Dear President Tessier-Lavigne, Provost Drell, and the IDEAL Team Members:  

The Materials Science and Engineering community are writing to express our support for the departmentalization of African and African American Studies (AAAS) and commend the Framework Task Force’s recommendation of AAAS departmentalization. We acknowledge the activism by the Stanford Black Graduate Student Association, Black Student Union, and Solidarity Network in championing for this long overdue change. We affirm that the interdisciplinary contributions of African and African American studies advance the efforts of all its adjoining departments; efforts which include the production of reliable and responsible scholarship, and offer students a broader curriculum. We recognize the work of AAAS scholars in demonstrating the deep historical investments in colonial exploitation and race essentialism that scholarly disciplines and universities have carried into the present, with Stanford being no exception.

We encourage the IDEAL Team Members, Provost Persis Drell, and President Marc Tessier-Lavigne to follow the steps set forth in the AAAS Open Letter, which include a commitment to departmentalization within the next five years, the authorization of a cluster hire and two postdoctoral positions, and a fundraising commitment to support the long-term development of AAAS at Stanford. In this call to action, we are expressing our confidence in the ability of AAAS leadership, program staff, and affiliated faculty to identify the proper course for the future of African and African American Studies at Stanford. And we are further expressing that the extension of Stanford’s full support and resource to this work is a commitment to both scholarly integrity and social justice.

In conclusion, we would like to highlight the direct benefit AAAS has had and will continue to have on our faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates through coursework such as Great Works of the African American Tradition, and Race and Technology which contribute to the intellectual exposure and research profiles of our graduate students. Furthermore, the MSE Department is designing a new required course called “Nucleating Ethical Materials Research in Academia, Industry, and Society” which connects traditional materials science ethics to relevant societal, environmental, and cultural equity and inclusion topics. Topics include the ethical mining of battery materials and the statistical disadvantage of minorities in peer review. The realization of the AAAS departmentalization would be critical to the development and improvement of courses such as this one as it would centralize scholarship, resources, and expert insight. Allocating more resources to AAAS can enrich wide-ranging studies in history, literature, science, culture, and society while providing a community-engaged learning program across disciplines and contexts. In addition, supporting a better understanding of the African Diaspora advances diversity, inclusivity, and a global perspective.