Dear SSW Community,

Over the last few weeks, many of us have been made aware of letters written by both resident and adjunct faculty members with the intent to attack and undermine the Anti-Racism Commitment of Smith’s SSW program. We are a group of concerned community members from various social locations who have decided to provide transparency around these letters.

We feel that it is critical to share these letters with the community, in order to facilitate transparency and accountability around the violent, racist rhetoric directed toward students of color on the Smith Campus. The language in these letters contributes to a climate of fear experienced by students of color at Smith and exemplifies how individuals in positions of power are both participatory and complicit in white supremacist systems at the school.

Some examples of the white supremacist language and ideology from the (attached) letters include:

- The idea that students of color’s experiences of racism are mere “perceptions” and that their stories of racism at the school and in the field are “not reflective of actual events” or are “exaggerated.” This narrative seeks to invalidate the very real and lived experiences of students of color and the racism that they face daily.
- The use of the term “tainted” to describe a supposed degeneration in quality of students at Smith calls upon a historically racist discourse which casts people of color or others deemed “lesser than” as contaminants of a pure white bloodline. This is violent language that is completely unacceptable to use in reference to students at this institution.
- “I am very afraid that your decisions as an administrative group are going to create further tensions in our student body - you seem to be contributing to a white/student of color divide on our campus.” The idea that Dean and anti-racism organizers are responsible for inciting racial division on campus between white students and students of color is a frequently used trope used to silence and diminish coalitions. We reject this narrative wholeheartedly.
- “I am very troubled that we increasingly, as a School, pay little attention to the gate-keeping function of our profession.” This begs the question: who do we mean to keep out? Is “gate-keeping” a method of perpetuating white privilege?

Throughout, the letters question the competence of the Dean, a woman of color, and her ability to manage the responsibilities of her job. We believe this constitutes resistance to the Dean’s dedication to dismantling systems of oppression and continuous anti-racism work which we see as exemplary social work practice and as raising the bar for this institution.

The tensions produced by these letters have created a climate in which the student body as a whole, especially students of color, feel devalued and afraid. The coded rhetoric within these letters has been used to attack students of color around their level of competence as both students and as social workers. Rather...
than creating an environment of learning, these letters have produced an environment of chaos throughout the school in which students feel targeted and afraid of the very professionals they expect to learn from and be inspired by.

Further, the authors of these letters demonstrate an ignorance to the larger movements occurring presently in our society. It should be noted that the letter from “Concerned Adjuncts” was dated on the exact date of the Black Lives Matter Rally on campus. What does this say about the school’s commitment to being an anti-racist institution? Instead of participating in the powerful anti-racism work occurring on campus, “concerned adjunct faculty” wrote a demeaning and divisive letter targeted at students of color.

If we are truly to be a leading school for social work with an anti-racism mission, then our faculty must be leading our field to be more inclusive and ever-committed to the pursuit of social justice. We deserve a faculty that critically examines and deconstructs the systems we know to be oppressive. It is the responsibility of the school’s faculty to model, call-out, and TAKE ACTION in solidarity with students targeted by an institution that prides itself in its anti-racist commitment, but in actuality continues to allow the perpetuation of white supremacy, white privilege, and the targeting of students of color. This type of behavior is unethical, immoral, and needs to be put to a stop.

With respect,
Concerned Community Members