

March 30th, 2016

Dear President Rosanne Somerson, Provost Pradeep Sharma, Board of Trustees Chair Michael H. Spalter, and all senior Deans of Rhode Island School of Design,

As one of the oldest and leading art and design institutions in the country, RISD has been celebrated for shaping exceptional problem solvers out of students who possess unique and unparalleled creative skills. RISD claims that its graduates are encouraged to become mavericks, innovators in their fields, and the next forward-thinking leaders of our global society. As image makers, we are the movers and shakers of visual culture, and the resources granted to us at this institution make the possibilities for social impact endless. To call oneself a RISD student, alumni, or faculty is an immense privilege, yet it is one that far too many take for granted and use irresponsibly.

RISD has neglected to address the needs of marginalized individuals on campus through its lack of widespread accessibility that affects a broad intersection of identities. There is a depressing lack of cultural competency in classes, critique culture, as well as student and faculty relationships. We as students are being challenged to make unconventional work that breaks the norm, but only if it does not stray too far from what the white, wealthy, and heteronormative class finds to be comfortable, acceptable, and marketable. Our students choose to pursue a RISD degree for the opportunities it seems to promise, yet upon arrival, it often feels like these opportunities are granted to an elite few. An institution that fails its students also fails the outside world. RISD must learn to quickly catch up with an ever changing multicultural society before it is too late.

Black Artists and Designers (BAAD) is a coalition of marginalized and allied students who are seeking greater accountability, transparency, and respect from RISD as an institution. In response to the events at the University of Missouri and so many other colleges this past year, we believed that it was crucial to address our own administration's shortcomings. While the stories of tension in these institutions have long been erased from news headlines in past months, it is important to keep these discussions at the forefront of national discourse and across the classroom and offices of our own school.

As students, we know that the fight for equality will be long and difficult, but we also want to stress that it is no longer our sole responsibility to ensure that our school is promoting a safe and accessible environment. The work that we have put into this initiative thus far has been physically and mentally taxing for many, and by handing this document to those in power, we wish to shift our focus back onto the work that we always intended to do—in the studio and beyond through an innovative creative practice.

For these reasons, we present to you our List of Demands in the hopes that you can all continue to implement the work we have started as the administrators and leaders of RISD.

Please join us in this daunting yet highly achievable endeavor.

Respectfully yours,

Black Artists and Designers, students and allies, 2016

I. We Demand a mandatory global consciousness course for all students in order to make them responsible image-makers.

- This course must fit into the current curriculum by taking the place of a required liberal arts credit. While this class is being created, RISD must provide students with a seminar/lecture/workshop during orientation in order to accomplish the same purpose.
- In the same way that non-native speakers must take an introductory English course, there should be a special course offered to international students in order to help them better understand certain contexts and references within the classroom such as Intro to American History.

II. We Demand that all faculty undergo adequate, regular, and thorough cultural and identity-based sensitivity training upon being hired as well as after contract renewals on a basis of one, three, or five years.

- Faculty who fail to abide by basic principles established in training or who develop a record of repeated offenses **MUST** be held accountable.
- Stronger disciplinary action must be taken towards faculty have been reported more than once to administration.

III. We Demand that there be an increase in outreach and support to both low-income students and students of color whether they be prospective applicants or currently enrolled.

- RISD should push for stronger partnerships with outside organizations in order to make the institution a more accessible and welcoming space:
 - Programs like Questbridge help bridge the gap between high-achieving low-income students and access to higher education opportunities with some of the most prestigious colleges in America.
 - RISD must make a greater effort to connect with Providence-based schools and organizations like City Arts, New Urban Arts and AS220 which cater to low-income and first generation high school students through after-school partnerships and more extensive contact from admissions officers.
- Studio and Liberal arts Professors **MUST** put an end to classist studio culture where those who can afford certain resources will have a higher chance of succeeding academically. Changes should include:
 - Publishing syllabi and supply lists ahead of time, especially if a specific course has been taught for more than one school year.
 - The total estimated cost of expenses for materials, books, and deposit fees should be published online along side all course descriptions on Student Planning.
 - Professors should make their students aware of options like emergency funds and Second Life, and they should be more lenient with their material's brands.

IV. We Demand an increase in the number of faculty of color through a Diversity Action Plan and a more active involvement of students during the hiring process in which they should give input BEFORE and AFTER a candidate pool is closed.

- A minimum of 50% of the candidate pool should be non-white individuals who specialize in race, gender, sexuality, religion, inclusion, etc.
- This year, Brown University unveiled its own Pathways to Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) which works to address and reform a lack of inclusion through six major categories:
 - People
 - Academic Excellence
 - Community
 - Curriculum
 - Knowledge
 - Accountability

As a sister school, it is highly advisable that RISD turn to Brown as a model for implementing its own reform policies.

V. We Demand an increased number of visiting artists of color

- We want every department to have no less than 50% of visiting artists per semester that come from marginalized backgrounds.
- The school should have a separate fund set aside for a monthly lecture series that allows for an artist of color to visit, speak and hold workshops in collaboration with departments. We would like the series to be named after sculptor Nancy Elizabeth Prophet, the first black woman to graduate from RISD.

VI. We Demand sweeping curriculum reform, departing from the westernized and outdated form of art and design education that are inclusive only to some.

- Liberal arts must increase the number of courses focusing on race, diversity, sexuality, gender and religion, and these courses must be taught by faculty who specialize in these areas.
- The first year HAVC survey needs to be drastically altered in order to include equal representation of artists and works from cultures that are not predominantly European.

VII. We Demand that the RISD Fact Book change its statistics so that international races and ethnicities are actually broken down and represented accurately.

The representation of socio-economic classes must be included as well, and the Fact Book should be an easily accessible and distributed publication. This will allow the student body to fully gauge the size of domestic and international communities around them

VIII. We Demand improvements in RISD's treatment of mental health, especially in regards to the psychological adjustment and well being of marginalized students in predominantly white spaces.

- Counseling and Psychological Services must hire a full time counselor of color who specializes in issues of marginalization, discrimination, racial fatigue, and imposter syndrome.
- CAPS should also administer support groups for marginalized students.

IX. We Demand the creation of a public memorial in Market Square that acknowledges the legacy of slavery and racism on campus.

RISD can commission either undergraduate or graduate students of color to submit proposals for a permanent sculpture installation, community garden, or reflections space.

X. We Demand that the Ewing Multicultural Center be fully restored from its current state of neglect, to become a fully functioning center for students of color, faith, and LGBTQIA identities, and to provide a safe space for our marginalized students to thrive and administer programs with student organizations and the office of Intercultural Student Engagement.