Dear Biology students (and faculty and staff).

The horrific murder of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis is a recent reminder of the systemic racism and prejudice experienced by too many people in our country and around the world. The Department of Biology stands with the multiracial coalition of peaceful protesters who recognize, in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Black Lives Matter.

We have seen this type of senseless violence before. We share the hope that the latest tragedy is a true inflection point. It is up to every citizen to listen with open ears, reflect with open minds, and love with open hearts…and then it’s time to roll up our sleeves and get to work. We must seize this important moment to use our voices, our rights and our privileges to affect real, systemic change. History will judge us by our actions, and we encourage everyone to take this opportunity to act –reflecting on our behaviors and assumptions, supporting institutions and people that champion moral causes, and exercising our true power by voting.

The Department of Biology is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion and strongly condemns any and all forms of racism, bigotry, and prejudice. Over the last five years, we as a department have taken an active role in the establishment and empowerment of the College of Arts & Sciences Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and we have established our own departmental Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee. The roles of both of these entities are to create and deploy policies as well as to support university initiatives. We take this very seriously. Our departmental committee reflects our community, and consists of faculty, staff, and students committed to promoting awareness and improving our collective lives through developing initiatives that promote a fair, diverse, and inclusive environment among our students, staff, and faculty. In the coming months, our department will submit a three-year action plan to achieve these goals and to disintegrate inherent systemic biases that exist. In addition, some current graduate students have called for action in a recent letter and some faculty have separately distributed a statement to their students (for example, Drs. Wieder, Chapman, and Stark to students in General Biology II). As a department, we will continue to support efforts by the College of Liberal Arts, including the new Anti-Racism Initiative just announced (please see announcement by Dean Adele Lindenmeyr on 5 June), the university DEI office (please refer to their website to learn about events that are happening within and outside our community and here for their statement on recent events), and the Office of the President at Villanova University (please see President Donohue’s pledge to address these issues in his email on 6 June). Much work
remains, and the Biology faculty and staff will actively participate and collaborate with students in creating an environment in which all members of our community can thrive in our department. We encourage you to be inspired to act and get involved at any of these levels.

Finally, we also emphasize that if you or any of your fellow students have been treated unfairly, we encourage you to seek help from us. We, as your professors and advisors, are available, as is our department’s DEI committee, currently headed by Dr. Troy Shirangi (troy.shirangi@villanova.edu). In addition, the University’s Office of DEI provides a number of resources for students.

We wish you a healthy summer and hope to see you in person on campus in the fall semester.

Sincerely,

Dr. John Olson, Chair
Dr. Vik Iyengar, Assistant Chair
Dr. Troy Shirangi, Chair of the DEI Committee

Department of Biology