

Dismantling Anti-Black Racism and Reimagining Equity

A study of the experiences of Black students and Alumni of the Brown University School of Professional Studies

Council to Eliminate Anti-Black Racism
Brown University School of Professional Studies

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“Physical pain may not even be as painful as knowing that this person does not like me because I am Black. It pierces you. You feel it, and it’s terrible what you feel. It is more profound than people want to believe” (Jonathan Mawere, Black Male, MHL Program).

Preface



*Ace Robinson, Chair,
Council to Eliminate Anti-Black Racism*

The Brown University School of Professional Studies (SPS) Council to Eliminate Anti-Black Racism is a collective of Black alumni from across the African Diaspora forged with one collective goal in mind: to improve the lived and academic experiences of Black applicants, students (non-completers and completers), and alumni. We came together in the middle of the George Floyd Summer, bringing with us our own personal experiences and motivations to support the Brown University SPS in becoming not just a more inclusive academic experience for Black people but also a more inviting academic experience for Black people.

We quickly learned to lean on each other and support each other through personal and professional challenges while always remaining focused on our collective goal. Throughout this process, our vision and resolve were steadfast. We were not only going to hold the Brown University SPS accountable for improving the Black experience, but

we also were going to hold each other accountable to bring forth a tangible and measurable set of actions and recommendations. These activities are centered on Our Community. We were intentional about bringing forth the lived experiences of current students and alumni for one reason: to ensure that we are clearing the path for the developing and future Black leaders of tomorrow to step boldly into shaping, adapting, and, when necessary, dismantling the structures that prevent us from a better, more equitable tomorrow.

Ace Robinson, MHL '19

Chair, Council to Eliminate Anti-Black Racism

Acknowledgements

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Consultants Keletso Makofane, PhD, MPH, and Nicholas Diamond, MPH, prepared this report on behalf of the Brown University School of Professional Studies Council to Eliminate Anti-Black Racism.

Background

The Council to Eliminate Anti-Black Racism was founded and originally convened on August 15, 2020, to provide guidance to the Brown University School of Professional Studies (SPS) on how to create — within its academic environment — culturally responsive services, curriculum, and professional networking opportunities that are equitable for and inclusive of Black students. The founding members of the Council were: Jacqueline Ejuwa, Gigi Palma, Cynthia Henry, Talya Parker, Lauren Johnson, Ace Robinson, and Shicara Stewart. In 2021, Talya Parker stepped down and was replaced by B Davis. Members were nominated by their peers in each of the four programs within SPS.

The Council advises the Brown University SPS on four areas: recruitment, curriculum content, networking, and alumni engagement. Firstly, regarding recruitment, the Council advises the University on the recruitment of diverse operational staff, students, and faculty/guest lecturers. Secondly, regarding curriculum, the Council infuses content that reflects Black culture and history to increase understanding of how racism perpetuates social inequities, ultimately exhibited in the academic experience. Thirdly, regarding networking, the Council facilitates mentoring by professional leaders who are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Lastly, regarding alumni engagement, the Council increases engagement among Black alumni by formalizing structures to coordinate and fund activities involving the Black alumni networks of Brown University.

Soon after formation, the Council created a structure and set of expectations, goals, and objectives to guide its activities which aimed to obtain experiential feedback from Black students and alumni. The Council created a mission and a vision, in addition to formalizing bylaws, to maintain a clear directive on its intentions and subsequent actions. Officers were selected to interface with the Brown University SPS Administration. Ace Robinson was appointed as Chair, Lauren Johnson as Vice-Chair, and Shircara Stewart as Secretary. The Council held weekly meetings to discuss issues

related to the Black experience of SPS students and alumni and to develop a strategy to garner feedback from Black academic peers. Additionally, we held planning and feedback meetings with other Black alumni and affinity groups at Brown University, as well as with Brown University SPS Administration.

As one of the first external engagement activities of the Council, a study on the experiences of Black students and alumni was conducted from March 2021 to January 2022. It began with a self-administered survey, which was open from March 2021 to July 2021. Respondents had the opportunity to voluntarily participate in listening sessions with Council members to further share their experiences. Listening sessions were conducted from September 2021 to January 2022 with Black students and alumni of the Brown University SPS.

This document reports on the findings of this study, documenting the successes and challenges of the academic programs of the Brown University SPS as they relate to the experiences of Black students. We highlight opportunities to improve these experiences.

Methods

The study reported below had two components, each helping to capture the experiences of students and alumni of the Brown University SPS: (1) an online survey targeting all students and alumni; and (2) a set of interviews among Black-identified respondents who volunteered to participate in listening sessions - semi-structured interviews conducted by members of the Council.

For the survey, questions were developed by the Council, Brown University Office of Institutional Research, Dean Leah VanWey, and Justin Vieira from December 2020 to March 2021. Multiple-choice and short-answer questions were designed to elicit responses regarding the experiences of Black students in their recruitment, application, student, and alumni phases. The survey was distributed by Sam Caldis through the Office of the SPS Dean, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Students who identified as Black received a different set of questions than students who did not. These were intended to deepen understanding of the Black student experience. At the end of the quantitative survey, Black-identified respondents were invited to submit their details to be contacted by the Council for a listening session. Thirteen respondents took up the invitation, and 12 were interviewed.

Recorded listening sessions were conducted by members of the Council from November 2021 to January 2022. They ranged in duration from 20 to 65 minutes. For most interviews (11 out of 12), two members of the Council conducted the interview. In one interview, only one member did.

We conducted descriptive analysis of survey data using R, and made notes on interview recordings, paying attention to positive and negative experiences with students, administrators, and faculty related to race or racism during the recruitment, application, student, and alumni phases. After editing them for clarity, we grouped quotes and notes into themes and have organized this report using these.

Results

Theme 1: Faculty

“Many times, my comments were marginalized and minimized within the program, and I think some of it had to do with the way that I look. I was very mindful of that as a Black man in the program... being a Black man in America, that's who you are, and you have to face all the challenges that come with that — and Brown is no different” (Marc Rahming, Black Male, MHL Program).

In this section, we report on experiences with faculty and teaching at the Brown University SPS. Among the 16 non-Black-identified participants who answered the relevant survey question, 14 agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “learning about people who are different from me is an important part of an executive education.” This kind of learning was especially important to a Black graduate of the MBA Program hosted by Brown University and IE, whose biggest expectation “was really... to have a global cohort that was diverse; that had people from all different backgrounds, especially in terms of business and in terms of diversity of thought. I thought you would get that more in an international program than you would get in a US-based program” (Christopher Presley, Black Male, MBA Program).

Presley expected to see more nationalities represented in the cohort. He had also hoped that there would be more Black American people there because “you think about America... obviously we [Black people] have enormous impact on the culture... it would be nice to see that represented in the program.” Nevertheless, he enjoyed and benefited from the diversity of the IE faculty, who were from all over the world, and all seemed to keep their native cultures and languages intact. He did note that there were no Black faculty from anywhere in the world at IE, however.

Table: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents

	Black Identified (N=31)	Not Black Identified (N=20)	Overall (N=56)
Year of Graduation			
2012 to 2019	14 (45.2%)	4 (20.0%)	18 (32.1%)
2020	8 (25.8%)	12 (60.0%)	20 (35.7%)
2021	7 (22.6%)	0 (0%)	7 (12.5%)
Did not Graduate	1 (3.2%)	2 (10.0%)	3 (5.4%)
Missing	1 (3.2%)	2 (10.0%)	8 (14.3%)
Program			
Executive Masters in Cyber Security	8 (25.8%)	8 (40.0%)	16 (28.6%)
Executive Masters in Healthcare Leadership	13 (41.9%)	4 (20.0%)	17 (30.4%)
Executive Masters in Science and Technology Leadership	3 (9.7%)	0 (0%)	3 (5.4%)
IE-Brown Executive Masters in Business Administration	7 (22.6%)	8 (40.0%)	15 (26.8%)
Missing	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (8.9%)
Age			
20-30	1 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.8%)
31-39	10 (32.3%)	9 (45.0%)	19 (33.9%)
40-49	13 (41.9%)	3 (15.0%)	16 (28.6%)
50-59	5 (16.1%)	5 (25.0%)	10 (17.9%)
60 and over	1 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.8%)
Missing	1 (3.2%)	3 (15.0%)	9 (16.1%)
Gender			
Cis-gender Man	15 (48.4%)	7 (35.0%)	22 (39.3%)
Cis-gender Woman	9 (29.0%)	2 (10.0%)	11 (19.6%)
Gender Non-conforming	1 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.8%)
Non-binary	2 (6.5%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.6%)
Prefer not to say	2 (6.5%)	5 (25.0%)	7 (12.5%)
Missing	2 (6.5%)	6 (30.0%)	13 (23.2%)

He found that the majority of professors at Brown were white; there were no Black faculty, and only a handful of non-Black faculty of color. Hi observation was consistent with the consensus among survey respondents. Of 31 Black respondents of the

quantitative survey, 25 (80%) reported that their program had no Black faculty, 20 (65%) reported no Black visiting faculty, 23 (74%) said there were no Black advisers, and 21 (68%) reported no Black guest speakers. One non-Black respondent noted, “for a program and school that actively promotes diversity, I was extremely disappointed with the lack of diversity of the faculty. The faculty, although accomplished and capable, were predominantly white. I understand that the dynamics of leaders today would cause the makeup of the faculty to be white, but it would have been nice to see the diversity represented in the faculty as it was in the cohort.”

The racial makeup of faculty shaped how students engaged with them, according to a Black interviewee: “What I was really looking for was somebody that looked like me that I could reach out to that would still be able to connect with my lived experience, as well as my challenges from a professional standpoint” (Black Male, Cybersecurity Program). Another Black interviewee echoed this sentiment. Addressing a Council member who was leading the listening session, she said, “It was great to see you as a TA [laughs]. A Black female leader. That was definitely a highlight to see you come in and be an instructor for one of our classes” (Janae Johnson, Black Female, MHL Program).

Sometimes, the lack of diversity among faculty, and consequent miscommunication, led to hilarity.

Interviewee: “We had this one little joke that we had throughout our time at Brown. One of the speakers came in, and we all had our names across the desk where we were sitting. There is one young lady in our cohort whose name is Shauna [pronounced shah-nah]... So we are all sitting and listening, and he could not get anyone’s name right that was [pauses]...”

Interviewer: “Not anglo-centric?”

Interviewee: “Yes [laughs]... So he goes around the room trying to say everybody’s name. He gets to her, and he calls her Sha-wo-nah. [laughs] All of

us busted out laughing. You're not Shauna anymore, you are Sha-wo-nah"
(Teandra Lassister, Black Female, MHL Program).

Other times the racial composition of faculty negatively affected how students engaged with course content: "A slavery class taught by a non-Black professor is disrespectful... the DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) talks came from a Black lens without a Black person speaking, and it felt unauthentic."

Perhaps related to the makeup of the teaching faculty, five of the 15 Black participants who answered the survey question reported having experienced situations where their "opinions were considered less relevant than non-Black students." One respondent in the Executive Masters in Science and Technology Leadership Program wrote that "faculty treated my responses as 'less than' versus white students. My academic adviser never met with me but engaged very much with other students." Few Black respondents found their instructors to be "culturally responsive to [them] as a Black professional." In responses to the survey question on this statement, about half (15 of 30) were neutral, 9 (29%) agreed or strongly agreed, and the remainder disagreed with it. One respondent pointed out that "I think [I got] some bias because I'm not only Black but also [because] of my gender," alluding to the interaction of racism and sexism.

Experiences with faculty were not uniformly negative. All but one of the 15 Black respondents also reported having had positive relationships and interactions with faculty. A Black respondent felt that "during my time enrolled in the SPS Program, I felt valued as a student, and my voice mattered."

For as many complaints as there were about the diversity of the faculty and the treatment of Black students by faculty, there were proposed solutions. For instance, one interviewee suggested bolstering the diversity of faculty by engaging more lunchtime speakers from diverse backgrounds. For many students, however, it was not just the

diversity of faculty which was found wanting, it was the content of their teaching, as well — the topic of the next section.

Recommendations

1. *SPS should recruit diverse faculty as a matter of equity*

To do this, the university should consider: incorporating a rating system that integrates racially diverse experiences when assessing candidates for faculty positions; focusing recruitment efforts on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); and identifying and inviting Black leaders within industry to be guest lecturers.

Theme 2: Curriculum

Almost three quarters (34 of the 46) of respondents reported that their curriculum was good, very good, or excellent at “include[ing] and encourage[ing] diverse perspectives.” Black respondents, however, found one perspective underrepresented: almost two thirds (19 of 30) reported that their curriculum did not incorporate Black experiences and/or Black/African American history. This felt intellectually limiting to one: “The program didn’t cater to non-white perspectives. Readings and coursework considered very white and American perspectives, which limited the breadth of my learning.” Another simply concluded that “the curriculum was based on European standards. Nothing from a DEI standpoint.” This held true even for a survey participant who completed the international MBA Program: “There was definitely a bias towards US-centric themes and ideas. I was a bit surprised considering the global format of the program.”

Of particular concern, for one interviewee, was the absence of content on racial health disparities: “We didn’t spend much time on that, and that’s a huge issue. It’s always been a huge issue. Whenever the topic came up in class, it was kind of swept under the

rug a bit. Considering the fact that these disparities exist here in America, I would have loved to have seen more of an emphasis on that — in improving outcomes for patients of color” (Marc Rahming, Black Male, MHL Program).

Some praised their programs and teachers and reported feeling well-prepared by the program to pursue their interests. For many, though, the experience was mixed: “[faculty have started] having uncomfortable conversations... I think they’re going where not a lot of programs would, and I think it’s a valiant effort... it’s a valuable experience for people who have not lived that, but if you’re gonna talk about the Black community, having Black voices at the table... [would lead to these conversations being] less tone deaf...” (Black Male, MBA Program).

An interviewee (Christopher Presley, Black Male, MBA Program) expressed a more general concern about the quality and relevance of the material taught in courses. He characterized the training he received from IE as a “modern education” and that from Brown University as “how-it-was-originally-founded education.” He found that, at IE, teaching was grounded in real-world experience by well-credentialed lecturers, and at Brown University, teaching was based on research and sometimes “stale information.” Lecturing at Brown University was more didactic and did not fully engage the experience that students brought to the program, being largely mid-career professionals: “some of them treated us like undergrads.”

Interviewees and survey respondents had concrete recommendations for improving student experiences. A Black respondent suggested widening the curriculum’s focus by enriching it with case studies about Black-owned enterprises — citing Rihanna and LVMH and Jay-Z and Tidal as examples of contemporary businesses and the Harlem Renaissance in New York as an historical example — which might shed light on how businesses shape culture.

But it was not only Black respondents who were concerned with the diversity of thought in curricula. One respondent who does not identify as Black found the course material to be thin on conservative ideas: “I very much enjoy my cohort and what I am learning at Brown. While I understand and appreciate the progressive and inspiring mindset of most of the program’s base, it wouldn’t hurt to discuss some more of the conservative viewpoints that affect where we are today, as well.” In the next section, we report on experiences of racism at the hands of fellow students at Brown.

Recommendations

1. *SPS Faculty should update course content to include Black experiences and to reflect the diversity of the U.S.*

To do this, students should be given an opportunity to introduce new content in program curricula based on their expertise

2. *SPS Faculty should introduce content about the impact of systemic racism in their fields and guidance on the integration of anti-racist practices*

Theme 3: Students

"It's not just faculty who could be prejudiced, but the student population, as well... It should be known that the School will not accept a student to treat another student that way" (Jonathan Mawere, Black Male, MHL Program).

In the wake of the murder of Mr. George Floyd, a white student in the MBA Program took to course discussion boards to announce, “I don’t mind if people protest but when you Blacks... when you put my family in harm’s way, then I have a problem with what’s going on.” An interviewee described the post: “She went on and on about how this was negatively impacting her and could put some of her family in harm’s way since some of them were in law enforcement” (Christopher Presley, Black Male, MBA Program). The white student wrote “a whole barrage of things around everything but the central point

and issue at hand.” The Black student did not respond directly, but his classmates did: “I had a great cohort. A lot of people [confronted her], especially some of the white members of the cohort that were just not about that. They reached out to her separately. I had four or five of them say, ‘Hey, I reached out to her and let her know that this is not acceptable, and we won’t allow this type of thing to be spread here’” (Christopher Presley, Black Male, MBA Program).

The learning environment is not only shaped by teachers and curricula. It is equally shaped by the interactions students have with one another while learning. For Black students, some of these interactions were fraught, but not as openly hostile as the one described above. An interviewee recalled an unpleasant exchange in the context of a group project. It was during the very first week or two of his program, so he was not yet well-acquainted with his teammates. Every time he spoke, one of his teammates, a white woman, would interject, effectively excluding him from the discussion. “When I tried to even say a word, she would cut me off right away. I was the only Black person in the group, and everybody else was white, so she immediately felt like maybe I didn’t belong in the program” (Jonathan Mawere, Black Male, MHL Program). He explained that after some time he had to confront her: “I am here by merit, not by any consideration of affirmative action or anything. Allow me to say what I have to say.” In his mind, the experience was unpleasant enough to have possibly derailed him: “If I wasn’t at the level that I was at the time I attended this program, I may have fizzled out and really felt that the community wasn’t a good community for me. I would have maybe just left the program because of that very unpleasant experience. But I was prepared for this.”

Racism affects the learning environment for Black students not only through open and passive aggression, but by reducing their credibility in the eyes of their peers. A Black male interviewee noted that his contributions were consistently discounted throughout the program: “I could say the exact same thing that... my white counterpart would say... we could say the same thing in the same way in the same context, but it’s taken

significantly differently depending on who the listener is... a lot of the comments I made would have to have white confirmation in order to be valid... if my white counterpart in the classroom said it, it was true, it had to be true then. But if I said it, it was 'well, wait a minute, let's evaluate if what you're saying is actually true'" (Marc Rahming, Black Male, MHL Program).

Some interviewees reported making important connections while attending their program and felt that Brown University fostered an atmosphere that allowed for collaboration rather than competition: "[classmates] were just saying how Brown is just known for... a welcoming type of atmosphere, not that competitiveness that is oftentimes found at other Ivy League Schools. I found that to be true... If there is that constant competitiveness that you constantly feel? I didn't feel that. I felt, of course, that drive to learn and to be the best. But you didn't feel like there was a competitive edge where you were left behind. You always felt like, 'okay, let me pull you up and bring you with me' — that type of atmosphere... like you felt sad leaving, honestly... I don't know if that is experienced in other Ivy League schools, other programs, but I can say I walked away with family, and that's unique. Especially at this age and stage" (Janae Johnson, Black Female, MHL Program).

A recommendation made by one interviewee (Jonathan Mawere, Black Male, MHL Program) was to ensure that Brown University conduct anti-racist trainings among incoming students and uphold a code of ethics that does not tolerate racism.

In the above cases, the actions or words of some students had an interpersonal impact limited to a few students around them or in their programs. An incident that was reported by a Black respondent in the MBA Program, however, was larger in scale, and perhaps demanded an institutional intervention: "We had a Black visiting professor who was essentially railroaded out of the program by the students in my class. The university removed her, which essentially appeared to validate their behavior." In the next section,

we report on students' experiences of bias and institutional responses at Brown University.

Recommendations

1. SPS should conduct anti-racist training among incoming students
2. SPS should ensure that students receive information on anti-bias protections that apply to them
3. SPS should offer clear guidance on how to report student-teacher and student-student mistreatment related to race or racism

Theme 4: Bias and Institutional Responses

"I just thought it was really insensitive to have class on Juneteenth and class on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day" (Black Male, MBA Program)

Experiences of racial bias were ubiquitous among Black respondents, and perceptions about the University's responsiveness to these incidents were varied. Nine of 30 (30%) Black respondents reported having experienced incidents of racial bias while in their program. Nine of 29 (31%) Black respondents also reported having experienced other kinds of bias. Among 15 non-Black respondents who answered the question, there were divergent views on whether the program was responsive to students' concerns: nine agreed that the program was responsive, four disagreed, and two were neutral. None of the 16 white respondents reported having experienced an incident of racial bias, but one did report experiencing another kind of bias: "there seems to be some hesitation to see things from a more conservative perspective. It would be helpful to get input from both conservative and liberal thought leaders."

Racial bias created an unwelcoming climate on campus for Black students, at times. For example, of the 30 Black respondents who answered the question, 11 (36%) had a

neutral response to the statement “during my recruitment process, I felt that the value of my professional experience as a Black person was considered as a benefit to the cohort's diversity and learning.” Fifteen (50%) respondents agreed with the statement, and four (13%) disagreed. Of the 19 Black respondents who answered the question, eight (42%) reported having had experiences where they were treated as less valued than non-Black students. Of the 13 Black respondents who answered the question, 11 (85%) believed that their program could have done more to improve their experience at SPS as a Black student.

Survey respondents noted varying degrees of investment by the institution in DEI initiatives — a crucial resource for students navigating racism in institutions of higher education. Of 46 respondents, only 20 (43%) agreed that their program included curriculum/forums on the value of DEI, and 15 (32%) disagreed. The remaining 11 (24%) were neutral. For Black respondents, community and connection with other Black students can be an important resource for weathering racism and for making decisions about which schools to attend, which workplaces to join, which cities to live in, etc. Most Black respondents (27 of 31; 87%) did not request to be connected with Black students/alumni during the recruitment process. Among those who made a request, three were connected.

Several remarked on the racial and gender composition of the cohort itself, something that the university can influence through recruitment and admissions: "I find it interesting that they doubled the enrollment for the [MBA Program] over this year, and there was not one Black female [in the incoming class]" (Black Male, MBA Program).

Finally, Black students noticed the institution's failure to recognize holidays commemorating Black history. Class was held on Juneteenth and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. One interviewee noted that he decided not to attend class on these holidays: "I sent an email saying that I would not be participating [in class held on Juneteenth and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day]. We had July 4th off,

obviously. For a program that teaches an entire class on slavery, I just thought it was really insensitive to have class on Juneteenth and class on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day” (Black Male, MBA Program). Another respondent agreed: “Class on Juneteenth is inexcusable.”

In the final section, we report on students’ experiences accessing financial aid and other resources at Brown.

Recommendations

1. *SPS should develop and implement a plan for the recruitment and support of Black applicants to academic programs*
2. *The Brown University CareerLAB should develop a plan to engage and support Black students and alumni with the challenges that they will face in the workforce*
3. *SPS should recognize Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Juneteenth as holidays by not holding classes on those days*

Theme 5: Resources

“I don’t know how important it is for them to have a connection with us. I don’t know how vested they are in us” (Christopher Presley, Black Male, MBA Program).

Access to financial aid differed between Black and non-Black respondents. Overall, 29 of 46 (63%) respondents requested financial aid. Eleven of 16 (69%) non-Black respondents received financial aid from an outside source, whereas nine of 30 (33%) Black respondents did. External sources included the IE Business School, employers, scholarships, veteran benefits, and private loans.

Students also made use of opportunities for funding at Brown University. Overall, sixteen of 29 (55%) respondents reported having administrators or faculty discuss

available scholarships with them, and 28 of 46 (61%) respondents reported having received grants or scholarships from Brown University. Fourteen of 46 (30%) respondents indicated that their financial situation changed while they were in the program. Of these, three informed Brown University of the changes in financial situation, and one was supported with financial options by the University.

Financial support from the University was accessible but not actively promoted to individual students who needed it. One non-Black respondent in the MBA Program explained that “I had to seek out the available scholarships myself. No one mentioned it to me. I applied for a diversity scholarship as I am mixed and did not receive any assistance.” This was also the experience of an interviewee (Christopher Presley, Black Male, MBA Program) who noted that, though application forms had a place where applicants could indicate their financial need, no one from the University followed up with him about his need. He did, however, feel that he could find funding on his own.

Survey respondents had several recommendations for improving the accessibility of funding. These included advertising scholarship opportunities more aggressively, offering larger scholarships and focusing on individual need, working directly with the employers of prospective students to see if it is possible for them to co-sponsor the student, and working directly with individuals on a case-by-case basis.

Beyond funding, a slim majority of survey respondents reported that they were satisfied with resources offered by the university to assist with personal concerns. Of 46 respondents, 26 (57%) reported being satisfied or extremely satisfied; 15 (32%) reported being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and the remainder were dissatisfied. For an interviewee who participated in the MBA Program, the social support he found among administrators at IE enabled him to stay on course with his program, whereas the administration at Brown University was not as helpful:

There was one moment in the program where it started to get too much with dealing with the pandemic, work, home schooling... I had a moment where I considered moving to the next cohort. I reached out to the Brown team and told them that... they listened... The guys from Brown never followed up with me beyond that conversation. The Spain faction, we had a very personal conversation... They didn't want me to leave the program. They felt I was a value add and an asset. To me, it was a lot more personal for them — how they related to the cohort. Brown seemed a lot more transactional and got caught up in the bureaucratic stuff.... [my cohort has] a lot of praise for the IE management... if it wasn't for them, I don't know if I personally would have made it through — I probably would have had to push off into another cohort... I don't know how important it is for [Brown University administrators] to have a connection with us. I don't know how vested they are in us" (Christopher Presley, Black Male, MBA Program).

There is room to strengthen career support for graduating students. A Black survey respondent highlighted a gap in career support as students transitioned to alumni: "The concept of graduation and graduate resources needs significant improvement. Having a great degree is great, but the engagement for alumni would really improve the value of the program. It's as if we finished and there's nothing we can say connects us to the school." One respondent explained that "the network has been great. [I] met people through LinkedIn. [There was a] good base of employers looking to source talent, but nothing specific to Black people."

An interviewee who did attempt to find opportunities using the resources provided by Brown University concluded that the job postings did not match her level: "I don't think anything on there was tailored to an executive masters-type of opportunity... Every time I looked it was not really tailored to what I did... when you looked at the opportunities it seemed more like entry-level things. I think they could do a better job at filtering... really looking at the career level that people are on" (Teandra Lassister, Black Female, MHL

Program). Another wanted Brown University to be more intentional in cultivating opportunities for students and graduates: “You got such a diverse group — how come [Brown University isn’t] finding ways to project us through the social capital that the Ivy League has... it’s why we are all here. I think they could do better at that piece... sometimes just talking about things can get you so far... being put in a room where people in the room can see you, actually can help you secure those opportunities” (Black Male, MBA Program).

Nonetheless, having graduated from Brown University facilitated connections for some. An interviewee who bought a car after graduation explains that in her state, cars are not required to have a front license plate. She purchased a Brown University plate for the front of the car: “I work at the hospital, and I park there... I came out of work one day and there was a card on my windshield: it was a Brown alum who said ‘Hey, I saw your Brown plates — this is my info. Give me a call or connect with me on LinkedIn,’ so we did — we connected. Then, the funny thing is, someone else saw [the plate], and they thought it was his car, so they emailed him, and then he forwarded me the email and said, ‘No, it’s hers’ [laughs]. So then I met two people. It’s really funny how... you don’t even realize how many people have gone to Brown... I find it to be a good thing because had I not had those plates, I would have never met the two individuals who work... in the same health care system... had it not been for that plate, we probably would have just walked past each other” (Teandra Lassister, Black Female, MHL Program).

Recommendations

1. *SPS should create an emergency fund for Black students with demonstrated need*
2. *Students with resources should be allowed to contribute to this emergency fund*

Afterword



Council to Eliminate Anti-Black Racism. Top row: Ace Robinson (Chair), Master's in Healthcare Leadership, 2019; Shircara Stewart (Secretary), Master's in Science & Technology Leadership, 2020; Lauren Johnson (Vice-Chair), Master's in Business Administration, 2020. Bottom row: Jacqueline Ejuwa, Master's in Healthcare Leadership, 2017; Cynthia Henry, Master's in Business Administration, 2017; Gigi Palma, Master's in Science & Technology Leadership, 2020; B Davis, Master's in Cyber Security Management, 2020 (served from Spring 2021 to present); Talya Parker, Master's in Cyber Security Management, 2019 (served from inception to Spring 2021)

Months before the first meeting of the Council to Eliminate Anti-Black Racism, an unknown virus appeared and sowed havoc — at first from a distance, and then suddenly and all at once — from the inside of our homes, workplaces, and schools among friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues at a scale that defies the imagination. On the day of our first meeting, about 60,000 people were hospitalized for COVID-19 infection per day, on average, and 1,000 died. Then, in the middle of this catastrophe, another: Mr. George Floyd was murdered by a police officer on a balmy, overcast Spring evening in Minneapolis, in the sight of an unflinching 17-year-old boy, who, from his cellphone, broadcast the horrific sight to the world. Millions obtained a new clarity and urgency and took to the streets. You couldn't avert your eyes.

We tasked ourselves with what might, in the upheaval and uprising of the time, seem a small errand: to convene a group of alumni of the Brown University SPS to advise the School on how to build a more habitable environment for students; one which preserves their dignity and expands their horizons. We spent the following 18 months asking our friends and colleagues how to do that, and they told us — as we have reported above — that they want to be taught by a diverse cadre of faculty in courses that do not evade Black history. They want a community in which they are treated as equals and they want access to resources that will allow them to flourish. We have been honored and privileged to hear and record their thoughts. Far from a small errand, we continue a long tradition of resistance against racism. By doing this work, we tend a garden that will bear fruit for generations to come.

We hope our recommendations will be received by the leadership of the Brown University School of Professional Studies in the same spirit in which we offer them: with an openness to grapple with uncomfortable truths, and a commitment to the dignity, humanity, and curiosity of all students, particularly Black students. Defending Black lives is not just something to be done in the streets after someone has died. It is something that must be done everywhere there is a glowing soul whose light is threatened by racism.

*B Davis, Jacqueline Ejuwa, Cynthia Henry, Lauren Johnson, Gigi Palma, Ace Robinson, Shicara Stewart
Council to Eliminate Anti-Black Racism*