**Dr. Kenneth Melville McGill Black Faculty and Staff Caucus**

Statement - December 9, 2020

**Use of N-Word in the Classroom**

The Dr. Kenneth Melville McGill Black Faculty and Staff Caucus stands in solidarity with Black faculty, students and staff at the University of Ottawa, and our fellow Caucus member Adelle Blackett, who has faced backlash for speaking up in solidarity. During a time when the world is on fire over the issues of racism, inequity, and lack of human dignity, it is critical to refuse to allow academic freedom to become a red herring. The n-word is not simply a racial epithet. It has a sordid history, because, for hundreds of years, anti-Black racists have used it as a fierce weapon to dehumanize Black people. We are people, and yet are often seen as objects to be excluded, diminished, ignored, and murdered. These historic and contemporary contexts confer to members of the Black community the ultimate say regarding when and where it is appropriate to fully state the n-word.

As part of the commitment to redressing anti-Black racism within post-secondary education including our own institution, it is imperative that we examine the academic spaces in which learning has traditionally occurred, especially regarding the use of the n-word.  First, only Black people have the ultimate say where use of the n-word is concerned. Second, if the objective is to highlight the historical use of the word as an academic discussion point, then insistence by non-Black people to articulate the full word in the classroom, rather than the euphemism, becomes suspect. Abandoning our dignity and humanity should not be confused with preserving academic freedom. As noted by the Nobel Laureate, Toni Morrison, “Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

1. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/lecture/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)