

KSU Demands on Anti-Black Racism at King's—June 12, 2020

Dear King's Senior Administrative Team,

In the King's statement addressing anti-Black racism, it is acknowledged that there are not many Black students, faculty, or board members at King's, however, there was no acknowledgement of the institutional barriers that prevent Black students and faculty from firstly being able to come to King's and secondly being supported during their time at King's. Therefore, please see our following demands regarding anti-Black racism at the college.

We demand that:

- The university publicly releases an action plan for making King's more accessible to Black folks as well as for supporting Black students, faculty and staff while they are at King's.
- This action plan includes plans to collect race-based data to identify areas where support or affirmative action is needed. NOTE: The call to collect race-based data was a direct call to action from the CFS Black Students' Caucus. The KSU is committed to engaging with the administration to provide them with information on the importance of race-based data and best practices for using it.
- The University makes a substantial donation to Black community organizations and creates a plan to continue giving forms of reparations as a sign of their constant action towards being an institution for the Black students of today and the future.
- The University set aside bursary money specifically for Black students on a continual basis. This would begin to address the insufficiency of the current system, which supports only up to 2 Black students through undergraduate scholarships.

***Content warning: mention of n-word use within a classroom*

We also would like to address the systemic racism perpetuated within King's classrooms. Last week, there were reports of a Journalism faculty member who received no consequences for using the n-word in the classroom, despite there being complaints made against them to the head of the department. The organization Everyseeker has called on the King's administration to publicly acknowledge these complaints from students. In echoing their call, we demand that:

- The University publicly address this matter, including identifying measures that the university will take for preventing the professor in question from continuing to perpetuate harm.
- The University publicly release an action plan for addressing and preventing anti-Black racism in the classroom and in the wider King's community.

In terms of timelines for the demands above, the King's Equity Officer and Equity Committee should be consulted. Timelines are important to hold the University accountable to taking these important actions, but a strict timeline could result in the University taking performative measures to address these issues and thereby causing more harm to Black students, staff, and faculty.

However, we demand a public response addressing these demands to be released within 2-3 weeks. This response should directly address each of our demands and whether or not the University plans to comply.

Additionally, we demand that the KSU Executive be given a 30-minute time slot to give a presentation on our demands at the Board of Governors meeting on June 18th, 2020. This time would be used to address these demands as well as our demands regarding the University's planning for the upcoming 2020-2021 academic year.

Sincerely,

The King's Students' Union Executive

Response to KSU Demands—June 3, 2020

Dear King's Students' Union Executive

I write in response to the demands you made in your June 11 letter to the King's Senior Administrative Team regarding anti-Black racism at King's. We understand that these demands are meant to address institutional barriers that prevent Black students and faculty from coming to King's and from being supported at King's.

In the June 1 statement of solidarity with Black members of our community I issued on behalf of the university, I acknowledged, "This is not as large a collective group as we want it to be" and that "[w]e have continued work to do as a university, including by offering you support." I believe this work includes addressing all of the factors contributing to this situation, and that these factors include the racism that Black students can experience at King's.

One of these factors is recognition and acknowledgement by King's of the place of anti-Black racism in its origins. I am referring to the university's significant financial dependency in its early decades on wealth created by the labour of enslaved Black people, the ownership of Black people by many associated with King's across those decades, including its founder, and the pro-slavery views of many of those who played important roles at King's from its founding in 1789 into the 1830s and beyond. Uncovering and acknowledging this history and its legacies was the purpose of the Scholarly Inquiry on King's and Slavery, which I launched in 2018, on advice from our Equity Committee, on which KSU is represented.

On behalf of the university, I have stated that the inquiry is not an end in itself but rather a necessary step in building a stronger and more honest relationship with the African Nova Scotian community. I have also said that the inquiry "is part of the continuing and sustained conversation we need to have with Black people about how we make King's a university for them that makes valuable contributions to their communities."

With the Board Chair, Mr. Doug Ruck, I have started those conversations with individuals and leaders of organizations in the African Nova Scotia community. These conversations are at an early stage – they were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. But even at an early stage they indicate that many in the African Nova Scotia community are interested in building a stronger relationship with King's – if its focus is appropriate educational opportunity for Black students, the creation of educational opportunities in the community more broadly and supporting the work of the community more generally.

Most of the conversations the Board Chair and I have had with members of African Nova Scotian community about the scholarly inquiry have quickly turned in these directions. So far, King's has taken one very concrete step in that direction, by joining the Nova Scotia Community College and Global News to support J-School Noire, a project of the Canadian Association of

Black Journalists. J-School Noire gives young people in the African Nova Scotia community opportunities to learn about journalism and develop journalism skills through workshops and mentorship. We must do more.

I have said at these meetings, faculty meetings and Board meetings, that I understand and accept that these discussions need to proceed under a reparations framework, particularly in light of the previously unacknowledged contribution that enslaved Black people were forced to make to King's and without which King's would not have survived.

A similar attitude and approach, under the concept and principles of reconciliation, must shape our efforts to build relationship with the Mi'kmaw community. This has been the approach of the School of Journalism in designing its new course, Reporting in Mi'kmaki, which will be offered partly in Eskasoni First Nation. An important part of the course will be the opportunity it provides young people in that community to learn journalism skills they can use to tell their own stories.

Financial barriers are among the barriers that Black students and other racialized students face in coming to King's. Like all students, Black students also appreciate receiving recognition for their academic accomplishments – and they are too often denied that recognition. That is why we reinstated the Prince Scholarship for African Nova Scotian students in 2018. This scholarship was originally created in the 1950s, at a time when only a handful of African Nova Scotians had the opportunity to attend university. The Prince Scholarship was allowed to lapse in the 1970s when the original source of funding ended. We have now re-established it on the basis of endowed funding to ensure it exists in perpetuity. Alongside other donors, I personally contributed \$30,000 to the university to help make this possible. The first two Prince Scholars of the modern area attended King's in 2019-2020, and two more Prince Scholars will be coming to King's in the coming year.

This spring at the J-School Noire launch and in partnership with Global News, we announced the creation of the Global News Journalism Award, which is specifically designated for a Black student. The Carrie Best Scholarship (for Black or Indigenous students), the ATV/CTV Scholarship, and the Reader's Digest Award are the other financial awards currently designated for Black students.

The need for Black and other racialized faculty is another recognized priority. It is one of the key supports that Black students, and other racialized students, need. That is why I recommended the creation of four new tenure-track positions over three fiscal years to the Board of Governors in 2019, on condition they be reserved for professors from communities that are underrepresented at King's. This recommendation was approved by the Board, with strong support from the Board's student members. Two of these positions were in the process of being filled when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Work is now being done to figure out how to resume those hiring processes in the near future in our virtual world. The third and fourth diversity positions will be hired in the next two academic years.

In March of this year, King's appointed a new Equity Officer, Tanisi Pooran. Unlike her predecessor, who combined equity responsibilities with others, Ms. Pooran will be devoted to equity work. She was hired through a process restricted to racialized candidates. The hiring committee included a number of student members chosen by the KSU equal or nearly equal to the rest of the voting membership of the committee.

The mandate of the Equity Officer is a direct response to the importance of providing greater support to Black and other racialized members of the King's community. Her mandate is to be exactly that – a support to racialized members of the King's community, be they students, faculty, staff, board members or alumni. This is the mandate for the position that was recommended by the university's Equity Committee and by the KSU, both through its representation on the committee and independently of it.

The creation of a stand-alone Equity Officer is a good example of how things happen collegially and collaboratively at King's. I proposed earmarking \$50,000 for diversity initiatives during the development of the budget for 2019-2020, without specifying the initiatives for which the money would be used. This was incorporated into the budget that was proposed back to me by the Budget Advisory Committee, on which KSU is represented, along with faculty, staff and administration. With the Bursar, I proposed a budget that included the \$50,000 for diversity initiatives to the Board's Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, which in turn proposed that Budget to the Board. Along with faculty, the KSU is represented on the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, as well as the Board. Once the budget was approved by the Board, the question of how the \$50,000 for diversity initiatives was to be utilized was referred to the Equity Committee, which recommended the creation of a stand-alone Equity Officer.

These initiatives and the others underway are not enough. But they are moving us in the right direction. They have not happened randomly or in isolation. They have happened in response to the dedicated work and advocacy of racialized and other students and the KSU for a more diverse university that accepts and addresses the barriers facing Black and other racialized students. They have also happened, with many other diversity-related initiatives over the past four years, under the mandate I was given by the Board of Governors, first verbally in 2016 and then in writing in 2017, to make increasing diversity at King's one of my overriding priorities. In giving me this mandate, which is on the university's website, the Board established diversity as a priority for the College. I am pleased that another important part of the job description recommended by the Equity Committee for the Equity Officer is to support me and our community in implementation of this part of my mandate.

Last June, the Board revised my mandate letter to amplify the importance the Board attaches to equity, diversity and inclusion. Under the revised mandate, I was tasked with completing a review of past and ongoing initiatives to assess their efficacy and adequacy, and also to make recommendations on what further initiatives or measures may be necessary to make our goals for a more diverse College reality.

A draft of this review is close to ready for input from others, including the Equity Officer and the Equity Committee, before it is finalized for tabling with the Board at its next meeting in September. It will call for an action plan on equity, diversity and inclusion, including plans to address accessibility for Black students – and other racialized students – and for continuing work to ensure that Black and other racialized students receive the support they need to succeed. I believe an explicit and overarching plan of action will give greater coherence, support, purpose, visibility, impact and urgency to the many discrete and encouraging efforts currently being made across the College to advance equity, diversity and inclusion, including for Black students. It will in that way help to assure the success of those efforts. A formal action plan will also ensure there is clear accountability for significant progress, building on what has been done so far, including the Scholarly Inquiry on King's and Slavery.

The university's response to the finding of the scholarly inquiry on slavery should be a major part of the action plan – or a separate action plan on its own. I will be stressing that this plan of action should call for, and resource, concerted action to make King's into a university that Black students will want to attend and a university at which they can thrive. I am counting on having the support of the KSU in this work.

Like all university policy documents, our action plan will be a public document. It will not be developed as a top-down plan imposed on the university by administration, but a plan that is collaboratively developed through a participatory and inclusive process that includes all parts of the community, including the KSU. It will have to be responsive to the voice of racialized students at King's and to what we learn from our relationships with the African Nova Scotian community and the Mi'kmaq community. This will ensure it truly has the power any *action* plan should have.

My review will also be proposing additional financial support, through bursaries and scholarships, or other kinds of awards, for Black students – and for BIPOC students more generally. Work on this is already under way. This will include taking advice from the university's Scholarships Committee. My review will also say we need to reconsider how we represent King's to racialized students and dedicate more resources and efforts to recruiting BIPOC students.

My review will not specifically address the question of whether an action plan should provide for the collection of race-based data to identify areas where support or affirmative action is needed. It will instead leave this to be determined in the process of developing a comprehensive action plan. There may be issues about collection and use of such information in a small community that have to be addressed. Another consideration may be that the size of King's, and the obvious lack of diversity at King's in absolute and relative terms, may make such data collection less useful here than it is in larger and more complex institutions. It may be that the College's limited resources can be better utilized. The KSU will be part of the consideration of these questions when the time comes for them.

My review will also not address the question of whether the university should make a substantial donation to a Black organization. I believe the better path for the objective of addressing the barriers that prevent Black students from coming to King's and being supported at King's is continued and sustained attention to building stronger relationships with the African Nova Scotian community. This will require King's to contribute to building opportunity and capacity in the African Nova Scotia community through collaborative partnerships with Black organizations. It will also require willingness to enter into discussions about how King's can make reparations for its history relating to slavery and the legacies of that history.

King's will look for opportunities to sponsor the events and initiatives of Black organizations and to sponsor or co-sponsor events, programs and initiatives of interest to the Black community. King's has done some of this in the past but it needs to do more of it. A major opportunity in this regard will arise from the co-hosting by King's and Dalhousie in 2021 of the fall conference of the consortium called Universities Studying Slavery, of which King's and Dalhousie were the first two Canadian members. Although planning for this major international conference has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is the intention of King's and Dalhousie to host this conference in broad collaboration and partnership with the African Nova Scotian community and with significant involvement by students. Bringing international attention to Black history and the history of slavery in Canada, and its legacies, will be a focus of the conference.

My review will deal with teaching and the measures to be taken to ensure it is supportive of Black students. It will do so in ways that recognize that teaching is not within the direct jurisdiction of the administration of the university but instead a matter for our faculty, academic programs and faculty as a governing body.

In that context, my review will call for more hiring of diverse faculty in addition to the four positions that have already been designated for this purpose. It will argue that curriculum and teaching have to be responsive to calls for changes from Black students, scholars and communities about what is taught and how it is taught. It will also call for a continuing program of education and professional development for faculty – as well as staff – so that faculty are supported in teaching in ways that create a consistently positive learning environment for Black students, and for all racialized students. This will build on the facilitated learning King's faculty participated in during the past academic year. It will create a space for faculty to discuss how this kind of professional development can be incorporated into teaching that is competent in teaching racially mixed classes so that they are supportive of learning by all students without sacrificing what all great teaching does – challenge students to think and see differently. The College's new Equity Officer will be a tremendous additional onsite resource to this ongoing work.

Learning and support is the way to handle a situation where a professor who in good faith gets it wrong and acknowledges they did so, not denunciation or penalization. I think this describes the events on which you demand a public statement from the university and "measures that the university will take for preventing the professor in question from continuing to perpetuate

harm.” I understand the seriousness of what happened and the lasting seriousness of it to students. I am, however, reassured the professor in question also understands the seriousness of the matter, as indicated by willingness to accept responsibility and acknowledge this to the affected students. In such circumstances, I do not believe measures against the professor are justified or called for.

However, I believe these events do demonstrate the importance of greater cultural competency at King’s and the need for much greater clarity on how situations of this nature are to be addressed when we are unable to prevent them. This requires providing better information to students (and everyone) on the policies already in place and the processes they should follow to bring forward concerns to have them addressed in a timely, transparent and accountable way. This is something that we will be working on with the assistance of the Equity Officer.

I look forward to having the continuing active participation of KSU in all of the work and progress that will unfold in coming months and years in eliminating barriers and improving supports for Black students and faculty at King’s.

Your truly,
Bill

William Lahey
President and Vice-Chancellor