February 12, 2021

Dear community members affiliated with the biomedical sciences and engineering,

Since the summer of 2020, there have been several instances where Black Lives Matters posters have been ripped down in an elevator in Sinsheimer Labs. The impact of defacing these posters is larger than some might recognize because the act itself is emblematic of the way white supremacy works - riding the line of punishability, operating in the realm of deniability, all the while adding real bricks to the walls of exclusion. We know our community is harmed by all that this act represents; signs of ongoing inequity and anti-Blackness.

Since the first of these instances was reported, we have been engaged in efforts to identify the perpetrator(s) of these harmful acts. Despite being unable to do so, we will not give up on this effort. Even if we succeed and the symbolic act is resolved; everything that it symbolizes and the harm that it created remains.

Already, there is a great deal of anti-racist work ongoing at UC Santa Cruz. Our Associate Vice Chancellor and Chief Diversity Officer Teresa Maria Linda Scholz has been developing a site to catalogue these efforts so that we can leverage our collective work. Distinguished Professor Christina Ravelo, Associate Dean of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Division of Physical and Biological Sciences, is leading efforts in that division and helping to coordinate and amplify grassroots initiatives launched by departments and student groups. In Baskin Engineering, Dr. Carmen Robinson, Director of Student Excellence, Engagement, and Inclusion is developing and leading programs to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for students, faculty and staff of color, and to promote anti-racist practices and policies. Rooting out structural racism requires careful and sustained effort as we admit and enroll students, as we hire, promote and retain faculty and staff, as we support basic needs, and as we continue to learn and grow as a community.

None of this removes the need to respond affirmatively to the continued destruction of our students’ expression of support for BLM. Our community should be able to express our shared values loudly – especially that Black lives matter and that BIPOC students, faculty, and staff belong in academia and on our campus. We saw so recently how a violent insurrection was accompanied by vicious symbols of hate, paraded through our nation’s capitol building. We can and should be louder.

We want to offer an opportunity for co-creating solutions for safety and support in Sinsheimer Labs. The Office of the Chancellor has committed $5,000 to this effort. Deans Koch and Wolf will be working with their department chairs and building users to get started. Let’s build something together that cannot be torn down.
We recognize the impact these actions have had and the pain this has continued to cause. When harm is done, there is never full restoration, we know that, but we also know that even when there are people trying to pull us backward, we can move this university and our community forward together.

Sincerely,

Paul Koch, Dean, Physical and Biological Sciences
Alexander Wolf, Dean, Baskin Engineering
Lori Kletzer, Campus Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor
Cindy Larive, Chancellor