Pitzer College Black Student Union Address:
How Pitzer can support the success of their Black students.
Response requested by September 28th, 2020

To:
Pitzer Board of Trustees
Pitzer College President, Melvin Oliver
Pitzer College Community
September 14, 2020

We, the members of the Black Student Union (BSU) of Pitzer College, have authored a coherent list of ways Pitzer College and specific offices/departments can support and foster a successful and well-rounded college experience for their Black students. We also want the institution to be cognizant of the acts of racial violence against Black lives and how that has caused added stress to Black students during this time.

The plan below is requesting immediate change at Pitzer College in order to support past, current, and future Black students. We hope that after reading this list that everyone within the Pitzer College community can begin to mobilize their efforts in support of Black lives both in and out of academe. We understand that President Melvin Oliver has put in place a Racial Justice initiative in light of the violent racially motivated incidents against Black lives however, our list comes directly from the Black students who study at Pitzer College.

Drawing from the statement above, this is not a list of demands, rather, a list of ways that Pitzer College can help their Black students feel more supported and ultimately be successful on campus. Additionally, we want to highlight that we will be awaiting a direct response from President Melvin Oliver by September 28th, 2020. We would also like to schedule a meeting with President Oliver and members of the Board of Trustees to discuss how we envision the actions Pitzer can take to make us [Black Students] feel more safe, supported, and at home at Pitzer College.

Lastly, in the appendix, we have included an archived document of the Claremont College Black Student Union. The document has a list of demands that the Black students made in 1968-9. We want to highlight that it has been approximately 52 years and yet, our list of requests read almost identical to theirs. This point further shows that the colleges have failed their students with lack of sustainable policies in regard to admission and recruitment. We are hoping that administration, faculty, students, and staff at Pitzer College read this document and understand how incongruous to the eye it is to see that our list is the same as the demands made 52 years ago.
1. In order for Black students to be more successful at Pitzer, we are calling for active recruitment of Black faculty and staff. It is evident that an important aspect of quality education is representation. If Pitzer College wants their Black students to be more successful, then they need to commit to diversifying faculty in order for Black students to feel more represented and safe inside and outside of the classroom. We are calling for at least one Black faculty member to be hired by Fall 2021.

- There should be a comprehensive and thorough review of the faculty hiring process to ensure faculty within all field groups are both gender-inclusive and racially diverse. Let it be known, that the Political studies field group, American studies field group, Anthropology field group, Gender and Feminist studies field group, History field group, Linguistics field group, Mathematics field group, Organizational Studies field group, Philosophy field group, Religious studies field group, and many more field groups at Pitzer have 0 Black Faculty advisors.

- A study in *The Journal of Higher Education* found that faculty committees often pick candidates based on their supposed fit. *The Journal of Higher Education* study concluded that “fit” is a highly subjective concept which makes the hiring process more prone to racial and other biases (Flaherty, 2020). “Fit,” then, shields irregularities and biases throughout the faculty hiring process, and may “perpetuate racial aversion, neutrality, and convenience,” said Damani K. White-Lewis a postdoctoral scholar in counseling, higher education, and special education (Flaherty, 2020). Drawing from the aforementioned statements, the Black Student Union at Pitzer College is requesting that Black faculty members be hired with the endorsement and consultation of the Black Student Union.

- We believe that this process can start with using the Target of Opportunity (TOP) approach as we already have one professor in mind that we are sure will have an exceptional impact on the inclusive goals of Pitzer. We want this professor to be hired as a faculty member no later than Fall 2021 as they are certified to teach in Sociology, Political Science, and History. Let us note that ⅔ of those disciplines previously mentioned do not have ANY Black faculty members as of Fall 2020.
2. In order for Black students to feel more at home at Pitzer, we are calling for aggressive recruitment of Black students to be initiated immediately at Pitzer College. There should be proportional representation of minority students for the 2021-22 academic year and every year following. These classes should include a proportional number of Black students, Latinx students, Asian students, and other minority group members. Instead of the creation of a committee, we are calling for a task-and-finish approach that will utilize SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time bounded) to create a timely and sufficient approach to our list of demands. We ask that the task-and-finish group consist of representatives from each of the above affinity groups, an admission counselor, and a representative from the office of student affairs along with faculty members.

- Pitzer College must understand the necessity of extending diversity to include the success of Black students on campus. According to the American Council on Education diversity enriches the educational experience and promotes personal growth by challenging stereotyped preconceptions (ACE Board of Directors, 2012). Due to the exclusive nature of the Pitzer application process, we are challenging Pitzer College to extend their networks to include urban areas and consider partnerships with college-access programs that support diversity such as Posse and Questbridge.

- The Black Students at Pitzer College have heard many times that Pitzer does not receive many Black applicants but we also must understand the positionality of Pitzer. Being that Pitzer is a predominantly white institution Black students may not see a home here, and when Black students do enroll they may quickly see that Claremont is very white and there is nothing to keep them here. When Black students come in as Posse and Questbridge scholars they will come in with a community of students that will support them in being more open and engaged with the social, cultural, and intellectual atmosphere of Pitzer College.

- We want to ensure that Black students at Pitzer who do not come into college with the proper support are not at a disadvantage and have the necessary tools to thrive at Pitzer College. Implementation of a college bridge program to support Black students who come from under-resourced high schools, are first-generation college students, and/or come from low-income backgrounds is vital to increase the retention of all Black students. With the enactment of a college bridge program, Black students will have the proper education and social prep and the guidance of Black faculty and students before the start of their first semester in higher education.

- The recruitment of more Black students from economically and socially diverse backgrounds will need an admission initiative specifically targeting surrounding high schools in under-resourced and divested neighborhoods nationwide. This initiative will open doors to higher education to Black students far less likely to seek it due to access and will bring an enriched Black student body to Pitzer’s campus.
3. In order to ensure the academic success of Black students at Pitzer, we are calling for a more robust financial aid package. Currently, students on financial aid are expected to take out an increasing amount of loans every year, despite financial situations remaining the same. While this policy is intended for students to have personal investments in their education, it instead harms the very people it’s trying to help. Black students at Pitzer already show that they are invested in their education as they take on the emotional burden that comes with being a Black student on a predominately white campus. The financial aid policy undermines our ability to remain at Pitzer and graduate on time. Black students have had to crowdfunding for tuition in the past because they could not take out such a large amount of loans; this occurrence is particularly true for upperclassmen, as their financial aid amount tends to decrease as they matriculate through college. It is no secret that Pitzer College has one of the biggest wealth disparities between students in the country, with an overwhelming number of students from the one percent. The New York Times reported that 20% of Pitzer students hail from the top 1%, while only 2.7% of students are from the bottom 20%. We are calling for the following to be done in order to create a more equitable Pitzer community.

- Stop the harmful policy of increasing loans for Black Pitzer students. Instead, offer more grants and scholarships to decrease the loan amounts.
- Follow in the lines of Pomona, Claremont Mckenna College, and other top liberal arts colleges in removing loans from financial aid packages, creating an atmosphere for Black students to thrive without the worry and stress that financial hardship loans bring.

4. In order for Black students to be more equally represented in the admissions process, we are calling for there to be more Black administrator(s) in the Admissions Office & Office of Student Affairs. Currently, there are no Black staff members in the Pitzer admissions office. It is crucial that Pitzer’s commitment to diversity is implemented from the moment a student applies to Pitzer to when they graduate.

- A study published in the journal Sociology of Race and Ethnicity demonstrated that admissions counselors are more likely to react positively to Black students who are less focused on racial justice than Black students who center Black identity and activism (Thornhill, 2018). Diverse experiences are more likely to be read and valued by a diverse admissions staff.
- Many Black Pitzer students have reported feeling encouraged to apply or come to Pitzer because of Black tour guides and other Black students who have created a welcoming environment for them. Black Pitzer students feel it is important to see Black representation and experience reflected in our admissions staff.
5. In order for the burden of educating their peers to be taken off of Black students, it is important that racial equity is built into the structure of the Pitzer curriculum. We are calling for this process to begin with a third module to be implemented in transfer students’ and first-years’ orientation. This module would consist of a speaker to present to students about implicit bias as well as a discussion afterwards among students’ OA groups. Sexual assault, overuse of drugs, and alcohol are prevalent issues on college campuses, as is racism.

- To prevent sexual assault, the CDC says it is important for colleges to implement education, messaging, and other forms of prevention throughout students’ college experience (Haskins, 2018). There is little attention given to the prevention of racism and microaggressions on campus, but reducing racism on campus should begin in the same way as sexual-assault prevention.
- An article by Ochoa and Pineada (2008) shows that white students tend to dominate the classroom and Black students and other students of color are often spoken over or remain silent. This is an example of the daily microaggressions and racist practices that take place in the classroom. While many white and non-Black students may think they are exempt from racism and anti-blackness, there are many ways this seeps into our daily life. It cannot begin to fade from our college experience without direct conversation and education to initiate this change.
- The speaker should be approved by BSU and/or a committee of Black students and other students of color.

6. The aforementioned racism and anti-blackness not only seeps into the daily lives of Black students but into their mental health as well. Pitzer College as an institution must have tangible lines of direct support for Black students coming into the Claremont Colleges’ community for mental health resources. The mental strain of existing in predominantly white spaces for Black students is a unique position and should be approached with unique avenues of care to secure the success of Black students at Pitzer College.

- The hiring of Black social workers competent in racial justice to listen to Black student occurrences of racial violence on campus and serve as a bridge to hold accountable racial violence incidence on campus. The Black social worker will have available the needed resources to help the student be successful in the Pitzer College environment after such occurrences and help them thrive.
- The available resources will include tangible mental well-being for Black students with intersecting identities and their unique challenges that appear in the academy specifically transgender Black students, non-binary Black students, queer Black students, Black women
students, disabled Black students, undocumented Black students, and first-generation low-income Black students.

- An absence of immediate punitive actions on Black students on incidents involving mental health. Instead, bringing in community actions of care and intervention with the help of a healing practitioner/social worker.
- Opening more communication of accountability when racial incidents occur and checking implicit biases of those involved.
- Checking specific incidents that affected predominantly Black students on campus as racial incidents.
- As a part of the Claremont Colleges, it is Pitzer College’s duty to help stop campus security’s racial profiling of Black students on campus, especially in light of the violence Black people face at the hands of police within and outside of the Claremont Colleges.

In order for Pitzer to truly demonstrate they value their Black students, we are requesting that the school engage the Black Student Union moving forward with the Racial Justice Initiative (RJI) and other initiatives, policies, and programming involving and/or relating to Black students on campus. Attending a predominantly white institution as a Black student is a challenging experience. On top of many Black students having to work while taking their courses, the burden again has fallen upon Black students to advocate for things that should already be implemented in our Pitzer community, school, and how we function as an institution. The Black Student Union at Pitzer has never been contacted by President Melvin in the midst of him starting the RJI. In order to implement true change, the school must understand that listening to the personal testimonies and meeting Black students’ needs for success is where that change begins.

Until Justice,
Pitzer College Black Student Union
Works Cited:


Appendix:
Below are the Student Demands that the Claremont Colleges Black Student Union made in 1968-9.

BLACK STUDENTS' UNION DEMANDS

The white power structure is one that has constantly denied the black man a place in its economic and social structure. Society's ills have disabled, harassed and humiliated black people. The American educational system has perpetually de-educated the black child. Blacks realize that an adequate education will provide them with the basic tools to combat racism, discrimination, and unequal opportunity. The black man's lack of education has led to poor housing, job shortages, and destitution; thus giving the white man an excuse to structurally exclude the black man. The black man must redefine his position and focus on education.

The Claremont Colleges as educational institutions can and must play an important role in the re-structuring of our society. The social, cultural, and intellectual atmosphere of the colleges caters to the needs and desires of the white student, while black students are left lurking in a cultural and social void. If a person is unable to relate to his educational surroundings, he cannot be expected to function well academically. Black people must be in at the college level. A black student at the Claremont Colleges quickly realizes that Claremont is all white, and there is nothing to keep him here. We had a black administrator—a person to whom we could relate and a person who was honored for doing a wonderful job by all the college presidents. He was forced to leave for financial reasons. The Administration claims it wants more black administrators, yet it made no move to keep him here. Programs to recruit minority group students have been undertaken because the Administrations say that they want more minority students, but recruitment was half-time in nature and limited to the Los Angeles area. Because of these and other contradictions in the philosophy and the recruitment practices of the Claremont Colleges, the Black Students' Union demands the following:

1. We demand that an active recruitment of minority group members be initiated immediately on all the campuses of the Claremont Colleges. The aim of this recruitment effort should be the achievement of a proportional representation of minority group members for the 1969-70 academic year and every year there after. Each of these classes should include a proportional number of black students, Mexican-Americans, American Indians, and other minority group members. Recruitment should be implemented on the junior college level also; and that a committee be organized comprised of a representative group from each campus and the Black Students' Union to deal with this problem.
2. Because of the inherent discriminatory factors in white American culture, present administrators are basically limited and inadequate in their abilities to relate to black and other minority group students effectively. We therefore demand that a black administrator be hired with the endorsement of the Black Students Union to lead the recruitment drive of minority group students. This job should be at the top administrative level, full-time in nature and should include a wide geographic area; and that representatives of the Black Students Union assist in the recruitment of more minority students on a work-study basis.

3. We demand that at least five "marginal" minority group students be admitted to the Claremont Colleges complex for the 1969-70 academic year; that their selection and recruitment should be conducted exclusively by the Black Students Union. Because of the nature of their enrollment, we demand that admissions test and other evaluatory material not be used as criteria for their acceptance; but a one-year probationary period be given to each student in which to adjust to the academic life of Claremont; that scholarships be allotted to that finances will not inhibit their attaining a higher education; and that at the end of this probationary period, a final decision will be made by an admissions officer and a representative of the Black Students Union as to whether or not the student will remain.

4. We demand that in the realm of financial aid, the colleges recognize the high cost of living in Claremont and substantiate scholarships for minority group students correspond to so that it will not be necessary for these students to work during their first year of college.

5. We demand that the colleges immediately remove from that approved—housing list any off-campus housing (including apartments) that engages in discriminatory acts of leasing or renting procedures; and that students living in such housing be required to move immediately.

6. Because of the deficiencies of Honold Library in dealing with the cultural and social revolution of the blackman, we demand that immediate purchases be made of more books dealing with the present crisis and its development. Purchases should also include more black literature, including books dealing with the present history, art and culture; that the periodical listings be updated with such black magazines as Ebony and the Negro Digest; and that representatives from the Black Students Union assist the personnel in charge of purchases at Honold with the selection of such books.
7. We demand that more minority group members be hired for supervisory positions (e.g., dietician) throughout the college complex. This increased hiring should also include the non-professional fields such as janitorial and kitchen help; that a statement be submitted to the Black Students' Union in which the reasons for the hiring of such personnel would be explicitly stated therein.

6. We demand that the Claremont Colleges make immediate efforts to employ qualified minority faculty members and administrators; and that a meeting be summoned with responsible personnel administrators for the purpose of dealing with this problem.

9. We demand that the Claremont Colleges immediately introduce meaningful and relevant curriculum for both white and minority group students on these campuses. This curriculum should include courses related to current problems facing the country today, such as white racism and the black revolution; that a committee be formed to investigate the possibility of a Black Studies program for the colleges similar to the ones now in operation at Merritt College in Oakland and San Francisco State College.

10. We demand that the colleges face reality and fulfill their purpose in the greater community by seriously considering the aforementioned demands and a statement of acceptance and commitment to immediate action be presented to the Black Students' Union.