



Thursday, March 3, 2022

This letter is written in support of the students of color attending the University of Montana, the University of Montana's commitment to racial justice through its diversity equity and inclusion plan and serves as our formal condemnation of the racist statements made by University of Montana Professor Clayton Looney, Poe Family Distinguished Faculty Fellow in the UM College of Business.

In a now infamous Instagram video, an individual clearly identified as Professor Looney is caught on camera making a racist remark and directing it to his young biracial daughter. The encounter is alleged to have been filmed by his ex-wife, who is African American and made public in an alleged custody dispute. In subsequent posts, Mr. Looney is revealed to have made a number of other race-based negative characterizations of people of color.

These posts were brought to the attention of University of Montana Administration in the spring of 2021. In their engagement with this issue, the University of Montana's Title IX Office and Office of Equal Employment Opportunity found, due to the location of remarks (they allegedly occurred off the UM campus and at Mr. Looney's residence), the University had no legal recourse to direct toward Mr. Looney, stating these comments fell under "a non-workplace issue".

In a subsequent newspaper interview and in his own words, Mr. Looney is quoted referring to the diversity training the incident prompted stating "It helped me move closer to my full potential as a human being and has put an end to the subject." We would submit this is further evidence of his lack of understanding to date of what racism is—here he is clearly only thinking of himself and how these statements have impacted his life with no concern for the collateral damage emanating from his racist behaviors and their bearing on people of color. As an educator, Mr. Looney is expected to have a conceptual understanding of pedagogy and approaches to learning. In espousing the benefits of the diversity training that he received while continuing to participate in racist rhetoric, Mr. Looney displays that he is unable to connect his displays of interpersonal racism to institutional racism. He has failed to understand that the systemic nature of racism accommodates and harbors individual racism as well. Strategy 2.1.1 of the University of Montana's DEI plan creates the expectation and expands the opportunity for faculty to pursue professional development focused on inclusive and anti-racist teaching practices. While it is clear that Mr. Looney attended the training and by his admission received good information this current situation illustrates that Mr. Looney has much room to grow in applying anti-racist pedagogy to anti-racist praxis.

In the same article, Mr. Looney goes on to state "In 15 years of service, no other student complaints have been filed against me," ... I am a distinguished faculty fellow with an impeccable track record. Following the Title IX process, it was determined to be a non-workplace issue and the matter dismissed." We might advise Mr. Looney that his lack of previous student complaints and his "impeccable track record" have little to nothing to do with calling his daughter a *nigger*. Hiding behind a cloak of past accomplishments does not mitigate the effect of racism. We further doubt if students of color on campus share his stated assessment of the matter being "dismissed". In fact students of color, particularly Black,

African, and Muslim students are on record expressing their concern that Mr. Looney's implicit bias and clear demonstrations of overt racism will have negative consequences for their educational future at the University of Montana and even more so as they have bravely raise their voices against him creating an unsafe environment not only for those students but the many allies who lend their support to their peers.

The University of Montana finds itself in what is described by civil rights lawyer and former Deputy Legal Director of the ACLU, Jeffrey Robinson as the "gap between the law and living." representing where institutional racism is addressed through legal requirements but fall short of protecting individuals impacted by interpersonal racism. Irrespective of legal recourse, we would remind the University one of the fundamental responsibilities of an institution of higher learning centers on the concept of safety and security for its students. The ability to learn and retain information is truncated in an environment where significant concerns exists which serve to compromise a student's mental well-being. Students of color along with other students on campus have strongly indicated this is the case brought on by Mr. Looney's racist statements.

Students have expressed a high degree of angst knowing that a professor, someone whose salary is paid in part through their tuition, harbors these thoughts and demonstrates no consternation in expressing them in front of and to his young biracial child. At some point in time, it is safe to assume this young child will grow up and question her father as to the "whys" of this statement and inquire as to not what he *said*, but what he *did* to demonstrate these were not his true feelings (as he now contends). If this is the language that he uses to refer to his own child whom he has an intimate connection to, it does not take much to imagine how might Mr. Looney refer to a student of color in his own classroom.

Collaterally, we cannot separate the use of this language to his own daughter from how it informs the fear felt by Black students who are mandated to take his class as a requirement for graduation. His willingness to use this language directed towards a defenseless child, a child of his own progeny, speaks volumes as to the level of bias, whether unconscious or not, he has demonstrated to embrace. In this instance, the racism was caught on camera. However, there is no guarantee it will not resurface and rear its head when it comes to assigning grades. How might a student of color in his class ever address what they feel is an unfair grade?

Racism is pernicious. Whether or not we note it, it impacts us all. As such, whether we agree or not, it is our problem, jointly. Irrespective of the call for Mr. Looney's firing, the looming question is then this- what are the systems in place which presently ensure the safety and security of students of color attending the University of Montana that serve to mitigate the impact of this and future racist behaviors? In conclusion, we would ask all who read or hear this letter to look to Priority 5 of the University of Montana's DEI plan which is to, "Proudly tell the UM story" and ask, "Are we proud of this story?"

In solidarity,

The Montana Black Collective-Missoula