July 17, 2017

Dear Campus Community,

As many of you are aware, on July 9th there was a tragic event for our community. Merced Police Department raided a private party at a hookah lounge in downtown Merced. Witness accounts and video evidence suggests the incident was haphazardly conducted. This dangerous and confusing scenario led to the arrests of five upstanding black men, including a 5th year engineering student at UC Merced. If these rising leaders are convicted, their successful career trajectories will likely be tarnished.

Unfortunately, these types of incidents have been seen before. They continue to happen to many minorities residing in the United States, with otherwise bright futures ahead of them. These individuals were put in an unfair situation, and that should be rectified. Systemically, the Merced police force need to have rigorous training for its employees to better serve our community. Raids like the one last weekend are unacceptable.

This incident and its implications regarding the safety of Black members residing within Merced is terrifying. Police are employed to protect, not harm, Merced residents and visitors. We applaud ASUCM President Memon's statement as a reflection of the emotional maturity of UC Merced students, echoing back to our unified stance regarding the unfortunate incident associated with #BobcatStrong. Hence:

> We support dropping the charges.
> We demand the Merced PD reevaluate how its employees are trained regarding bias and safety.
> We will ensure a graduate-represented committee is in constant communication with the UC Merced police department to promote safety for our fellow Black and minority student populations, fostering their academic retention and success.
> We are committed to the safety, well-being, and support of all students.

Pursuing studies are difficult on their own. Many graduate students juggle courses, teaching, and research. On top of these commitments, a large number of UC Merced students additionally tend to families, are the first in their family to navigate higher education, and/or battle many prejudice-associated hurdles while also being deeply engaged members of their campus and Merced community. Alone, balancing these commitments can easily seem impossible and daunting. By coming together and celebrating these many commitments, we not only succeed in the pursuit of our own individual careers but also stand out as distinctively being UC Merced.

Our incoming GSA hosts an array of backgrounds and identities reflecting our vibrant campus. These backgrounds and identities present different challenges, each with their own validity. Especially in this politically hostile time, it is our responsibility as a campus and larger Merced community to stand up for each other when injustices arise. Today represents an opportunity to demonstrate support for a UC Merced student and the Black community of Merced. A city council meeting is scheduled for 6:00 pm today. UC Merced's Black Student Union has organized a silent protest starting at 4:30pm at the Merced Civic Center. We encourage everyone to support this organization and our fellow Black students and community members at UC Merced or otherwise.

The UC Merced campus and Merced community are a pillar for the central valley. Let us shine in creating light together rather than grow divided when dark times arise.

In solidarity,

UC Merced Graduate Student Association 2017-2018

Resources
UCM Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
Phone: (209) 228-4266

UCM Office of the Ombuds
Phone: (209) 228-4410

Graduate Dean's Advisory Council on Diversity
Phone: (209) 228-4723

Supporting Graduate Groups
https://goo.gl/Us4pYW

Merced County NAACP
Phone: (209) 726-3236

ACLU of Northern California
Phone: (415) 621-2488

National Suicide Prevention Hotline
Phone: (800) 273-8255

Available Gathering Spaces for Students
The Intercultural Hub (KL 159)
Social Justice Center (KL 167)
Graduate Cultural Resource Center (temporarily located in KL 470)
Reflection Room (SSB 255)