

UMKC University Libraries BIPOC Workers Seek Equity

“What we do is more important than what we say or what we say we believe.” --bell hooks

We, the undersigned Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) library workers, endorse the below actions in order to align with a vision for a more just and equitable environment in the UMKC University Libraries. Motivated by the recent attention paid to highly visible events of state-sanctioned violence on the Black community, we understand that structural inequities play a direct role in the continued dehumanization and devaluation of BIPOC. These structural inequities are either upheld by or dismantled by the people within an organization, and we are calling upon you to move beyond passive learning approaches into active learning that puts you on a path toward dismantling these systems. As your colleagues, we demand a work environment that allows us to access our dignity and humanity, and we ask that you not leave this work solely to us. It must be a priority for all library workers to root out and dismantle any structures that create inequities along the lenses of race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and more.

As you read this document, we ask that you reflect upon these recommendations and particularly sit with any feelings of discomfort or fragility. Please be aware that these statements were written to center BIPOC experiences, and as such, the identified needs of BIPOC are a direct response to the enactment of white privilege in our work environment. The focus of this document is not to center white privilege; rather, it is intended to call attention to the disparities faced by BIPOC workers and to call everyone to participate in building a more just and

equitable work environment. We believe that a more just and equitable workplace could be enacted through the following actions:

Change the name of the Miller Nichols Library.

We understand that there is a task force that is reviewing this very issue. We would remind this task force of the following section from the libraries' proposal¹:

“As the university’s central hub for study and research, the Miller Nichols Library and adjacent Learning Center carries with it a family name that has become synonymous with housing segregation in Kansas City. Housing segregation is identified as the number one contributor to disparities in wealth, health, education, and safety for communities of color, a point which is not lost upon the students, staff, faculty, and community members of color who come through our doors seeking to engage in critical inquiry, discovery, and research. How can we, in this context, create a climate of equity and inclusion?”

It’s past time for us to remove the name of a known segregationist from our building.

Develop a strong statement to minimize police presence in University Libraries and invest in de-escalation training.

We understand that a great deal of effort has been undertaken to fully document the incident reporting procedure and that the task force has been receptive to feedback to add statements that give pause to calling campus police. We think we could go further to ensure the safety of BIPOC students, staff, and community patrons. Providing a strong

¹ UMKC University Libraries’ Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. “The Sake of Names: Confronting the dissonance between legacy, inclusion, and naming practices through a university-wide review.” March 2019.

statement to minimize police presence would signal that we are a welcoming and inclusive environment, but it would also require us to invest in de-escalation strategies and training as well as form partnerships with campus services for intervention. We suggest as a first step-- a review and coding of past incident reports to inform a discussion on alternative approaches.

Prioritize remote work for those who are disproportionately impacted by COVID and less likely to receive quality healthcare.

We understand that it is illegal to include race as a risk category for making COVID-related arrangements, but we also note that the law, itself, is unjust to marginalized communities. In addition to the categories of high risk indicated in the HR policy, we strongly urge supervisors to prioritize remote work for those who are disproportionately impacted by COVID, specifically Black, Indigenous, and Latinx workers², should they choose. Please consider that the lower quality of healthcare that BIPOC receives is well-documented, and as such, if a BIPOC worker tests positive for COVID, they are at greater risk for death, as a result.

Require that all departments develop an anti-racist action plan.

As made very evident in the recent Anti-Racist Breakout Discussion, there are many more white colleagues than BIPOC. This work must be decentralized and undertaken by all for us to advance equity. We ask that all departments start by accessing literature that documents critical practice in your service area. Then, use what is learned to critically examine your own work practices and policies. Develop anti-racist action plans with clear deadlines, priorities, and accountability measures.

² Kaur, Harmmeet. "These variables affect whether you live, die or get help during the pandemic." <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/20/us/systemic-racism-coronavirus-pandemic-trnd/index.html>

Require all library workers read and discuss the 2020 Social Justice Lecture book, “How to be an anti-racist” by Ibram X. Kendi.

At this moment, we feel it is beneficial for all library workers to participate in this year’s Social Justice Lecture by reading the book and engaging in a discussion, at minimum. The discussion does not have to be among all library workers but could happen in small groups or one-on-one conversations.

Create anti-oppressive structures or revise existing structures that guide our daily work interactions.

Many of our policies and procedures do not properly address the systems of power, privilege, and oppression that create risk categories across race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and more. Therefore, they essentially serve to reinforce these norms. We would advise review or creation of the following:

- Review and revise the Safe and Respectful Environment policy.
- Develop a code of conduct and revise existing procedures of accountability, i.e., the Personnel Toolkit.
- Develop Community Agreements that govern discussions.
- Train all library workers in anti-oppressive techniques. Require all supervisors and department heads develop and use anti-oppressive facilitation techniques.

Retain the Diversity Liaison role.

Our current Diversity Liaison, [REDACTED], will be retiring soon. We understand that there are budgetary challenges as a result of COVID, but it is critical that this role be reassigned upon [REDACTED]’s retirement. The library worker who takes on this added responsibility should be

compensated, and their existing work should be appropriately adjusted to allow capacity to perform these duties. Finally, they should be empowered to make decisions related to the Postlethwaite Possibilities Fund, and work with UMKC Foundation and the Deans' Leadership Group to establish more stable and ongoing funding sources.

Acknowledge the “invisible” labor performed by BIPOC library workers by appropriately recognizing and compensating this work.

In addition to our library work, we perform additional labor that benefits the institution. This work often addresses our own inequitable conditions, but it also supports improved services for BIPOC students. We are asked to meet the same work demands as our white colleagues without proper formal recognition of the additional work we already perform. Until our white colleagues engage this work as well, it deserves formal recognition. This work is relegated to “service” (some of it is, but much of it is not) which further impedes our agency and access to develop and participate in our own areas of expertise. As a result, we are often less recognized, less compensated, and less supported for advancement.

We recommend the following:

- Require that all job descriptions include expectations to sustain work toward raising critical consciousness and enacting anti-oppressive work practices. These expectations will be addressed in all annual evaluations.
- For those who have expectations of direct work with marginalized communities or who are engaged in work to shape policies and practices toward equity and inclusion, formally acknowledge this work in the job description and ensure other duties are adequately reduced to allow for fair appraisal. If other duties cannot be

- reduced for exempt employees, there is always an option to increase compensation. For non-exempt employees, there is always an option for compensatory time.
- Provide formal acknowledgment of mentoring work that leads to retention of BIPOC faculty, staff, and students.

Address salary disparities by race and gender.

We understand that there is a university-wide task force that is focused on developing recruitment and retention policies and practices, but we think it's important to recognize that BIPOC library workers have been and continue to be materially impacted by inequities enacted in the workplace. Uncompensated and unacknowledged labor has often led to unfair evaluation of BIPOC colleagues in comparison to white colleagues, and therefore, limits our access to merit raises. Furthermore, a lack of consistent practice in which additional work receives compensation has increased these disparities. For instance, we have witnessed some white librarians receive initial appointments beyond the rank in which they are qualified and we've also witnessed some move down from the administrative positions which provided high salaries, only to continue to retain these high salaries citing alignment with market rates as the rationale. These decisions cause a strain on the overall budget and essentially hamper our ability to prioritize addressing inequitable and low wages.

We recommend the following:

- Review, analyze, and prioritize adjustment of pay disparities by race and gender for University Libraries faculty and staff. Conduct a transparent conversation about wages.
- Review job classification by race and gender and promote under-classified employees.

- Evaluate the appraisal process, especially who is involved in making merit determinations. Make explicit the criteria and value demonstrated commitment to social justice work over project work.
- Develop and enact consistent rules for pay increases and decreases related to additional or reduced workload and responsibilities.

Prioritize hiring of BIPOC across all position types.

Again, we understand there is a task force addressing recruitment of BIPOC workers, but we want to also acknowledge that our recruitment efforts should be improved. For instance, though we recently hired several BIPOC, it should be noted that they were hired into the lowest paid positions that we have.

Provide BIPOC equitable access and support to career development and advancement opportunities.

We have observed that when we “grow our own,” those who benefit are most often white colleagues. A review of the last 10 years would reveal an astonishing disparity in promotion and advancement opportunities through the lens of race. We have observed many white colleagues advance from hourly staff positions to ranked, NTT librarian positions and from librarian to department head to administrative leadership relatively early on in their careers.

Though a BIPOC colleague was recently promoted to an administrative position, we would caution that this not be used as a tokenizing opportunity to further reinforce the lack of access to opportunities experienced by BIPOC library workers.

For BIPOC seeking advancement, we should offer and support pathways to promotion. For white colleagues seeking advancement, consider the over-representation of white colleagues in supervisory and leadership roles.

We recommend the following strategy:

- Develop a process that includes consultation with the Diversity Liaison to provide critical feedback on all hierarchical promotion decisions for individuals.
- Scrutinize why a white candidate is preferred over BIPOC candidates before having to consult with the Diversity Liaison. There is a possibility that this structure will be developed on a campus level, but we encourage University Libraries to take immediate action regardless.

We are all aware that these recommendations come almost three months after the surge in protests and advocacy surrounding racial justice. As this movement continues to build momentum, we must add our voices and our efforts to keep that momentum pushing us forward. We have seen organizations and universities respond by holding town halls, book discussions, and forming task forces. Up to this point, the library has responded to this by releasing a Call to Action, launching the Workers Relief Fund with a significant portion of grants allocated specifically for QTBIPOC, and instituting an Anti-Racist Breakout Discussion. These initiatives help the University Libraries by painting us as a progressive and proactive organization. These initiatives were almost exclusively written and executed by our BIPOC colleagues. Time and again, we bear the weight of this institution's most important endeavors. We need you to do more. The time has come to go beyond simply discussing and identifying issues, though this is foundational to the change that we are calling for in this statement.

We submit this proposal to again lead this organization to a truly equitable and inclusive environment, and we ask that you take initiative in fulfilling these recommendations to create a better library environment for not just ourselves, but for those that come after us.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

Signed and distributed August 25, 2020:

[Redacted; signed by 10 of 14 BIPOC library workers]