

Dear Rollins Community,

As we, the Black students at Rollins, are mourning the loss of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and other Black people who died at the hands of racism, it is important to remember that these emotions and calamities are never-ending for the Black community. History continues to repeat itself - so much that it feels like a constant echo. Grief remains our steadiest companion since the first slaves landed in Jamestown. This isn't one moment. This is history. This is the present. But this will **not** be the future. This change needs to occur in our households, within our friend groups, and in the classroom. In the classroom, we discuss race as an impact, a contributing factor, and an addition to public health issues. Too often the Rollins community's discussions on racism, racial discrimination, and inequities focus on how it affects the oppressed but not on the **very** actions of the oppressor. That is the issue. Black students in academia, especially in predominantly white institutions, have their voices overshadowed and silenced by institutions that prioritize the comfortability of white students in white spaces. We are your colleagues and peers, yet we have faced indifference and disrespect - both overtly and covertly. We are your team members, yet our ideas and solutions informed by our own lived experiences are still ignored. We work diligently and consistently to speak up, share, and challenge in order to make a difference - yet our voices are responded to with self-victimization and ears that value their comfort over our testimonies.

As for our colleagues, this includes how you contribute to discussions about race, supporting the testimonies of your classmates, and reflecting on your presence and space in a classroom - individually and collectively. As individuals across the world discuss what white allyship looks like, your Black colleagues need you to show up for them. We need more than your temporary "we hear you and we see you" acknowledgments. We need you to listen intently and speak reflectively. Your silence in professional and academic settings is **extremely** loud. When Black students have these important and uncomfortable conversations, it is not for us. Our skin is the first thing we see in the morning when we wake up, when we look in the mirror, and the first thing you see when we walk into the room. We can't have transformative dialogue without your effort. If you still decide to ignore this grave issue and sit in the background, you are committing acts of oppression. Racism was never a simple issue; you must accept that racism is engrained in the architecture of our civil society and blueprinted in all spaces -- professional and academic. **So, why would you hide behind signatures, watered-down statements, public service announcements, and "we feel you" text messages and social media posts?**

There needs to be more acknowledgment of how Black students' stories and emotions are gaslighted in and out of the classroom. Particularly for the Rollins administration, this includes more than creating underfunded, performative committees and briefly having these conversations. In our administrative and decision-making settings: Whose voices are at the table? Who warrants voice? How is Rollins perpetuating institutional racism knowingly and unknowingly? What's the call-to-action?

Being anti-racist involves dismantling systematic racism through action. Academic institutions are not exempt. Developing initiatives to prevent disease, promote health, and better quality of life begins with actionable condemnations of racism and state-sponsored violence at home and abroad. Accountability predicates reconciliation and reform. The responsibility of making certain that **Black Lives Matter** in this country and around the world is on you too. Stand in the sun and make it known that this is what you are fighting for. Let's not wait for others, let's be the momentum. Racism is a public health crisis. It is time to turn these conversations into initiatives that truly represent activism.

Rollins, we are only just beginning.

Let's get to work,

The Black Community at Rollins School of Public Health

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