

# How DAAP Fashion Design Needs To Challenge Racism:

An Open Living Letter to University of Cincinnati's  
School of Design on Behalf of the Fashion Design Students

# 01/CURRICULUM

It is clear from submissions that students across races view our curriculum as white-centric. This is proven by the western culture based curriculum, lack of discussion about cultural appropriation in fashion, and a scarcity of non-white perspectives. Meaning, all assignments and student projects often center whiteness or white culture, without actually naming it. On the contrary, our Black peers often choose to focus their work on Black culture and Black consumers, but receive little to no feedback. This is clear disservice.

**The Fashion Design Students of DAAP Demand the Following:**

7-15-2020

To Faculty and Administration,

We, the students and alumni of the DAAP Fashion Design program are ready to see change. We thank you for sharing with us your thoughts and actions in the June 22nd virtual town hall. After the meeting, we all sat with what we had just heard, digested it, and prepared this letter for you.

Not only are the students and alumni ready to see change, we are committed to making the fashion program a leader in anti-racism within design. Fashion Design students and faculty are expected to participate in all efforts to make this program anti-racist. As identity is one of the most important aspects of fashion, we see it crucial that everyone has a proper understanding of racial identity and is comfortable with their own.

This letter outlines the same four categories we spoke about during the town hall, as well as the responses the faculty and administration shared with us. Within each category, we will share the actions we expect to be taken by the school.

This letter is not finished, and is open to all students for critique. We expect this letter to change and grow as needed, and to be revisited each semester.

**1. A broader fashion history curriculum with global representation.** The fashion students see the current curriculum as white centric and exclusive. We would like to see a more well-rounded approach to fashion history.

**2. We ask that all non-Black faculty in the fashion department receive anti-racist training.** Additionally, we are asking the faculty to discuss with students why they are implementing anti-racism into their classroom and how.

**3. Critical thinking courses required for foundation students, taught by staff who have received up to date anti-racist training.** These classes need to give students the ability to view global issues in a local context. We want DAAP students to use design to benefit their communities.

**4. The fashion students of DAAP want a greater understanding of the purpose of what we are learning in context to the industry.** We also see it as appropriate, as paying members of this institution, to have curriculum and faculty meetings open to students. We want to work with faculty to create the best learning environment possible.

**5. A design research unit should be implemented within trend forecasting.**

The students of fashion design see trend forecasting as exploitive and extractive in nature. We want to focus on how students can learn to research and design ethically and responsibly. We want this course to focus on teaching students how to:

- Acknowledge the work of others and give credit when researching
- Implement sustainability into design with a focus on the function of fashion design rather than just aesthetics.
- Students should be encouraged to research and design to the benefit of non-white people.

We understand this is likely a long term goal. More immediate steps that should be taken is implementing a cultural appropriation and responsible designing unit in foundations and Design Communication course. It is imperative that future designers go into the workforce knowing how to design ethically.

# 02/CO-OP

Most students come to this school for the Co-op program and believe that they will be paid while on Co-op. There are many issues with the unpaid internship standard but for now we are focusing on how Co-op serves as an accessory to upholding white supremacy within our industry. Since COVID-19 and the murder of George Floyd, the fashion industry has been turned upside down. One of the many issues being discussed publicly, is the fact that there are not enough black designers. We see this as directly related to the lack of paid internship opportunities and how they disproportionately hinder Black students in both DAAP and in their post-grad careers.

**1. We want to see the School of Design actively working to fulfill their initial promises of paid Co-ops for all majors including Fashion Design.**

**Understanding that this is nearly impossible during COVID-19, we need to see action regarding the Co-op fee and EEP.** Most students are completely unsure what the Co-op fee pays for.

While we are told that the fee maintains a student's full-time enrollment status and course registration, we are aware that we do not have all of the benefits of full time students while on Co-op. We would like to see an itemized receipt as to where the \$485.00 that each of us pay every other semester goes.

**2. We are insisting that the SoD and DAAP administration pressure the university to eliminate the Co-op fee.**

Cincinnati State's Co-op fee rates depend on the program, but their Co-op fee is charged by credit hours and will not exceed \$350 per semester. How can we implement their ideas of transparency and price point to our own program to make it more accessible?

**The Fashion Design Students of DAAP Demand the Following:**

**3. We are asking DAAP to invest in students and alumni**

- We are demanding that all funding brought into the school, events such as E2C, and donations are focused on helping students' ability to afford Co-op through scholarships or other forms of financial aid.
- We are asking that scholarships be given to fashion students in need to relieve the financial burden when it comes to internships. We recognize the socio-economic disparity that disproportionately affects Black students. Most students in general can not afford to move across the country for an unpaid internship so how can we expect Black students to be able to afford these opportunities? That is why it is crucial that scholarships be given out to provide an equal chance for Black students.
- We are demanding scholarships be given to Black fashion alumni so that they too can provide Co-op opportunities to students, and afford to pay them for their labor.

# 02/CO-OP

**4. The fashion students are asking for transparency when it comes to racial discrimination, and any forms of abuse on Co-op. While not every student may feel comfortable sharing their own testimonies, any report should be a public record that is easily accessible. This is imperative to the safety of all students, but especially our Black classmates.** Co-op reports are not available to students. These reports need to be accessible to ensure student's safety, and to hold these positions accountable. Options to ensure this transparency can include a privacy waiver that students can fill out to make anonymous reviews public.

# 03/REPRESENTATION

According to a research paper released by Johns Hopkins University, “Black students who have two Black teachers are 32% more likely to go to college.” . It is well documented that same-race teachers are key to closing the K-12 achievement gap. Based on testimonials from Black students, this ideology also applies to the college experience in that more Black educators would set up Black students for greater success in their careers. It is well documented that Black educators are often pigeonholed into teaching culturally specific classes, while also taking on a second role as the sole mentor for Black students. This adds more emotional labor and stress to these educators than their White counterparts. These are just a few of the many reasons why we need more black educators at DAAP.

## 1. Randall Wilson must be appointed to a formalized mentorship director role for BIPOC students.

- This needs to be a paid position for at least 3 years with at minimum \$20,000 budget per year. Each additional mentor must be financially compensated for their time.
- As an experienced professor for over 20 years, Randall Wilson should be given the opportunity to teach a capstone class.

## 2. Using the Myron Ullman Fund, shift the hiring process of new faculty from committee-led to a student-centered election process.

- As participants in UC’s co-op program, students spend nearly half of their enrollment at DAAP working in the industry. We understand what is relevant in the fashion industry and demand more intentional and meaningful involvement in the hiring process of new faculty.

## The Fashion Design Students of DAAP Demand the Following:

- Based on the open discussion that happened on June 22nd, the students have discussed a revised plan for new hires at DAAP. It was made clear that new hires are chosen from a committee of faculty after potential hires pass the initial qualifications. In this scenario we have faculty choosing their coworkers. As current and paying students of DAAP, we see it fit that the students should replace the faculty committee, and choose from a small pool of qualified individuals that are eligible by university standards. This allows the paying students to have control over the quality, relevance, and content of their education. **Students are paying for their education, they should have a say in who educates them.**

# 03/REPRESENTATION

## 3. With adjunct positions being annualized, there is an opportunity for a more diverse group of professors to be brought into DAAP.

Students and faculty should be encouraged to research potential adjuncts. COVID-19 has forced us to look at problems from a different angle. With remote teaching taking place this fall semester, it would be very easy to offer an online adjunct position to an industry professional. This would be extremely reasonable as experienced industry professionals may be out of work, or working from home and looking for work.

- The Fashion Design program needs a visiting professor program. Visiting professor programs offer industry professionals an opportunity to test the waters of academia. Students would receive a new pool of perspectives with visiting professors teaching classes for which they have recent industry experience.

## 4. DAAP must hire more BIPOC professors. Black and POC alumni should be involved in the critique of capstone and other fashion finals. Current BIPOC professors should be equally promoted and given full time status and overall receive the same opportunities.

- Many (specifically Black) students have come forward with stories of their projects and capstone being ill-received due to uninformed guest critique and professors. Black students need Black critique judges who can comfortably and intelligently provide knowledgeable and pertinent feedback on Black specific topics.
- The current curriculum will not change to be more inclusive if there is not a community of Black individuals sharing ideas in an environment that is ready and open to receive them. **Hiring more Black individuals is crucial to initiate any amount of change.**

# 04/ACCOUNTABILITY

We would like to see more accountability and transparency by the college administration and faculty. In addition we need to see more interaction and outreach within the community which DAAP resides. This is essential to anti-racism work.

## The Fashion Design Students of DAAP Demand the Following:

**1. As previously stated, the fashion students of DAAP want to be involved with action plans, as we are the ones demanding change.**

We are insisting that a public calendar be made with deadlines for each of these demands.

**2. In Comparing DAAP to other design schools, it is clear we lack racial diversity.**

According to SCAD's demographics page, their student population is 54% white and 11% Black. FIT reports their Fall 2019 enrollment as 41% white and 9% Black. While DAAP doesn't have publicly displayed demographics, the University of Cincinnati reported 69.1% white students and 7% Black students for the Fall of 2018. According to the 2010 census, Cincinnati was "49.3% white and "44.8% black or African-American". We are asking that DAAP take actions to better represent the city demographics in the student population.

**3. We demand more transparency of the demographic makeup of both the staff and students.**

The numbers should be stated on the UC/DAAP website in a clear, easy to navigate way. Currently, the demographics are displayed on a website through the server Tableau. We have found this site to be difficult to navigate, as well as inconclusive to race demographics on a college basis rather than university-wide.

**4. We find it necessary to update the DAAP website every semester with updated information such as new and visiting professors, and every year as new demographic information becomes available.**

This page should provide the demographics for all of DAAP, as well as each school within it.

# MOVING FORWARD

After faculty and administration have had the chance to read and analyze this letter in its entirety, we would like to schedule a public townhall to work on key deadlines and action items.

We understand that anti-racism work is not easy and will require effort on both the student and faculty/administration side. However, the fashion student body believes in the value and necessity of making DAAP an equal experience for all Black students within our community.