

Middlebury College Program in Neuroscience Statement in Support of Black Lives Matter

The members of the Neuroscience Program at Middlebury College stand unequivocally in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name movements. The brutal killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, and countless other Black people are appalling, and we unite with everyone marching in support of these movements in saying “enough is enough.” We stand in solidarity with all BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) members of the Middlebury College community. We stand with those who are “committed to struggling together and to imagining and creating a world free of anti-Blackness, where every Black person has the social, economic, and political power to thrive” (<https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/>).

According to the BLM mission statement: “Black Lives Matter Foundation, Inc is a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes. By combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy, we are winning immediate improvements in our lives.”(<https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>). As educators, we believe that one way we can contribute to the BLM mission is by helping to elevate our Black students and faculty to places of power and influence in order to help create a world free of anti-Blackness and state-sanctioned violence against members of the Black community. In particular, we can create spaces for Black imagination and innovation in our classrooms (and beyond) through changes to our pedagogy and program culture. To achieve these goals, we commit to the following steps:

For our classrooms: We recognize that the legacy of systemic racism is operative in every corner of American life and that it is pervasive both in the history of neuroscience as a discipline, and in its contemporary institutions as well.

- We are committed to reexamining the content of the Neuroscience curriculum in order to bring issues of racism and inequality into prominence whenever possible, for instance, by devoting time in courses to uncovering the legacy of racism in neuroscience as a discipline (e.g. the eugenics movement, scientific racism), and studying neuroscientific perspectives on the sources of bias, inequality, and injustice.
- We commit to increasing the number of non-white seminar speakers invited to campus each year through invitations from the Neuroscience Program and co-sponsoring events with the Biology and Psychology Departments.
- We are committed to improving our advising practices to better embody authentic mentoring, a personalized relationship that helps students to identify and achieve their professional goals during their time at Middlebury

and beyond. We acknowledge that this guidance is especially crucial for BIPOC students whose professional success is impeded by systemic racism.

- We are working towards improved communication practices to ensure that students with backgrounds that are underrepresented in neuroscience know how to pursue research opportunities with faculty and other STEM summer experiences, and are actively encouraged to apply for them.

For the Neuroscience Program: We as a Program need to do much more to identify and expunge the instances of racism and inequity within our own community, curriculum, teaching practices, and programming.

- Faculty will continue to educate themselves about systemic racism, and we will engage in ongoing professional development about the best practices in anti-racist pedagogy. In particular, all faculty in the department will take part in anti-racism workshops offered by the College.
- We will appoint a liaison within the Neuroscience faculty who will report to the Program about student concerns and suggestions related to diversity and inclusion. Feedback can also be submitted anonymously through the Student Advisory Council. Time will be allotted during each Program meeting to address these concerns and suggestions.
- We will continue to strive to make our hiring process for new faculty members as equitable as possible, in order to promote equal opportunity for all applicants.

We regard the above measures as merely first steps in an ongoing dialogue and recognize that these efforts are but a small contribution to a much larger movement, one whose stakes transcend what we are able to do on our campus. We nonetheless believe that it is important to contribute what we can to this movement, in the hopes of moving together toward a community, at Middlebury and beyond, that is free of anti-Black racism and racism of all kinds. We welcome novel perspectives in this ongoing process and will be offering continuing opportunities for discussion of student concerns and ideas about how to create a more inclusive community.

Sincerely,

The Faculty of the Neuroscience Program

Jason Arndt
Clint Cave
Marcia Collaer
Amanda Crocker
Kim Cronise
Mike Dash

Glen Ernstrom
Clarissa Parker
Joanna Shipley
John Spackman
Mark Spritzer
Zu Wei Zhai