



June 9, 2020

Dear Austin College Community,

These last two weeks have been unlike any other in recent history. As the nation and Austin College navigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were horrified by the killing of George Floyd. This senseless violence and the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and countless others have sparked national protests, demonstrations, and great sorrow throughout 'RooNation.

Last week, Austin College denounced this violence and offered the world a reminder of the values of our community. We are grateful to so many of you for joining the Service of Prayer and Reflection prepared and led by students, faculty, and staff. We also thank those who have supported our student groups that are raising money for the George Floyd Memorial Fund.

Since last week, many have expressed their thoughts to me and to others in our AC community. The spectrum of reactions highlights what makes Austin College special: we provide a forum for young people to find their voices and learn to express their thoughts on the critical issues of our times—within an environment of civil discourse and in the spirit of finding just solutions together.

We are listening. I welcome these discussions, as this is a seminal moment in a renewed effort to address centuries of racism and white supremacy in this country. Dialogue about the College's response to the ongoing protests of the disparate treatment of Black people at the hands of law enforcement in our country have yielded robust and wide-ranging points of view on how we will address these problems going forward.

We continue to examine every aspect of how we educate, engage, and learn, so that we do so in a way that respects and welcomes every individual in our community, with particular attention to those from groups that have been historically disenfranchised.

In combatting racism and oppression, we will grow and make progress not by dismissing contrasting beliefs but by listening and speaking thoughtfully. In inviting these discussions, we do so in the extraordinary spirit of Austin College: with respect for others, love for one another, and a collective commitment to creating an environment in which each of us is valued.

With this moment of opportunity before us, I have charged the President's Committee on Inclusion and Diversity to gather ideas from all members of the Austin College community on actionable steps to help to make justice and opportunity a reality for all—here and everywhere. This committee is co-chaired by Dr. Lisa M. Brown and Dr. John Williams '84 and is comprised of faculty, students, staff, and alumni. Invited members of this committee include our Student Assembly president and recently elected president of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC).

There is progress worth noting. Over the past several years, Austin College has actively fostered a diverse campus community of students who vary in race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, disability status, and faith (or no faith). Of the current student body, 54% identify as students of color, and 21% are first-generation college students. As part of our new curriculum, all students are required to take courses in Global Diversity and Systems of Power, Privilege, and Inequality. Because of our diversity, we amplify the voices of all students and provide them with the opportunity to engage in discussion, learning, and action directed toward creating a more just campus and world.

Progress is ongoing, but crucial work must still be accomplished. I am further requesting a full and complete audit of campus-wide training initiatives. We will evaluate how we educate and cultivate skills to enhance our community of diversity and inclusion. In those areas that are deficient, action will be taken.

Together, we can help to bring to fruition the vision of justice and opportunity for all. Austin College is proud to have your voice included.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven P. O'Day". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Steven P. O'Day, J.D.**  
President  
The Cecil H. and Ida M. Green  
Chair of Creative Educational Leadership