

Statement by Oliver Rosales to the Bakersfield College Academic Senate, November 18, 2020

On May 25, 2020 George Floyd died in downtown Minneapolis after being choked to death for 8 minutes and 46 seconds by police officer Derek Chauvin. The video recording of Floyd's death shocked America into action and protest against police violence. As a historian who has studied extensively the history of police violence in this country, I was not particularly shocked by Floyd's death. Black men dying unjustly at the hands of white police officers is unfortunately not new. The aftermath of Floyd's death was however unique. The resulting protests, I perceived, might be a generative force for young people into sustained civic action. That remains to be seen but I applaud thus far the community organizing nationwide that has taken place since June, including here in Bakersfield.

What does this have to do with Bakersfield College? Isn't our campus a bastion of tolerance amidst an otherwise polarized country? Although isolated in many ways from larger currents in California, Bakersfield does not exist in a social vacuum. What happens nationally and within the periphery generally, impacts our faculty, staff, and students. I applauded therefore President Christian, Chancellor Oakley, and the administrative leadership of more than 60 community colleges for joining USC's racial equity alliance in early June. I believe the document before the Academic Senate today, nearly six months after George Floyd's death, is an expression of that commitment.

I understand there is criticism against the document: perhaps it's the manner it was produced, allegations that it violates the California Constitution, it's anti-Western, un-American, reflects the politics of the 1960s, etc. Some of these arguments are both old and new. I myself have been accused publicly by these same types of arguments regarding the work I do here at BC, as were my father, David Rosales, and mentor, the late Jess Nieto before me—both of who championed racial equity at Bakersfield College decades ago before we called it that.

What I understand very clearly however is that the racial equity commitments before us today are in line with the Chancellor's Office *Vision For Success, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force*. There is nothing in these racial equity commitments that violates Proposition 209 or suggests racial preference toward any particular group. Faculty and staff diversity are important. We need to work toward creating diverse hiring pools. Studies show student learning outcomes improve with diverse faculty, including racial and ethnic diversity. Diversity beyond race/ethnicity of course matters. No one discounts that. There's obviously ideological diversity at Bakersfield College given the resistance this document has encountered. We all value open inquiry and collegial dialogue.

Regarding process, this document reflects a timely effort on behalf of the Equal Opportunity & Diversity Advisory Committee (EODAC) to respond to the Chancellor's call to action. EODAC should be praised for responding to a national crisis and offering a vision for moving our institution forward. I especially want to thank EODAC faculty chair Bryan Hirayama for his leadership and tireless effort to move this work out of committee. I hope the Academic Senate listens to the recommendations sent forth by EODAC today, which has now voted twice, unanimously, to move these racial equity commitments forward. To quote our committee

chairman, “this is a struggle for the heart and soul of Bakersfield College,” and I stand proudly with my fellow EODAC members in supporting these commitments.