

News

Various campus groups pledge support to racial equality

Bree Gray, News Editor | June 18, 2020



On May 25, 2020, a black male, George Floyd Jr., was detained by Minneapolis police after being suspected of using counterfeit currency. Video emerged of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes while Floyd gasped for breath and begged him to stop. Chauvin's actions caused Floyd to go into cardiac arrest, which resulted in his death.

Within hours, the video of Floyd's murder went viral and the nation came together in Floyd's defense. Protestors lined the streets nation-wide for nearly two weeks demanding justice. Those that did not attend the protests, took to social media to raise awareness about racism in America. Several cities have experienced arson and looting following riots and the National Guard was called in to reestablish peace and enforce mandated curfews.

At the demands of the nation and neighboring nations, Chauvin was fired and eventually charged with second-degree murder on May 29. His fellow officers were fired and as of June 3, face charges of aiding and abetting second-degree murder.

According to the Meadville Tribune, over 150 Meadville community members protested the death of George Floyd on May 31. The peaceful protest was organized by Jaida Speed and her mother, Christina Smith.

"There's a lot of love in Meadville," Speed said in an interview with the Meadville Tribune. "We just want to get everybody together and make a change."

Floyd's death has resulted in reforms against racism across the world. Policies are being challenged and individuals who have engaged in racism are being held accountable for their actions. The Black Lives Matter movement has become an international reform movement against racial prejudice from policy makers, employers and the police.

In response to current circumstances, President Hilary Link and Dean of Institutional Diversity Kristin Dukes sent an email on Sunday, May 31, expressing their sympathy for those impacted by Floyd's death and the college's continued support for all students.

"Along with you, we are heartbroken and grief-stricken by the repeated racial injustices suffered by Blacks in Minneapolis, in Meadville, in Atlanta, in New York City, and in so many places over the past weeks and months," wrote Link and Dukes. "For our students, we see you, we hear you, we hurt alongside you, and we are here for you."

In addition to the college's official statement, student organizations and college officials took to social media to express their support for the Black Lives Matter movement and to educate peers on racism. Some members of the campus community partook in Blackout Tuesday on social media platforms on Tuesday, June 2, to symbolically pause the 'business as usual' mentality to call attention to racial prejudice.

"(We) recognize our privilege and want to pledge our alliance with those fighting for justice," the sisters of the Epsilon Iota chapter of Delta Delta Delta released in a statement on social media.

Delta Delta Delta was joined by fellow Fraternity and Sorority Life organizations on campus.

"I call upon all the brothers to remember our founding values, particularly morality. In times like these, morality demands that we do what is right, to stand on the side of justice and fairness for everyone, regardless of race, creed, color, or sexual orientation ... We do not accept racism and discrimination in our Fraternity," the brothers of the Pi chapter of Phi Gamma Delta released in a statement on social media.

Additionally, the College Democrats and College Republicans released statements on their social media condemning acts of racism. Both organizations pledged their loyalty to the Black Lives Matter movement and to those who are peacefully protesting during this time.

College officials and departments have published statements regarding recent events as well. On Sunday, May 31, Allegheny's Global Health Department posted an image condemning acts of racism and pledging support to those protesting for racial equality. In an email to the English department students, Allegheny's English Department released a statement standing in solidarity with those affected by racism and pledge support to all students.

"Allegheny's Department of English affirms and declares solidarity with protesters, writers, artists, community activists, organizers, and all who demand justice, freedom, and the right to breathe," the Department wrote. "We will demonstrate our commitment to these efforts by making anti-racist theory and practice a central topic in our department meetings in the coming academic year. Our agenda in those meetings will focus on developing concrete ways to hold ourselves accountable for this urgent work and to ensure that our teaching and extra-curricular programming advances these values by enacting the sort of structural change the

curricular programming advances these values by enacting the sort of structural change the current situation demands.”

In an email to business and economic students, the Center of Business and Economics Fellows issued a statement supporting racial equality and pledging allegiance to the Black Lives Matter movement.

In an effort to support those dedicated to racial equality, campus community members and many of the student organizations have lists of resources, from donations to petitions, for individuals to offer additional support to those afflicted by recent events.

On Wednesday, June 3, Advancement of Black Culture held a zoom panel focused on maintaining mental health and a support network during the protests and recent racially-charged events.

“With all that is going on in the world in relation to the treatment of Black lives, it is important that we take a moment to provide space to openly discuss how constantly seeing images/videos and experiencing the abhorrent ways we are treated by this country can affect Black mental health,” ABC posted on their social media. “(The panel) is a space to talk about how you are doing mentally and collectively find ways to to support each other from afar.”

In a social media post to the campus community, Allegheny Student Government, urged fellow students to continue to educate themselves and to strive for equality for all.

“This is not the first instance I have seen happen, where a black man is murdered or experiences police brutality and there is response afterwards from the public and the government,” said ASG President Abdikadir Lugundi ‘21. “I think we have reached the point where people are tired of being tired and there cannot be a solution without concrete and genuine resolution. I want to prepare for what is next and have conversations where everyone’s voice is heard.”

In their platform, Lugundi and Vice President Patricia Gaxiola ‘21 pledged their support to students who often are ignored on campus and dedicated themselves to ensuring equality within the student body.

“This is beyond social media, it is beyond just posting, it is getting into positions of power to make change,” said Gaxiola. “It is in our platform to ensure that those who are mostly unheard can be heard. This is why we wanted to run for the positions that we are in, to make change.”

The pair intend to establish a more comfortable and reputable relationship with Public Safety officers to ensure that the campus is a safe environment for all, Lugundi indicated.

“If you are a person who is not of color, or who does not feel as though they are involved because they have not seen (racism), this is one of those times where I feel that you should not be afraid or uncomfortable because individuals who are experiencing these events are facing fears or emotions far greater,” Lugundi said. “Especially, when they are trying to come back into the academic school year in Meadville, a predominantly white community, where they may see or experience events that they do not wish to. I think from here it becomes what can the school do to create safe spaces and to ensure that my schooling is not affected by

these events.”

The Allegheny IDEAS Center located in the Henderson Campus Center is dedicated to inclusion, diversity, equity, access, and social justice for all students on campus. This office is a designated safe space for students and contains the Culture, Identity, and Leadership Coalition. The coalition includes over fourteen student organizations focused on promoting diversity and fostering an inclusive campus environment.

“We see you. We hear you. We stand in solidarity with you,” the Gateway’s Career Education wrote in a social media statement on June 3rd. “And we recognize the importance of ensuring our work in Career Education replicates that commitment equitably and actively.”

The Allegheny Gateway is a major support network for students located in the Pelletier Library. The Gateway has remained a support network through remote instruction and in times of need.

The campus community received an email from Link, Dukes, Provost and Dean of the College Ron Cole, and Director of Human Resources Jennifer Mangus on Wednesday, June 10, requesting faculty to partake in #ShutDownAcademia to strive to eliminate racism.

“For our Black employees, spend time today doing whatever nourishes and restores you. For others, spend time today engaging with the mental and emotional labor of anti-racist work,” wrote Link in the email.

In response to recent events, the college drafted the Action Plan for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, which will be announced to the campus community soon, Link indicated in the email.

“This plan has been shaped over the past months and will lay out our vision and concrete steps for addressing racism in our campus community, for better educating ourselves about systemic racism and injustices in our community and in our country, and for supporting our Black community members. The plan will offer ways for the entire Allegheny community to engage in these efforts,” wrote Link.

[Black Lives Matter](#) [George Floyd](#) [Minneapolis](#) [race discrimination](#)

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Bree Gray, News Editor

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