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THE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL

**THE GRADUATE MENTORING CENTER**

Indiana University Bloomington

## The GMC Newsletter

*July 2020: Volume 1*

**Dear Graduate Mentoring Center Community,**

In a departure from how we have responded to crises in the past, The Graduate Mentoring Center (GMC) has been quiet. Not silent. Quiet.

Between our last newsletter in March when we responded to the initial COVID-19 emergency, we have worked to provide much-needed assistance to students. In addition, in the case of a national emergency, we know that it is prudent to have reliable information from official institutional communications to avoid misinformation. To this end, we thank everyone who is responsible for these updates, such as the University Graduate School staff and leadership, under whose auspices we operate. And, particularly the Graduate and Professional Student Government ([GPSG](#)) who has worked tirelessly to keep graduate and professional students informed.

We break our quiet after the fourth of July weekend. Why? In full transparency, the past three months - a full quarter of a year – have meant re-membling and re-experiencing events that continue to shape what I do as artist-healer-scholar-teacher-director-community and cultural worker: July 6, 2001, the disappearance of Tionda and Diamond Bradley. July 6, 2016, the killing of Philando Castile. July 6, 2016: the eve of the “Battle of Juba” (South Sudan).

The people, places, and things I carry with/in me influence who I mentor and why. This newsletter, then, is an extended contemplation on the historical moments in which we are all agents. I am contemplating the struggle, and how so many different people have joined it to bring global attention to health disparities and police brutality due to racism,

specifically anti-Black racism. I am fully aware that there is more than racism in this story. However, as a Black Caribbean American woman, my skin and gender, the lilt in my voice, my choice of clothing, all mark my body and experiences as different from the norm of multiple worlds. Race is only one of them. But, it is the most visible and most difficult to ignore.

Of course, the more we focus on race, racialization, and racism, the more we will discover the complex “intersectionality” of our histories and politics. We may also – for the first time - be coming to terms with just how much the pandemic has highlighted other oppressions, such as gender. Shruti Rana’s essay, [Gendered Fault Lines and Their Implications for International Law](#), calls our attention to this.

If we are truly paying attention to – being mindful - of intersectionality, then we must acknowledge even the complexity of its origins. Perhaps you are familiar with [Kimberlé Crenshaw](#) who coined the term intersectionality in her essay “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989, *University of Chicago Legal Forum*).

However, if your interests lean not towards the legal but towards the creative, consider reading Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1978) or *Parable of the Sower* (1993), or listen to the *Parable of the Sower podcasts*. Or consider reading this *New York Times* opinion essay by Caroline Randall Williams (June 26, 2020), [“You Want a Confederate Monument? My Body is a Confederate Monument.”](#)

The point is: As we become mindful of the moment and ourselves within and part of it, we can begin to see how we are inter/connected. Is this not reason enough to learn how to listen to and be with one another?

Let me say this: Contemplation without engagement with what one has heard and/or learned results in no action, no possibility of change. While it would be nice to talk theory and history, at The GMC we want to avoid the inertia that comes with believing that discussing ideas equates to action. We want to acknowledge the work of our many campus and community collaborators who are still taking time to learn and act.

We, like you, want to be the change – or at least offer what we can to be part of the solution. It took our nation centuries to arrive at this point. It is our deepest dream that it will not take us centuries to arrive at our next destination together, with justice and peace as our daily practices.

To this end, The GMC has spent these months contemplating what our role has been and

can be, guided as always by the voices and visions of those we serve. We have included some concrete ways that invite you into dialogues and practices that support becoming community and deepening our connections as one. All are opportunities to learn more about being human and how mentoring is connected to this state of existence.

The Graduate Mentoring Center takes to heart Tenet 2 of what we have named The Five Fold Path: Community. As director, I invited cohort members, including alumni, to help revise my draft statement and to include their names as part of it, if they were in a position to do so, or wanted to do so. We recognize that everyone is not able to publicly offer support for everything they wish without a larger sacrifice, and are grateful for those who offered suggestions in multiple ways. Those who were able to view the draft, help revise it, and add their names within the period I requested are listed.

This statement is an agreement between The Graduate Mentoring Center and our communities. It is our commitment to intentionally pursue the goals we have set out for ourselves, and to revise and refine these goals and expectations as needed with the help of those we serve.

Gratitude to each and every one who has supported us over the years.

As you read the statement, inspired by the National Book Award Finalist, [\*Whereas\*](#), by Oglala Lakota poet Layli Long Soldier (2017, Graywolf Press) – also our intentional effort to honor the Native peoples on whose lands this university sits - I invite you to breathe between each segment, each line even; to stop and sit with what you have read, and to breathe again. I invite you to be aware – to be mindful – of how we are alive together.

Maria Hamilton Abegunde, Ph.D.  
Founding Director

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### **In These Turbulent Times**

**-After *Whereas* by Oglala Lakota poet Layli Long Soldier (2017, Graywolf Press, National Book Award Finalist)**

WHEREAS, as a result of the global pandemic known as COVID-19 the world was brought to a standstill and will never return to its previous state; and that this pandemic has forced all human beings to contemplate – become mindful of - our relationships with the Earth and other species, to ourselves and to each other;

WHEREAS, this pandemic has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands worldwide, and has caused all human beings to be aware of – become mindful of – their breaths and breathing, one of the essential things that indicate that we are alive as humans,

and WHEREAS the pandemic has resulted in our own illnesses and near-deaths, the illnesses and deaths of members of our families, friends, communities, society, and has prevented many of us from grieving and mourning full or at all, resulting in feelings of helplessness, depression, anger, isolation, and fear,

We are disheartened and despondent, disappointed and distressed, disgusted, even, that we must simultaneously grieve and mourn, alone in some cases, the brutal and public murders of Ahmaud Arbery (February 23, 2020), Breonna Taylor (March 13, 2020), and George Floyd (May 25, 2020).

WHEREAS, these deaths are the ones that have been brought to the general public's attention, in some cases after much effort by families and social justice activists, and they and other deaths unknown cannot be un-seen, un-heard, un-felt, or forgotten,

WHEREAS, all these deaths re-open personal, familial, community, national, international, and transgenerational traumas that re-call the deaths of, for example, Laura Nelson (May 25, 1911), Lawrence Nelson (May 25, 2011), Emmett Till (August 28, 1955), Amadou Diallo (February 4, 1999), Trayvon Martin (February 26, 2012), Eric Garner (July 17, 2014), Michael Brown, Jr. (August 9, 2014), Tamir Rice (November 22, 2014), Sandra Bland (July 13, 2015), Philando Castile (July 6, 2016), Botham Jean (October 1, 2019), Atatiana Jefferson (October 12, 2019), Dreasjon Reed (May 6, 2020), Tony McDade (May 27, 2020), and, and, and, ... and that these deaths and others unknown are reminders of the consequences of 1619 and 1640, and events of more recent centuries,

WHEREAS, the global responses to these deaths remind us, again, that Black Lives Matter, we know they also remind us of 1791, 1822, 1831, 1835, 1859, 1968, 1992, 2014, 2016, and have birthed a global movement in which young people of all identities have chosen to be in solidarity with each other, and with older generations who remember not only the Holy Week Uprising but also May 31-June 1, 1921, September 15, 1963, June 16, 1976, and other dates too numerous to name here,

WHEREAS institutions of higher education find themselves in the midst of inevitable and necessary change, demanded by students who believe that change is possible within their lifetimes; demanded by faculty, staff, and community who, though tired, are hopeful that

“a change is gonna come” sooner than later,

and, WHEREAS our hearts and bodies have no more space for such grief, our tears are dry, our throats hoarse, and the relevancy of our research challenged and, therefore, the meaning of our very identities,

The Graduate Mentoring Center (GMC) of IU Bloomington remains a refuge where breathing is encouraged and honored for all sentient beings. We believe that change and transformation are possible now. This belief undergirds our mission and vision. We, therefore, recommit to the work we envisioned and began “bit by bit” when we were founded in 2014 to serve the mentoring needs of underrepresented minority students or marginalized students.

The Graduate Mentoring Center will:

- be an intentional and engaged collaborator in the fight against injustice and oppression of all sentient beings, especially those subjected to anti-Black racism, at IU and in parts of the world where our students, faculty, staff, and alumni breathe and live, work and love.
  - The GMC will continue its collaboration with other departments/units on campus. We invite and welcome suggestions for work that asks us all to dig deep and often into our own histories to better understand the core values that we were taught and that we learned, and that guide our interactions and mentoring with/of each other.
- support members of the IU community who are actively and intentionally – mindfully - working to end injustice and oppression of all kinds, especially, that of anti-Black racism, which intersects with and is sometimes the foundation of other forms of racism and other systemic oppressions.
  - The GMC will continue our mentoring cohort, which brings together faculty and graduate students in dialogues about research, life, and living. From its inception, cohort members have explored difficult topics such as how systemic racism shapes their research, teaching, and mentoring. We also explore the importance of rest to our research. Cohort members create

- solutions by learning from each other, re-imagining their futures, and finding good in each other and IU's resources.
- We will re-activate *Let's Talk about Mentoring*, an additional mentoring cohort that introduces faculty and students to The GMC's contemplative approach to mentoring. Topics will include: how contexts and culture shape mentoring; mentoring as contemplative practice; stages of mentoring; mentoring across disciplines, race, gender, nationality; how to have difficult dialogues; and finding relevancy and meaning in research during crises.
  - In acknowledgement that First Nations, LatinX, Asian, and Asian-American, and other groups continue to engage in dialogues about anti-Black racism in their own communities, we will re-activate the *Tough Topics in the Academy* series as an invitation to members of those communities to discuss the impact of racism on mentoring.
  - In acknowledgement that international students are subjected to anti-Black racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination, we will continue to support international students as they pursue their degrees.
- 
- help students, faculty, and staff reflect on and understand – become mindful of – how our historical lineages, different cultures, and personal experiences shape our relationships with each other, the communities we serve, and the research we create and produce.
    - We will re-activate the *Being at the Table* series to explore what it means to have a seat, have a table (or not), make your own table, and/or to bring your own chair (or sit on the floor) in the academy.
    - We will continue to offer *Sitting for Peace*, an interactive contemplative practice and space for rest, to help the IU community care for itself and to develop self-guided ways to center, access practices that can benefit them personally and professionally, respond to ongoing life/world changes in practical and creative ways, and engage those practices regularly.
    - We will continue to host our annual Toni Morrison and Audre Lorde *Drop In and Read for A While* birthday reading.
    - We will continue to work with the cultural centers to ensure we provide mentoring that is culturally diverse and relevant to the populations we serve.

- develop and offer programs that are grounded in contemplative practices, mindful strategies that deepen our attention to research and the sentient beings on whom we rely; help us develop mentoring relationships that intentionally dismantle systemic oppression; and that encourage and support the growth, liberation, and joy of graduate students in ways that do not demean or devalue them or their mentors.
  - We will offer a new reading and dialogue series entitled *The Academy as a Contemplative Practice: A Whole/Holistic Approach to Research, Teaching, and Service*, based on the work of Dr. Laura Rendon. This series is made possible through the IAS Provocations Grant program and is an extension of the closing keynote Dr. Abegunde offered at the inaugural Women of IU conference. It will introduce participants to scholars who implement contemplative practices at institutional levels.
  
- deepen our vision to develop and help graduate an intentional community of scholars who are culturally diverse, mindful, and who consistently produce innovative research and creative works that have viable and sustainable impact on their communities.
  - We will offer fall and spring retreats to introduce students to The GMC reflective practices that can help them re/ acclimate to graduate life and living.
  - We will continue *Tales from the Field*, a roundtable that invites graduate students to share their experiences of fieldwork: preparation, acculturation, research, and return.
  - We will continue to offer *Drop In, Write On*, two weekly writing group(s).
  - We will activate the *Sankofa Alumni Dialogues* to connect graduate students and GMC alumni.

And, finally, WE at The Graduate Mentoring Center will:

- co-create with you – **yes you** – a community of scholars who are dedicated to the full breath and breathing - life and living – justice and peace - for all human beings.

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