

UNM Staff:

Recently, I was asked to help address a question that arose from the “Combatting Anti-Blackness” town hall that was hosted by UNM’s Division of Equity and Inclusion:

***How can staff members support black faculty, staff and students and encourage respect in the workplace?***

I won’t claim to be an expert on race and social justice – and **we have those experts here on campus** – but each of us has a responsibility to do what we can within our capacity. As President of the Staff Council I take seriously the charge to represent the interests of all staff and to respond to questions asked in sincerity. Sometimes these questions are of such broad interest that I feel compelled to share them more widely. This is a topic about which I feel strongly – and I know many of you do, too.

To answer this question appropriately we must first acknowledge where we are in history. Racism is alive and pervasive. On our own campus, racial threats have been made against one of our own – Dr. Charles Becknell – and have affected many of our colleagues and students. Several **statements of support** have been circulated rejecting that nastiness – including **a letter** organized by the Staff Council Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee which has been signed by more than 430 people. It is against this backdrop that UNM’s Division of Equity and Inclusion held the town hall focusing on combatting anti-blackness at UNM.

We also have to acknowledge that what we’re seeing is not new. We are seeing – through the greater access provided by social media – exactly how black lives are being disregarded and taken, often at the hands of those who are tasked with protecting our communities. Recently we learned about the senseless killing of Ahmaud Arbery who was jogging along the side of the road when his life was taken. Breonna Taylor was killed while asleep in her home. Tony McDade was also killed, unarmed. Just days ago, we all watched in horror as George Floyd was murdered before our very eyes. These names are added to a long list of unarmed black people who have been killed. Unfortunately, I could dedicate pages and pages to the names and summaries of killings of unarmed black people. These names, and their lives, matter. I mention this background information because none of us lives or works in a vacuum. We aren’t separate from what goes on in the rest of society.

Staff at The University of New Mexico are uniquely positioned to support our black colleagues (among the staff and faculty) and students in regard to respect in the workplace. UNM has given us tools to do this through two resources: our **Respectful Campus policy** and **Active Bystander guidance**. The Respectful Campus policy affirms that a respectful campus is essential to our mission and provides remedies for addressing violations and destructive actions. The Active Bystander guidance seeks to provide the tools necessary to effectively intervene when you see something and want to get involved.

Of course, policies and guidance – alone – do nothing if we don’t have the necessary perspective and desire to be supportive. Coming from a place of informed understanding is essential. The lived experiences of our black colleagues and students is not something that many of us will ever be able to truly understand. That said we can work to be strong allies by listening, learning, and centering and elevating those experiences to push back on hate. We can also use our privileges to disrupt inappropriate behavior.

**Listen** by talking to your colleagues and our students. Each of us has a perspective informed by the experiences to which we’ve been exposed. Engaging in genuine conversations – and these may be uncomfortable for you – about the experiences of our colleagues and students is essential. Believe them when they tell you what they have experienced.

**Learn** by trying to fully realize those experiences. It’s not enough just to listen, but you can’t fully realize the scope of the problem if you don’t start with listening, and then move to learning.

**Center and elevate** these experiences by using our resources. This can be as simple as recognizing **microaggressions** and addressing them. It can also be complex. The Respectful Campus policy grants each of us the authority to call out disrespectful behavior, and should serve to hold us accountable. The Active Bystander guidance empowers us to do so in a way that is both safe and effective.

**Use your privilege to model appropriate behavior.** Each of us should reflect on the privileges from which we benefit. We are presented, daily, with the opportunity to call out behavior – whether intentional or unintentional – that demeans and dismisses our colleagues and students. You can make a difference each day by modeling respectful and inclusive behavior.

UNM is both like and unlike every other community in our society. We are alike in that we face many of the same challenges and we’re certainly not removed from the racism that has permeated our society. We are unique in that we possess specific tools that can be used to effectively combat this racism and ensure a workplace that is respectful of, and which honors, our diversity.

UNM staff can further support their colleagues by knowing the resources available to each of us if something isn’t right:

- **the Office of Equal Opportunity**
- **the Division for Equity and Inclusion**
- **Ombuds for Staff**
- **UNM’s Compliance Hotline**

We can support our students by maintaining connections with the student support services on our campus through making referrals and other supportive connections:

- **Women’s Resource Center**
- **African American Student Services (AASS)**
- **El Centro de la Raza**
- **American Indian Student Services (AISS)**
- **the LoboRespect Advocacy Center**
- **LGBTQ Resource Center**
- **Student Health and Counseling (SHAC)**
- **Career Services**
- **Accessibility Resource Center (ARC)**
- **(so many more!)**

I also want to include some resources that I have found helpful on my own journey to **learn more** and **be a better ally** and you can also use our **tuition remission benefit** to take a course in Africana Studies or attend one of the many programs, lectures and other events hosted by our black colleagues and students.

There’s no doubt that this is difficult. I can’t give you a step-by-step guide. But we have campus colleagues who are experts and who are fighting this fight every day – because they have to. I’m committed to continuous learning and reflection, and I’d ask that each of us to join in that effort.



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*I consulted with the Staff Council Executive and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committees, and UNM African American Student Services in drafting this statement*