

A Collective Commitment to Transformative Justice, Inclusion and Equality

The Department of Anthropology at Appalachian State University is committed to maintaining a community where folks of diverse race, ethnicity, veteran status, marital status, socio-economic level, national origin, religious belief, physical & mental abilities, sexual orientation, age, class, gender identity and expression can participate in, contribute to, and benefit equally from our academic community.

Throughout the early 21st-century and across the world, there has been a significant surge of racist, homophobic/anti-LGBTQ+, misogynist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, ableist, and anti-indigenous movements. In terms of our own university milieu, one need only look to the recent past to find several incidents of intolerance and hate that goes against the Appalachian mission statement of “envisioning a just and sustainable future” (Appalachian State University, n.d.).

- In 2019, the UNC Board of Governors entered into negotiations and granted University property and \$2.5 million to the Sons of Confederacy (Pequeño 2020) an organization where the mission is in large part rooted in slavery, racism, and white supremacy.
- Here at Appalachian State there have been several incidents, some that gained local and national media attention while others remained obscure. In 2016, a series of anti-immigrant messages written in chalk appeared all over the campus commons, causing the administration to ban all sidewalk graffiti not made by university clubs (McLinton 2016).
- In 2017, a white supremacist group hung a banner in a prominent campus location (Bennet 2017).
- In 2018, antisemitic graffiti was found in a pedestrian tunnel on our campus in more than one incident (Newell 2018).
- In 2020, between the inadequate response to the COVID-19 global pandemic and national protests over police violence against Black communities, we have been disappointed by the administration’s disregard to respectfully engage with the demands called for by #BlackatAppState (BlackatAppState 2020). We were further disheartened by the administration’s mishandling of the peaceful student protest at B.B. Dougherty on August 31, 2020, when student protestors were threatened with trespassing citations (Lasure 2020).

Anthropology, like other disciplines that emerged during the colonial and industrial-capitalist era, has been complicit in racist ideologies, imperial projects, and military occupations. Anthropology of the early 20th century advanced “scientific racism” to argue for genetic hierarchies cloaked as empirical data to justify slavery, colonialism, segregation, sterilization programs, anti-immigrant policies, and terror. In 2007, anthropologists were participating in the U.S. military “Human Terrain Systems” program as embedded expert consultants for military operations most notably in Afghanistan and Iraq. Although the American Anthropological Association published a statement opposing the use of anthropology in war, with many voices within the discipline calling it a “neocolonial mission” (Price 2011), this incident is a prominent but not exclusive failing of praxis in anthropology that reinscribes systems of oppression. In 2010, the Commission on Race and Racism Within Anthropology found the discipline among the least integrated academic disciplines (Hutchinson & Patterson 2010) while a 2019 analysis of the

Open Syllabus Project by Laurence Ralph showed that out of the top 1,000 texts assigned in anthropology courses, only 9 were Black scholars (Ralph 2019).

As a group of anthropologists who acknowledge these legacies and seek to confront them, we have dedicated our life's work to theorizing and critiquing various forms of violence and inequality. However, it is clear that systems of oppression pervade our university and academia at large. As we take steps to decolonize and transform our discipline, we will work with the provocation set by renowned anthropologist Leith Mullings, where she reminds us that anthropology has, "made a major contribution to addressing the racial ideologies of the world that anthropologists helped to make, but what we have not always done so well is to demonstrate that though race is socially constructed, racism is a lethal social reality, constraining the potential, if not threatening the lives, of millions of people" (Mullings 2013). The challenge for us remains to address the material realities of historical injustice as it exists in our research paradigms, our classrooms, our syllabi, publishing networks, and professional spaces.

Our process is not a one-time effort. We understand there are valid critiques of "diversity and inclusion" initiatives that have no real impact. We know this work should not allow us to be self-congratulatory. If there is anything transformative that anthropology has given us, it is to learn how to become vulnerable and internalize how others who have different life experiences from one's own can teach and present powerful critiques of our own received ways of knowing and relating to each other. There is no choice but to prioritize and steadily work towards anti-racist, anti-misogynist, anti-homophobic, anti-transphobic, anti-ableist, anti-xenophobic models of social life and community. Alongside critical and liberatory pedagogies we pledge to aim farther and be part of imagining and providing tools for implementing (with our colleagues, students, collaborators in our research sites, and members of our local community) another social world structured by equity, inclusion, reparation, compassion and diversity.

Signed,

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