



Dear Panhellenic and the broader Campus Community,

We, the UCLA Panhellenic Executive Board, want to address the recent events and the Black Lives Matter movement to Panhellenic membership and the larger campus community. We believe it is important that this network of women advocates, supports, and includes Black people. There are many different ways this can occur—educating ourselves, donating, starting conversations, signing petitions, listening, along with many other actions. In whatever form you can support the Black community, make sure you do it, and do it with honorable intent.

The first step in changing this community is acknowledging its history. A crucial part of this education is naming and recognizing our contribution to anti-Blackness. Panhellenic organizations were first founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, admissions to universities were regulated by laws and institutional policies that explicitly stated the exclusion of Black students, which ultimately led to the deliberate exclusion of Black individuals from white fraternity and sorority organizations.<sup>1</sup> Identifying this and any other uncomfortable truths about our history will need to be a continual practice among current members, alumnae, and potential new members. We, the Panhellenic Executive Board, recognize that to pinpoint the necessary steps to move forward, Panhellenic must identify the critical errors made in the past.

The information we shared above is only a small piece of the larger history lesson. As Panhellenic members, we must purposely educate ourselves on this history beyond what has been provided above, so we can actively change the systemic perpetuation of racism in the community. While our organizations have removed the policies explicitly prohibiting Black members and no longer discriminate on the basis of racial or ethnic backgrounds, anti-Black behavior that violates Panhellenic values has failed to be acknowledged in this community. One such incident occurred in 2015, when members within the Panhellenic community hosted and participated in a “Kanye Western” themed event. At this event, members wore pejorative outfits of the Black community, appropriating Black culture, and wore coal on their face which presented as blackface. It has been less than 5 years since this incident occurred and many Panhellenic members have no knowledge of it. However, this is something that Black students do not have the luxury of forgetting, and is an event they still hear about today. Clearly, Panhellenic ignored the implications of this event and the chance to take accountability. In the wake of this blatant anti-Black behavior, we glaringly missed the opportunity to become educated and aware of the impact of our privilege, influencing how we respond to current and future misconduct. Alpha Phi chose to release their own statement regarding this incident which can be found [here](#).

<sup>1</sup>Gillon, Kathleen E., et al. “Race and Racism in Fraternity and Sorority Life: A Historical Overview.” *Wiley Online Library*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 1 Mar. 2019, [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ss.20289](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ss.20289).

The Panhellenic Executive Board sincerely apologizes to the Black community for our failure to properly acknowledge the impact of this incident and not moving to educate members on systemic racism following this event. Although this event occurred in one chapter, we recognize that this could have occurred in any of the 13 chapters due to a gap in knowledge and training when it comes to topics such as privilege and race. Additionally, it is important to recognize that the event above was publicized, contributing to its familiarity among Black and non-Black students, whereas many other anti-Black sentiments and actions within the Panhellenic community largely go undetected. Knowing this, we must take accountability for our past and present actions and their disproportionate effects on Black lives, knowing that we are determined to change our collective future.

We, the Panhellenic Executive Board, also want to sincerely apologize for UCLA Panhellenic's Instagram statement on May 30, 2020. The immediate response to the heartbreaking murder of George Floyd given out by UCLA Panhellenic was poorly constructed and offered no meaningful information or plan of action. Our neglect to capitalize the 'b' in Black Americans was an egregious oversight that highlighted our failure to properly educate ourselves, and did so at the expense of the dignity of the Black community. For this we are immensely sorry. We are aware that apologies alone are not sufficient. We are listening to the calls of accountability past empty words. We will not take down this post as it represents our commitment to growth and we want to be held accountable; taking this statement down would erase this error and our attribution of it.

These are the Panhellenic Executive Board's initial steps forward:

- We can no longer remain inactive in the fight for racial equality and justice for all. In accordance with our values of community and mutual respect, we will be supporting the [NAACP](#), [Black Lives Matter Los Angeles](#), and the [LA Action Bail Fund](#). Furthermore, we realize that our mission to empower women must be extended to Black women and therefore we will be supporting the [California Black Women's Health Project](#) and [Black Women's Blueprint](#).
- When potential new members of the Panhellenic community register for recruitment, they will also be presented with the opportunity to learn about and support [Black Women's Blueprint](#), an organization that focuses on the empowerment of Black girls and women and aligns with our core goal of supporting and empowering women. As we finalize details about the logistics of recruitment in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are working to dismantle institutional bias and make this community more accessible to Black women and women of color. We are currently engaging in conversations about how to change recruitment and make it a more inclusive and accessible process.
- On June 13, 2020 (time and details to follow), Panhellenic will be hosting a town hall. The purpose of this town hall, and the town halls to come, is to create a space where

Panhellenic and non-affiliated students can voice their concerns, criticisms, and comments to women on the Panhellenic Executive Board. The goal of this space is to foster an open discussion to inform Panhellenic's actions and commitments moving forward. Participants will be welcome to anonymously submit questions or comments via [this form](#) as well as during the session. We plan to record the audio of these meetings and detailed written minutes to post on the Panhellenic website for the community to refer to and reflect on previous sessions.

- We are developing a committee that will meet over the summer and into the school year to maintain and bolster current conversations. Our VP of Women's Wellness and our VP of Programming will lead this committee and anyone within the Panhellenic community is invited to join. We intend to address topics such as white privilege, implicit biases, and the complex history of this community. The purpose of this learning and dialogue is to establish long-term and tangible actions for diversity, inclusivity, and equity. If you are interested in contributing to these conversations and helping this community move forward, please fill out [this form](#).

While these steps are 100 years late and are currently incapable of remedying all of our history, we are committed to taking one step at a time towards equality.

To our members—we acknowledge that many of your chapters and you as individuals have made statements on social media and that is a first step, but we must do more and come up with tangible action steps. One of the simplest things that you can do to help Black Bruins right now is to send a letter to your professors advocating for the modification, the postponement, or the cancellation of finals. Daniella Hagopian has created an [email template](#) for both Black and non-Black students. You can also donate and sign petitions. [Lizzie Campbell's Call to Action](#) includes information about actions for allyship, places to donate, and petitions to sign, among other resources. Work to educate yourself and other members. [The List](#) is a guide compiled by AFLV, the Association of Fraternal Leadership & Values, for potential resources and educational tools. There are many more resources out there and we urge you to go past what we have laid out here and continue to do your own research to find materials and actions that speak to you.

We also want to express that anyone who is not Black can participate in anti-Blackness. We want to acknowledge that racism exists on a spectrum and our own operations rarely include our Black and POC membership. We are trying to change that. We want to explicitly express support for our Black and POC members— we see you, we value you, and we want to amplify your voices.

We recognize that it is the end of Spring Quarter, but supporting and advocating cannot stop over summer; it must continue into summer, into the next school year, and for years to come. This is

only the beginning. Panhellenic must strive for progress knowing that we will make mistakes, but we must actively work to fix these mistakes.

We would also like to take a moment to thank Daniella Hagopian, Irvin Mason Jr., Brandee Mills, and Graham Smith who assisted us in identifying key goals in making progress with our effort to support and advocate for Black students. This message could not have been written without them. They spent their own time and effort to hold us accountable and to provide assistance in writing a response to the Panhellenic community about recent events and meeting with us to discuss this letter. We want to express how grateful we are for their guidance and their call to action.

Now more than ever, we must lean into uncomfortable conversations which encourage personal change and growth within this community and beyond. We have an obligation to hold ourselves and our organization accountable for what we say and do, because silence is no longer an option.

Sincerely,

Sarah Bergren  
President

Lilly Maxfield  
VP Programming

Elizabeth Elton  
Executive Vice President

Elizabeth Gaines  
VP Finance

Kara Portier  
VP Women's Wellness

Star Grayson  
VP Communications

Ryley Holdridge  
VP Membership

Gracey Maxwell  
VP Scholarship

Sally Nason  
VP Risk Management

Kat Lanoue  
VP Member Development