

14 June 2020

Open Letter to De Anza College Senior Staff,

This is not a comfortable letter to write. These are not comfortable times. In the wake of a global pandemic, we are reckoning with the original sins of slavery and colonialism on a world-wide scale. It is becoming clearer to all of us, including to our campus community, that things must change, and change substantially.

It is evident to anyone willing to look, that many structures on our campus are not diverse or inclusive. This much, people are starting to publicly admit and even question. But what still remains unspoken—perhaps because people are afraid to vocalize it—is that the way that our senior leaders on this campus have led must also change, and change substantially. It is inadequate and disingenuous to talk now about the need for diversity and greater equity in our institutional practices if we are not also going to acknowledge how it is that we got to where we are now, and commit to changing how college governance operates.

Promising Steps

We want to start by acknowledging some steps in the right direction by our senior staff. In recent months, senior staff has shown more willingness to consult with the campus community and make decisions based on campus input. For example:

- Senior staff created weekly zoom conversations with the college in response to the COVID crisis. These weekly sessions have been a way for the college to hear important news and updates, and ask questions to senior staff directly.
- With the sudden shift to remote services, the senior staff displayed a willingness to do things differently according to the pulse of the campus, with more professional development initiatives and incentives to support faculty and staff. This flexibility has enabled faculty and staff to feel empowered during this time of great uncertainty.
- Negotiated changes to contractual processes like PGA, PAA, PDL and tenure--usually results of months of back and forth, and sometimes contentious exchanges--were prioritized and fast-tracked with respect for faculty and the importance of their role in the campus-wide shift to online instruction.
- The president responded quickly to hire a full-time, tenure-track UMOJA counselor (one of the “Eight Asks” put forward by the BFSAs) with the aim of changing De Anza capacity to be a safe and supportive college for Black students.

These efforts by the administration have been essential for maintaining solidarity and supporting campus employees and students during this challenging time. And yet, they are not enough, and they cannot be merely temporary responses to multiple crises. They must continue and go deeper if we are to have a truly inclusive and equitable college.

How We Got Here

How is it that a college with the professed values of social justice, democracy, integrity and equity finds itself needing to answer for the institutional neglect of the Black community and other communities of color? For too long, our senior staff has operated in a manner that has been largely top-down, closed off and detached from the rest of the campus. While it is common for working teams to be tight-knit, it is dangerous and detrimental to a democratic institution of higher learning (especially one that espouses the values of inclusion, equity and social justice) for its senior staff to lead from the top down, and to be so insular that it hears primarily the opinions of its own members and consults mainly with itself. Earlier this year, the presidential search process conducted surveys and focus groups of constituencies all across campus asking for our input into what we wanted to see in our new leader. The results of this campus-wide inquiry overwhelmingly pointed to a dip in morale across the campus, as well as to the desire for more accessibility, more transparency and openness and more inclusive decision-making processes. What individuals are too afraid to vocalize publicly, we stated collectively and overwhelmingly in the focus groups and surveys. And yet, there has never been a campus conversation about these results. There has been no attempt by our college leadership to acknowledge the widespread disaffection of the majority of the campus and to dig into the roots of these sentiments. *Why is this the case? Where is the leadership of our senior staff on this subject?*

This disregard for the pulse of the campus community is particularly harmful to marginalized communities because they are always already struggling to be heard and served within any given institution. Two recent examples that underscore the alienation of racialized populations in our campus community are: 1) the lack of any De Anza senior staff response to recent xenophobic and racist scapegoating targeting the AAPI community during this pandemic which the Board of Trustees addressed in its recent resolution 2) the “Eight Asks” presented by the Black Faculty and Staff and Administrators Network (BFSA) amidst world-wide Black Lives Matter protests, that articulate needs long un-met and issues long-ignored to the detriment of all Black people at De Anza. College senior staff did not anticipate the concerns raised in both cases, they did not respond at all to the concerns of the AAPI community, and have met only two demands made by BFSA, and only now. Challenging institutionalized racism requires that senior staff listen and respond holistically, intentionally and systematically to the concerns of its constituents.

What We Need Now: Guiding Questions and Principles

We stand at the crossroads of a change in campus leadership. At this moment, we have an opportunity to bring about the kind of college governance that we *need* for substantial change to happen. The purpose of this open letter is to expose the unacknowledged truth that has held our campus back from being a place that is hospitable not only to Black students, staff and faculty, but also to other under-represented groups. It is time to recognize that without a change from an insular, top-down model of senior staff governance, in which only few are given access to information and only a repetitive handful given a seat at the table, in which decisions happen in the absence of public knowledge or dialogue, over the summer, over the weekend or overnight, we will never undo the structures of power that so demoralize the majority of our campus community, and that continue to keep marginalized groups on the margins.

What we need now and moving forward is for our senior administrators to question their leadership habits with deep self-reflection and to apply the principles of shared governance, equity, inclusion, respect, accountability, and transparency to every aspect of how they make decisions. De Anza College needs to operate in ways that allow everyone to feel respected, included, and heard. In carrying out their work and in making decisions, senior staff should be asking themselves the following questions:

- Have we worked to include stakeholders in decision-making processes *from beginning to end*? And, if not, why?
- Have we allowed deans to access all of the information that is available to us at both the district and college level, so that they can be effective in their roles, communicate this information to their constituencies and have input into college governance?
- Have we established truly inclusive channels of communication where we can hear input from our campus community about how or whether things are working? Have we created spaces where people can share ideas and question college processes in a way that is open, public and reciprocal?
- Are we respecting committee processes and allowing for enough time for people to learn?
- Who do our decisions benefit? Who might they negatively impact? What are the equity considerations in both the positive and negative impacts of these decisions?

These guiding questions will be critical in developing mindful, inclusive, and equitable practices that more robustly meet the true tenets of shared governance.

In addition to these guiding questions, we have developed a set of Guiding Principles with the aim of re-orienting institutional habits for true shared governance. As our college begins to rethink processes and decision-making structures (such as IPBT) we suggest the following framework be applied to all decision-making structures and processes:

1. **Consult widely and bring people to the table:** Ensure all stakeholders have a place in institutional decision-making processes, especially those whose work and interests relate directly to the college's values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice. Recognize that stakeholders may not represent the full interests of their constituents as all groups are diverse in experiences and perspectives. Create processes or opportunities that allow for the voices of constituencies being represented to be heard and considered.
2. **Provide for clear and adequate timelines for decision making:** Work with all

3. stakeholders to establish clear and agreed-upon timelines to ensure that decision-making facilitates inclusive, equitable, and democratic deliberation.
4. **Center equity in decision making:** Work with all stakeholders to establish clear and agreed-upon equity-based criteria for guiding decision making processes.
5. **Establish and communicate clear rules for decision making:** Clearly identify, and make public the rules and criteria that guide how institutional decisions are made for all stakeholders.
6. **Be transparent about outcomes and processes:** Ensure that all institutional decision making processes are clearly described and publicized to the campus community, including the minutes of meetings, outcomes of decisions, information about stakeholders involved, timelines, and criteria for decisions.

We believe these principles, if carried out, will help De Anza be more transparent and accountable in our reach for more inclusive and equitable decision making.

Invitation to the De Anza Community

This letter is meant to spark collective dialogue and action so that we can transform De Anza in this pivotal moment. We are inspired by the courage, commitment, and coming together of so many people on our campus who are putting their minds and hearts toward the important work of changing and improving our campus community. We believe that we can live up to our values as an open, equitable, inclusive, just and democratic institution that is so vital for the communities we serve. We invite all members of the De Anza campus community to sign on to this letter if you support this statement.

In the coming days, this effort for accountability will be read publicly in multiple shared governance settings. To join in on the vision for a more democratic and inclusive college campus, please view and comment on the [Proposal for Transformation of IPBT](#).

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