



Dear Speed School Family,

These are unprecedented times. No one was expecting a global pandemic and working from home for so many months. We also were not anticipating the current national and global protests over injustice in our policing systems. I had a great conversation recently with one of our students who is participating in the Louisville protests. After that talk, I decided to offer some personal perspectives to Speed School students, staff, and faculty and emphasize some of Speed School's core values.

Though I am African-American, I do not speak as an official representative of the African-American community. I do speak as an American and academic engineering leader, who is part of that community.

As an African-American engineering student, I attended and graduated from Morehouse College (a well-known HBCU – Historically Black College/University) in Atlanta and Georgia Tech (a prominent STEM university in the same city). Later I served as a professor at Florida A&M University (the largest HBCU in the nation) as well as Florida State University (one of the two preeminent research universities in Florida). In the present time, as you all know, I serve as the first African-American Dean of the Speed School of Engineering. These varied experiences give me a personal understanding of the challenges faced by people of color in academia and an appreciation of this particular moment in time.

Black Lives Matter

When talking with the aforementioned Speed School student, I appreciated his concern and his passion for advocating for justice. He referred to the protests as “Black Lives Matter.” To some ears, “Black Lives Matter” may have seemed to be saying that somehow Black people are special. This is a gross misunderstanding. The perspective of the phrase has always been that in comparison to other ethnicities within our nation, Black people’s lives are not as valued. Hence, it is more likely we will die at the hands of certain police officers, it is more likely that we will have a harder time getting a loan, we are more likely to experience housing or job discrimination, and we are more likely to have poor educational achievements – in part due to teachers who do not believe in our educational abilities. I think that the tragic graphic image of what happened to George Floyd and Breonna Taylor allowed more people outside of the African-American community and the wider social justice community to understand and appreciate the phrase “Black Lives Matter.”

At this moment in time, social consciousness of justice issues has increased. Companies, universities, and celebrities have seemingly had a mass awakening. How this awakening will make lasting changes remains to be seen. Within the current turbulent times, my job is to lead Speed School and to make sure that we take positive steps to make our college more diverse and more inclusive. These principles of diversity and inclusion are not only important values for me as dean, but also core values within Speed School and part of our core Cardinal Principles at the University of Louisville; so I will share a few of our priorities related to our under-represented minority students.

Speed School Diversity and Inclusion Programs and Aspirations

Nationwide, including at Speed School, there is a shortage of under-represented minority students enrolling in and graduating from STEM majors, especially Engineering. Speed School has been working on facing this challenge along all the phases of the (prospective) student's career from outreach to recruitment, admission, student success, and retention.

First, I acknowledge our makerspace programs with West End School and Nativity Academy, two private donor-supported schools in Louisville that cater to under-represented minorities. We also have a makerspace program with Central High School. Students from these programs that meet Speed School admission standards are guaranteed scholarships to Speed School. To continue and facilitate these important relationships, I serve on the board of the two academies.

I have already mandated Speed School Admissions to put an emphasis on recruiting students from diverse backgrounds. They are accomplishing this by making sure that we have some focused recruitment efforts at schools with large proportions of students from diverse backgrounds. As a result, the incoming freshman class will have the largest number of African American students in Speed School's history.

It is not just important to recruit under-represented minority students, we need to make sure that they succeed and graduate. Hence, we are actively working on increasing our freshman retention rate by implementing an Algebra Proficiency Assessment (APA) for incoming freshmen to ensure that students are placed in the proper math class. The APA is inspired by a STEM education consultant who implemented a similar program that achieved unprecedented success. The APA is expected to play a major role in the academic achievement of Speed School students.

I deeply want all of our students to feel a sense of belonging at Speed School. Knowing that many of our black and brown students are among those who will sometimes not have this sense and that I am one of them, I have reached out to work with NSBE (National Society of Black Engineers) and SHPE (Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers). In fact, I have committed to opening my home to them a few times a year to hold meetings and recruitment events. I call on them to work with me and others in the Speed School administration to help create a better environment for our under-represented minorities.

At Speed School, we have also lacked faculty and staff who are under-represented minorities. Our Speed School family needs to see more diversity within our faculty and staff ranks. Why is this important? Because inclusive, diverse teams are more successful and because our students need to see role models who look like them. It makes a difference. When I enrolled in Purdue's College of Engineering as a graduate student, there were no African-American faculty (zero, nada) in this very large college. My research struggled in the first year of my PhD program in the School of Aeronautics and Astronautics and I felt displaced because there were no successful images of African-American PhDs in engineering around me, not at Purdue and not in the author photographs of the journals that I read. Fortunately, during my PhD program, the School of Mechanical Engineering did hire a black professor. It made a big difference to my self-image. I commit to doing more to ensure that we hire more faculty who are under-represented minorities. I call on the chairs and other faculty to partner with me in this effort.

Diversity and inclusion also mean that we would like to see more female students and faculty at Speed School and we want to ensure that they also feel they belong. I acknowledge here the role played by the Society of Women Engineers (SWE)'s chapter for students. I would also like to mention a new initiative, called "Advancement through healthy empowerment, networking, and

awareness” (ATHENA), for the recruitment, retention and advancement of diverse faculty in STEM disciplines. This project, recently funded by the National Science Foundation, works at the institutional level, but is led by faculty from the Speed School of Engineering. As dean, I have been an early supporter of ATHENA and look forward to its success.

I do not want to forget our LGBTQ community and support the efforts of Speed Spectrum to help us create an environment in which that underrepresented community also feels that they belong at Speed School. They are an important part of us.

Listening and Caring

Going forward, let’s pay careful attention to how we treat one another and be more sensitive to listening to the expressed concerns and hurts of others. One of the things I personally try to do in interactions is listen. I know that I have heard the person, when I can articulate back to them what they communicated to me.

I talked about how some people misunderstood the context of the phrase “Black Lives Matter.” This is because they are not truly listening. All of us need to listen to one another, whether the speaker is black, white, latino, a student, a professor, or a police officer.

At Speed School, my hope is that we develop a culture of listening – truly listening to one another. If we do this, we will be well along to achieving the diversity and inclusion that we are seeking.

Final Thoughts to Students

Finally, I would like to speak directly to our future Speed School engineers. Today you have the opportunity to be a part of a historical watershed moment. You have the freedom to voice your opinions on these matters of justice. Should you choose to do this, I encourage you to do so wisely, taking appropriate care of yourselves as you interact in the community and within Speed School. Please use good time management skills and keep striving to achieve your goal of becoming a successful engineer who has a positive impact in your communities and all of humanity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Emmanuel G. Collins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "E" and "G".

Emmanuel G. Collins