

## **We Charge Anti-Blackness: Petition to Value Black Lives at UC Merced**

June 3, 2020

Dear UCM Administrators,

The Department of History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies at UC Merced is deeply anguished and angered by the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, David McAtee, Dreasjon Reed, Tony McDade, and Ahmaud Arbery by police officers and white supremacist vigilantes. In mourning their deaths and remembering their lives, we join the global calls for justice for all Black Americans who have been killed, attacked, and brutalized. We stand with the Black Lives Matter movement.

The UCM Black Student Union has shared their Call to Action statement and we offer our complete support for their urgent demands that additional resources be made available via CAPS and that the University fund a professionally mediated remote workshop in which our students can engage and be heard.

UCM takes great pride in its commitment to diversity, receiving praise for the breadth and complexity of our multi-racial student body and proudly wearing the appellation of *Hispanic-Serving Institution*. Yet, while Administrators benefit from the presence of Black and Brown bodies and the positive reflections they and their accomplishments make on UCM, little has been done to create a sense of inclusion. America began diversifying itself in 1619, but diversity without inclusion is exploitation. Unfortunately, UCM is objectifying the Black and Brown bodies of its students by doing little to make them feel like an integral part of the community while ignoring their voices when they ask, even beg, for change.

We are heartened that UCM has finally issued a statement on the killings that acknowledges the long history of structural and ideological racism that have created the conditions for ongoing violence and dehumanization of Black people in America and has offered some concrete actions in response. But more must be done.

In addition to these actions and the BSU student demands, we call for UCM Administration to:

1. **Hire More Counselors of Color in CAPS.** Students have demanded this time and again. While individual psychological approaches cannot fix structural racism, mental health services are important for students to help survive racist encounters, institutions, and society. The partnering of CAPS with the Office of Social Justice Initiatives and Identity Programs is a start, but UCM needs more counselors of color, a Black counselor in particular. Five years ago Black students were told that counselors of color who are culturally competent could not be recruited to UCM because qualified candidates would find better pay at the nearby prisons. This rationale is unacceptable. In the interim, we demand resources be allocated to telehealth services that can be used by Black students.
2. **Create a Student Union, including a Staffed Black Cultural Resource Center.** Students should have a place where they can develop a sense of community necessary to

endure, and hopefully thrive in the institutionalized racism that is endemic to the United States. Such spaces, in order to function, must be staffed. Therefore, at minimum, a full-time staff position for a Black Cultural Resource Center is needed. This position should be afforded the title, authority, mandate, resources, budget, and facilities to adequately service the multiple needs of Black students at UC Merced and serve as a proxy between the Black student population and the administration, faculty, staff and community. For examples of this kind of position, look across the UC campuses and other major universities.

3. **Immediate Disarming of the UCM Police Department.** The UCM PD prides itself on being a different kind of police department, yet it has already killed one student on campus in 2015. There are other less lethal options that police officers can use for engaging threats.
4. **Transition the UCM PD from a Police Department to Community Service Model Replacing Necessary Police Department Functions in Cooperation with the Campus Community.** We need to seriously consider what functions of the UCM PD are actually necessary and whether they can be better embodied in civilian organizations not rooted in a long history of institutionalized violence against the people of color who make up the vast majority of our student body. Reflexive reliance on police powers to deal with problems in our community is an outdated and dangerous approach, and UC Merced can and should do better.
5. **Pressure the Merced PD and Merced County Sheriff's Office to Demilitarize and the Merced Public School District to Eliminate Resource Officers.** All of these law enforcement entities interface with and impact not only members of the campus community but also their children who attend local schools. The shift toward militarization has indicated that law enforcement interprets citizens, Black citizens in particular, as enemy threats. Police should not be militarized and schools should not feel like prisons.
6. **Host a Joint Campus and Community Black Lives Matter Forum.** The recently released UCM administrative statement, "In Solidarity," mentions the Police Advisory Board. To date, it has hosted only one meaningful public forum on concerns about policing and Black Lives Matter. We demand it do more to get campus and community input on how to address anti-Blackness and police violence.
7. **Build a Reciprocal Relationship with the Black Community in Merced.** While our students are our priority, we must not be so narrowly focused on them to the exclusion of the local Black community. UCM has yet to demonstrate in actions its words of being committed to supporting the Greater Merced and Central Valley areas.
8. **Provide Compensation for Members of Anti-Blackness Task Force.** We support the collaborative approach to addressing anti-Blackness and anti-Black violence. We believe members of this task force (made up of students, staff, faculty, administrators, and

community members) should be compensated rather than asked to do more free labor for the University. This task force would report directly to the Chancellor and Provost.

9. **Recruit More Black Undergraduate and Graduate Students, and Provide Resources to Facilitate Their Retention.** Increase recruitment efforts of Black graduate and undergraduate students. The gradual decline in Black student enrollment represents a failure to proactively recruit and retain Black students on our campus.
10. **Hire More UCM Black Senior Administrators.** We are encouraged by the work of Chief Diversity Officer Dania Matos and Dean Jonathan Grady. Their hires were integral to changing UCM, but it would be an unconscionable mistake to think that they can do the work alone.
11. **Hire More Black Faculty.** Black faculty are woefully underrepresented or nonexistent in the vast majority of departments on campus. In addition to important and innovative research, Black faculty do the heavy lifting of recruiting, mentoring, and retaining Black students. They are also tasked to disproportionately serve on diversity related committees. In order to promote the well-being of and retain Black faculty and students, UCM needs to hire a critical mass of Black faculty. The absence of Black faculty has allowed white supremacy to creep and fester into curriculum, policy, and even architecture.
12. **Acknowledge the Metropolis of Prisons that Surround Campus and Subsequent Action to Divest from the Prison Industrial Complex.** UCM can no longer be silent about the presence of tens of prisons and other carceral facilities within a 50-mile radius of the campus. This lack of acknowledgement is tantamount to complicity in the act of the disproportionate U.S. hyper-incarceration of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people. We know these prisons weigh heavily on our students psychologically because we read the terror in their written work, hear the terror in class discussions. We demand divestment in the prison industrial complex (PIC) by, for example, preventing prison agencies from recruiting at UCM job fairs on “Scholar’s Lane.” In order to dismantle the PIC and imagine otherwise, UCM should provide funding for a Center for the Study of Prison Abolition.
13. **Highlight and Celebrate Solidarity Among Black and Brown People with Generously Funded-Programming and Inter-cultural Opportunities.** Use programming and inter-cultural opportunities to create solidarity and address issues that inevitably stem from living in a white supremacist, individualistic market-driven culture. Socio-economic and cultural factors lead hip-hop derived variations of the N-word to be regularly used by people who are not Black on the UCM campus. Additionally, the university’s failure to explicitly acknowledge and celebrate its diversity within diversity has led to conflicts of colorism and the subjectivity of Black descendants vis-à-vis the Black Diaspora. Address these issues by celebrating the true diversity, solidarity and community of Black and Brown people.

We urge UCM administrators to take seriously the national uprisings against anti-Blackness and state-sanctioned police violence. Condolences and platitudes--as you have stated--are not sufficient actions to remediate 400 years of structural racism. COVID-19 has done innumerable damage to the UC's budget, but anti-Blackness can no longer be swept to the side. Justice is not only about police accountability, it's about structural change within all institutions. UCM's immediate actions on all the demands are necessary steps toward justice and to show with actions, not just words, that Black Lives Matter.

LIST OF ENDORSEMENTS (As of 12 pm, June 5, 2020)

**Organizational Endorsements:**

Department of History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies	UC Merced
Black Student Union (BSU)	UC Merced
Merritt Writing Program	UC Merced
Department of Sociology	UC Merced
NAACP	UC Merced
National Society of Black Engineers	UC Merced
Graduate Students of Color Coalition	UC Merced
Graduate Cultural Resource Center	UC Merced
CounterAct!	UC Merced
Native and Indigenous Student Coalition (NISC)	UC Merced
Anthropology Society	UC Merced
The Undergraduate Historical and Critical Race & Ethnic Studies Journal	UC Merced
Roteract	UC Merced
UAW 2865	UC Merced
Central Valley Mutual Aid & Collective Care Network	Merced
Residence Hall Association	UC Merced
Cheer Team	UC Merced
Magic the Gathering Club	UC Merced
Staff and Faculty of Color Association	UC Merced

**Individual Endorsements:**

Nigel Hatton	Associate Professor, Literature & Philosophy, UC Merced
Whitney Pirtle	Assistant Professor, Sociology, UC Merced
Maria Martin	Assistant Professor, History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Sabrina Smith	Assistant Professor, History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Myles Ali	UC President's Postdoctoral Fellow, History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Kevin Dawson	Associate Professor, History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Ma Vang	Assistant Professor, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Kit Myers	Assistant Professor, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Mario Sifuentez	Associate Professor, History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced

Romina Robles	
Ruvalcaba	Assistant Professor, History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Sapana Doshi	Associate Professor, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Muey Saeteurn	Assistant Professor, History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Sholeh Quinn	Associate Professor, History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Tommy Tran	Lecturer, History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Sean Malloy	Professor, History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Susan Amussen	Professor, History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
David Torres-Rouff	Associate Professor, History & Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Khyree Glover	President, Black Student Union, Political Science, UC Merced
Dalia Magaña	Assistant Professor, Spanish Linguistics, UC Merced
Arnold Kim	Professor, Applied Mathematics
Tanya Golash-Boza	Professor, Sociology, UC Merced
Lorena Alvarado	Assistant Professor, Global Arts, Media and Writing Studies
Laura Hamilton	Professor and Chair of Sociology, UCM
Jayson Beaster-Jones	Professor, Global Arts, Media, and Writing Studies, UC Merced
Irene Beattie	Associate Professor, Sociology, UC Merced
Nella Van Dyke	Professor, Sociology, UC Merced
Katie Brokaw	Associate Professor of English, UC Merced
Kyle Dodson	Associate Professor, Sociology, UC Merced
Cintia Quesada	PhD Student, Sociology Department, UC Merced
Analis Villaseñor	Student
Kiminy Chhith	Undergraduate Student, Global Arts, UC Merced
Katie Daniels	Lecturer, Sociology, UC Merced
Holley Moyes	Associate Professor, Anthropology and Heritage Studies
Arturo Arias	Professor, English and Spanish, UC Merced
Shiloh Green	PhD Student, Interdisciplinary Humanities, UC Merced
Maria-Elena De Trinidad Young	Assistant Professor, Public Health, UC Merced
Jan Goggans	Associate Professor Literatures and Languages, UCM
Maria DePrano	Associate Professor of Art History, UC Merced
Gina Palefsky	Graduate Student, Interdisciplinary Humanities, UC Merced
Alyson Caine	PhD Candidate, Interdisciplinary Humanities Graduate Group, UC Merced
Ivan Gonzalez Soto	Graduate Student, Interdisciplinary Humanities Graduate Group, UC Merced
Violet Barton	PhD Candidate, UC Merced
Danielle Bermudez	Ph.D. Candidate, Interdisciplinary Humanities, UC Merced
Hala Alnagar	PhD Candidate, Sociology, UC Merced
Teamrat A. Ghezzehei	Professor, Life & Environmental Sciences, UC Merced
Asmeret Asefaw Berhe	Professor, Life and Environmental Sciences; UC Merced
Tabesh Zaidi	Graduate student, Interdisciplinary Humanities, UC Merced
Ignacio López-Calvo	Literatures and Languages, UCM
Lorraine Ramos	PhD Candidate, Interdisciplinary Humanities, UCM
Jazmine Kenny	MSPH, Graduate Student, Public Health, UC Merced
Laura Gomez	Ph.D. Candidate, Interdisciplinary Humanities, UC Merced
Sora Kim	Assistant Professor, Life and Environmental Sciences, UC Merced
Edward Flores	Associate Professor of Sociology, UC Merced
Michelle Yeung	Ph.D Candidate, Sociology Department, UC Merced
Ahmed Correa Alvarez	PhD Student Interdisciplinary Humanities, UC Merced

Yang Lor	Assistant Professor (Teaching), Sociology, UC Merced
Alma Alvarado	Graduate Student, Interdisciplinary Humanities, UC Merced
Ariell Wright	Alumni 2020, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies; Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Queer Issues
Camille Paladino Ponce	PhD Student, Interdisciplinary Humanities, UC Merced
Stephanie L. Canizales	Assistant Professor, Sociology, UC Merced
Melissa Quesada	Sociology PhD Student, UC Merced
Alejandro Zermeno	PhD Candidate, Sociology Department at UC Merced
May Yang	Graduate Student, UC Merced
Karla Seijas	PhD Student, Interdisciplinary Humanities, UC Merced
Amanda Caterina Leong	Ph.D Student, Persianate, Chinese and Portuguese Studies, UCM
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Humberto Garcia	Associate Professor, Department of Literatures and Languages, UCM
Yehuda Sharim	Assistant Professor, Global Arts, Media, and Writing Studies, UCM
Ruby Martinez	Undergraduate Student, Psychology, UC Merced
Cameron Smith	Third Year Student, Co-Chair of Queer and Trans People of Color Organization , UC Merced
Paola Plasencia	Undergraduate student, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Anais Palomo	Undergraduate student, Critical Race & Ethnic Studies, Undergraduate Research Assistant
Angela Villanueva	Student
Kayri Garcia	Undergraduate Student, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UCM
Lidia Gonzalez	Graduate student, UC Merced
Jessica Martinez	Undergraduate Student, CRES, UC Merced
Shaira Vargas	Undergraduate, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Iskally Huerta	Undergraduate Student, Psychology, UC Merced
Jovana Ramos	Graduate Student, Sociology Department, UC Merced
Rocio Hernandez	Student at UC Merced
Menjivar, Daniel Adahir	Undergraduate Student, Public Health, UCM
Ángeles Hernandez	Student, political science, uc merced
Azul De Leon	Undergraduate, Natural Sciences, UC Merced.
Simona Nanda	Student, MBE, UC Merced
Joel Rodriguez	Intern at UCM
Alejandro Esquivel	Student, Sociology, UC Merced
Karla Pascual	Undergraduate, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Cassandra Espinoza-Martinez	Undergraduate student, Political Science & History, Recruitment Chair Phi Alpha Delta, VP of Academics PFC, ACQUIRE chair EXO ASUCM
Abigail Hernandez	Undergraduate
Martin Baeza	UCM Alumni
Beatriz Lopez	Undergraduate, Biology, UC Merced
Kiana Hugins	Undergraduate Student, Anthropology and Heritage Studies, UC Merced
Krystal Navarro	Undergraduate student, Sociology, UC Merced
Janessa Phan	Student, Anthropology Major, UCM
Mariela Quezada-Flores	Undergraduate Student, Psychology, Sociology, UC Merced
Anaya Parashar	Undergraduate, undeclared
Ma Angela Edith Montiel	Undergraduate student, Cognitive Science, UCM
Camille Raynaud	Undergraduate Student, UC Merced
Daniel Ciau	Student, GASP major

Stephanie Webb	UC Merced Undergrad
Abigail Cole	President, National Organization of the Advancement of Colored People at UCM
Jaqueline Torres	Student, UCM
Andrea Alfaro	Undergraduate sociology major
Madison Chambers	Undergraduate Sociology Major
Fiza Haroon	Undergraduate, computer science and engineering major
Jennifer Esmay	Undergraduate, Mechanical Engineering Major
Hope Blackwell	Undergraduate, Political Science!
Kathy Martinez	Undergraduate Student, Political Science, UC Merced
Genoveva Vega Gastelum	Undergraduate, Psychology Major
Paul Almeida	Professor, Sociology, UC Merced
Mirko De Tomassi	Graduate Student, UCM
Sidra Goldman-Mellor	Assistant Professor, Department of Public Health
Nancy Ventura	Undergraduate, human biology major
Catherine Yeager	Graduate Student, Interdisciplinary Humanities, UC Merced
Nou Chi Her	Alumni 2020, Biological Sciences--Human Biology, UC Merced
Kenny Jung	Undergraduate, Computer Science and Engineering
Jenifer Hernandez	Undergraduate, Bioengineering, UC Merced
Jose Ramirez Reyes	Undergraduate, Political Science, UC Merced
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Natasha Hagaman-Cummins	PhD Candidate, Sociology, UC Merced
Ashley Metzger	Graduate Student, Department of Sociology
Erin Meyer	Staff
Derek Schwartz Merrill	Lecturer, Merritt Writing Program, UC Merced
Alisha Jones	PhD Student, Sociology, UC Merced
Maria Fernanda Sanchez Sanchez	Undergraduate, Human Biology major
Jacqueline Hernandez	Undergraduate, Psychology
Lizzy Gomez	Residence Life Coordinator, UC Merced
Amalia Pérez	Graduate Student, Sociology Department, UCM
Kasernyia Thao	Undergraduate, Human Biology Major
Rose Chang	Undergraduate, Psychology & Public Health, UC Merced
Maila Vang	Undergraduate, Sociology Major
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Ken Yoshida	Assistant Professor, UCM
Marilinn López Paz	Undergraduate, History Major, UC Merced
Maria Del Cid	Undergraduate undeclared
Elena Velasquez	Undergraduate, Management and Business Economics Major
Juanae Bailey	BLACK UC MERCED ALUMNI
Linda Solis	Student
Alondra Morales	Alumni
Abril Gutierrez	Undergraduate, biology major
Natalie Skiera	Undergraduate, Anthropology Major
Sarah Lee	Undergraduate Student, History Major
Phillip Lovas	Lecturer, Merritt Writing Program, UC Merced

Darlene Medrano	Undergraduate Student, Economics Major
Jorge Alvarez	Undergraduate Student, Public Health Major
Madelyn Lara	Undergraduate, History Major
Verenize Arceo	UC Merced Alumni
Uriel E Angelino	Undergraduate, Global Arts Studies Program Major
Alexis Bernal	Undergraduate, Biological Sciences Major UC Merced
Thomas Paniagua	UC Merced PH D candidate
Sunanda Ralmilay	Student, Undergraduate, English
Matt Snyder	Continuing Lecturer, Merritt Writing Program
Josiah Beharry	Undergraduate student, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, UC Merced
Omar González	UCM Alumni
Sylvia Sanchez	UC Merced Alumni
Chelsy Cummings	Alumni, Molecular Biology Major, UCM
Breanna Bland	Undergraduate, Chemistry
Téa Pusey	Undergraduate Sociology Major
T.R. (Thomas) Salsman	Alumni, BA in history 2019 UCM
Bob Garman	Continuing Lecturer Merritt Writing Program UC Merced
Norma Vargas	(English/History c/o 2017, graduate student @ CSU Fresno)
Sandy Dorantes	Undergraduate, Psychology and Spanish Major
Iris Ruiz	MWP Lecturer
Elizabeth Cunningham	Lecturer, Merritt Writing Program
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Christine Isborn	Associate Professor, Chemistry, UC Merced
Trevor Jackson	Instructor of Humanities, Modesto Junior College; Interdisciplinary Humanities Alumni, UC Merced
Jamin Shih	Lecturer in Critical Race and Ethnic Studies
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Jeremey Cunningham	Undergrad
Neama Alamri	PhD, Interdisciplinary Humanities
Maria Nguyen-Cruz	Undergraduate student, English: Literature and Languages Major
Anh L. Diep	Graduate Student Researcher, Quantitative Systems Biology PhD
Nikole Truong	Undergraduate, Poli sci, UCM
Samantha Ocena	Associate Director / Merritt Writing Program
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Katie L. Butterfield	PhD Candidate, Sociology
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Jazmyne Pritchett	Student Undergraduate, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies Major
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John Bultena	Continuing Lecturer, Merritt Writing Program
Kevin Leuthold	Undergraduate Student, Applied Math Major
Hannah Sarnoff	Undergraduate, Public Health Major
Riley Whitmer	Undergrad Chemistry Major
Fabiola Perez	Graduate student, Public Health
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Justin Gautreau	Lecturer, Merritt Writing Program, UC Merced
Samantha Brown	Undergraduate__Public Health
Aiden Cutright	Undergraduate Student, Anthropology Major
Kevin Easley	PhD student Interdisciplinary Humanities
Leila Elizalde	Undergraduate, Political Sciences Major
Rebeca Antoine	Lecturer, Merritt Writing Program
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Heather Devrick	Lecturer, Merritt Writing Program
Flor Nunez	Undergraduate Student
Sienna Martinez	Undergraduate, Molecular and Cell Biology Major
Sheindel Gamerberg	Undergraduate, Bioengineering Major, UCM
Anna Moncovich	former MWP Lecturer
John Galindo	Undergraduate
Ying Wei Zhang	Undergraduate, English Major
Carlos Hernandez	Undergraduate, Sociology Major
Litzy Rubio-Montano	Undergraduate Student, Bioengineering, UC Merced
Adrian Buitron Boada	Undergraduate - Mechanical Engineering
Valerie Valdivia	Undergraduate Student, Psychology
Miguel Payan	Undergraduate, political science major
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Joanne Luu	Bioengineering major, Chemical Science minor, UC Merced
John Haner	Faculty, Merritt Writing Program
Thomas Martinez	Undergraduate, History Major
Chelsey Olivarria	Undergraduate, Sociology Major
Yash Dhillon	Student(Undergraduate, CSE)
Nina Thornton	Student (Undergraduate, Biology Major)
Janeth Castaneda	Undergraduate, Biological Sciences Major
Debbo Elias	Student Undergraduate, Biology Major
Mariana Abuan	Lecturer, Merritt Writing Program, UC Merced
Danielle Mingua-	
Lopstain	Lecturer, Merritt Writing Program, UC Merced
Jess Evora	Associate Director, Margo F. Souza Student Leadership Center
Stewart Choi	Student Undergraduate, CSE
Catherine Koehler	Continuing Lecturer, Merritt Writing Program, UC Merced
Hugo Alberto López	
Chavolla Ph.D.	Student Interdisciplinary Humanities, UC Merced
Emily Junez	Undergraduate, Mechanical Engineering Major
Arlyne Nava	Undergraduate, Business Major
Daisy Cabrera	Undergraduate, Psych Major
Gilberto Fuerte	Undergraduate, Sociology Major
Arely Ortiz	Second year, ESS major

Eduardo Bautista Jr	Undergraduate, Mechanical Engineering Major
Juan Perez Vasquez	Undergraduate Student
Angelica Plasencia	Parent
Sean Epstein-Corbin	Lecturer, Merritt Writing Program, UC Merced
Emmanuel Avalos	Undergraduate, Biology Major
Alyssa Santellano	Undergraduate/Applied Mathematics Major
Arianna Mengel	Undergraduate, English Major
Ingry Cruz Lopez	Undergraduate, UC Merced, Psychology Major/Pre-Health
Gabriel Benavidez	Undergrad CSE major
Mary Guidone	Lecturer, Dept. of Languages and Literature
Immanuel Hargrave	Undergraduate, psychology major
Ada Johnson-Kanu	PhD Candidate Political Science
Amelia Johnson	Staff, Health Sciences Research Institute
Annabella Grande Agostinho	Undergraduate, Management of Business Economics Major
Gabriella Hernandez	Undergraduate, Psychology
Jazmin Santos	Undergraduate, Economics Major
Luis Rubén González	Graduate Student, Sociology, UC Merced
Erika Murillo-Candelas	Undergraduate Student
Lucio Moreno	Undergraduate, Mechanical Engineering Major
Christina Torres-Rouff	Professor, Anthropology & Heritage Studies
Jake Moreno	Undergraduate, MBE Major
Crystal Rincon	Undergraduate Student, Public Health, UC Merced
Keona Ragudo	Undergraduate, Psychology Major
Theodore Ude	Former President, National Society of Black Engineers
Jaqueline Gutierrez	Undergraduate Psychology Major
Lidia Haile	National Society of Black Engineers President, Undergraduate, Mechanical Engineering
John Hundley	Lecturer, Merritt Writing Program