Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity

June 24, 2021

Minutes

Attendees: Katrina Akande, Olasubomi Akintola, Akilah Alwan, Vinicia Biancardi, Michael Brown, Mikayla Brown, Chacolby Burns-Johnson, Angela Cannon, Taffye Benson Clayton, Astin Cole, Kevin Coonrod, Brian Cornish, George Flowers, Joffery Gaymon, Lady Frances Hamilton, Robin Jaffe, Dustin Johnson, Bridgett King, Kimberly Mulligan-Guy, Lastella Paradise, Ebony Robinson, Jared Russell, Melody Russell, Jailin Sanders, Cheryl Seals, Joellen Sefton, Bruce Smith, Giovanna Summerfield, Aariyan Tooley, Jeffery Turnipseed, Gretchen VanValkenburg, Rett Waggoner, Alan Wilson, Jennifer Adams, Kim Brown and Amy Weaver

Updates – Gen. Ron Burgess

- **Quarterly meeting with NAACP**
    - Trustee's office gave a short update on where they are with building namings.
    - Bobby Woodard gave them an update from student affairs.
    - Dr. Gogue presented information on diversity initiatives we have going on around the state.
    - Positive meeting overall.
    - Next meeting is after Sept. 15 so that we will have official numbers on our freshmen student enrollment.
- Gen. Burgess has to step aside as he is doing work outside of Samford Hall in the afternoons. His assignment could last for up to six months.
    - Asked members to email him with suggestions for someone on the task force who should lead the committee.
- Dr. Taffye Clayton – Everfi is in a pilot stage and engaging with key campus stakeholders,
    - Will have face-to-face meetings after July 4 with the governance groups and key constituencies on campus.
    - Goal is to launch the modules in the fall, but want to get feedback on modules from the campus community first.

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

- Dr. Taffye Clayton presented a retrospective Power Point entitled "The Institute for Racial Justice, Inquiry and Innovation Journey," a copy of which will be placed on the Task Force website.

- Clayton spoke specifically about the recent listening sessions during which we shared and received information.
    - In April we spoke primarily with faculty -- those individuals with scholarly engagement. Some sessions had students mixed in attendance as well.
    - In May, we spoke with academic administrators and informed them of input received from 40 faculty, staff, and graduate students.
    - We gave reflection questions to all groups during their listening sessions. A point was made by the administrators that there was dissonance between the title of the institute and the mission.
    - They proposed that the word choice of the title should be specific and aligned with the mission more acutely.
- The administrators appreciated the University of Virginia and Purdue institute models during their May meeting. Some thought we need clearly defined goals, clearly defined sense of what success looks like, clearly defined priorities, and intentional and thoughtful stakeholder engagement. They commented that we need to secure resources both internally and externally, and that we need to be 60% inward and 40% outward facing.
- Points of agreement:
    - We have the scholarly expertise and community needed to build and sustain an institute. This could be deepened and advanced.
    - We are uniquely situated.
    - Our peer and aspirant institutes have their own institutes or centers. Ours should be unique. We can model others, but differentiate ours.
    - These agreements prompted questions.
        - How are we going to be differentiated from other related resources in the state of Alabama?
        - How will our institute align with AU's current strategic goals?
        - Will our institute be positioned within an existing structure or are we going to build?

- Is the focus of the institute going to be race? Or specifically African American? Is it going to relate to justice or equity? Will it focus on African American history and experiences, or inquiry problem-solving and innovation? Is it going to be focused on liberal arts or STEM?
    - This can be a "both, and" proposal.
    - We will need to define the focus and positioning for a board scholarship presentation.
- As we think about next steps, we should clarify key sticking points.
    - We are discussing an institute focused on equity-related problem solving.
    - We are in need of interdisciplinary solutions.
    - Questions – What could that mean? Is there a way to marry the racial equity piece and a way to focus on African American issues? What are the ways we can harness interdisciplinary solutions?
    - We would like to position the university institute to have a focus on solution-oriented work and be viewed as a problem-solver for the state.

- After we think about the sticking points and the points of clarification, we have key people on the team to finalize the process; resolve the sticking points; identify leading stakeholders; view Board of Trustee meeting dates; and map and receive guidance on drafting our proposal from the Provost's office.
- A discussion by subcommittee members followed Taffye's presentation. Below is a summary of that conversation.
    - A member commented on the focus being either African American or race equity.
    - At first, we wanted the Institute to be focused on African American experience, but now the member thinks equity for many communities such as indigenous communities should be discussed by this subcommittee.
    - Another member stated the mission and vision have to align with the institute name.
    - Presently, the mission and the vision focus is on African American experiences and issues.
        - We decided not to include "inquiry" in the name as insensitive to the experiments held in Tuskegee.
    - A comment was made that we should hone the mission and vision prior to honing the name. The name will ensue from the finalized mission and vision.
    - Another member stated we have been talking about the "experience." In particular, the African American experience was discussed. A member asked if we need to revisit those discussions.
    - Should we focus on naming the institute after an African American individual?
    - Should we also recognize indigenous people, Asian, gender studies?
    - A suggestion was made that Fred Gray's name be included with Harold Franklin's name since the two worked together to integrate Auburn and attorney Gray was also responsible for obtaining the order to integrate the University of Alabama and ultimately all educational institutions in the state of Alabama.
        - Another member stated that we will need to approach and gain permission from any living person for whom we propose to name the Institute.
    - A point was made that the institute could address native, Asian, gender studies, and African American studies.
    - Another person asked if we want to stay with our vision and mission, as depicted in the slide presentation.
- We realized that our discussion suggested that we are not in sync and clear as to what we intend to do.
    - Applied research and outreach to communities are things we should weave into our mission and vision.
    - Should we be more broad-based in our goal to include equity and social justice across the board? African Americans are clearly the priority regarding the bulk of research and where we are in Alabama, it was stated. We shouldn't limit ourselves to just African American issues, a member said. We can still add to the work as the institute develops and evolves.

- The discussion continued with the question, “should we be excluding communities of people from the institute?”

    - There has been a lot of damage to African Americans in this state one person observed. The biggest group as to where the experiences are is with African Americans.
    - A member stated that it may be a form of gaslighting if we start something that doesn’t work and won’t make a difference.
    - Another remarked that we can begin and focus on African American issues and then include other communities or establish institutes for those communities at a later time.
    - We don’t want to lose sight of where we started, which was with a focus on the African American experience. We don’t want to be apologetic when we say, “we are going to have an African American institute.” The African American experience has been the focus since the incipient stages of the discussions about the focus of this institute.
        - When we called for researchers, we focused on areas of African American race.
        - Some have said they don’t see STEM issues in a study of the African American experience in the south. But we are looking at the holistic, totality of the African American experience in this state, another said.

- We have to be prepared to fight for the institute, for acceptance and resources. We need to ask administrators and the Board, “what are you willing to do to make this institute happen”? Are we ready to plow forward with issues for just an African American institute?
    - A member pointed out that, in many ways, our discussion today about the listening session input is a return to the origin point of our discussions where we debated these same questions extensively.
- A challenge was made as to whether we have buy-in to our mission. It was stated that we could have such buy-in. A member stated that we need to take all listening session input seriously, but we need to synthesize the input and come to our own conclusion as to what will comprise the institute.
- One of us suggested that we need a story-teller and a video to show our proposal for buy-in by our stakeholders.
- Another stated that when we think about engaged scholarship, we should speak with Dr. Royrickers Cook for his input, as well as a cluster of faculty members who are interested in researching slavery and artifacts for the institute.
- A member remarked that our ACES county extension coordinators know their communities’ needs and have data on what the constituents in the state would like to see from an institute.
- Another member stated that the task force was intended from its inception to be a fluid organization, with focus on African American issues as a priority in the beginning due to the catalyst of the horrible treatment against Black Americans in our country.
    - The fluidity of the task force was also intended to allow for initiatives for other communities in the future.

    - This would allow for an evolution from an institute for Black or African American issues to a later extension of the institute or establishment of centers to focus on other marginalized groups.

Graduate Student Subcommittee

Chairs: George Flowers and Jared Russell

Members: Cheryl Seals, Bridgett King, Alan Wilson, Vinicia Biancardi, Astin Cole, Brian Cornish, Dustin Johnson, Bridgett King, Ebony Robinson, Cheryl Seals, Aariyan Tooley and Alan Wilson

- Summary and review of previous meeting's minutes (meeting held on June 10)
    - Meeting highlights
    - Proposed action steps
- Reviewed data regarding Black/African American graduate student enrollment (by college and degree program)
    - Nine years of data
    - 15th class day Fall 2021 – new data will be available
    - Fairly static across university
- ACTION STEP: Identify "strong" programs that have been successful at recruiting AND retaining AND advancing (graduating) students
- ACTION STEP: Add columns with % (compared to overall student enrollment numbers)
    - Total #s/% AND Total Domestic #s/%
    - Change in % from 2012 – 2020 (Total #s/% AND Total Domestic #s/%)
    - How to identify strong?
    - Box plot style of presenting information
    - Drop-out rate / lack of completion
    - When did these students leave the program?
    - Location of degree program across time of evaluation (some programs moved to different college)
    - Question: Average age of Black or African American graduate students?
- ACTION STEP: Place data (and documents) into Box for sub-committee to access
- IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS: Obtain data for degree *Time to Completion*; graduation data
    - Attention to context of respective programs (for example: social sciences versus STEM programs)
    - COVID-19 retention issue?
- Degrees awarded across 2011-2021 through 2020-2021
    - Data seems problematic
- Financial packages for students (school versus industry)
- ACTION STEPS: Include the deltas for all student populations (provide insight into why there is a decline)
- ACTION STEPS: Identify students who are on assistantships (impact of financial aid on retention)
    - % on assistantships
- Survey discussion:
    - Target population for survey will be: Include all those who identify as Black/African American AND include an identifier question

    - Add other demographic questions: country of origin, in-state vs out-of-status, HBCU?, location of origin, full-time or part-time employment, in-school full-time or part-time status, marital status, dependents, student loan debt from UG, etc.
    - Data regarding use of financial aid for UG vs. Grad students; How much financial support is allowed; are you a dependent vs. independent from parents
    - Reliance on: a) FAFSA; b) Parent income; c) Assistantship; d) etc.
    - Online vs traditional on-campus question: Reach out to Dr. B. King for a survey item
    - Eligibility criteria for students (need to be discussed and contextualized)
        - Federal government sets levels of funding support
    - CONCERN: Keep survey short and to the point
    - CONCERN: Data analysis technique
    - CONCERN: Platform to host the survey
- Timeline: Shooting for early Fall 2021
- Indicate the mode(s) of program delivery that most accurately describe your program (check all that apply):
    - In person instruction only
    - In person instruction with online coursework available
    - Primarily online (students have to come to campus at least once)
    - Completely online (students never have to come to campus)
- Primary areas for survey: intrinsic, community, cultural, socioeconomic
- Survey development: Question Dump for committee using Google Sheet
- Sub-committee: King, Astin, Ebony Robinson, Sefton, Russell, Flowers