



# ST JOHN'S College

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

## **An Open Letter to the St. John's College Community on Race, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion from the SJC Alumni Association Board**

July 24, 2020

Dear Fellow Alumni and Students of St. John's College:

As representatives of the alumni of St. John's, we, the Alumni Association Board, have read, with heartbreak, individual posts (FN1) and letters (FN2) addressed to the College, from students, and our fellow alumni, documenting their experiences, over the decades, of racism at St. John's.

The Alumni Association affirms that any racist incident— reported or not— is antithetical to an institution that aspires to make “free adults by means of books and a balance.” Moreover, we cannot be inactive while members of our Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color (BIPOC) community continue to experience racial and ethnic injustice.

While we acknowledge our past conduct of passively listening, we pledge to work with the SJC Community to make meaningful progress, not only in this moment, but as part of a necessarily continuous commitment to anti-racism.

According to the June 2020 St. John's College Board of Visitors and Governors (BVG) Report, 17% of deposited students in the incoming freshman class are international students, while 21% are domestic students of color. While diversity among SJC students has increased over the decades, we must also acknowledge that creating diversity among members of our community alone is not enough. A true commitment to diversity requires equity and support.

Accordingly, as representatives of the Alumni Association, we commit ourselves to helping build a community of inclusion where members who are Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color are not only valued and respected, but are supported to contribute, thrive and succeed.

In demanding better of our community, we must demand better of ourselves. Below are our steps towards achieving our stated aspirations. To be clear, the Alumni Association Board considers these to be initial steps in creating lasting change. We also pledge to increase accountability in this process by working with all key stakeholders, students, alumni, the College and the BVG, to achieve results.

### **Changes in Representation and Governance:**

As the representative body of the Alumni Association, we must be relevant to and reflect our diverse members. Persons of color must hold positions of leadership in order to chart the best and most inclusive way forward for our community. We want to state unequivocally that diversity enriches the St. John's community. The contributions of our fellow BIPOC students and alumni are essential to the best expression of the Program.

Thus, the Board of the SJC Alumni Association is committed to increasing diversity in formal alumni representation. In 2020, the Alumni Association Board actively recruited and recommended for membership to the Alumni Board, an unprecedented number of alumni who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the SJC alumni community.

In addition, we have proposed changes to our Code of Operating Resolutions (COR), Sections 12.2-3, governing representation on the Alumni Association Board and for alumni-elected members of the Board of Visitors and Governors. These changes will help achieve diversity in Alumni Association Leadership by expanding the current provisions' focus on gender, campus affiliation, age, undergraduate and Graduate Institute affiliation, to include racial and ethnic diversity, as well as other more inclusive criteria. It is paramount to us, and the alumni community we serve, that our governing documents reflect and codify our values of inclusion, equity, and diversity.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/blackandbrownatsjc/>

<sup>2</sup> Letter by current and former students of St. John's College in Santa Fe, Misgana Sharew (SF22), et al., dated 6/9/20; Letter to St. John's College by Zachary Gold (A17), et al., dated 6/25/20; Letter to the Administration and Faculty at St. John's College by Keaton Jahn, et al., dated 7/10/20, and Letter to St. John's College Administrators of both Santa Fe and Annapolis by Samantha Ardoin (SF16), et al., dated 6/25/20.

### Changes in Programming:

We commit to anti-racism in the core functions of the Alumni Association by:

- Including a more diverse representation of voices at our events and in the selection of topics in our programming;
- Supporting students, especially BIPOC students struggling with issues related to inclusion and equity, through our alumni networks and by continuing to advocate for student needs;
- Providing Reading Lists to Alumni Chapters specifically to facilitate discussions around diversity, justice, and equity and that reflect a diversity of authors;
- Facilitating yearly Chapter and National events that will invite our members to deepen their capacity for empathy and understanding by providing alumni with recurring opportunities to engage on topics of race, justice, and equity; and
- Helping to create safe and productive venues within our community for the exploration and expression of complex and critically important issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.

### Changes in Accountability:

The Alumni Association Board will form a special committee to address issues of diversity, equity and inclusion, as identified by alumni and students. This committee will determine, specifically, how alumni can best contribute to improving the SJC community for BIPOC students and alumni.

This committee will work in conjunction with all key stakeholders, including students, alumni, the College and the BVC to ensure coordinated efforts on issues of diversity and inclusion. We look forward to working on key BVC initiatives addressing this important work. In addition, the committee will examine the work of independent Alumni Associations addressing these issues.

The committee's main tasks will be to help guide Alumni Leadership in implementing the above changes to the Association's core functions, increasing accountability and collaboration among the key partners working with the Alumni Association, as well as exploring opportunities to help BIPOC students and alumni on issues of diversity and inclusion.

At the beginning of next year, the Alumni Association will publish the initial outcomes of this committee's work. To be included in these outcomes are concrete recommendations to 1) help with retention rates of students of color by providing opportunities like alumni mentorship for students struggling with issues related to diversity, inclusion and equity at the College; 2) facilitate more diverse representation in leadership that will lead to better and more inclusive governance; and 3) create more inclusive programming that promotes thoughtful, empathetic and productive interactions within the St. John's community and a greater appreciation of the role each of us must play in creating a more just society.

We are grateful for the contributions of alumni and students, over the years, and in this moment, to accelerate positive change. The changes articulated above are not and cannot be the breadth of the Association's work, because lasting change requires continuous commitment. Through this statement, the Board of Directors of the Alumni Association commits to the groundwork needed to address issues raised by alumni and students, as well as the establishment of organizational practices to promote inclusion and equity.

We join you in building an anti-racist community of which we can all be proud. For those interested in working with the Alumni Association, we urge you to contact us via email at [alumni.association@sjc.edu](mailto:alumni.association@sjc.edu).

In Solidarity,

The St. John's College Alumni Association Board