STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY

The faculty of the Department of African and Afro-American Studies (AAAS) at Brandeis University stand in solidarity with the students who have occupied the office of President Lisa Lynch and the demands they have issued. AAAS was established in 1969 following the occupation of Ford Hall by Brandeis black students committed to systemic institutional change. As a department born out of student protest, we believe it is our intellectual and moral obligation to support our students in their struggle to transform Brandeis into a truly 21st century university.

The challenges facing students, faculty and staff of African descent at Brandeis are not new. Over the years, Brandeis has repeatedly professed its commitment to “diversity.” Committees have been convened, studies conducted and reports issued. Nevertheless, progress has been painfully slow and African American and other marginalized students continue to suffer. Given the urgency of our current historical moment, continued delay and lip service to change is simply unacceptable.

Our students have taken the lead, and we are ready to follow them. With great courage, they have articulated the pain, frustration and anger many students of African descent grapple with at Brandeis on a daily basis. With tremendous vision, they have put forth a series of demands that are in the best traditions of Brandeis University. They insist that this institution, founded on the principles of racial, ethnic and religious inclusion, live up to its creed. They insist that this institution, named after a champion of social justice, aggressively confront its own history of white supremacy. They insist that this institution, where black women like Pauli Murray, Angela Davis, Patricia Hill Collins, Margo Jefferson, Hortense Spillers and others once taught and learned, provide opportunities for future generations of black faculty and students to also achieve greatness.

It is our duty as faculty to stand with the students of #FordHall2015 and do our part to move Brandeis forward. AAAS has never wavered in its commitment to providing students with an interdisciplinary grounding in the history, culture and politics of African Americans and other peoples of African descent. Yet, for too long the department has been seen and treated as the lone academic space where students can learn about these subjects in an intellectually informed and rigorous manner. The work of educating Brandeis students about black people cannot fall on the shoulders of one department. Just as our students have exhibited remarkable bravery in their fight to make Brandeis a truly inclusive and academically fulfilling university, so should we.

In his April 16, 1963 “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote, “Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.” His words ring prophetically true for Brandeis University in 2015. We call upon President Lynch and the entire senior administration, Perry Traquina and the Board of Trustees, and all concerned members of the Brandeis community to move beyond mere good will to immediate action. Our students cannot wait any longer.

Signed,
The Faculty of the African and Afro-American Studies Department
Brandeis University