

These letters accompany the ACM Interactions blog post titled: *Addressing Institutional Racism within Initiatives for SIGCHI's Diversity and Inclusion* by Siobahn Day Grady, Pamela Wisniewski, Ron Metoyer, Pamela Gibbs, Karla Badillo-Urquiola, Salma Elsayed-Ali Eiad Yafi.

### **Resignation Letter - February 7, 2020**

Dear [Redacted],

The purpose of this email is two-fold. First, it serves as a joint statement of resignation from the members of the Racial/Ethnic Identities SIGCHI Diversity and Inclusion group. Each member of our group initially volunteered because we had personally experienced the ways in which academia can be exclusionary, and we were eager to contribute to the efforts to make SIGCHI more inclusive of diverse perspectives, including our own. However, the events that led up to this difficult decision made us feel further marginalized and, even worse, silenced while trying to serve our community. Therefore, we jointly agreed that discontinuing our affiliation with the D&I Teams would be in the best interest of our members.

Second, this email serves to document some of the ways that this experience has been harmful to the members of our group in hopes that you and others within the SIGCHI leadership might be more thoughtful about how you engage with SIGCHI members, particularly people of color, in the future. Our D&I Team is comprised of seven individuals who all identify as racial minorities and who are primarily junior scholars (at the time of our group's inception, 1 undergraduate student, 2 Ph.D. students, 2 Lecturers, 1 Assistant Professor, and 1 Associate Professor). Our group was formed in January 2019.

In February 2019, we contacted you to let you know our intention to create a diversity and inclusion survey. If you remember, you praised us as your "most organized team" and were impressed with our progress when reviewing our meeting notes. In July 2019, you confirmed that our plan to launch the survey and publish our results was "a promising path." Therefore, even though you recently implied that you were surprised by our efforts, we are certain that you were aware of our survey, which was launched in Summer 2019.

As you know, the survey received quite the public backlash from the SIGCHI Community on the CHI Meta Facebook Group. People (primarily Caucasian) criticized everything from our group name, survey questions, to our intentions behind the survey. While we were vilified publicly, we listened to the community's feedback, redesigned, and relaunch the survey in August 2019. In January 2020, we posted a third recruitment message about the survey noting that we had received over 50 responses. At that time, Helena Mentis asked us to clarify that the survey was part of our SIGCHI D&I Team service, which it was, so we did as requested.

During this challenging time, we received very little support from the SIGCHI EC and leadership, even though we know that the EC was aware of our efforts and struggles. For instance, we reached out to you multiple times about helping us disseminate the survey. Often times, it took weeks for you to get back with us. We truly understand how busy and hectic everyone's schedule can be, so we stayed the course while awaiting your response.

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In January 2020, only after we started getting some traction with our survey, did you reach out to us by email. [Redacted] responded on behalf of our team, and we were all eager to join efforts with the EC to bolster our existing efforts. However, we did not receive a response to that email. Instead, I was blindsided when I met with you and the other inclusion team leaders on January 22, 2020. First, I was not made aware that our survey would be on the agenda at all, nor that it would be the first order of business on the call. Therefore, I was not prepared to answer questions regarding our survey. If I had known that I would be put in that uncomfortable position, I would have requested that my team members be present at the meeting. Also, I was shocked that after all of our hard work, we were being accused of conflicting with ACM's interests, were ordered to take down the survey immediately, and that we would not be able to publish our results. As a black woman and junior researcher who is just starting a tenure-track position on a call with mostly white and more senior SIGCHI leaders, I was speechless and hurt. Thankfully, others spoke up to defend our efforts, but the harm was already done. By making us take down our survey and superseding it with an "official" SIGCHI diversity and inclusion survey, you essentially erased and appropriated our efforts, taking credit for our hard work, which was nearly a year in the making.

As a group of racial minorities, we are not surprised by these actions, but we are deeply disappointed that this happened under the guise of promoting diversity and inclusion within SIGCHI. As a result, we no longer feel "included" as a D&I Team; therefore, this dissonance necessitated our group resignation. We sincerely wish you the best on the new survey and your efforts in promoting diversity and inclusion within SIGCHI. However, we hope that this experience makes you reflect more deeply on the voices you might be stifling unintentionally along the way.

Sincerely,  
Siobahn D., Ron M., Pamela G., Salma E., Karla B., Eiad Y., and Pam W.

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### **Response Letter - March 9, 2020**

Dear [Redacted],

Thank you for reflecting a bit more on your initial response and admitting that a ball was dropped. We understand that no one meant to marginalize the efforts of our group, but unfortunately, the culmination of the events and decisions that led to the taking down of our survey and replacing it with another, did just that. Therefore, we collectively decided that it is best for our resignation to still stand.

We met as a group to discuss whether it makes sense for us to meet with you. We brainstormed potential reparations for the harm that was caused, but we could not come up with a retroactive remedy to wholly fix what happened. Therefore, we don't know that a meeting would be productive. However, we did come up with a few tangible actions that would restore some of the dignity that was lost for our group members. We hope that you consider taking these steps as a good faith gesture towards making amends:

- We would like you to “reply all” to the EC members and D&I Team leads on our original resignation to retract your initial response with an apology. You essentially blamed us for not getting back to you regarding the two surveys. That simply was not true and was extremely dismissive of our experience.
- We would like you to acknowledge the R.A.C.E. D&I Team was the group that originated the idea and kicked off the foundational work for the “official” SIGCHI D&I survey. This would be distinctly different than thanking us for our contributions at the same level as the other D&I teams.

We understand that you probably did not realize it took us over a week as a group to draft our resignation email, in which we thoughtfully shared the pain of our shared experience. It added insult to the injury when you replied within 10 minutes with a non-apology and placing the blame on us. We ask that you please reread that email to hear the betrayal, disbelief, and disappointment that is unique to a group of people who are accustomed to having their pain rationalized away by those who are well-intentioned but are blind to our experience.

We understand that SIGCHI is a volunteer-led organization, and we are all overwhelmed and doing our best. However, it must also be acknowledged that voluntary service leadership is still a position of power. And, sometimes one's best intentions are not good enough. We are sorry that you were sick and hope that you are feeling better. Our group members also had significant life challenges over the last year, and having our efforts as a SIGCHI D&I Team erased was demoralizing after all of our hard work.

In reflection, we were most hurt that no one stepped up on our behalf to say that what happened was wrong. There were many alternative solutions that could have bolstered the efforts of our team instead of appropriating them for the benefit of others. For example, the EC could have

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asked us to lead the efforts for the new SIGCHI D&I survey, giving us credit for our work and the opportunity to take a larger, more visible service leadership role within SIGCHI. As you know, these types of opportunities are rarely given to racial minorities but are pivotal in helping us succeed in the academy.

We would also like to highlight that the SIGCHI Volunteer Development Committee recently launched a research study that was posted on the ACM SIG CHI Facebook page. From the description, it appears that the committee's intention is also to publish their findings, which as we were told, would be a conflict of ACM's interest. We hope that the ACM SIGCHI Executive Committee reflects on how they interpret ACM's policies moving forward, then applies and communicates these policies fairly and consistently to all SIGCHI volunteers, not just when it serves the personal interests of the EC.

This experience has been eye-opening for us all. We have learned a great deal and will continue to nurture the newfound relationships that formed through this experience. In response to our resignation, we hope that the SIGCHI D&I teams and leadership can also learn from and improve based on our feedback, so that others do not have to endure such embarrassment and exclusion under the guise of promoting diversity and inclusion. We are all still committed to serving SIGCHI in other capacities that promote inclusionary practices in our community. We hope that this interaction does not preclude us from such opportunities in the future.

Sincerely,

Ron, Pam W., Siobahn, Eiad, Pamela G., Karla, and Salma