

Open letter from the CFA about the state of racial politics at SFSU

Dear President Mahoney, Provost Summit, and Interim Vice President Hellwig:

We, the members of the CFA-SFSU Executive Board, write to protest the harmful racial politics at our university. Even in this time of heightened awareness due to the George Floyd Uprising, we see that racial inequity is not improving on this campus but is becoming more entrenched.

As you know, we have long expressed our concern that white solidarity, cronyism, and fragility have a powerful grip on our campus. In particular, our campus is characterized by an organizational culture of over-policing, the perpetuation of white solidarity via administrative decisions, the neglect of the CSU in supporting AB1460 (which passed in spite of the Chancellor's Office), neglect of initiatives designed to acknowledge the service of Black, Indigenous, Latinx and Asian and Pacific Islander faculty, and a general climate of white supremacy that exacerbates diminished support for Black faculty. While we are going to give specific examples in what follows, we believe that these are not isolated incidents but exemplify the problematic organizational culture at SFSU.

The first incident involves a member of our CFA-Chapter Executive board, who was at home, in university housing, caring for their nieces (ages 8 & 9) and nephew (aged 4) just a week after the murder of George Floyd. Unbeknownst to them, a neighbor had called in a noise complaint to campus police. This was the fifth time this neighbor did so. As they were about to sit down to breakfast, there was a knock on the door. The four year-old opened it to see two fully armed officers with firearms, tasers, pepper spray, handcuffs, and nightsticks. This was traumatizing for these young children and for our colleague. Even while national and international eyes were focused on #BlackLivesMatters and police violence against Black people, the police came to their door, their home, and interjected themselves into a family gathering. To make matters worse, the officers were not wearing state, city, & University mandated PPE's, endangering the health of everyone in the home. The officers conceded there was no noise.

Our colleague is not the only non-white faculty member who lives and works in university housing to be policed and surveilled at the whim of an aggressive neighbor. A Black Muslim couple who live in University Housing reported that a neighbor called the University Police on them because their baby was crying. In another incident for this family, their father was pulled over by two Campus police cars (three officers) as they claimed he ran a stop sign.

We have seen many other incidents on this campus, including [white faculty calling the police on Black students](#) or police stops of Black faculty members. Tragically, in 2005, Dr. Antwi Akom was on campus at night to pick up items in his office while his young daughter waited for him in his car. White officers profiled him, questioned him, and arrested him.

Whenever non-Black people call the cops on Black people, they knowingly place that Black life in mortal jeopardy. Having armed police officers enter into people's homes has led to the murder of Breonna Taylor, Stephon Clark, and so many other Black people. As white

people with a great deal of agency over others, you should be highly attentive to the disproportionate risks faced by the many Black and Brown people under your purview. Your words may express sympathy, but your actions reveal disregard for the lives and wellbeing of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander members of our community. *Disrespect in an uneven power dynamic is bullying.* The time for talk is over; only bold action will do. It is time to eradicate racist campus policing from our community and create newer, transformational measures that protect and empower our faculty, staff, and, most importantly our students, to create the needed alternatives your office has failed to provide. We require the defunding of the university police department and resources to implement alternative community-based safety programs.

Another disturbing incident is the recent decision to hire Christina Sabee as a third (interim) Associate Dean of LCA replacing Troi Carleton. We have had a long history of problems with the overwhelmingly white LCA leadership prompting the recent hashtag #LCASoWhite.

Of the Associate Deans within that college's dean's office, Gail Dawson, who is still an associate dean, had a grievance filed against her for racial bias in her role as chair in her former department by four non-white faculty members. In that case the DHR and Title IX office refused to even conduct an investigation. Even when investigations are forthcoming, they are ineffective because the DHR and Title IX offices have been thoroughly politicized in recent years. White administrators tell each other that in every case the non-white faculty in question are angry or crazy—classic white solidarity tactics to discredit victims and misrepresent systemic discrimination as isolated incidents. This is how white solidarity (and hence, supremacy) works.

Furthermore, we implored you and Dean Harris to not replace the third associate dean's position. We argued that, as you slashed the incomes of so many lecturer faculty, it was wrong and unseemly to hire yet another high-priced administrator (especially when the number of administrators at SFSU exploded by 66% over the most recent audit period while the number of tenure track faculty declined by .4%!). We also said that if you were going to make the hire anyway, that you should give the job to a Black, Indigenous, Latinx or Asian and Pacific Islander faculty member and open up the search to ensure full transparency. As it stands, the entire leadership of LCA is white (and many have a track record of causing racial harm). And yet we were notified that the new hire is not only another white person, but also part of the DHR team that decided not to investigate the grievance by four non-white faculty members, suggesting once again a form of white solidarity and the dismissal of legitimate complaints by Black and Brown faculty.

In another case, the CBA mandates extraordinary assigned time (EAT) grants to Black, Indigenous, Latinx or Asian and Pacific Islander faculty in compensation for cultural taxation. The administration attempted to deny these grants entirely. After the CFA objected, they amended that policy to make half the awards this year and half the next, which still violates our CBA. This action demonstrates a profound indifference to the condition of Black, Indigenous, Latinx or Asian and Pacific Islander faculty when cultural taxation is an endemic burden on these faculty members at SFSU and at all CSU campuses, especially during these trying times.

Last year, we objected to the dismissal of Dr. Serie McDougal, who created and ran the Black Unity Center (a month after he received a commendation from the Academic Senate for how well he was running the program). Then, Vice President LuoLuo Hong and President Leslie Wong usurped control of the Black Unity Center and the other Student Centers based on ethnicity and religion, placing them under administration authority. To undo this harm and take a stand against white supremacy, you must return full governance of the BUC to the faculty and staff of the Africana Studies Department.

These are not isolated incidents. This is a pattern and that pattern is called white supremacy. In a world changed by the murder of George Floyd, white supremacy at the people's university must end. Our Indigenous, Latinx and Asian and Pacific Islander faculty and, in particular, our Black faculty are being surveilled and policed, as are many Black and Brown students. The campus increased its spending on police by 56% in the last few years, commensurate with an equivalent rise in administrators. We are not here to administer and police. We are here to teach and learn. These upside-down priorities wrongfully give increasingly military-style, lethal weapons to police a peaceful campus population; this implements a racist agenda. The gaslighting, shallow reformism, denial of resources, cherry-picking of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian and Pacific Islander faculty for committees with no accountability to campus organizations that come from these communities, and the refusal to acknowledge the real harm caused to non-white members of our community has got to end.

Accordingly:

- We demand a full, transparent investigation into the actions of former and current LCA associate deans by an independent body that is not subject to the systemic prejudices of our campus. We propose that one of the arbitrators used to settle grievances in the CSU system lead the investigation.
- We demand that the BUC be returned to the control and governance of Africana Studies.
- We demand that the campus police be defunded and prohibited from intervening in non-violent incidents in campus housing or classrooms. Non-violent incidents should be responded to by unarmed professionals trained in conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques.
- We demand a task force to dismantle white supremacy at SFSU under the leadership of Black campus organizations and given real institutional power.
- We demand that the College of Ethnic Studies receive full funding commensurate with other colleges.
- We demand that the administration and the CFA hold a joint open town hall forum this FALL (date TBA), where faculty, staff, & students can address every demand put forward in the CFA's ["CFA Statement Of Anti-Racism And Social Justice Demands In The Wake Of Anti-Black Racism, Violence, And Murder"](#)

These concrete steps will signal that the administration is finally ready to move from toothless, convenient, and well-meaning liberal talk (where everyone is well versed in how to sound like they are seriously addressing issues of racial inequity) to action, which is something entirely different. We don't think that SFSU is doomed to racial injustice in

perpetuity but as long as the all-talk (“Bold Then, Bold Now”) and no action tendency continues, as long as white senior administrators take the word of other white administrators about each and every incident (and about the problematical character of each and every Black faculty member) we will see nothing like racial justice in this university.

No to #LCASoWhite! No to #SFSUSoWhite!

Signed

The CFA-SFSU Executive Board