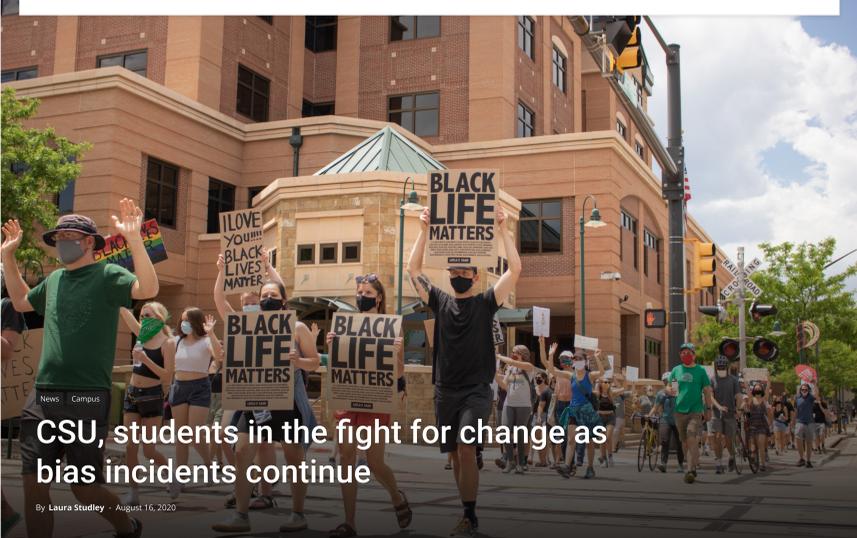


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# CSU, students in the fight for change as bias incidents continue

By Laura Studley | August 16, 2020

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George Floyd's death on May 25 sparked **protests** across the nation calling for change. This **demand for action** is all too familiar for the Colorado State University community.

In 2015, a **confederate flag** hung in Phi Kappa Tau's fraternity house. In 2017, a **noose** was found hanging on a Newsom Hall floor of the only Black student and resident assistant there. In 2019, four students posted a photo where they were wearing **blackface**. The list goes on.

Students have openly and continuously **criticized** how the University handled these incidents.

In September 2019, following the blackface incident, The Plaza was **filled with chalk messages** stating, "CSU sides with racists," and asking, "Who is CSU protecting?"

The chalk was later washed away during "regular maintenance," according to a University **tweet**. The University said that the chalk should not have been removed and that the employees had been informed that such messages are allowed.



Messages written in chalk on The Plaza in response to Colorado State University administrator's actions about the blackface image Sept. 18, 2019. (Matt Tackett | The Collegian)

Additionally, the initiative intends "to empower all members of our campus community to learn, work, live and recreate in a safe and welcoming environment."

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The initiative's website highlights the **steps taken** to achieve these goals stated in its mission statement. Major steps include coordinating a team to lead the initiative as well as reading and approving **RBEI submissions**, which propose ideas to improve the University community.

According to **SOURCE**, the RBEI received more than 100 proposals from various students, staff and faculty. From those, two have been chosen as a focus point. The first focuses on first generation students by "unifying and strengthening" current initiatives to enhance the first generation program at CSU. The second initiative focuses on creating a teaching certificate program for graduate students aiming to enhance diversity and equity, creating a more unified approach to inclusivity in the classroom.

"It is important to note that in order to truly begin making progress, we must focus," according to an email sent to the CSU community. "While we wish we had the capacity and resources to pursue all the ideas submitted, we wouldn't be able to do so without risking the success of each."

Above all, the RBEI is more about support than anything else, according to Vice President for Diversity and the co-chair of the Race Bias and Equity Initiative Mary Ontiveros.

"RBEI provides another platform to give students those much needed high-fives and show them that there really are people behind those screens," she said.

In addition to the University's measures, students have taken part in a multitude of protests and walks of solidarity.



A protester yells into a megaphone at the Charlie Kirk "Culture War" event at the University Center for the Arts Oct. 22, 2019. The event featured both Charlie Kirk, a prominent conservative speaker, and Donald Trump Jr., where they discussed conservative values and socialism in the United States. (Collegian File Photo)

From the **CSUite march** in 2018 to the public outcry surrounding **Charlie Kirk's talk**, once in 2018 and again in 2019, and the **#NotProudtoBe blackout event**, the CSU community has made their voices loud, standing in direct opposition to hate seen on campus.

It has been no different since Floyd's death. Students have **joined in the national protests** in support of the Black community, including demonstrations on campus and in Old Town.

Despite the collective effort, acts of racism are still occurring in the Fort Collins community.

In July, *The Collegian* learned of a **fake restaurant listing** using racist language to describe individuals of Asian descent. The creators of the listing were contacted by a University representative; however, the invitation to converse about the harm was denied, according to CSU Director of Media Relations and Denver Outreach Mike Hooker.

"The implications of such an establishment are to propagate anti-Asian sentiment and must be seen unequivocally as an act of racism," a **statement** released by the Asian/Pacific American Cultural Center read. "Even if such an establishment has the intention of situational humor, this deeply offensive creation publicizes racial vilification and continues to deter us from our mission of racial equity and inclusiveness."

At a **July Aurora, Colorado, protest**, a blue Jeep Wrangler drove through a crowd of protesters calling for justice in the death of Elijah McClain.

Screenshots posted by Instagram account **@colostatemes** show a LinkedIn profile of former student Kyle Scott Faulkison, claiming he was driving the vehicle.

## Resources

Vice President for Student Affairs and co-chair of the Race, Bias and Equity Initiative Blanche Hughes said that when it comes to creating a more equitable community at CSU, education is critical.

There are many resources available to create a community devoid of hateful and racially biased incidents, she said.

Hughes said that intellectualism and mindfulness are terms that can be used to describe the type of personal judgment that students can utilize to be more tolerant, kind and equitable.

It calls individuals to be informed enough to assess incidents and mindful enough to adjust the individual's behavior or to seek out help, she said.

There are many resources available on campus for students who have experienced bias related incidents.

Students can **report** the incident using an online form. On the **CSU support and safety website**, there are also resources to help better understand the process.

Recently, there has been an increase in racially-biased incident reports attributed to the current climate around racial bias and greater involvement of the students, according to Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs Kathy Sisneros.

Additionally, there are many **cultural centers** located in the Lory Student Center and other campus buildings that provide guidance, community and resources for students.

The **Black/African American Cultural Center** offers the **Rites of Passage Retreat**, which normally includes a fall semester retreat, workshops and outings.

The **Native American Cultural Center** offers **North Star Peer Mentoring**, which matches incoming freshmen and transfers with upper-class students. **El Centro**, the **Latinx** cultural center, offers a similar program for first-year students called **La Conexión**.

For incoming freshmen, the **Asian/Pacific American Cultural Center** also recommends a **peer mentoring program**, which hosted an ice cream social and a hike to Horsetooth Reservoir last year.

To learn how to be actively anti-racist and combat racism on campus, view the resources on the Office of the Vice President for Diversity's **"Educate Yourself" website**.

**Editor's Note:** *Isaiah Dennings and Noah Pasley contributed to the reporting for this article.*

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