

Executive Committee Statement On the Cancellation of the IU Indianapolis MLK Jr. Dinner

1/22/26

As the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), an organization dedicated to shared governance, academic freedom, and the fair and ethical treatment of faculty and students, we are compelled to speak out when institutional decisions undermine the academic community.

The cancellation of the IU Indianapolis Martin Luther King Jr. Dinner is troubling and unacceptable. For 57 years, the MLK Jr. Dinner has been a student-led tradition where the community comes together to honor Dr. King's legacy and affirm the presence and contributions of Black students, alumni, and community members at Indiana University.

The justification of "budget constraints", with little transparency, is difficult to reconcile with other spending decisions, suggesting this is a reason of convenience, rather than genuine fiscal necessity.

When long-standing traditions that center Black history and US History are deemed expendable, it raises serious concerns about whose experiences and histories the university values. The late timing of this decision and the lack of consultation with the IU Indianapolis Black Student Union students undermines trust. Compounding this harm, many cultural student organizations also learned simultaneously via a single mass email that their spring events were canceled as well.

Equally concerning is the attempt to smooth over the cancellation with hastily organized "alternative programming." While educational activities have lasting value, and while we hold deep respect for our colleagues' expertise and lived experience, such last-minute efforts are an inadequate substitute for a student-centered cultural tradition. These new activities were developed without meaningful student partnership and have placed Black faculty and university staff in the position of repairing institutional damage rather than guiding students through thoughtful, meaningful programming.

This approach relies on the goodwill and labor of faculty, particularly Black faculty, who care deeply about this community and who would rather see some programming than none, but who were not given the time, resources, or space to collaborate meaningfully with students. Their intellectual effort, time, and labor are being used to smooth over genuine community concern rather than to address its root causes.

Dr. King spoke often about the responsibility of institutions and the individuals who lead them to act with moral clarity, not convenience. Honoring his legacy requires far more than improvised alternatives; it requires sustained commitment, resources, transparency, and respect for the communities his work uplifted. Therefore, the IU Indianapolis AAUP calls on the IU Indianapolis administration to:

- Publicly explain the decision-making process behind the cancellation of the MLK Jr. Dinner;
- Commit to restoring the MLK Jr. Dinner as a fully supported annual tradition; and
- Engage directly and meaningfully with Black students, and other students and organizations, in decisions that affect their cultural and historical spaces and traditions.

As the AAUP, we raise these concerns because decisions like this have lasting consequences for faculty labor, student trust, shared governance, and the moral standing of the institution.

IUI-AAUP Executive Committee