

Tools for SUNY Campuses to Support Students During the *State of Minnesota v. Derek Chauvin* Trial

On May 25, 2020, an encounter between a white Minneapolis police officer, Derek Chauvin, and a 46-year-old Black man named George Floyd resulted in Floyd's tragic death. Derek Chauvin's trial, which began on March 8, 2021, is expected to last several weeks, and profoundly impact the nation. A significant percentage of students across SUNY are activated around racial justice and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement (including, but not limited to students of color). Conversely, there is a sizeable group of conservative students, many of whom are already frustrated with the results of an election they feel was "stolen," that are also activated in support of the police, and in opposition to the BLM movement. With that in mind, the stark reality is that *any* verdict will likely be disruptive to day-to-day operations. Campuses must act *before* the verdict to ensure that students of color and their allies are being supported and that conservative students feel equally safe and welcome to voice their opinions and concerns. In the coming weeks, it is crucial that campus leaders engage students, faculty and staff broadly in discussions of race and justice, so that all members of our campus community feel respected and have an opportunity to be heard.

The stakes are high. In the past, several weeks three significant campus incidents occurred at Binghamton, Geneseo, and Plattsburgh that demonstrate the tense environment in which we are operating. The emotional turmoil that this trial has caused does not exist in a vacuum; the stresses of remote learning, a polarized political climate, unprecedented financial strain, health risks of COVID-19, inability to decompress socially, and an exacerbated sense of testing fatigue have all contributed to the larger feelings of isolation, fear, sadness, and anxiety that students are experiencing. Their mental health and wellness provide us with a critical barometer of how they will respond to the Chauvin trial and verdict. We know it will not take much to ignite widespread unrest across our campuses.

This "toolkit" provides some resources and guidelines for campuses to proactively address the impact of the trial on their students. Many of these resources are drawn from Minneapolis-area schools and colleges, who feel the pressure most immediately.

1. General Advice

- Have early conversations with your campus police departments to ensure they understand the significance of this trial to students. Emphasize the importance of approaching potential protests with a support mindset, not a punishment mindset.
- Take this opportunity to have legal counsel give your campus an update on the boundaries of the First Amendment and its application to Hate Speech.
- Encourage students to take care of their mental health needs and raise awareness of the resources available to them both on-campus and remotely.
- In classroom settings, explicitly acknowledge the trial and the impact it may have on students.
- Take advantage of the resources provided by those closest to the situation:
 - **University of Minnesota's [Recommendations and Resources for Supporting Students Before, During, and After the Chauvin Trial](#)**

2. Facts about George Floyd's death and the trial of Derek Chauvin

As a reminder, when sharing information regarding this highly sensitive situation, you may choose to provide warnings of the graphic content involved that may not be suitable for all viewers.

- a. What happened in May 2020?
 - i. [What to Know About George Floyd's Death](#)
- b. What is happening in the trial?
 - i. [Explaining the Charges](#)
 - ii. NYT [Live Updates](#) and the C-SPAN [Livestream](#)
 - iii. [The State of Minnesota vs. Derek Chauvin](#) case documents
- c. Anti-racism Resources
 - i. [SUNY's Race & Multicultural Resources](#)

3. Sample Letters to the Campus Community

It is critical to use trauma-informed, sensitive language when discussing the circumstances surrounding the death of George Floyd. Please see sample letters below.

- a. Macalester College [Message from President Suzanne Rivera: Preparing for the Trial of Derek Chauvin](#)
- b. University of Minnesota [Message from the Office of the President: Chauvin Trial Resources and Board of Regents Update](#)
- c. Empire State College [Message from Then-President Jim Malatras](#)
- d. SUNY Board Chairman and SUNY SA President [Joint Letter to SUNY Family](#)
- e. [Letter from Then-Chancellor Kristina Johnson](#)

4. Mental Health Resources

National research¹ shows that the percentage of college students who indicated that stress had a negative impact on their studies increased roughly 50% since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (from 21.9% to 30.5% of respondents). We need to prepare for the impact that this trial will inevitably have on students in an already difficult circumstances by expanding awareness of the services available to them through SUNY, as well as trauma-informed services specific to this trial.

Below, please find some of the [system-wide mental health resources](#) we are offering to all SUNY students:

- SUNY has partnered with [Thriving Campus](#) to provide every SUNY student with access to a network of more than 6,000 licensed mental health service providers.
- The Governor launched a [statewide partnership with Headspace](#); a meditation and mindfulness app which provides guided meditations for a variety of situations free online for all New Yorkers.

¹[The Impact of COVID-19 on College Student Wellbeing, American College Health Association](#)



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- Students looking to engage with a trained counselor can find support on SUNY's 24/7 Crisis Text Line. To reach out, students should simply text Got5U to 741-741.
- All SUNY students have access to the [Middle Earth peer-to-peer assistance hotline](#) operated by the University at Albany. Middle Earth is a secure student-staffed hotline that connects students in need with peer counselors who are trained to help. Students do not need to be in crisis to use this hotline.
- Students at a handful of participating campuses² also have access to the [SUNY-STCN](#) (Student Tele-Counseling Network), which provides students with tele-counseling and tele-psychiatry services.

In addition to these valuable system-wide resources for students, please find below national resources specific to the emotional impact of this trial that will help educators facilitate conversations with students.

- a. The Minnesota Department of Education's [Resources to Help Educators, Adults Respond to Racism, Violence and Trauma](#)
- b. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network's ["Helping Youth after Community Trauma: Tips for Educators" Guide](#)

² Binghamton, Cobleskill, Cortland, Fredonia, Morrisville, Nassau Community College, New Paltz, Potsdam, SUNY OCC, Oneonta, Oswego, or Polytech