To the MT Community,

As the Master of Teaching Program leadership team, we are writing to express our respect and admiration to those struggling against anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism in Canada, the US and countries around the world. Although the systemic and brutal nature of white supremacy is not new, the current moment of widespread uprising and repression has been a real-time trauma for many Black people. To Black students, staff and faculty in the Master of Teaching Program, we know that many of you are suffering right now, and that this is a time of significant pain.

Although our attention may be drawn to the US, we need not look beyond our border to bear witness to racism-based police brutality, educational inequality, healthcare inequality, housing inequality, or employment inequality. In considering these issues, we recognize that our silence may serve as an endorsement of racist repression, and that any suggestion that these issues are not our problem here in Canada is a tacit practice of white supremacy. For those of you who expected a message from us sooner, we apologize. It took us longer than it should have to share this message.

To those of you actively working and organizing to combat anti-Black racism, we respect those efforts. To those of you working to take care of yourselves and your loved ones impacted by the current political climate, we appreciate that work. To those of you constructively raising these issues in class, we value your contributions. To those of you who have reached out to share your concerns about UofT’s and OISE’s responses, we thank you.

As many of you know, racism in education (as well as in policing, housing, employment, healthcare, the judicial system, and other areas) exists at the systemic, institutional and individual levels. Our teacher education program operates in each of these three domains. Ontario universities and K-12 schools make up structures and systems. UofT and OISE are institutions. Within our program and classes, we operate and interact as groups and individuals. So, from our locations as professors in an education institution and system, when we talk about fighting systemic racism in Canada, we are talking about fighting racism in places like the MT.

Kareem Abdul Jabbar writes that racism “is like dust in the air. It seems invisible — even if you’re choking on it — until you let the sun in. Then you see it’s everywhere.” We know the MT can be pretty dusty. Put another way, we know that despite anything we write in this statement, many people of colour have and will experience racism in one or more element of their MT Program. This is not news to many Black people, Indigenous people and people of colour (BIPOC).

We know that long before COVID-19, the MT was a space in which many BIPOC students, staff and faculty felt the need to socially distance, the need to wear a (metaphorical) mask, and the need to take extra precautions to ensure their safety and well-being – these practices were born of the persistent experiences of racism which started before the program and have carried through into the OISE building and our practicum schools. We know that for many, racism poses a far greater threat to one’s sense of safety than COVID-19.
We recognize that your experience of coming to school — whether it's engaging police services for your record check, walking around campus, seeking mental health supports, encountering TTC fare inspectors on your way to OISE, speaking aloud during classroom group work, entering practicum schools, or indeed just stepping into class — may feel safer or less safe, based on your race. Unfortunately, the lack of safety experienced in these instances by many BIPOC students, staff and faculty may be invisible to their White peers. Further, White students, staff and faculty may be unaware that their own safety in these spaces is contingent, at least in part, on their race. Race, even when it is made invisible, is a defining feature of many educational experiences, and this often holds true in the MT.

It is our responsibility as leaders in the program to not only “let in the sun” in order to expose this racism but to also fight that racism. Following two years of extensive consultation and data collection, the MT Race and Inclusion Committee has identified seven key areas for addressing racism in the program: admissions, recruitment, MT student curriculum, MT instructor professional development, faculty hiring, reporting processes for incidents of racism, and in-program student experiences.

A detailed report on these findings and recommendations will be available publicly in fall 2020. Started in 2018, this work establishes a plan for concrete anti-racist action in each of the identified areas with a focus on anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. To be clear, these efforts will not eliminate racism in the MT. They will, we hope, help to establish the MT as an anti-racist teacher education program and space, which attends to racial safety and inclusion actively and intentionally. Further, we hope to accept and graduate more and more anti-racist educators and thereby contribute to anti-racist work and transformation in K-12 schooling contexts in Canada.

We have more anti-racist learning, changing, and acting to do in this program. As leaders in the program, we know that we cannot lead anti-racist professional lives without leading anti-racist personal lives. This is true today and will be true a year from now. We are personally and professionally committed to this work, and know that business as usual is unacceptable as we prepare teachers to critically inspire and engage future generations of students.

For many, the current moment is one of agonizing grief. Anxiety, depression, and frustration are widespread right now. We hope you will give your MT Community members (be they students, staff or professors) the respect, support and love needed to keep on pushing. While a friendly smile may be nice, we can do a lot better than that. In this majority White program, let’s be sure to think about, acknowledge and rupture the ways race plays a role in our universities and schools (systemic level); at UofT, OISE & the MT (institutional level); and in how we understand our positionality in the world as well as our interactions with others (individual level).

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you want or need to. We wish you safety and wellness.

With respect,

Kathy Broad (CTL, Associate Chair, Teacher Education)