

BENNINGTON

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**President's Working Group on Anti-Racism**

1 message

**Bennington College - President's Office** <presidentsoffice@bennington.edu>

Fri, Feb 12, 2021 at 6:16 PM

To: HAndersen@bennington.edu

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**TO:** Students, Faculty, and Staff  
**FR:** Carter Strong and Ara Aman '21

Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff,

As Field Work Term comes to its close, we hope you are well and ready to begin the Spring tem! February is a month of paramount importance as we observe and celebrate Black History Month. This is a month when we must educate ourselves and investigate the injustices and horrors of our collective and national history, while we also celebrate the tremendous achievements and perseverance of the Black community.

Today we are writing to you about the work of the President's Working Group on Anti-Racism. This work is built on Bennington's founding vision of an inclusive and equitable future and the work led by President Mariko Silver to build a community based on the values of inclusivity and internationalism. During her tenure as the VP of Diversity and Inclusion, Dr. Delia Saenz fiercely advocated for an intentional approach to equity through the adoption of anti-racist practices. President Walker and the President's Working Group are building on these tireless efforts.

Three months ago, the President's Working Group on Anti-Racism was convened in order to envision and implement a campus-wide strategy for realizing the College's commitment to anti-racism in all aspects of institutional life—including but not limited to curricular planning, student life, hiring, and communications. We wanted to take a moment and provide you with a report on the group's work thus far.

Over the course of our first four meetings, we have consolidated the group's collective understanding of anti-racism as it relates to our community through shared reflection and by reading the work of [Ibram X. Kendi](#), [Sara Ahmed](#), and [Isabel Wilkerson](#). It is our collective conviction that anti-racism is a non-negotiable value for the Bennington College campus to embody not only in its vision, but also in implementation and experience. In this process we also encountered challenges and roadblocks, which led us to dismiss the consultancy firm that was hired to support us. We felt that their priorities and expertise did not align with the group's anti-racist mandate.

**Moving forward**

The Working Group is now turning its attention to formulating both near-term and long-term strategies for reforming Bennington's culture and policies, as the practice of anti-racism is not wholly a matter of education. At this inflection point, five task forces will be created to advise on specific goals. Each task force will have a charge, a timeline and a chair.

The five Task Forces are:

1. **Campus Climate Survey** will work with the group to assess the desirability and options for conducting a climate survey of students, faculty and staff. This process will be carried out during the Spring term.
2. **Education** will lead the planning and presentation of public events, as well as other ways to advance understanding and problem solving about anti-racism and DEI at Bennington and beyond. The group will also recommend and oversee implementation for all constituents to develop tools for anti-racist community building.
3. **Policies and Practices** will review and provide feedback on hiring, discrimination and bias policies and procedures and engage with various campus constituencies to ensure language and process aligns with anti-racist values.
4. **Academic Life, Curriculum, and Pedagogy** will begin to work with faculty groups and individuals to identify and suggest additions to the current curriculum with a goal of ensuring that DEI work is evaluated as part of the overall assessment of faculty.
5. **Student Life** will respond to feedback from students and recommend ways to augment and support the student experience for Black, POC and international students.

### Community Education

We invite you to take part in the following near-term opportunities with us. Details will be shared with the community as the events are finalized.

- **Queen's Girl: Black in the Green Mountains.** In partnership with Everyman Theatre, Bennington College will provide online access to the community to the third and final part of the *Queen's Girl* trilogy written by alum Caleen Sinnette Jennings '72. We would like to thank David Guzman '21 and Imara Glimph '23 for bringing this to our attention and for their continued dedication to advancing inclusion within our community.
- **Loretta J. Ross, Visiting Professor, Smith College.** Academic, feminist author and public intellectual Loretta J. Ross will join the community in the following month in a discussion about white supremacy as a feature of race and gender politics in contemporary U.S. society and how to respond to this ideology.
- **Black History Month.** A list of educational resources and exhibits available this month.
  - The National Museum of African American History and Culture, [We Return Fighting](#)
  - The National Women's History Museum, [Standing up for Change](#)
  - The Museum of African Diaspora, [Slavery Narratives](#)
  - The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, [Subversion & The Art of Slavery Abolition](#)
  - [Google Arts and Culture](#): centralized source of online learning opportunities

### Anti-Racism

We would like to share with you some of the insights that have emerged in this process of education and community building. As expected, our learning strongly underscores the importance of a specifically anti-racist vision for the College.

We recognize that the considered use of language can be an act of mutual care and solidarity as well as a means of saying "I believe you" to those we care about. Naming our work as "anti-racism" is an acknowledgement of the power of systemic forms of racial injustice at Bennington College and in wider national, global, and historical contexts. Systemic racism so deeply structures the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students, staff, and faculty, that creating a culture in which each member of our community survives and thrives, requires practices that are intentionally *anti-racist*. We recognize that ours is a community in which racialized trauma has been and continues to be inflicted and in which systemic, institutional, and interpersonal forms of racism remain ever-present. Choosing to orient our work in a way that is accountable to the reality of those traumatic effects is a

necessary step toward creating a truly inclusive community, in line with our institutional values.

Furthermore, by centering anti-racism in our planning, we commit ourselves to listening to the wisdom not only of our own campus community, but of the larger community of historical and contemporary thinkers, leaders, and activists dedicated to equity and social justice who have articulated a specifically anti-racist vision for the future. In particular, we commit to honoring the political thought and practice of Black, Indigenous, and woman and queer of color feminists who have attested to the importance of grounding work for equity in an intersectional analysis of race, class, gender, and ability. The Working Group looks to examples such as the Combahee River Collective, Angela Davis, Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Cheryl Harris, Michelle Alexander, Janet Mock, Ijeoma Oluo, Reina Gossett, Opal Tometi, Alicia Garza, and Patrisse Cullors. As we move forward with our work, we invite you to join with us in studying their examples and exploring ways in which you can internalize their wisdom in all your engagements—whether it is planning a course, or having a casual conversation with a friend. Let us all commit ourselves to be actively anti-racist.

Please expect further updates from us as the Working Group shifts toward the creation of strategic recommendations for fulfilling the hope of an anti-racist College community, realized in the curriculum, in hiring, in student life, in structures of mutual education and accountability, and in the College's strategic communications. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Carter Strong and Ara Aman '21  
Members of the President's Working Group