

## **Statement from S-POWER Leadership team about brutal suffocation of George Floyd, with a call to the Northeastern University community for action\***

The brutal death by suffocation of George Floyd has ignited a justified awareness of the cruelty and injustice to Black people (e.g. Ahmaud Arbery, Beronna Taylor, and many more) by police, society, and the legal system. The S-POWER leadership team condemns racism, white supremacy, and all aspects of racial bias and inequality. Further, we are outraged by police officers killing or becoming violent with unarmed Black people. Unfortunately, and tragically, the recent events with George Floyd were not a surprise to our S-POWER leadership team. It represents a continuing cycle of oppression and bias against African Americans. We endorse the call for accountability and action written by the NAACP for “federal, state, and local reforms which impose strict police accountability, limit the use of force, eliminate racial profiling, de-militarize law enforcement, track and report data, and ensure proper screening, education and training of all officers.”<sup>1</sup>

S-POWER is a National Science Foundation (NSF) funded scholarship and mentoring program<sup>2</sup> that was formed to help address systematic racial biases against minority students, but in particular Black students, in the university education system. Policies within many universities, including Northeastern University, create difficult climates for Black and other minority students to succeed. The unprecedented success of S-POWER (100 % retention rate in COE reported at the 3-year NSF review) demonstrates that with proper infrastructure, mentoring, and finances, it is possible for a university to create a diverse body of next-generation leaders that can become impactful societal leaders for change. The S-POWER team challenges all leadership and administrations at Northeastern University and other universities to re-examine and revise policies for: admission, financial aid, space usage, tutoring services, one-on-one mentoring, and finances for these services.

### **Pledge from the S-POWER Leadership team to our students**

1. We pledge to continue to support and advocate the concerns of all the S-POWER scholars to Northeastern University. We promise to advocate for change against any racism, bias or limiting policies at Northeastern University. A student should never have to deal with such difficulties, and we will be your faculty advocates. We will always be here to help you.

But further, we are prepared to advocate for the concerns of Northeastern University students outside of our S-POWER cohort. Please feel free to contact anyone on our leadership team.

2. We also pledge to help change our flawed, racially oppressing justice system. We will bring into S-POWER mentoring infrastructure opportunities and training for topics like prisoner advocacy, legal injustices, and racial oppression, etc.

### **Call for Action:**

To faculty: We urge all faculty to make a commitment to understand the Black student experience and the barriers they must continually overcome while attending Northeastern University.

1. Faculty must learn how to listen, be empathetic, and supportive to minority students both inside and outside the classroom. Faculty should reach out to black and other minority students and learn more about their experiences, while offering to become their advocate.
2. Faculty should include discussions within classrooms to elevate the concerns and voices of minority students. Lesson plans, even in technical engineering classes, can include the

\*The opinions expressed in this statement represent the views of the authors and not the National Science Foundation.

contributions and societal concerns of black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), men and women.

3. Sometimes faculty feel they cannot speak on topics if they are not subject matter experts, but this is easily addressed: Commit to become educated through literature, film, and other forms of media, attend workshops within and outside of Northeastern. Contact any of the S-POWER leaders who can provide guidance. –
4. Become a part of our S-POWER team: Help the S-POWER leadership to obtain more resources for scholarships, infrastructure, mentoring and funding into programs to enhance the minority student experience.

Contact S-POWER leadership to learn more about how you can help (see email contact below).

To Northeastern University administration: S-POWER has become one of the most successful mentoring and scholarship programs in the nation for under-represented minority students. National Science Foundation (NSF) funding will end in 2021. We call on your support to institutionalize and expand this remarkable success story. This means allocating space, manpower for mentoring, funding and fundraising for infrastructure and scholarships, entering education agreements with our partners Clark Atlanta University, Hampton University and other HBCUs, providing funding for undergraduate research opportunities and scholarships, and more. In our S-POWER NSF research, we have carefully studied and are now documenting barriers of minority students at universities (admissions, financial aid, instruction, community, etc.). Together with the S-POWER team, we call on Northeastern University to develop new approaches to mitigate these barriers.

To industry/alumni: We need your help. With enough scholarship money and donations, we can continue the remarkable success of S-POWER to train and educate under-represented students at Northeastern University. Over the past few years, we gave many presentations about the impending crisis from lack of diversity in our engineering workforce, particularly in the energy related fields. The events recently have made it clearer to the urgency to create the next generation of leaders that will eliminate racial barriers. We call on you all with S-POWER to raise funds, provide industrial mentorship to our students, and open up racially diverse internships.

We call you to action.

*On Behalf of S-POWER Leadership,*

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.naacp.org/latest/joint-statement-naacp-links-incorporated-collective-outrage-regarding-police-murder-george-floyd-victims-law-enforcement/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://web.northeastern.edu/spower/>