Dr. Nasser Paydar and greater IUPUI Community,

This open letter is written in response to current events - specific to Black\(^1\) students - occurring on the campus of IUPUI.

Albeit not surprising, it was discouraging to read about the continual struggles that Black students face at IUPUI. As one of the three leaders of the Black Student Initiative of 2006 and recent PhD graduate of the Urban Education Studies Program at IUPUI, I find myself perplexed by the seemingly pacified or checklist approach IUPUI has contemporarily and historically taken when [pseudo-]confronting the issue of institutionalize white supremacy. Purposefully, I name this issue as such, because of the prevailing trappings of maintaining whiteness as usual (Low, 2009) and the commodification and lukewarm-ness of terms like inclusion and diversity.

Although I am aware of the tremendous amount of tensions that exist between academic freedom and professional development (How do you mandate PD to professors?), public relations and public image (Cost/Benefit of giving into student demands), budgeting and persona (Cost/Benefit of the fallout from mainly white donors/legislators), and student (majority and other) and institutional (financial) needs; nevertheless, as a leader, as well as your predecessors, I am still left in awe to the administration’s ill substitution of terms like commitment and pledge with actions that more resemble professional coddling and damage control. Much of what has occurred in response to Black student protest at IUPUI, has only resulted in lackluster promises and window-dressing. So, my first question is, why are there no strategically targeted and intentional agendas, both structural and pedagogical, to combat the present and historical racial disparities within this institution?

French philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1970; 1992), other post-structuralists (e.g., Gore, 1993; Foucault, Ewald, & Fontana, 2010), higher education and teacher education scholars (e.g. Quaye, & Harper, 2014; Marton et al., 2004) and social constructivist psychologists (e.g. Gauvain, 2001; Driscoll, 2005) have all spoke to the importance of space and its implications on the physiological and psychological being/learner. Furthermore, physical arrangements, motifs, pictures, and symbols are associated with ownership and affirmation, which are important pillars of Culturally Relevant and Responsive Practices (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Simply stated, the need for a space that is reflective of non-cannon and nonwhite tenets, which provide a safe haven from the conventions of predominantly white institutions like IUPUI, is backed by high quality research, is rudimentary to success, and is simply humane. Anything short of that is just lip-serves and amoral public relations.

In an era of great racial strife across the nation, IUPUI is poised to be something different than the norm. Conventional practices in similar circumstances would suggest that the institution meet with strategic folks of color to best address the issue. Although the intent of meeting may be cloaked in “equitable policy” or “meeting the needs of all,” the usual outcomes center around dusting hatred under the proverbial rug of lost history, appeasing both the white opposition as well as the Black protestors, while leveraging time as means to forget. Now, as a professor I have seen this played out as a participant and as a spectator. As previously stated, I understand the dilemma that this issue raises for yourself and other administrators, yet I ask you another
question, “Will you, Dr. Nasser Paydar, return to conventions or be courageous enough to go against whiteness as usual.”

I stand with Black Student Union and all marginalized folks who learn, teach, and work at IUPUI. I reaffirm their demands with the demands that were never delivered 10 years ago and over 35 years ago. If I was so privy, I would highlight the demand of cultural competency training for faculty as the most important. Adding that all faculty (adjunct, clinical, tenured/tenure-track, and full) be mandated to take specific pedagogical training that is couched in meeting the needs of diverse learners. If IUPUI is to be an institution where learners can, “succeed to the fullest extent of their potential,” than there needs to be pedagogical practices that foster such principles in every classroom on its campus. Anything short of that is just lip-serves and amoral public relations.

Thank you for your time and I will being pray for you and my village.

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\[1\]In 1899 W.E.B. DuBois stated in his first footnote of The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study, I shall throughout this study use the term ‘Negro’ to designate all persons of Negro Descent, although the appellation is to some extent illogical. I shall, moreover, capitalize the word, because I believe that eight million Americans are entitled to a capital letter. (p.1)

In that same vain, I too shall from this point on capitalize Black, as it is representative of a cultural, lifestyle, reality, and ideology of my people - so for that reason, we are entitled to a capital letter.

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