

Dear Meredith Community:

This Saturday (July 25) will mark two months since George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis. In that time, even greater attention has been paid to the systemic racism that has existed in the fabric of our country long before its founding. As is happening at other institutions, our students, staff, alumnae/i, faculty, and trustees have engaged on these topics asking how Meredith College can do better. We are listening and learning from our community, and we will bring needed, meaningful change to campus.

Like many institutions in the South and, indeed, throughout the country, Meredith must contextualize and address its history and those who have contributed to it, including William Faircloth, JY Joyner, Thomas Meredith, and possibly others whose participation in the Confederate Army, in leadership decisions based on white supremacist views, and those who held people in slavery must be studied. Over the course of the past two months, I have held several meetings with students, staff, board leaders, and allies regarding the work that needs to happen at Meredith, while also doing some significant (and painful) reading and soul-searching. We are announcing today that our Board of Trustees and Executive Leadership Team are developing a coordinated plan, rooted in cultural humility and intended to be thoughtful, inclusive, thorough, and action-oriented that will address the following:

- **We must further understand the realities of our current students.** Over the past 60 days, current students and alumnae/i have shared their stories with us. To guide our work to facilitate change, we will conduct a campus climate survey that will be an anonymous platform for providing feedback and a means for action.
- **We must further review our policies to ensure that our College is not unconsciously contributing to systemic racism.** We will charge cross-functional committees that will review student and employee handbooks for clear expectations of behavior regarding race; incorporate the lessons of race throughout the curriculum; establish guidelines for equitable treatment of all students in the classroom and through the honor code, traditions, recruiting, financial aid, housing, and more; review HR policies and practices for recruiting, hiring, evaluating, and dismissal.
- **We must further understand the realities of our history and any linkage to systemic racism.** To find out more about our history, we are announcing Meredith's affiliation with about 60 other institutions in pursuing the truth of their histories through the Universities Studying Slavery initiative. (See <https://slavery.virginia.edu/universities-studying-slavery>.) This group of scholars is working not only to understand history and its contexts, but also seeks to understand and dismantle the ways that racism continues to work in higher education.
- **We must develop a set of principles that will guide the Board's decision-making when it comes to renaming.** Institutions throughout the country are weighing what should be done about individuals that may have done good things for their university but also might have racist pasts. Institutions such as Yale, Stanford, UNC-CH, and George Washington have developed decision-making principles that have guided their board through these difficult renaming decisions. Board leaders will create a committee to develop a series of principles that will lead the Meredith Board of Trustees through these difficult conversations. Chair of the Board Carolyn Leith, '85, and Vice Chair Dr. Yvette Brown, '90, will coordinate that collaborative work with a diverse and inclusive group of board members, alumnae/i, students, and college employees.

This work is difficult but critical and is foundational to our community. It will be guided by a consultant with experience leading campus work on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Over the next few months, I ask for the community's help and patience as we learn together. I pledge to you continued status

updates on our progress.

At our core, we are educators—teachers and learners who seek and value knowledge and wisdom. Research and ongoing scholarship and training are key to understanding our past and moving to action. Similarly, we position education at the fulcrum of positive change, growth, and perhaps even redemption. We are also humans with emotions and anxieties that sometimes overwhelm us. As we tend to each other's hurts, let us also focus on our pathway forward, mindful of how our past and present and future must intersect in authentic ways that reflect our evolution into the humans we truly hope to be.

Jo Allen, '80  
President