Statement from the Department of Criminal Justice on Systemic Racism and Injustices Against Communities of Color

Like many others, members of the Department of Criminal Justice were horrified by the death of George Floyd at the hands of police. It was an unconscionable act of violence that has no place in any profession that is committed to serving and protecting others. The death of Floyd is one of too many Black Americans and people of color who have been unjustly killed by police. The Department stands with many others who believe in social justice (i.e. equality under the law and fundamental fairness for all Americans) and states unequivocally that Black Lives Matter. As social scientists in general, but criminal justice experts in particular, we acknowledge that systemic racism is a public health emergency that has existed for far too long. Our Department is composed of criminal justicians, criminologists, and former justice practitioners and we agree with the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences recent statement which asserts that “the current situation represents a systemic failure to address disparities within the criminal justice system and across our country.”

Our Department’s stated mission is to educate the next generation of criminal justice leaders. As researchers and educators in the field of criminal justice we have a responsibility and obligation to our students to act and to publicly state our intentions. Thus, the Department is committed to the following initiatives:

1. Providing opportunities to hear from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) about their concerns regarding equity, diversity, and inclusivity in the Department;
2. Working with the Ledonia Wright Cultural Center, the Office for Equity and Diversity, the Office for Faculty Excellence, the College of Arts and Sciences, and other campus departments to ensure faculty receive training on creating inclusive learning environments;
3. Reviewing our course content to ensure it includes appropriate links between structural and institutional racism and criminal justice systems and policy;
4. Providing opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to learn more about anti-racism and disparity in the criminal justice system;
5. Highlighting evidence-based faculty research that includes a focus on diversity and equity and seeks to solve the problem of disproportionate impact by criminal justice officials; and
6. Using research data for positive community engagement in matters pertaining to criminal justice.

As these initiatives are occurring, other steps will be developed with the input of Black faculty leaders, staff, and students. As Interim Chancellor Mitchelson said on June 1, 2020 “as a university we must rise to the challenge that this historic moment presents. Let this lead us to work together to be the change we want to see in our community.” Our work starts now.

Additional resources:
- The BIPOC Project: https://www.thebipocproject.org/
- The Innocence Project: https://www.innocenceproject.org/
- The Equal Justice Initiative: https://eji.org/
- The Marshall Project: https://themarshallproject.org
- The Southern Poverty Law Center: https://www.splcenter.org/
- The Sentencing Project: https://www.sentencingproject.org/
- Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences Statement on Injustices Against Communities of Color
- Statement of the American Society of Criminology Executive Board regarding the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery