

Chronology of UoM French department racism

To read and sign the open letter to the Head of the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, calling on him to help put a stop to this racism, click [here](#)

25/11/21 Dr Barbara Lebrun says the word 'n*gger' (not reading from a text, unprovoked) in a seminar about French colonial human zoos. She says the slur when describing the connotations of an already offensive and anti-black word in the French text that the class was examining.

04/05/22 Dr Lebrun gives a black student racialised feedback on an essay plan over email. The question was for the final essay for the 'French Identity' module- the full question was:

"Article 1 of the 1958 French Constitution states that 'France is an undividable, secular, democratic and social Republic, [which] guarantees legal equality for all its citizens without distinction of origin, race or religion'. Discuss the meaning, evolution and possible limitations of this statement with reference to TWO time periods or events studied in class this year.'

She described the student's plan as 'clear-sighted' and assured them that she believed that they were 'very smart and would articulate something well-researched and convincing'. Sandwiched in between this praise however was the explicit instruction not to be 'tempted to use the essay as a platform for personal exasperation or indignation around racism'.

21/09/22 The black student has a meeting with Dr Sheena Kalayil, head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) for the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures (SALC).

- In this meeting, the student makes a made disclosure re: the n-word incident (which they witnessed) as well as the racialised feedback they received.

22/09/22 Dr Kalayil confirms over email that a 'refresher' course will take place for all departments in SALC for academic staff on EDI issues

- The talk was to be written by Dr Kalayil but delivered by the EDI rep (i.e. an academic) for each department
- Dr Kalayil also confirms that she has met with the Head of Modern Languages and Cultures, Professor Julia Dobson → outlining the situation with the n-word and essay plan feedback
- They both 'agree that these behaviours are not conducive to the inclusive place we would like UoM to be'

25/10/22 Dr Kalayil says that Dr Lebrun would like to apologise to the student and that she would be at that meeting as well

04/11/22 The black student who made the complaint replies to Dr Kalayil's email, turning down the offer of a one-one apology, instead requesting that she say sorry to the whole seminar group that she said the n-word in front of. The student says the following:

- 'I don't feel comfortable being in a meeting with her, that feels quite intense and I don't think it would actually help me get any closure.'

- 'If she wants to apologise, I would advise her to address a written apology to my entire seminar group because I think she should say sorry to all of the students present, not just me.'
- The student here sends over an impact statement for Dr Lebrun to read, the statement references amongst other things:
 - '[how] she deliberately picked out one of the most offensive words in text and in her explanation said the n-word in English'
 - '[her saying the n-word] was humiliating and mortifying to experience because it was unquestionably a racist thing to do '

06/11/22 Dr Kalayil replies to the student's requests re: their impact statement and an apology to their seminar group. She confirms the following:

- She has 'already talked with Dr Lebrun at length, mentioning all the points you make, and I think your statement would be better served as something she can read and digest'
- She is 'keeping the Head of Department abreast with the situation and using this experience to inform our teaching across our School'
- She says 'again, thank you for courage. I'm sorry the incident happened, and I'm sorry for the toll it has taken on you.'

However, she says that whilst she understands 'why you [the student] want Dr Lebrun to email the seminar group - but I am afraid that by doing so we will be involving other students, who (I believe) have not complained about the incident, either directly or through Course Unit feedback. I have to say... that I don't agree with this idea, but I am happy to discuss this with you if you come and see me?'

10/11/22 Dr Kalayil meets with Dr Lebrun in the afternoon and shows her the student's impact statement

- 'She accepts what you say and she apologises, fully'
- 'She wants to meet with you to apologise, and suggested that you bring a friend as well if that helps, and I would be there as well of course - but that is really up to you'
 - There is no reference in this email to an apology to the seminar group where she said the n-word
- 'She is coming back from research leave next semester, and as Programme Director, and will be holding a session in French Studies on the issues you raise - French nationalism, their attitudes to language/race'

30/01/23 Dr Lebrun uses the n-word in French in the first Race and Empire lecture, she reads it from a text in front of a packed lecture hall

- N-word ([approx. 01: 15: 49 - 01:16:10 of the lecture recording](#))
 - 'The word nègre is unfortunate but normal for authors in the 1950s up until the 70s really in France. It means black'
 - When Dr Lebrun said the n-word this time, she had already been spoken to by the head of EDI for SALC and read an impact statement from a black student about the impact of this kind of behaviour, yet she still felt emboldened to use this racist slur.
- Intellectual not indignant ([approx. 01:48:00- 01:48:58 of the lecture recording](#))
 - 'The idea is that we are going to analyse our set texts and like Barthes, Roland Barthes what we are going to practise throughout the semester is to

be intellectual about it. Not to say 'ah! it's awful' and 'disgusting'... and [not to be] indignant about racism [indecipherable → sounded like 'instead'] how was it possible? How was the racism occurring, when it was racist? From which word, visual sign, which gesture, which costume, which dialogue, which camera lens, which framing, when we're looking at cinema or which word, or syntax or theme... '

- For an example of the kinds of racist imagery Dr Lebrun is telling students not to label 'disgusting' see [slide 34](#) of the second powerpoint used in this lecture
- Click [here](#) for the full lecture recording

02/02/23 Dr Lebrun is again witnessed using the n-word in French ('n*gre') multiple times during seminars that took place that day when she was reading from a PowerPoint.

08/02/23 The student sends Dr Kalayil an email asking some clarifying questions about what has happened so far in terms of how their complaint against Dr Lebrun (for saying the n-word in 2021, and for the racialised feedback she gave out in 2022) has been handled. Dr Kalayil says the following:

- 'I know the French Studies department have done a lot of reflection on your experiences'
- 'Professor Julia Dobson (Head of Department, most senior person) was not present when Barbara read the impact statement- but she knows that there is an impact statement and the contents.'
- 'I told both Barbara and Julia that you wanted Barbara to write in [sic] apology to the whole seminar group. It was in consultation with them, and particularly on Julia's decision - which I agree with - that we decided we would not put this forward.'
- 'Our processes following acts of discrimination do tend to focus on the individuals directly involved. So, bystanders would not receive an apology - only the victim - unless the bystanders themselves became involved.'