

20 for 20

20 Ways for Texas A&M to
Fearlessly Confront Racism in 2020



Foreword:

To the leadership of Texas A&M University:

The recent murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery among others have highlighted the systemic racism and discrimination that permeates the United States' legal, educational, economic, political, healthcare, justice, and environmental systems. These crimes have laid bare the systemic racism and other forms of oppression that have created inequities and disproportionate burdens for communities of color within this country, specifically for Black Americans.

Texas A&M University prides itself on its Core Values of excellence, integrity, leadership, loyalty, respect, and selfless service. Yet, racism and discrimination are present on our campus and undermine those values. In an effort to address these ills, we respectfully present the following proposals with the intent to positively affect the culture on our campus. We believe these proposals will spark fruitful, productive conversations that illuminate and advance the Aggie Core Values that we hope to consistently and uniformly uphold and implement.

Our proposals are informed by informal surveys, calls, texts, and social media communications involving hundreds of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color- to include Hispanic and Latinx persons) current and former students. We solicited their input and requested they share their experiences of racism, discrimination, and other forms of marginalization as Texas A&M students. We heard stories of racism and discrimination on the Texas A&M campus that were decades old, as well as accounts of recent events that happened as recently as the Spring 2020 semester.

On June 1st, President Young stated that “words alone, however heartfelt and sincere, are no longer enough.” We agree and posit that frankly, they never were. Racism, discrimination, and other forms of marginalization are not relics of the past; they are alive and well on our campus. They happen to us. And sometimes, they happen because of us.

It is time for the Aggie Community to roll up our sleeves to do the arduous, yet totally worthy work of addressing systemic racism and other forms of institutionalized discrimination here at Texas A&M and beyond. In response to President Young's call for action to “improve the lives and experiences of citizens of color here [within the Aggie Community] and elsewhere around the nation and the world,” we submit the following proposals with the hope that they will be catalysts for change.

As Aggies, we live by our Core Values. One of those Values--**selfless service**--demands that we serve others with even more vigor and care than we serve ourselves. What does it look like for Texas A&M to better serve its BIPOC students? Here are some ideas to start the conversation. Let's get to it, Ags.

The Proposal:

Address Symbols of Racism on Campus & Present our Full History:

1. Move the Lawrence Sullivan Ross statue from Academic Plaza to the Cushing Memorial Library (or somewhere similar where it can be understood in a historical context).
 - a. Ross's contributions to Texas A&M and the State of Texas do not negate his record of violence against Black and Indigenous Americans. Indeed, Ross's statue symbolizes oppression and an endorsement of white supremacy for many Aggies.
 - b. Moving the Sully statue is vital to the Texas A&M University System's claims to value inclusion, belonging, respect, and truth. While this measure is primarily symbolic, it is nevertheless significant because it would constitute a show of good faith by System Administrators to make Texas A&M University a more welcoming and inclusive campus. Additionally, this move would signal a serious effort by University officials to honor the voices and experiences of BIPOC students, as well as faculty and staff, who are an essential part of our Aggie community.
2. Revise the script used during tours for visitors and prospective students and install a plaque that acknowledges the complex but complete picture of Sul Ross.
 - a. Lawrence Sullivan Ross's role in preserving this university is incontrovertible. However, trotting out old and incomplete interpretations of Sully that whitewash his legacy in other realms does nothing to improve the lives or experiences of Aggie students, faculty, or staff of color, nor does it live up to the Aggie Core Values of integrity and respect.
3. Provide remaining funding and erect the Matthew Gaines statue by the Spring of 2021.
 - a. State Senator Gaines was integral to the 12th Texas Legislature's passage of Senate Bill 276, which created the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas under the Land-Grant College Act of 1862, also known as the Morrill Act.^{1 2} We have statues of "12th Man" E. King Gill in front of Kyle Field, James Vernon "Pinky" Wilson, composer of the Aggie War Hymn, on the west side of the Sanders Corps of Cadets Center, James Earl Rudder, the 16th President of Texas A&M, 1957 near Rudder Tower in Central Campus.

¹ <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fga05>

² <https://studentaffairs.tamu.edu/students/matthew-gaines-statue/>

Students and faculty alike have been pushing for this statue for at least the past decade.

- b. Chancellor Sharp's recent commitment of \$100,000 to help in this effort is laudable. If it is not enough to achieve the end goal, however, the university should appropriate funds to do so.

Provide New Training and Resources for Students Joining and Leading Our Community:

4. Create BIPOC specific-spaces and sessions at the New Student Conference (NSC).
 - a. BIPOC students and their families are often overlooked at the NSC, perhaps in part owing to the perception of their small numbers. Breakout sessions for BIPOC freshmen and transfers at the NSC, facilitated by the Department of Multicultural Services, would help the students and their families feel welcome and heard.
5. Develop and implement a new, more comprehensive DEI training for incoming Texas A&M freshmen and transfer students at their NSCs.
 - a. Of late, we have heard countless stories from BIPOC Aggies about hurtful, racist incidents that happened during their time at Texas A&M. Additionally, many non-BIPOC Aggies have bravely shared stories from their time at Texas A&M where they unintentionally hurt BIPOC Aggies by saying or doing things that were covertly racist or otherwise discriminatory. Additionally, they expressed regret for these actions and shared that they wished they had access to training that would help them prevent this kind of harm.
 - b. A redeveloped DEI training for incoming Texas A&M incoming freshmen and transfer students would help equip A&M students with a common set of tools and knowledge necessary to be more culturally aware, respectful, global citizens. Additionally, such training would help curb the frequency at which these incidents happen on campus.
 - c. To maximize professionalism and intended goals, University leadership should consider hiring independent consultants to lead this effort. Hiring a third-party consultant with expertise on DEI work would signal the University's commitment to diversity and inclusion.
6. Develop and implement a mandatory DEI seminar for all freshman and transfer students.
 - a. We recommend bi-monthly meetings of this seminar so as to create a safe space for students to engage in critical topics such as race in a respectful and critical manner.
 - b. Faculty and staff resources devoted to this effort should not exclusively draw from BIPOC who are already paying a "diversity tax" by being asked to serve on every committee, working group, etc. Hire outside consultants

owned/operated by BIPOC. The university spends millions every year for marketing and metrics consultation. If you value diversity, invest in it.

7. Develop and implement mandatory DEI training for student leaders of all University-recognized organizations on campus.
 - a. Countless Aggies have shared instances of racially insensitive encounters with student leaders on campus. Click [here](#) to view a sampling of these stories. This policy would equip student leaders with the tools and knowledge required to mitigate the frequency of these encounters. Further, this policy would also give student leaders the tools to be able to address instances of racism and other forms of marginalization that happen within the organizations they lead.
 - b. Like the SOFAB and Title IX training currently offered, these training modules would be required of all student leaders on a yearly basis for organizations to retain their University-recognized status. It is important to note that there is already infrastructure in place to support such training through the StuAct web portal.

8. Develop and implement a mandatory anti-racism and anti-hate training module that all Texas A&M System students must complete annually before registering for classes.
 - a. Such training would equip Texas A&M students with the necessary tools to combat racism and discrimination on campus and effectively maintain the Aggie Community of Respect. There is already precedent for such a proposal in TAMU's Department of Civil Rights and Equity Investigation's Sexual Assault Prevention and Title IX training. Texas A&M students must routinely complete this training to avoid the penalty of a temporary hold being placed on their registration.

9. Produce a handbook or digital resource that serves as a guide to student life for underrepresented students on campus.
 - a. Many Aggies from underrepresented communities (BIPOC, LGBTQIA, first-generation students, low-income students, etc.) shared stories of feeling isolated on campus. A guide tailored to orienting students from underrepresented communities to student life (detailing student organization, academic and mental health resources, and other offerings) would do much to help all Aggies find community during their time at Texas A&M.

Update University Policy & Standards:

10. We recommend adding Equity to Texas A&M's Core Values.
 - a. As Aggies we all live and breathe by Texas A&M's Core Values of excellence, integrity, leadership, loyalty, respect and selfless service. These Core Values were

established in 2005 under the leadership of then University President Dr. Robert Gates.³ Equity has always been the heart of the Aggie Spirit. Traditions like the Aggie family and Aggie Muster are deeply powerful *because* of their inclusivity. Our values should stand as a clear reflection of the Aggie Spirit, this must include Equity.

11. Require all Texas A&M University students to take 3 Race, Gender, and Ethnicity (RGE) studies-focused courses before graduation regardless of major. Involve industry leaders in multiple fields to testify on the importance of these perspectives for success in various career channels.
 - a. There is already precedent for such a policy in the University's International Cultural and Diversity credit graduation requirement.
 - b. The University already offers courses that critically address important topics surrounding race, gender, and ethnicity. This requirement would effectively mandate that Texas A&M University students take one course on race, gender, or ethnicity per academic year.
 - c. Establish a panel of appointed faculty members to certify both ICD courses and RGE courses.

12. Develop, share, and **enforce** a system-wide Anti-Racism policy.
 - a. Texas A&M leadership should develop, publicize, and enforce an Anti-Racism policy. This will affirm the university's stance on making Texas A&M a welcoming, inclusive place for all Aggies regardless of race, color, creed, religion, nationality, gender, sexual preference, or ability. This policy should outline specific ways that the university is creating a welcoming environment, and outline specific mechanisms for enforcing this policy.
 - b. Mandate a notice of the aforementioned policy in every syllabus at the university level. There is precedent for this to be found in Aggie Honor Code, FERPA Notices, and ADA Policy Statement Language in syllabi.
 - c. This proposal should include a revision of Student Rule 31, which pertains to Racial and Ethnic Harassment. Section 2.1 of Rule 31 reads as follows: "To rise to the level of Racial and Ethnic Harassment, behaviors must include something beyond the mere expression of views, words, symbols or thoughts that some person finds offensive. The conduct must also be sufficiently serious to deny or limit a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the educational program and/or experience."⁴ This language was last revised in 2008 and fairly lenient in its delineation of Racial and Ethnic Harassment. It is time that this language is revisited and revised to better protect BIPOC Aggies on campus.

³ <https://www.aggienetwork.com/theassociation/corevalues.aspx>

⁴ <https://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule31/>

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13. Re-fund RESI (Race and Ethnic Studies Institute)
 - a. Per the RESI webpage, "RESI's mission is to foster research that considers the historical and contemporary salience of race and ethnicity in human groups. We aim to bring together scholars who share a desire to understand how analytic and folk conceptions of racial and ethnic difference have shaped various aspects of the human experience."⁵ Additionally, the Institute has delivered workshops such as a workshop on Race and Ethnicity and another called "Development of a Racial Trauma Measure." This type of scholarship and programming deserves funding because it is integral to the University's effort to better support BIPOC Aggies on campus.

 14. Issue a follow-up statement to the that which President Young issued on June 1, 2020.
 - a. This statement should detail specific actions that the University plans to take to confront systemic racism and inequality at Texas A&M and timelines for said actions. Such a statement will affirm the administration's willingness to take action and give the Aggie community a way to hold the Administration accountable for their promises.

 15. The Student Conduct Office should retool and better publicize their mechanisms for reporting and investigating incidents of racism or racial discrimination on campus.
 - a. Countless Aggies have shared accounts of experiencing racism during their time at Texas A&M and having difficulty finding out where to report such incidents or having nothing happen once they actually did report such incidents. The current mechanism is a form linked to small text on the Student Conduct Office's website. We recommend that this link be displayed more prominently on the website.⁶ Further, we recommend implementing a hotline so that students can talk to trained staff members and these issues can be addressed promptly.

Work with Upper Management and Administrators on DEI Efforts:

16. Top officials at Texas A&M should provide quarterly updates to college-level Diversity Administrators, Department Heads, and the public on Institutional DEI work.
 - a. Texas A&M has a history of being reactive when it comes to addressing issues of discrimination on campus. Addressing systemic racism and other institutionalized forms of oppression on campus is a long haul. Quarterly updates will both provide a means of keeping University Administrators

⁵ <https://resi.tamu.edu/>

⁶ <https://studentlife.tamu.edu/sco/>

focused on these efforts, and provide the Aggie Community with a way to hold them accountable to doing this work.

17. Launch a concerted effort to improve the representation of BIPOC in TAMU System's upper management.
 - a. Representation is important. Of the 34 individuals identified as upper management by the Texas A&M System webpage, only 7 are BIPOC. Further, only 5 are women.⁷ Texas A&M is a "land-grant" institution. This entails, in part, an obligation to serve the people of Texas. To do this, it is integral that Texas A&M leadership reflect the people of the state that the System serves. Additionally, it is important that BIPOC occupy roles in leadership beyond just that of diversity administrators.

Allocate Financial Resources to Improve Campus Climate and Better Support BIPOC:

18. Fully fund identity-specific Cultural and Resource centers on campus.
 - a. Providing students from historically marginalized groups with their own space is a great way to take steps towards making campus a more welcoming and inclusive place for all Aggies. We propose finding a Black/ African American Cultural Center, APIDA Cultural Center, Latinx/Chicanx Cultural Center, Indigenous Cultural Center, and a LGBTQIA Center.
19. Fund a faculty cluster-hire in African American studies.
 - a. This hire should include the Departments of History, English, and Political Science (those least represented in the field).
 - b. Simultaneously fund additional OGAPS fellowships for graduate students pursuing research in race/ethnic studies.
20. Allocate funding to hire two full-time admissions staff members who specialize in recruiting Black, Hispanic and Indigenous students and allocate at least two other Student Affairs staff members to devote their time to issues facing these populations.
 - a. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that the population of Texas was roughly 12.8% as of July 2019.⁸ However, according to Texas A&M published data, less than 3% of the student body at Texas A&M University's College Station campus was Black. Texas has the 3rd largest Indigenous population in the United States and the 2nd largest when Indigeneity is considered in combination with other races.⁹ Yet, we lag far behind in recruiting much less supporting these

⁷ <https://www.tamus.edu/system/about/>

⁸ [census.gov/quickfacts/TX](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/TX)

⁹ [census.gov/quickfacts/TX](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/TX)

populations. Meanwhile, efforts to propel TAMU to the status of an Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI) meet constant roadblocks that are unacceptable, particularly when one considers the percentage of Hispanic students who serve in the Corps of Cadets, the University's premier institution of honor and excellence.