Dear AIAA Family,

The AIAA University of Minnesota - Twin Cities Student Chapter Leadership would like to offer our deepest condolences to the family and friends of George Floyd as well as anyone who has been struggling from the events happening around the country. We realize this is a sensitive time for many, and we want you all to know that we stand with you and share the indignation that you may have been feeling in these hard times.

As an officer board, we acknowledge our slow response to this situation and would like to formally apologize for remaining silent until now. AIAA is a group that is open to all, regardless of race, gender, and sexual orientation, and it is difficult to observe the blatant discrimination towards people of color that is occurring in the Twin Cities and around the world. We want the best with regards to the safety of our members and of everyone in all of our communities. We are aware of the systemic changes that need to occur.

We recognize the aerospace industry has deeply rooted problems with the hiring of people of color. In fact, NASA lagged behind every other government agency in diverse hiring practices as late as 1973. The government and industry took an active role in resisting diversity within aerospace jobs and research, preferring to stick with the status quo through the mid-1970s, until administrators like Harriet Jenkins took action (for more information, see here). While there is no longer an active bar against diversity in aerospace, both the scars and the implicit barriers remain. We will do as much as we can to educate ourselves and make a plan to enact change. We will begin reaching out to those with different backgrounds and ideas to formally create an initiative to increase diversity and promote a welcoming environment within the University of Minnesota AIAA chapter. We will share the plan with you all once it is complete - you can expect a follow up email regarding this plan in early July.

Feel free to reach out with any questions you may have. Use this anonymous google form to share thoughts, experiences, or suggestions for us to consider as we lay out a plan for moving forward. In addition, we have attached links to resources regarding the aerospace industry’s lack of diversity and their response, resources on mental health, and the national AIAA statement. Lastly, please, wherever you are, stay safe as we collectively continue this journey towards necessary transformation.

With Deepest Regards,
The AIAA University of Minnesota - Twin Cities Student Chapter Board

Links to Resources:

“Racism, Sexism, and Space Ventures”: Civil Rights at Nasa
https://www.history.nasa.gov/sp4801-chapter22.pdf
This excerpt from a book written by Kim McQuaid details the history of diversity at NASA.

“A Perspective on the Role of African-Americans in Aviation”
https://commons.crau.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1171&context=jaaer
This paper by Patricia W. Harris and Patrick K Alexander gives an informative viewpoint on the history of African-Americans in aviation.

“Boeing’s Difficult Journey from Racism to Diversity”
This article by the Seattle Time’s Dominic Gates documents the experiences of some African-Americans who have worked at Boeing over the past 80 years.

“Protecting Tribal Skies: Why Indian Tribes Possess the Sovereign Authority to Regulate Tribal Airspace”
https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1022&context=ailr
For those willing to set aside some time to read, this paper looks into the modern day issue of Native American rights regarding control over airspace. A different but informative take on discrimination within the aerospace industry.

Twin Cities University and Community Resources
https://diversity.umn.edu/resources/twin-cities-university-and-community-resources?
This is a link to the University and Community Resource page from the University’s Office of Equity and Diversity.

Mental Health Resources (Thanks to Rocket Team for finding these resources)
https://boynton.umn.edu/patient-focus/students
The University of Minnesota continues to provide mental health resources remotely.
https://counseling.umn.edu/campus-wide-services/mhc
The Mental Health Collective of Indigenous People and People of Color is another service that provides mental health support and resources. (Note: this service is changing its name to Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) soon.)

National AIAA Statement on Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion
This is a statement on the national AIAA organization’s stance on issues of diversity, equality, and inclusion from AIAA Executive Director Dan Dumbacher.