June 3, 2020

Active voice. We learn about it in our classrooms, but it takes on an entirely different meaning today. On the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic that exposed the inequalities already facing our black and brown communities, we witnessed the horrifying footage of a Minneapolis police officer kneeling on George Floyd’s neck because of a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill. The measure was disproportionate and callous, and it has thrust the topic of racial inequality yet again into the national spotlight. As an alumni association...as an institution of higher learning...as a world...we can no longer sit idly and watch.

George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor are just the latest three public victims, but prejudice and injustice are as old as our United States. As is often said, if you’re not outraged, you’re not paying attention. We have been down this road too many times with no substantive change. We now must harness our collective fear, distrust and anger and direct it to substantive, lasting, positive change.

We are the voice of almost 500,000 living alumni of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and we believe it would be unworthy of our esteemed institution not to exercise that voice at this point in time. If not now, when?

The mission at UIAA is to engage, inspire, celebrate and educate our alumni. We have a momentously teachable moment at hand. We must be as committed to equitable scholarship, social justice, inclusivity and leadership as we are to the humanities and sciences. We need to ensure that our alumni and citizens around the world participate in and contribute to a world free of prejudice and racism. Only then will we reach our full potential as the Illini community, as a country, and as the human race.

We can and we must do better. As the University of Illinois Alumni Association, we say to the black and brown community: Your outrage is our outrage, and your suffering is our suffering. We stand with you in this time of crisis and we are committed to ensuring that the UIAA is committed to inclusivity and justice.

Systemic prejudice requires systemic change. We need to turn our words into actions, and we must start right here, right now. Active voice.

As the University formulates its call for action, we will follow up with opportunities for alumni engagement.

Loyally,

Bill Forsyth ’86 BUS
Chair, University of Illinois Alumni Association

Jennifer Dillavou ‘82
President, University of Illinois Alumni Association