



*Pitzer College Black Student Union Address:
A list of **necessities** that the Black Students of Pitzer College
demand in order to thrive at Pitzer
Response requested by March 7th, 2023*

To:

Pitzer Board of Trustees

Pitzer College Interim President, Jill Klein '15

Pitzer College President-Elect, Storm Thatcher

Pitzer College Office of Student Affairs

Pitzer Academic Affairs

Pitzer College Events Board

Pitzer College Campus Life Committee

Pitzer Residence Life

Pitzer Admissions & Financial Aid

Pitzer Strive 2 Thrive

Pitzer Title IX Office

February 28th, 2023

We, the members of the Black Student Union (BSU) of Pitzer College, are appalled at the institution's lack of initiative to establish Pitzer as a safe and inclusive space for Black Students. In 2020 a similar statement was released in light of the Black Lives Matter Movement, however, three years later the safety and wellness of Black students continue to go unacknowledged. Pitzer must be cognizant of the fact that there is no “**Then**” and “**Now**” in terms of equity for Black students on campus. Black students still face racial inequality on campus and we demand to see change. We took the initiative to create a list of necessities as a way of survival and to obtain our well-being, which is an endeavor that the college has unendingly failed to support us in since its founding in 1963. In this academic year alone we have seen and experienced the glaring disparities and discriminations that run rampant throughout Pitzer’s campus. What is listed is not all-encompassing, but a start to what is needed.

The demands made by Black Pitzer students during the Civil Rights movement have still not been met by the administration.

Based on the lack of action and unfulfilled promises on the college’s part, we the Black Student Union feel abandoned, blatantly ignored, disrespected, and discriminated against on campus and **demand** immediate change. These changes are **necessary and essential** for Black students to thrive here at Pitzer.

1. Improved Black History Month Engagement & Recognition

The lack of programming and support for Black students has been disturbing to witness. Especially during the month that is supposed to commemorate our history. While Black history should be celebrated and taught year round, during **the one month** dedicated to Black History we were still given nothing. *We the BSU are calling for programming geared towards the advancement of Black students every Black History Month starting February 2024.* This entails providing events for Black students, staff, and faculty. Specific examples of how the school can provide better programming include:

- Career workshops geared toward Black students,
- Celebrations of Black history and Black futurism
- Community engagement events at local businesses/schools
- Inviting Black guest speakers and alumni with compensation.

Overall, funding for Black events and programming geared towards the various facets of the Black experience is crucial for our community to feel they are embraced on this campus. From what we have observed, the only instances of Pitzer acknowledging Black History Month were two Instagram posts. Pitzer created a Black History heritage page but despite efforts, the execution fell short in many ways. To start, none of the events listed were hosted specifically by Pitzer. Events were hosted by the Hive, Pomona, and Scripps. The biggest event hosted was

announced to the community on the same day and gave little time for students to register. While the page did provide (only) three community spotlights, these felt mediocre as no large effort was made to boost them. Additionally, the majority of our community **was not contacted** in an effort to emphasize our work on this campus. We have three BSU co-presidents and only one of them was highlighted. As students on this campus who must move through an institution built to keep us out at every turn, who have to fight for the smallest amount of help, we deserve more acknowledgement than that. We are an afterthought to this institution. Programming should be provided year-round by the institution, however, it has consistently fallen on the shoulders of the students.

2. Rectified Funding Issues

As an affinity group with an emphasis on establishing a community for Black students on Pitzer's campus, the Black Student Union is entitled to funding for anything that further advances our mission of providing a safe space for Black people to exist and express their blackness. Throughout the academic school year, the BSU has been working to gain funding for our annual retreat, but we have been met with defiance from offices that are responsible for providing funding for Pitzer events. One of the biggest push backs we have received is that funding needs to be used on events that incorporate the entire student body. While other events on campus are marketed as being open to all, these are typically privileged white spaces that many Black students do not feel comfortable in. We do not benefit from those events. The retreat is our way of prioritizing our joy and well-being in ways the school has not. The majority of the student body attending Pitzer has the financial luxury to plan experiences for themselves daily. The majority of the Black student body does not have that same financial luxury. If Pitzer is not providing experiences and programming for the wellness and success of Black students, the BSU should at least be given the funds to support our community. *We are asking that Pitzer sets aside at least \$8,000 annually for the BSU retreat so that Black students do not have to face feelings of insecurity and unease that come with requesting funding on an annual basis.* We are currently only fifty percent towards our funding goals for this year's retreat and we promised our community that it would take place in the following month. Although CLC has now approved our funding request for the retreat, their initial rejection of our funding request was based on two CLC rules:

1. The retreat is not held on campus and all campus life events **must be on campus**
 - a. This is false as CLC has hosted events off campus (Melrose Trading Post, Hamilton, The Lion King, etc.)
2. The retreat is not open to the **entire Pitzer community**
 - a. When Pitzer College holds events, most of the time, these events are catered to serve the majority of the student population. Who makes up the majority of the student population? White students. Most of the time these events are inherently uncomfortable for the majority of the Black community on campus. So, to have a

rule that says everything must be open to the entire Pitzer community is a display of white supremacy and anti-Blackness.

- b. Additionally, the comparison to other affinity groups when it comes to budgeting is anti-black and is a tactic that has long been used to pit people of color against one another. Us asking for money is not taking away from our fellow affinity groups.

We deem it necessary that the college revises its practices of approving funding. The current practices in place are inconsistent and inequitable. On multiple occasions, we have faced discrepancies across offices when it comes to requesting additional funding. For example, the BSU partnered with LSU and APAC for an affinity Halloween collab, but only received minimal funding and was not allowed to specify that it was a POC event. **On the contrary, event boards have funded, in full, birthday party events for white students.** Recently, we requested funding from the events board for another affinity collab but were given inadequate funding compared to events, such as Kohoutek and Apron Parties, which received a surplus of funding. This has made it increasingly difficult for Black students to build solidarity with other affinity groups who share common feelings of marginalization. It is crucial for BSU to host events FOR us and BY us.

There is also a lack of emergency funding for Black students to access which, ultimately, results in the drainage of club funding. Referencing back to our 2020 address, most of the Black student's financial aid packages include loans and/or do not include enough money for indirect expenses. Worrying about medical bills, groceries, transportation, technology, and graduate academic resources places undue stress on students when our attention could be focused on our academics. Yet, these are the things that place us under immense stress and oftentimes consume our well-being. It is necessary that this burden is not just shared with students, but also the college if they truly care about the success of their students and adhere to their core values. We deem it necessary that the college establishes access to some sort of reserve funding for Black students to alleviate the burden of financial insecurity so that we can focus on being students.

3. Increased Retention Rate of Black Students

Black students have the lowest retention rate among all racial/ethnic groups on campus, as a result of the lack of academic support, career development, and personal/emotional support. Referencing the 2020 statement, Pitzer BSU asked for the **aggressive recruitment** of Black students so that we can feel safe and included on campus. As well as, feel proportionally represented in classes and on campus. However, according to data retrieved from common data sets representing the most recent four classes, the percentage of Black students on campus has decreased from 6.07% to a miserable **low** of 4.7%.

Black Students on Pitzer Data (Retrieved from the Common Data Sets)

2022:56/1185=4.7%

2021: 57/922=6.07%

2020: 64/1119= 5.7%

2019: 62/1106= 5.6%

The percentage decrease is an overall representation of how unsafe and uncomfortable Pitzer is for Black students. With Black students transferring or dropping out all together, Pitzer needs to hold itself accountable for the **alarmingly** low retention rate for its Black students. Over the last semester, we have lost three Black students. Two of those students left due to the lack of academic and mental health support from Pitzer. Both of those students reached out for help prior to leaving and the school failed to assist them.

- Nicholas A. Bowman, who works in Higher Education and Student Affairs at Bowling Green State University, inquires that an increase in diversity on college campuses has seen a positive correlation between student engagement, first-year college GPA, and first to second-year retention among college students. Students who are open to diversity and challenge are more likely to seek out new experiences and achieve educational success.¹

*We call for aggressive recruitment by going into more predominantly Black areas with **full transparency** of the opportunities Pitzer College can provide them with.*

Additionally, with the potential rulings of the Supreme Court's affirmative action case², Black students are in fear of what the community could look like in the future; considering that there are currently few initiatives being made to sustain the small demographic we have on campus. We have no official support from the institution given what a significant loss the departure of these students is to our community. *We demand that the BSU have check-ins with the president per semester and have a **mutually agreed upon** staff and/or faculty member assigned to the BSU.* This staff/faculty member should be communicating and interacting with the BSU at least twice a semester. Having an assigned person eliminates some of the stress of the planning that falls completely onto students. More DEI training is needed by a **mutually agreed upon** a third party to be given to faculty and staff to help cultivate a diverse and equitable environment for Black students. Ways that we can improve our DEI structures on campus is by including Black students in the hiring process for these positions.

4. Concern for the Well-being of Black Students

As of 2023 Pitzer only employs 11 Black faculty and staff members of their 344³ employees. Those who are present on campus are difficult to access because of the excessive workload that the school has placed on them as well. Just having the presence of a few Black admin does not provide Black students with the support that our community requires as a marginalized

¹ [Conceptualizing Openness to Diversity and Challenge: Its Relation to College Experiences, Achievement, and Retention](#)

² [What You Need to Know about Affirmative Action at the Supreme Court](#)

³ [Faculty & Staffs Statistics at Pitzer College \(univstats.com\)](#)

demographic. Pitzer falls particularly short in their hiring initiatives for health and wellness. In both the EmPOWER Center and Monsour, the staff does not accurately represent the Black students at Pitzer. Due to the historical distrust of oppressive groups that the black community suffers from, our access to mental health assistance is disproportionately disrupted by the lack of representation. Many BSU members face mental health crises throughout the year and go without important diagnoses for extended periods of time. This neglect of our mental health has gravely impaired our ability to perform academically and socially, as well as our quality of life here at Pitzer college. Despite the untended personal struggles that Black students are facing, many of us still contribute to various offices and spaces on this campus. With the majority of Pitzer's Black students working a minimum of two on-campus jobs, the school has not expressed any concern for our health or financial stability.⁴ Outside of these campus jobs many of us also hold positions as student leaders, not only as a form of participation but as a necessity. Due to the lack of admin support, we take on the responsibility of creating these safe spaces for ourselves, often facing burnout in the process. Additionally, amidst the death of Tyre Nichols, it took ten days for the college to send out a statement to acknowledge the situation and to offer support for grieving students. Ten days that the college let Black students grieve without extending their support. There was also no communication from the school directly to BSU. There are several collective platforms where we as a community can be contacted. *We demand adequate representation, through staff members and mental health professionals, as well as access to resources that are catered to Black students on campus.* Although there are 2 immediate Black staff members that Black students can resonate with, they are not qualified to provide sufficient solutions. Currently, there is only 1 Black mental health professional and they are employed through a third-party practice. They are also only available once a week with limited spots that are not just for Black students.

The Black Student Union is saddened that we have to make a statement at the end of a month that was meant to be filled with joy and celebration. This statement is a representation of the college's wrongdoings and ignorance towards the Black experience at Pitzer College. The Pitzer administration, faculty, and community need to do better for our Black students. Until these demands are met, Pitzer College does not even begin to uphold the "core values" advertised within the institution. Attached are both statements from 1968 and 2020. It must be acknowledged that both statements asked for **extremely** similar demands that have yet to be met **55 years** after the publication of the initial statement. **We hope that upon reading this statement administration, faculty, staff, and the Board of Trustees of Pitzer College will hear our demands. We want to make it clear that nothing in this statement should be up to interpretation. BSU leadership is open to discussing the specifics of any claims made in this statement.**

Additionally, we want to highlight that we will be awaiting a direct response from Interim President Jill Klein by March 7th, 2023. We would also like to schedule a meeting with President-elect Storm Thatcher and members of the Board of Trustees to discuss how we

⁴ [Office of Financial Aid | Pitzer College](#)

envision the actions Pitzer can take to make us [Black Students] feel safer, supported, and in the community at Pitzer College.

Below are the Student Demands that the Claremont Colleges Black Student Union made in 1968-9 and 2020.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Kas6Kcb4dHztAgH5QK-iKCYHHZpeq0CHUPVTiqxuKqM/edit>