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From: Alumni <MDP-ALUMNI-LIST@LISTSERV.CC.EMORY.EDU> on behalf of Masters In Development Practice <mastdev@EMORY.EDU>
Sent: Thursday, June 4, 2020 1:25 PM
To: MDP-ALUMNI-LIST@LISTSERV.CC.EMORY.EDU
Subject: At a loss for words
Attachments: SorenStevenson.pdf

Dear MDP alums,

We are at a loss for words. There is simply no adequate way to express the grief, rage, and shame that is called for when faced with the racist violence, injustice, and oppression that has manifested itself in our country, our state, and our city in the last days, weeks, and months. Coming on the heels of a pandemic that made blatantly clear that who lives and who dies is mostly about race, the recent murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor have shown, again and again, how far we still are – as a society – from embracing that obvious fact that Black Lives Matter.

We stand in solidarity with Black and African American students, families, and communities as we witness and denounce these instances of modern-day lynching. We also understand that the racism that fuels them also hurts and kills other Black and Brown people, through state-sponsored violence and structural inequities in services and opportunities. The most basic expression of life - breathing - should not be a privilege that is automatically granted to white people while being denied to People of Color, through physical violence, health disparities, gun violence, or police brutality.

We likewise condemn the senseless retaliation against protesters that led to more killing and injury over the past several days, including the appalling and traumatizing police assault on the Morehouse and Spelman college students in Atlanta last weekend. As we watch the live broadcasts of the protests, we pray for everyone's safety, but especially those within our MDP family. We have just learned – with sadness and outrage - that a University of Minnesota MDP student – [Soren Stevenson \(class of 2020\)](#) - was severely injured while peacefully protesting (please consider posting a message of support, as requested in the attached notice). We are humbled and inspired by his selfless sacrifice and fearless commitment as well as the courage and passion of Emory MPD students and alums. Do let us know if you hear of other members of our community who have been affected and may need help.

We are painfully aware that many of you are the target of race- and gender based harassment, discrimination, marginalization, and micro-aggressions in your daily lives and work. Despite theoretical advances and reflexive critiques, international development and humanitarian work remains a largely white-led enterprise, funded by the Global North and directed to communities of color in the Global South. Most of you operate in such contexts and confront these dilemmas and challenges on regular basis, even as you strive to put into practice the socially equitable and transformative approaches that we embrace in the MDP program.

It is these insidious forms of interpersonal and institutionalized racism – rather than a few bad apples or mean folks – that pave the way for the vicious outbreaks of racial hatred we have been witnessing in recent weeks. In some cases we ourselves have been the source, or the enablers, of expressions of racialized bias, ethnic stereotyping, and cultural insensitivity towards members of the MDP community. We are deeply sorry for the hurt and stress we caused: if anyone reading this letter has been affected in this way, we ask that you let us know so we can apologize directly and appropriately make amends.

We understand that advocating for radical transformation – including racially-just development practice - requires ongoing engagement in critical self-reflection, personal growth, collective action, and authentic solidarity. As we continue the struggle to build a future where all lives are equally valued, affirmed, and supported, we must rely on a combination of insight, vision, outrage, and caring that can only be developed and sustained in community. We welcome your ideas for honorably responding to challenges that we face at various scales, from our classrooms and our campus, to our city and our country, to our increasingly interconnected world.

Over the last few months, in response to students' feedback, MDP has adopted changes to integrate these concerns more centrally in our curriculum. We have added a new competency area on Diversity and Social Justice to program requirements, and planning new courses for the new academic year that address that competency. We are revising course materials to more intentionally include Global South authors and recruiting new instructors with diverse background. We are likewise working with Emory's [Center for Faculty Development and Excellence](#) and other partners to develop inclusive pedagogy resources for MDP instructors, including guidelines for identifying and addressing implicit bias and microaggressions.

In the meantime, we warmly invite you to join us in participating in the [Online Solidarity Vigil](#) that Emory's Campus Life and the Office of Spiritual and Religious Life will hold on June 5 at 4 pm (make sure you register ASAP!). In closing, we offer this poem, entitled [Bullet Points](#), by Emory's Creative Writing Professor and Pulitzer Prize winner [Jericho Brown](#) who will also offer a reading at the Vigil.

Thank you for pushing us, again and again, to be braver and better.

Take care and stay safe!

[Carla, Hilary, David, Chan, Jonny, and Rebeca](#)