

Statement from President Boudreau

Dear Campus Community,

Almost a full year ago, as the reality of the pandemic was settling around us, sections of our society lashed out at people of Asian descent.

These attacks, odious under any circumstances, were particularly so at a time when we so badly needed the understanding, compassion and support of one another. Today, when hope for a more normal future seems every day closer at hand, it strikes me as all the more baffling that these attacks have resurfaced with more prominence.

We know, of course, that this never truly went away and that my earlier statement could have been reissued at any time between then and now. But it now seems particularly important to remind one another of how important it is to be able to trust and rely on one another, to draw strength from the inclusiveness of our community, and to fortify our core inclusive values.

I am therefore reissuing my statement of March 2020, with a heavy heart that these words are still necessary but an unshakable conviction in their content.



To the City College Community,

Last week Diana Cuzzo, our Chief Diversity Officer, issued a statement urging us all to maintain our commitment to diversity and anti-discrimination in the face of this crisis. Particularly, she asked that we carefully assess our transition to a distance learning practices to make sure we don't slide into discriminatory or inequitable modes of interacting with students. It was a timely reminder and I thoroughly endorse the message.

Little by little over the past weeks, however, a new ugliness has crept across the land. Despite wise calls to pull together and respond in a unified manner to a challenge we face collectively, some seem incapable of approaching a crisis as anything other than an opportunity to give their very basest instincts free reign: they scapegoat, they stigmatize, insult and denigrate. They imagine that every hardship must be understood as the product of some culpable other; they wait for some difficulty as an opportunity to dress up prejudice in baseless allegations. Many of them—including the President of the United States, unthinking representations in the media, random people on the street and in the subway—have attempted to craft a narrative that identifies the COVID-19 virus as having a specific Asian identity by misnaming it the “Chinese virus.” The very idea is ignorant, and the climate it seeks to create is absolutely poisonous.

We all share apprehension associated with this virus. But to saddle our Asian neighbors, our Asian American citizens, and our Asian American friends with the additional burden of wondering, at every encounter, whether they will need to deflect insult or aggression is intolerable. To begin, we know enough about contagions to know that where a disease begins is the most irrelevant element of our understanding. And we also know enough about humanity to know that framing a health crisis in racial terms will certainly bring undue hardship and suffering upon people already sharing the common weight of the moment.

I condemn all expressions of anti-Asian racism that try to link this disease to ethnic or national origins. I condemn the thoughtless words of the American president and the bigots who parrot his prejudice. I mourn the ease with which some members of our society adopt that language, knitting it to the prefabricated structures of their own racism. And I reaffirm, in the very strongest terms, the inclusive values of our college.

No crisis demands a more coordinated and other-directed response than a public health crisis. No moment in our recent history has demanded more collaboration among all people. We must share, support one another, provide care (sometimes at personal risk), and pay attention to the physical and emotional needs of the people around us.

No place should more strongly demonstrate and proselytize these values than CCNY, founded on the dream of a stronger and more just society built upon an inclusive educational system. We have worked to build the future of our dreams for over 170 years, moving to more audacious goals all the time. Let us now together to reject hate and bigotry of all kinds, and rise to the defense of every person who suffers categorical discrimination, or who finds themselves suddenly vulnerable in the crosswinds of a crisis. Today, we particularly extend our embrace to Asian and Asian American people. They are our community, they are our family, they are our neighbors, and they are part of the global community. Tomorrow, we will rise to the defense of some other group. But our goal is constant and our vision is clear: when we stand for our community and for others against racism, we stand for justice.

I urge every member of our community to reaffirm the values of our college, and to actively defend them both as a general and principled position and when, in particular encounters, we see them under attack. Please visit <https://www.cuny.edu/coronavirus/#wellness> for the updated CUNY statement on Equity and Inclusion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V. Boudreau', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Vince Boudreau
President