

Department of African American Studies Letter in Support of Project 1000

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The Department of African American Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) affirms our support for Project 1000, which the Black United Front has proposed. Inspired by the historic Project 500 of 1968, which significantly increased the enrollment of Black and Brown students at UIUC, Project 1000 demands the enrollment of at least 1,000 African American students per year by 2020. The ambitious plan also calls for additional University support for African American Studies and the Bruce D. Nesbitt African American Cultural Center. There is no question that a serious crisis faces African American students on campus today. Over the last several years, the numbers of Black students at UIUC have dwindled precipitously. In Fall 2016, the state's flagship public university listed a total student enrollment of 44,880. Of those, 2,317 (5.16%) reported their race/ethnicity as African American. When all students of African descent, including those who report themselves as multi-racial or multi-ethnic are counted, the number of African Americans rises slightly to 2,786 (6.21%). In a state with a 14.7% African American population, we can argue that Black students at UIUC are severely under-represented, and the African American population in the state of Illinois is severely under-served. At the same time, our campus and community—like those across the United States and beyond—have witnessed a spike in racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and homophobia in recent years. Our students regularly encounter racial slurs and insults in passing, scribblings on the Quad, and racist notes on doors. Emboldened white supremacists basking in the after-glow of the recent presidential election have struck fear in the hearts of students of color on campus. Black students have received invitations to a lynching. Students have encountered images of the racist “Chief” mascot adorned on “Unofficial” t-shirts, nooses hung on doors, and racist posters on campus. Every year, we tread over the same tracks as the year before, constantly working to protect our students from white supremacy and other forms of hate. These are common features of life for African American college students on the campus of UIUC. Given these realities, we support the Black United Front in seeking to increase African American student enrollment at--and to transform--the University. We ask that you join us in this endeavor. As faculty dedicated to realizing the historic motto of African American Studies--“academic excellence and social responsibility”--we heartily support Project 1000.