



Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

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Memorandum

To: Heads, faculty members and administrative staff in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
From: Jennifer Simpson, Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Date: June 8, 2020
Re: Strike for Black Lives, HSS Conversation

Derek Chauvin's use of force against George Floyd, Floyd's resulting death, and the related protests are drawing important attention to anti-Black racism and the ongoing reality of institutional injustice in the United States and in Canada. I recently learned of the [Strike for Black Lives](#), an event occurring on June 10th with objectives including "to hit pause, to give Black academics a break and to give others an opportunity to reflect on their own complicity in anti-Black racism in academia and their local and global communities." This event is organized by physicists at universities in North America.

I have scheduled a conversation for June 10 from 12:00 – 1:00 for those in HSS to engage in discussion about ways in which HSS faculty, in relation to teaching and research activities, can build capacity and make change.

As noted in information about the strike, one action the organizers are encouraging is to "Repurpose scheduled meetings and seminar times to discuss specific actions you will take to have an impact locally. Focus on concrete actions you can take now." As the organizers note in their [webpage](#), "Importantly, we are not calling for more diversity and inclusion talks and seminars. We are not asking people to sit through another training about implicit bias. We are calling for every member of the community to commit to taking actions that will change the material circumstances of how Black lives are lived."

Making change related to racism and colonialism is complicated. It will not happen quickly, or in just one meeting, particularly at institutional levels. In the conversation scheduled for June 10 at noon, the focus will be on what ASMs, Heads, and those in my office can do with existing resources and within our Faculty—how can we, starting from where we are right now, collectively consider possibilities for change. All academic and administrative staff members are welcome to attend this conversation.

I will also reiterate my expectations for a collegial discussion. In my mind, this requires that we ask questions of our colleagues rather than making evaluative or judgmental statements about others' behavior. It is also useful to consider and place priority on comments that engage with best ways to move forward.

Finally, I note in my 2014 book, *Longing for Justice: Higher Education and Democracy's Agenda* that one way to think about structural change is through the two steps of naming and imagining. It is first necessary to name what is, and then possible to imagine a different future. I think such work is possible in institutions of higher education. For the meeting on Wednesday, I encourage you to consider:

- Are there resources in your discipline that can productively inform anti-racist work? If yes, what are these? To what degree are these resources made visible or active in your department?
- What do we see inside of HSS as impediments to anti-racist practices?
- What supports can we build or provide within HSS to address these impediments?