



July 28, 2021

University of Nebraska Board of Regents
Varner Hall
2835 Holdrege Street
Lincoln, NE 68583

Dear Board Members,

We write to share our deep concerns about a resolution regarding critical race theory scheduled for consideration at the next Board of Regents meeting, August 13, 2021. With this letter we add our voices to those of President Carter and Chancellors Gold, Green, Kristensen, and Li (July 21, 2021) in strong opposition to any resolution that compromises our core commitment to academic freedom and imposes limits on the ability of the faculty to determine the content of course curriculum in accordance with their professional expertise.

Scholars across a wide range of diverse academic fields investigate the ways in which seemingly neutral policies, laws, and practices can sustain and perpetuate racial and ethnic inequalities and injustices. The following web site provides a list of relevant books and articles covering several decades of scholarship in critical race theory: <https://crossculturalsolidarity.com/critical-race-theory/>. One of the contributions of critical race theory – among many other approaches to race and inequality – is to help us identify some of the *structural* means by which the U.S. can more fully realize the true meaning and dignity of the principles of equal freedom, human rights, and justice for all. Since the pursuit of a “more perfect union” is at the core of the United States’ constitutional tradition, any approach that illuminates possible pathways for such a future warrants reasoned consideration and respectful deliberation by every citizen and elected public official.

As with all well-established theories and intellectual frameworks utilized in published scholarship and in the classroom, critical race theory deserves to be engaged and assessed through informed, thoughtful, and critical inquiry. This work can only begin by seriously examining the full range of existing scholarship in the area and carefully considering what this theory – or any other – contributes to our understanding of the social, natural, or material world. As scholars and educators, this type of analysis is central to our vocation and fundamental to our responsibilities as faculty at a Land Grant university.

We are committed to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s “Journey toward Anti-Racism and Racial Equity” (<https://journey.unl.edu/welcome>) and the “Commitment to Change” <https://diversity.unl.edu/commitment-to-change/> and recognize critical race theory and other analyses of systemic racial and ethnic inequality as aligned with these initiatives. As members of a community dedicated to the creation and dissemination of knowledge, “we are uniquely positioned to learn from the past, give voice and action to the present and help shape future generations” (Chancellor Green, June 5, 2020: <https://www.unl.edu/chancellor/now-must-be-different>.) Confronting hard questions about the persistence of racial and ethnic inequalities in multiple areas of life and doing so from a variety of different theoretical perspectives is an essential part of the intellectual and moral responsibility of higher education today. Critical thinking demands nothing less.

The College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is deeply committed to the principle of academic freedom in teaching, learning, and research. At a great university such as ours, we don't impose ideas, we discuss and debate them. Academic freedom protects the ability of teachers and learners to explore and share the results of their inquiries with one another (see <https://cas.unl.edu/statement-academic-freedom-teaching-and-learning>). The Bylaws of the Board of Regents captures the importance of this principle: "The right to search for truth, to support a position the searcher believes is the truth, and to disagree with others whose intellect reaches a different conclusion is the fiber of America's greatness. It is, likewise, the strength of a great University, and its preservation is vital" (see Section 4.2 <https://nebraska.edu/regents/bylaws-policies-and-rules>)

These foundational principles shape our approach to every theory and methodology that is directly relevant to a specific disciplinary field or academic subject, and they are particularly important in how we approach the discussion of theories that some may deem "controversial" or "divisive." Since knowledge develops and changes over time, our faculty and students continually utilize their training to seek truth, advance new knowledge, and deepen our understanding of humanity.

In defense of these values and their importance to the intellectual integrity of higher education in the state of Nebraska, we urge the Regents of the University of Nebraska to oppose the resolution regarding critical race theory. The adoption of this resolution would have significant negative effects on our ability to recruit and retain students, staff, and faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Sincerely,



Mark Button
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
University of Nebraska – Lincoln



Pat Dussault
Associate Dean for Faculty, College of Arts and Sciences
University of Nebraska – Lincoln

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "June Griffin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "June" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Griffin".

June Griffin
Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education, College of Arts and Sciences
University of Nebraska – Lincoln

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alecia Kimbrough". The signature is cursive and elegant, with the first name "Alecia" being larger than the last name "Kimbrough".

Alecia Kimbrough, Ph.D.
Assistant Dean for Business & Finance, College of Arts and Sciences
University of Nebraska – Lincoln

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William G. Thomas III". The signature is bold and cursive, with the last name "Thomas" and the Roman numeral "III" being particularly prominent.

William G. Thomas III
Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education, College of Arts and Sciences
Angle Chair in the Humanities and Professor of History
University of Nebraska – Lincoln