



Presidential Task Force for Opportunity *and* Equity

Sept. 16, 2021

Minutes

Attendees: Katrina Akande, Scott Bishop, Jordan Branchman, Michael Brown, Chacolby Burns-Johnson, Taffye Benson Clayton, Kevin Coonrod, George Flowers, Joffery Gaymon, Dustin Johnson, Bridgett King, Kimberly Mulligan-Guy, Ebony Robinson, Jared Russell, Melody Russell, Joellen Sefton, Jackson Thomas, Gretel Thornton, Aariyan Tooley, Lastella Paradise-Watson, Jennifer Adams, and Amy Weaver

- **Enrollment Update - Dr. Joffery Gaymon**
 - Dr. Gaymon reported Auburn enrolled its largest freshmen class, with 5,311 students. There are 31,526 undergraduate and graduate students.
- **Wallace Hall Contextualization – Dr. Joffery Gaymon**
 - Reported the BOT resolution and shared that a plaque will be placed at Wallace Hall.
- **Graduate subcommittee Update**
 - Dr. Jared Russell discussed the graduate student subcommittee. He said they are working well together.
 - We have been able to look at a lot of data. Find data that is relative to our mission and our charge. It has allowed us to conceptualize what we can do – key issues: mental health issues, financial aid
 - Survey 480 to Black and African American graduate students – 111 responses
 - Not just looking at what can be improved, but what is working and can be scaled up.
 - Looking and asking questions that are relative to Black graduate students.

Institute for African American and Black Studies Subcommittee

Chair: Dr. Melody Russell

Members: Katrina Akande, Cori Akins, Molly Boudreaux, Michael Brown, Taffye Clayton, Kevin Coonrod, Norman Godwin, Robin Jaffe, Kimberly Mulligan, Jared Russell, Bruce Smith, Lady Frances Hamilton, Scott Bishop, Giovanna Summerfield & Gretel Thornton, and Jackson Thomas

We reviewed the feedback from Provost Hardgrave during our proposal meeting. The following summarizes comments made during the meeting:

- Dr. Hardgrave's feedback was insightful.
- We need to be thoughtful about obtaining funding.

- The pointedness of a current successful research strength is important, especially since we want to be a research-focused institute. What are our areas of research excellence? Who are the key stakeholders that would need to agree that they desire an institute be established?
- The value proposition is important -- the "value add" is likewise important, especially in terms of research.
- What funding aspects should be discussed? The Institute of African American Research at University of North Carolina had a Mellon grant that was there for 25 years. That grant is no longer being funded, and the funding of their center is thus in jeopardy.
- A member remarked that there will be competition over funds between the institute and colleges and schools.
- Many agencies and funders will want to know how we will sustain the institute. We have more thinking to do, and we need people outside this subcommittee to be contemplating the institute goals as well. Perhaps those people will be the professors who will be making up the institute. We would like for the people who will comprise the institute to be involved, because the institute will be theirs.
- We need to focus down, start smaller and grow. We feel that research will be the focus. Teaching was not the initial focus for the institute so we will try to keep the focus on research. We need to get "mean and lean." Who will be the faculty members who will use the institute most? What is their research and what are their departments? Deans and associate deans for research need to be part of the conversation. What will they gain from this, and how will the indirect costs share? How will it add value to their college, and how can they agree to share costs with the institute?
- The Provost said it will be appropriate for us to approach potential funders to let them know what our idea is and to ask what they will be willing to put their money into.
- One member stated the institute director will likely have to be a part-time position, after having participated and learned in the Provost's feedback session. Another questioned whether a part-time director will have the time to do an adequate job and pushed for a full-time director.
- What is the intellectual merit for this institute? What will it do, investigate, and examine, and how will that be organized? Starting point: what are we stitching together? Research is going to be the key. What is going to be the focus? We pulled from a body of research submitted to us when we surveyed the campus. How can we package that information together so those professors can pull together to do their research? What is the intellectual merit? That is what the grantors will want to see. We need to be confident, precise, and succinct when we speak to potential funders.
- Definition of Intellectual Merit: Encompasses the potential to advance knowledge.
- How will the institute advance knowledge and take us beyond where we are at Auburn University? This could be our elevator speech.
- We would like to get faculty involved in discussing how they can collaborate.
- How far are we from the 30-second elevator speech? We could review the listening materials and surveys to find particular cluster areas and then bring faculty together to talk about what they can do together (better or how the institute can help them with the work they are already doing).
- From the listening sessions, the sticking points were around social -- in terms of a more liberal arts -- social sciences emphasis, and STEM. What could it mean to be thoughtful about this,

considering the African American emphasis, and what does the social impact of certain things look like?

- If we are looking at NSF funding, there is a lot of conversation about social impact. “Covid in the communities”, said one member, is an example of social impact.
- We need to think about this process. “Interdisciplinary” does not mean “everything.”
- We are also talking about stitching things together at this point.
- What barriers are the researchers facing? If we can give them value, they might be willing to join. What could the institute do for them?
- We need to always think about not what we are asking -- but saying what we are returning.
- We should put together a list of faculty based on information from the listening sessions who can provide insight on the process of developing the “elevator pitch”. The question we need to address is:
 - How can this institute help faculty do what they already do better?
 - How will the research advance knowledge? We should ask faculty that intellectual merit question.
 - What list of all the colleges and contact people can we put together as next steps?
- A member suggested that we create a Qualtrics survey that asks what we can do for faculty already doing work in the area that would be the focus of the institute.
- A remark was made about the importance of faculty being more invested in this institute if they had an opportunity to facilitate with its conceptualization. This presents a win-win situation for both the institute and faculty. How can we help them; how can they help us; how can we help each other? Our conversation today is reminiscent of the collaborative research cluster process that we initiated under Provost Boosinger. Are there things the promoters of that initiative did that may help us go forward?
- We were asked to think of next steps for our meeting in two weeks.

Graduate Student Subcommittee

Chairs: George Flowers and Jared Russell

Members: Olasubomi Akintola, Akilah Alwan, Mikayla Brown, Chacolby Burns-Johnson, Angela Cannon, Vinicia Biancardi, Astin Cole, Alexicia Richardson, Sedighe Zamani, Brian Cornish, Dustin Johnson, Bridgett King, Ebony Robinson, Cheryl Seals, Aariyan Tooley, Jordan Branchman and Alan Wilson

1. Reviewed data collected for black graduate student enrollment and degrees awarded by college and program. The two spreadsheets are:
 - Black-white avg age Fall 2020.xlsx
 - Black enrollment by department.xlsx

Both spreadsheets are available in the Subcommittee Box folder. Volunteers are needed to review the data and provide thoughts/insights.

Concern was expressed over the lack of Black faculty/faculty of color who can provide mentorship on scholarship and research on under-represented groups.

It was suggested that the Miller Writing Center needs to have specific resources and programming for graduate students, specifically graduate students of color.

It was noted that work-life balance, impacts both graduate and UG students.

Some important items that could be addressed by the focus group discussions are the differences between (1) first generation and not first generation students, and (2) students with family responsibilities vs. those w/o such responsibilities.

It was noted that many of the graduate students in teacher education programs are adults with jobs and other responsibilities

2. Next steps for focus groups

Had discussions on the process to be used for focus group discussions:

- Provide trigger warning, protection of data/confidentiality

Added Provocation Warning: "Please be advised that the questions may lead someone to recall challenging or adverse events in their lives, which could unintentionally provoke complicated emotionality and/or psychological distress. Participation is voluntary, and participants may opt out of answering any or all the questions, as desired. Student Counseling & Psychological Services has a clinician available by phone (334-844-5123) 24/7 for consultation should someone desire to speak to someone based on their reactions to the subject matter addressed in this survey."

- Plan to have someone takes notes to record feedback, rather than video record sessions.
- Encourage people to omit questions that they did not find comfortable to answer.