassing sore thumb of a “European Cultures” GE requirement, which sidesteps completely or seriously downplays the critical study of whiteness, the history and present of white supremacy, etc.
- **Student experience:** We are very proud that Associate Dean Victor Rios teamed up with CBSR Director Sharon Tettegah to organize a student-centered Black town hall, held on Friday June 12. Follow up actions are outlined in Section IV below.

- **Department-based actions:** see Section V below.

II. A Shout-Out to our Staff

Content provided by:

Tilly Govender
Assistant Dean, Division of Social Sciences

May is the month when we celebrate staff, but this year we must go without our usual week of events where outstanding staff are recognized. One important employee in our Global Studies Department deserves the spotlight in our final dispatch for the 19-20 academic year. **Meghan Zero** is our newest staff member in Global Studies, filling the position of Undergraduate Advisor since July 2019. In this short space of time she has excelled in serving the almost 800 undergraduate student population in the department, was nominated and received the Staff Citation of Excellence Award this year. Congratulations, Meghan!

2020 has been a fast-evolving year so far and our staff have worked creatively and efficiently to adapt to each department’s needs. Much effort was put into organizing virtual commencement ceremonies in each department in the last two weeks. Students, their families, guests, faculty and staff had a chance to celebrate our graduates from various remote locations and your hard work in orchestrating these events is appreciated.

Our Division’s wheels keep turning as a direct result of your dedication to your work and engagement with the Social Sciences. Thanks for everything you do, and have a happy summer.

III. SOSC versus COVID

As part of our effort to highlight and support Social Science research that engages various dimensions of the COVID crisis, we have:

- Compiled a “living” [list](#) of research initiatives in our Division with this focus;
- Contributed funds for Social Science Graduate student proposals selected by the Graduate Division;
- Conceived, together with our Development team, a “virtual salon” [program](#), which opens space for small group discussions between friends of the Division and faculty researchers. Professors Robin Nabi (COMM) and Peter Rupert (ECON) already have presented, and there are many more to come.

IV. Report Back on the Black Students Town Hall

Content provided by:

Victor Rios
Associate Dean, Division of Social Sciences
Professor, Sociology

The items below were developed from listening sessions with Black students at UCSB. These sessions took place in June 2020 and included a Town Hall attended by over 600 participants, a facilitated extended discussion with a group of fifteen Black students, and dozens of one-on-one conversations with Black undergraduate and graduate students. Letters written by the Black Student Union and Black graduate students from departments across the University were also taken into account. Dr. Sharon Tettegah, Director of the Center for Black Studies Research, and Dr. Victor Rios, Associate Dean of Social Sciences, gathered the major themes that emerged from these conversations and created an action item list for Departments and faculty to use as a guide for improving the Black student experience at UCSB. This list is a short summation of what emerged and by no means encompasses all student input; we hope these ideas can be applied in academic departments across the Division and beyond.

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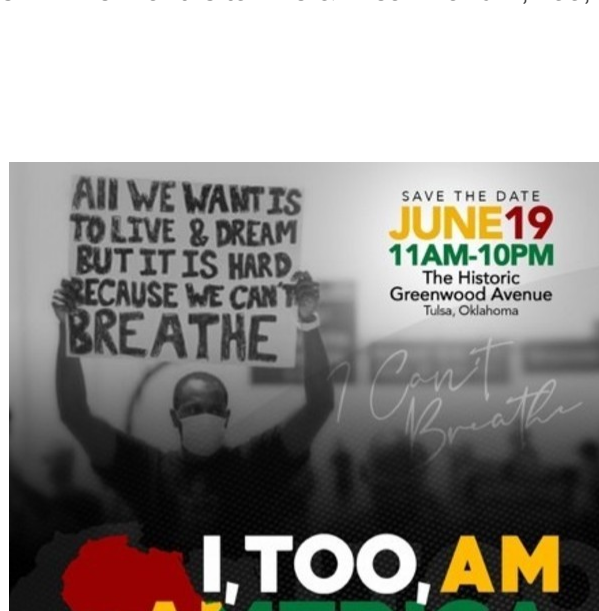
V. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Content provided by:

Aida Hurtado
Associate Dean and Faculty Equity Advisor, Division of Social Sciences
Professor, Chicana/o Studies

Luis Leal
Endowed Chair

The poster below captures the spirit of the ongoing demonstrations fueled by the killing of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police. As the Juneteenth poster announcing the rally for justice states “All We Want Is to Live & Dream” and “I, Too, Am America.”



Now that the country has become woke to the fact that not everybody has been given the same opportunities to belong to this country, all institutions everywhere have to respond with actions beyond the moving statements of solidarity and support for the BLM movement. The Division of Social Science is providing an opportunity for Social Science departments to use their creativity in imagining a multiplicity of actions to address disparities that always have been apparent, and that the BLM movement has brought to the fore. To that end, the Office of the Dean has distributed to faculty and departments a [call](#) to submit “Racial Justice Action Plans for building more equitable and inclusive climate, curriculum, and training programs.”

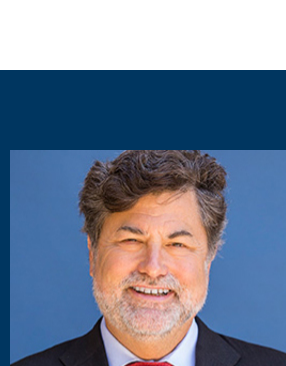
Some departments have already begun the arduous process of delineating action items including: proposing a series of colloquia to address anti-blackness and white supremacy, new courses on race, dialogue groups to discuss readings on race, revise curricula, work with community organizations on racial justice issues, among many other actions. For example, the Departments of Communication and Political Science have conducted climate studies to assess the perceptions of diversity and inclusion among faculty, graduate students, and staff. The Division plans to use these endeavors as pilot studies to inform our development, in the coming academic year, of a full-fledged program to carry out periodic division-wide climate assessments. We encourage others to submit to the Division their own ideas of potential actions that may be taken in collaboration with others to go beyond the statements of solidarity and calls for justice.

As Associate Dean and Faculty Equity Advisor, I will be reviewing the Racial Justice Action Plans to provide feedback that departments can choose to use at their discretion. In addition, I will be available for consultation and department visits to discuss the Plans as they develop. We have faith and hope that faculty and departments will use their commitment as expressed in their statements of solidarity to propose innovative initiatives and actions. Our purpose is to have Racial Justice Action Plans that will embody the spirit expressed in the BLM movement wanting to “live and dream” without fear of violence.

VI. Resources for Hope and Resilience

[Celebrating graduation](#) despite everything...

A dramatic [public opinion shift](#) in support for BLM...



Charles R. Hale

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