

We read the statement from our Faculty Senate and we are appreciative. We also appreciate all UMBC's accomplishments in STEM and we are proud to be its faculty. But, as token Black physicists among you, we would also be woefully remiss if we remain silent in the face of what is ailing our nation today. It is no secret – it starts with “silence” in the face of inept and corrupt leadership. One of us has emigrated from a country where silence and tolerance has enabled injustice and dictatorship to take hold. We have been silent and “invisible” in the face of racism, police trauma, and aggression with the belief that good will prevail eventually. Silence in the name of tolerance and “invisibility” may have even allowed some of us to survive and thrive personally. But watching the faces of our children and the young in our society today disturbs us. The atrocities and discriminatory acts should not be a rite of passage for them, the Black and Brown America. As two Black physics professors amongst you, we break our silence on this topic today in hopes we make UMBC a better place after we are gone. We have chosen to speak because our silence makes us feel complicit. Complicity with the very atrocities we abhor.

At present, a perfect storm of COVID-19 health disparities, racist and cruel law enforcement, and inept leadership have compounded the injustices we see assaulting the Black and Brown community. Just the fact that we have to say “Black and Brown Community” and not “our” community makes us hesitant and wonder if we are together. We hate the feeling. We urge you, our non-Black colleagues, not to remain silent. This is the time to speak against injustice. Silence is complicit. Silence in the face of racism will destroy us all. So, act. Act individually and in your unit – whatever that is. We offer below quick and doable actions for our departments.

It is a time for introspection: we must start and clean our own house first. Look at our department, the graduate student and faculty composition. We see a problem. We are not diverse, not enough for UMBC's reputation. We have heard the reasons, nay “excuses” of “can't find any”, “not a good fit”, “not as qualified” etc – for more years than it takes to train a graduate student, postdoc, and get them tenured. In all these years we gave that excuse, we could have graduated our own faculty! So, the expiration date of those terms we give to explain why we are not diverse has long passed. We are here, token Black faculty members, because someone decided to take a chance, to mentor, to break a cycle. We want our faculty to take a chance and lead on this. Even a single member can make a difference – there are plenty of examples in our department, just not enough! Ask yourself what you can do, and you will find a way.

It is a time to learn from our failings: Because of COVID-19 we may not have any international students coming next fall and may not have students in class. A case of putting our eggs in a single basket. What makes this disheartening is that there are many kids around us we have not reached and are deserving of such a graduate education. With foresight and a little more organized effort, we could extend a helping hand to many Black and Brown graduate students here in America. Oh yes, they are “not qualified” is what one would say and, in the same breath, we encourage our bright graduates to go to better places than UMBC. We hate to think what this implies of our

departments. This we believe is a dereliction of duty. We, the tenured faculty in particular, control the knowledge creation, the gates to enter, requirements to graduate, and modulation of the *culture* of the department. It is our job to ask why we have not attracted more domestic American kids, the majority in future America, and acted. If we don't our future is doomed. Below are a couple of modest suggestions that we can pursue to contribute to the solution. There are more.

Don't accept the "not qualified" excuse at face value: The American Physical Society (APS) has a program for enhancing minority physics graduate students. One of us knows that program well and was in its leadership since its early years. It is called the Bridge Program (<https://www.apsbridgeprogram.org>). He was also Chair of the APS Committee on Minorities in Physics (COM) in the early 90s and established a collaboration between COM and the Committee on the Status of Women in Physics (CSWP). We should seriously think and learn from it – use it wholly or adopt its best methods into our department's culture. There are more examples out there. Above all, we urge all of you none Black and Brown friends to try and ask what our role is individually in fixing this lack of Black and Brown domestic graduate students before retreating to use the tired, expired, and simplest "not qualified" response. We have several HBCUs within half an hour drive from UMBC that we can partner with. We could even learn a thing or two on UMBC and USM history in Maryland with respect to the treatment of HBCUs. This addresses one of the primary reasons for the dearth of minorities in our field: "disadvantages in background and opportunities".

Search for win-win solutions and not be seen as a bottleneck to growth: we have centers that are a magnet for attracting underrepresented students. If we cannot compete with the Ivory towers of the world with resources, we should use all the levers at our disposal to gain an advantage. Not doing so is a recipe for failure. We should not be afraid to broaden our discipline's reach. Let's not get hung up with "Ivory-tower thinking" that we will not be "pure enough" to the traditional "culture" of Physics, Math, Chemistry or whatever your discipline maybe. Let's define our mission and *culture* of *our* department. Find a way without compromising our value. We can create and invigorate the minors and our connection with engineering and information science without diluting our "pure-breed" subject culture. It would not hurt to be advocates and leaders in forming interdisciplinary programs. We need to avoid the banker mentality and ask if we are perpetuating a real or *apparent culture*. Above all, is this "culture" seen by others as a bottleneck. Let us grow as we let other programs grow and/or germinate. This may address a second reason for lack of minority participation: "biases in admission" in many of its forms.

These are but just a few things we can do to change the culture. We may not be able to change the larger issues our Black and Brown faculty face with agency funding discrimination, real or perceived biases in student evaluation, and overall societal culture that is choking them. But we certainly can look critically at ourselves and our department's culture and demand we play a part in being proactive. We have a healthy minority undergraduate population for our size. So, let's

develop a culture that recognizes, diagnoses, and openly discusses biases that exist and let us thrive to be the future department UMBC deserves. This is a good strategic action (mind you: action not plan) and is a win-win for us. In our department structures, we the faculty control the admissions, the training, the culture, the knowledge, and its ego. So, let's not remain silent or treat the lack of minority faculty as a problem for others to solve, a taboo subject to discuss. Let us change the *culture of our department*. Be proactive, it is our job to make them qualified because there are many more of them here in America, and that is the future. Let's do things that we will not be ashamed of when we look back at our actions from our comfy future retirement.

Finally, thank you, if you are still reading. We beg your forgiveness if we invaded your electronic space. But as two of the few fortunate Black Physicists among you, we feel we have an extra burden to speak. Above all, our silence has made us feel like a dead weight and traitors to our kids and the very community that sustains us. Given the lack of progress thus far, please realize that the Physics Department's "diversity box" will be unchecked in our retirement.

Belay B. Demoz

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