



PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

**American Association of
University Professors**

Promoting Quality Higher Education – An Investment in Oregon's Future

December 13, 2019

Stephen Percy, President
Portland State University

Susan Jeffords, Provost
Portland State University

Dear President Percy and Provost Jeffords,

We are writing with a call for urgent action in relation to a crisis in the Black Studies Department created by PSU Administration neglect. The neglect is historical, and the immediate crisis is the product of what we see as very questionable budgetary decisions that verge on negligence.

Colleagues in Black Studies, and colleagues in other departments who are aware of the situation, have reached out to PSU-AAUP urging us to take action.

This time last year, the Department of Black Studies had four tenure/tenure-track, and two non-tenure track faculty lines.

- Two of the tenure track faculty have since left (last year at least 10 Black administrators **and faculty** left PSU [Dec. 15 Correction: The original letter stated 10 administrators, and meant to state 10 administrators and faculty], in no small measure because of the [institutional climate and poor support for their work](#), but we save that for a longer public discussion at another date.)
- One of two non-tenure track colleagues will leave at the end of this academic year.
- The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences has not authorized the replacement of the two lines, and there is no sign that any better can be expected in relation the non-tenure track colleague.
- Ostensibly, the cutbacks to Black Studies are part of the CLAS response to a budget crisis.
- PSU-AAUP has been raising serious questions about budget crisis claims, as there was a sizable surplus in the last academic year (\$27 million). Even if we were facing a real crisis, the disproportionality of the cutbacks to Black Studies is glaring. Have all departments in CLAS, or any other college, seen their tenure and non-tenure track lines slashed in half as a measure of budget tightening? Here we have a double standard that cannot but be seen strong evidence of institutional racism.

We understand that the Chair of the Department of Black Studies wrote a [letter to the Dean of CLAS, copied to Provost Jeffords](#), with an appeal to urgent action. That was on October 11, and there is no response yet. The letter was then shared, and the case brought up, with the President more recently, and we understand the President indicated a response would be forthcoming in the new year.

President Percy and Provost Jeffords, we urge urgent action on your part. A clear decision to restore the tenure and non-tenure track lines lost, and more, to make the investment in Black Studies (and all departments in the School of Gender, Race and Nations) that is necessary to retain faculty.

The situation is simple: Black Studies is paying the cost of a long history of “benign neglect” and, more immediately, the consequences of a glaring double standard in budget cutbacks.

Further equivocation by the PSU Administration will legitimately be interpreted as a sign of callousness in the face of an inequity that has truncated the development of the Black Studies Department, has made it near impossible to retain faculty, and is now shrinking it out of existence.

It is a sad irony that we are writing this on the eve of the 50th anniversary of Black Studies at Portland State University.

We look forward to decisive leadership and a prompt plan for remediation of administrative neglect.

Sincerely,

The PSU-AAUP Executive Council

CC: PSU Board of Trustees