

## **Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity**

**April 29, 2021**

### **Minutes**

**Attendees:** Katrina Akande, Akilah Alwan, Michael Brown, Mikayla Brown, Ron Burgess, Chacolby Burns-Johnson, Angela Cannon, Taffye Benson Clayton, Royrickers Cook, Kevin Coonrod, Joffery Gaymon, Norman Godwin, Robin Jaffe, Kimberly Mulligan-Guy, Lastella Paradise

Jared Russell, Melody Russell, Jailin Sanders, Joellen Sefton, Bruce Smith, Giovanna Summerfield, Gretel Thornton, Jeffery Turnipseed, Gretchen VanValkenburg, Jennifer Adams, Kim Brown and Amy Weaver

**Guest speaker:** Dr. Bobby Woodard, Senior Vice President for Student Affairs

### **Updates – General Burgess**

- Discussed how often we should meet during the summer. He said he recognized how hard students, faculty and staff have worked this past year and needed a break. However, he does not want to lose the task force's momentum.
  - Going to meet every other week during the summer. First summer meeting is May 27.

### **Recap of Open Forum – Dr. Bobby Woodard**

- Dr. Woodard said that on Wednesday, April 21, Student Affairs was notified of a student who put something out on social media that was offensive. Student Affairs made contact with the student and the student went through the student conduct process.
- Representative from the Black Student Union contacted Dr. Woodard and requested an open forum with him via Zoom on Monday, April 26, at 5 p.m.
  - BSU, Auburn for Change, Auburn Black Caucus members and Black Alumni Council members were present for the meeting.
- Students wanted to know about the process when something like an offensive social media post happens.
  - Dr. Woodard said they discussed free speech, hate speech, the First Amendment, defamation, Affirmative Action and Title IX and how it relates to the student conduct process.
    - He said they had a conversation about the culture on campus and why the culture is that a student or anyone else feel comfortable making the type of statement that the student did.
  - One person did ask why Dr. Woodard couldn't tell them what happened with the student who posted the photo. He said they discussed [FERPA](#) and student privacy issues.

- He said they discussed the student climate survey went out in last week, how things are going on campus and how to move into the summer and fall.
  - Dr. Woodard said it was a really good meeting and people got to voice their opinions.
  - Gen. Burgess said the university's general counsel Jaime Hammer gave a 10-minute presentation to the President's cabinet the previous week that focused on students' rights under the First Amendment, free speech and hate speech. He said hate speech is protected speech under the First Amendment. He said that people might find hate speech deplorable and not agree with the words that are used, but hate speech is protected. As long as it is not done to incite something, on a university campus, free speech is part of what we do and part of what we talk about in an educational setting.
  - Dr. Clayton said the President's cabinet did talk about hate speech and how some of the incidents we are seeing do fall into protected category. However, the cabinet discussed how the speech can do harm to members of the campus community and the opportunities that we have, within the bounds of protected speech, to articulate our values and create an environment where our students feel included. She said the university can create a counter culture that is values driven.
- **Restorative Justice – Kevin Coonrod, Ombudsman**
    - Coonrod discussed the concept of restorative justice and how it can be used on campus to articulate our values.
    - Restorative justice provides the opportunity for someone who has committed some sort of abuse toward another person to sit down with the person who has been harmed, if everyone agrees to the meeting. Victims can sit down with their transgressor and say how they were harmed. It gives them a platform to be heard and for the transgressor to hear them. It is reciprocal, Coonrod said.
    - The point of the meeting is for the person who has done the harm to hear how they harmed someone else and the affect that it had on them. This gives the perpetrator the opportunity to apologize, to be accountable by acknowledging what happened and learn from it so they don't behave that way in the future. You can have a third-party facilitator if the victim agrees. Perpetrator needs to be there in good faith and not use it as a platform to abuse further.
      - It is one way to grow, learn and empathize. [University of Michigan](#) and the [University of Colorado](#) have a restorative justice program.
        - Can be used as a tool for better relationships across campus.
      - Dr. Woodard said he will follow up with this counterparts at other universities to see how they implement this program on their campuses.

- **Student Retention Subcommittee presentation – Dr. Gaymon and team**

- Dr. Joffery Gaymon said the committee looked at a lot of data and had content area experts talk to the subcommittee to see what some of the challenges are in African American and underrepresented student retention.
- Conducted a data informed SWOT analysis.
- Key Findings – From data obtained from from Auburn’s [Institutional Research](#) office, Dr. Gaymon and graduate student Gretel Thornton discussed:
  - First-Year Retention Rates
  - Four-Year & Six-Year Graduation Rates
  - Peer and Aspirant Institution.
- Alumni member Chacolby Burns-Johnson discussed SWOT analysis and successful retention models at Auburn. Those include:
  - Intentionality in the design and implementation of programs, policies, and practices (Advocacy)
  - Institutional leadership that embraces inclusion and diversity
  - Space that creates a sense of community
  - Includes academic and social support, mentorshi, and experiential learning opportunities
  - Early Outreach
  - Increased funding opportunities
- Recommendations were presented by graduate student Makayla Brown and undergraduate student Jeffery Turnipseed:
  1. Formalize the role and importance of student advocacy, possibly by establishing a Center for Student Advocacy to serve marginalized student populations.
  2. Establish a DEI framework for each College and create full-time position in each academic college for someone to solely focus on DEI initiatives.
  3. Establish Community Standards and Communicate Polices, such as developing a strategic communication plan to promote BERT and educate the campus community on current policies.
  4. Perform and release a new Climate Study, publish results, establish a schedule for future assessments, communicate outcomes and recommendations.
  5. Have a campuswide position responsible for coordinating retention and student success efforts.
  6. Strengthen financial literacy and improve funding and the experience for students with need.

- Dr. Gaymon discussed the next steps for the subcommittee:
  - Input from key stakeholders Black and URM students –SGA, Black Student Union and Auburn For Change, etc.
  - Student Affairs Leadership
  - Academic Affairs Leadership -Provost Council & Auburn Black Caucus
  - Summarize input and share updates with full Taskforce
  - Final presentation to Senior Leadership
- General Burgess complimented the subcommittee on a great presentation and for providing metrics to move the needle on retention.
- Dr. Jared Russell recommended that at some point the subcommittee talk about the recommendations with the Auburn Black Caucus.

## **Equity & Social Justice Center**

**Chair:** Dr. Melody Russell

**Members:** Katrina Akande, Michael Bennett, Michael Brown, Taffye Clayton, Kevin Coonrod, Robin Jaffe, Kimberly Mulligan, Jared Russell, Jailin Sanders, Joellen Sefton, Kamden Strunk, Giovanna Summerfield & Gretchen VanValkenburg

- We have a great number of productive notes from Sunday's Black Alumni Listening Session.
- There will be a deadline to submit documents for the Trustee's meeting in September. We want to have a proposal done by the end of May or complete before the end of the summer.
  - Dr. Godwin will also provide us on insight relative to protocol for disseminating the proposal prior to providing a proposal or any documents to the BoT.
- We had productive faculty listening sessions regarding institute possibilities. Certain institutions have begun to emerge as models: University of Virginia and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill are two such models. Staffing and financial *Motus Operandi* at UNC are instructive. Dr. Karla Slocumb is the Director of the UNC Institute of African American Research and an accomplished academic. Dr. Clayton is organizing a meeting with Dr. Slocumb and subcommittee members for Thursday, May 6, from 4 to 4:30 p.m.
- We have a May 14 meeting with AU administrators for focus group interviews on the possibility of an African American institute.
- The September Board of Trustees meeting is the most likely meeting time for us to present a proposal to the BOT members.
  - Sustainability and financial piece must to be developed prior to this meeting.
  - Meeting with administrators and their feedback will also be critical.
  - If approved by administrators, it will be up to the President to forward the proposal to the Board of Trustees for consideration.

- June and July will allow us time to continue to refine the proposal once we have a complete working draft.
- There are lots of different views relative to what the institute will accomplish. However, comments were made to be careful of being too broad with the focus or we dilute our vision and mission.
- A comment was also made about the fantastic performance of new hire Juwan Robinson (Office of Inclusion and Diversity) at the recent faculty listening session.
- Review document on Google drive and make suggestions for future meetings. We will take a break and resume meetings in mid-May when summer semester begins.