

Dear Professor Hess and Professor Rankin,

We hope this finds you well. Professor Hess, we would like to take this moment to thank you for the support you have provided to first-year planning students in your role as Director of Planning over the last year, and Professor Rankin, we would like to congratulate you on beginning a new term as our Director in July.

We are sending you this email with heavy hearts and in great frustration. Over the last month, the following acts of anti-Black racism in Canada and the United States were brought to the world's attention via news and social media:

- [25-year-old, Ahmaud Arbery was murdered on February 23 while running through a neighbourhood in Brunswick, Georgia;](#)
- [Amy Cooper called the police on Christian Cooper in New York's Central Park on May 25;](#)
- [On the same day, George Floyd was brutally murdered by police officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis;](#) and
- [Regis Korchinski-Paquet was pushed off an apartment building balcony by police after her family members made a call to Toronto Police requesting mental health assistance on May 28.](#)

Unfortunately, these events are only the latest in a long history of anti-Black racism on Turtle Island. Current attempts to address diversity and equity through planning barely scratch the surface of how racism has and continues to structure our cities and the discipline of planning. We also know that planning professionals often play a role in upholding and perpetuating these structural and socio-spatial inequities. We cannot allow the planners that graduate from this program to replicate and reproduce the models of oppression that have historically been exacerbated by planning practices rooted in colonization and racism.

Reflecting on our responsibility as future planners and alumni, we demand the Master of Science in Planning program at the University of Toronto do the following beginning Fall 2020:

- Require anti-Black racism in planning theory and practice be addressed as mandatory course components in the core curriculum of the MSc in Planning program (our current understanding is that inclusion of these materials in syllabi are at the discretion of instructors);
- Ensure that discussion regarding the role of planning in institutionalizing and perpetuating anti-Black racism is not just listed as part of available readings, or as part of a larger 'diversity in planning' module, but discussed explicitly while centring the nuanced historical and contemporary experiences of Black, queer, and disabled women and trans\* people in cities (here, we would like to recognize current efforts made by faculty, but we must do so much more);

- Ensure that readings and resources are not only about Black communities, but from them. This includes developing a mechanism that allows students with lived experience and other expertise to contribute to the curriculum; and,
- Require all faculty, staff and incoming students in the MScPI program to undertake anti-oppression training (currently this training is optional for students during orientation, but is a critically important element of the orientation program; it is also our understanding the faculty, including sessional instructors, are not required by the Department to undertake this training. Here, the planning program should leverage and advance the mandate of the University's Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office).

All of the above and below should be incorporated into a long-term strategy to operationalize racial equity throughout the MScPI program and the planning profession, including but not limited to:

- A definition of anti-Black racism and racial equity, broadly, and in relation to the profession;
- Commissioning a racial equity audit to identify existing strengths and weaknesses within the Department and subsequent solutions for implementation;
- Department policies to ensure the hiring of more BIPOC staff and faculty, with an emphasis on Black faculty, for the planning program specifically (this will provide much needed mentorship opportunities for students of colour); and
- Providing continued support, financially and otherwise, to programs like the Mentoring Initiative for Indigenous & Planners of Colour (MIPOC) that offer off-campus mentorship opportunities for BIPOC students with alumni and planning professionals across the city.

We also encourage the planning program to review the brief selection of resources and initiatives below from other institutions, that were undertaken in a similar spirit both administratively and pedagogically:

- ['Race' and Space: Self-Study Curriculum, UCL Bartlett;](#)
- [Abolitionist Planning Framework, UCLA;](#)
- [Initiative on Race, Gender, and the Built Environment, UT Austin School of Architecture;](#)  
and
- Explore the possibility of incorporating the compiled reading list of 100+ resources developed by U of T Bousfield Visiting Scholar, Jay Pitter & her students from her "Canadian Women and Cities Reading Course."

In closing, we are formalizing these requests, such that the planning program within the Department of Geography and Planning can stand as an organization which evolves beyond acknowledging issues impacting Black communities, and anti-Black racism more specifically, in departmental communications, and instead use its institutional privilege to create lasting change.

We, the undersigned, are looking forward to your response,

This letter is co-signed by the following second-year students in the MScPI program:

Hanne Yager h.yager@mail.utoronto.ca  
Anne James annef.james@mail.utoronto.ca  
Keisha St. Louis-McBurnie keisha.stlouis.mcburnie@mail.utoronto.ca  
Marissa Irene Uli marissa.uli@mail.utoronto.ca  
Catherine Jiao catherine.jiao@mail.utoronto.ca  
Christine Avery christine.avery@mail.utoronto.ca  
Nick Rhamey-Smith nick.rhamey.smith@mail.utoronto.ca  
Neve Adams neve.adams@mail.utoronto.ca  
Mark Tennenhouse mark.tennenhouse@mail.utoronto.ca  
Sarah Burrell sarah.burrell@mail.utoronto.ca  
Pragya Priyadarshini p.priyadarshini@mail.utoronto.ca  
Hazelmae Valenzuela hazelmae.valenzuela@mail.utoronto.ca  
Teresa Morante Arona teresa.morantearona@mail.utoronto.ca  
Thomas Kempster t.kempster@mail.utoronto.ca  
Zeina Ahmed zeina.ahmed@mail.utoronto.ca  
Charlie Caldwell charles.caldwell@mail.utoronto.ca  
Amy Protheroe amy.protheroe@mail.utoronto.ca  
Dahab Ibrahim dahab.ibrahim@mail.utoronto.ca  
Kayla Greenberg k.greenberg@mail.utoronto.ca  
Joanna Illunga joanna.ilunga.kapinga@mail.utoronto.ca  
Sanjida Usha sanjida.rabbi@mail.utoronto.ca  
Jhamela Stapleton jhamela.stapleton@mail.utoronto.ca  
Chiyi Tam chiyi.tam@mail.utoronto.ca  
Patricia Arnold patriciaj.arnold@mail.utoronto.ca  
Nick Vo nick.vo@mail.utoronto.ca  
Ajeev Bhatia ajeev.bhatia@mail.utoronto.ca  
Jorge Quesada jorge.quesadadavies@mail.utoronto.ca  
Lena Sanz Tovar lena.sanztovar@mail.utoronto.ca  
Aayesha Patel aayesha.patel@mail.utoronto.ca  
Jayne Armstrong jayne.armstrong@mail.utoronto.ca

Cc: Student signatories and faculty instructors of core planning courses Professor Jason Spicer and Professor Linday Stephens