



Presidential Task Force *for Opportunity and Equity*

March 3, 2022

Minutes

Attendees: Chacolby Burns-Johnson, Taffye Clayton, Astin Cole, Kevin Coonrod, Brian Cornish, George Flowers, Joffery Gaymon, Dustin Johnson, Bridgett King, Kimberly Mulligan, Alexicia Richardson, Jared Russell, Bruce Smith, Jennifer Adams and Amy Weaver

- **Task Force Website** – Dr. Joffery Gaymon
 - Reminded members that the website has been updated.
- **Chacolby Burns-Johnson** thank everyone for supporting the Dr. Franklin Scholarship on Tiger Giving Day.

Institute for African American and Black Studies Subcommittee

Chair: Dr. Melody Russell

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

- One of our members spoke about an advocacy institute in California for health disparities. We don't want to be an advocacy organization, but the California group provides a good example of community research – groups that are participating as community members. This provides fast, good feedback.
- Another group in Georgia commenced operation at the commencement of the Covid 19 pandemic. They had 4 focus areas, which may have been about 2 too many. They focused on health disparities and educational disparities. Those two subjects are two components of rural disparities. COSAM and the College of Human Sciences may be studying educational disparities.
- Health, education, economic opportunity and environment were proposed as the component of our institute's focus. Housing might also be a good component of our proposal, especially because of our Rural Studio in Hale County. A new institute name was proposed: "Auburn Institute for Rural Disparities." An objection was raised because the title does not reference the noun "Black", which has been the primary focus of our proposed institute. Perhaps something specific in the mission statement could name specific groups that will benefit from the focus of the areas of disparity, stated another member, such as health, education, and housing. We might want to prioritize those three: within them, what are the areas where we have the most talent, and which may garner the most grant and donation money?

- What can we offer that will cause a donor to say, “that will help our organization?” We should ask our research groups which of the three areas – health, education, and housing in rural Alabama -- should have the highest priority.
- Who will decide the ultimate focus of the institute?

We spoke of the structure of the institute and discussed the following ideas:

- Search committee for a director
- Members of our research groups would be represented on the committee.
- Perhaps members of the Institute Subcommittee, too.
- Advisory board
 - The board will decide how the institute will operationalize.
 - Maybe we should form the advisory board before we set up the institute.
 - A problem with that is that the focus of the institute will widen rather than continue to narrow.
 - Our job is to put forward a proposal that will stand on its own legs and attract funding.
 - One member stated that we should have people who will be involved with the institute as part of the advisory board. Another member disagreed, saying that if we bring people in we will get back to the point of where we were before, where we were trying to be everything to everybody.
 - Another member stated that once we solidify the focus of the institute, we could then bring people on board whose areas of research and expertise are in accord with the vision. They will join in to help enact that vision.
 - How will we decide who should be invited to be part of this body? One of our members stated that, with equity and social justice, might we want to avoid someone who is a squeaky wheel about their interests rather than someone who will promote the vision we provide them?
 - A subcommittee member stated that, metaphorically, we should be talking to the those that do this work and including them in the decisions. Another member disagreed, stating that we might then avoid the focus of the institute.
 - Another opinion is that the people doing the work will know how the subcommittee will change the world better than we as subcommittee members do.

Proposed next steps:

- Who are leaders in health disparities to whom we can reach out? We have a health disparities organization at the university. We should reach out to Thomas Fuller-Rowell, Associate Professor in Human Development and Family Studies. Dr. Fuller-Rowell is the Director of AU’s Health Disparities Research Institute (“HDRI”).
- We could put together our proposal and present it to the rest of the subcommittee. Then, we go to the groups on campus who have expertise in the areas of health, education, and housing, explain the proposal to them, and ask if they are interested. We should ask them what their proposals are for going forward with the plan; are there things they would want to add or subtract?

- One of our members proposed that we may want to retool this plan a bit by approaching the folks to see who a good representative would be, without putting anyone on the spot. We could ask them their experience with efforts like this, with institutes in this subject area. We might want to keep things open-ended by sharing vision and mission, rather than the full proposal, and give them the opportunity for feedback. We want to hear what their experiences are with their own past efforts that are similar to the proposed institute. The member stated we should retain our voice on the advisory group. too.
- We want to move forward, as we are narrowing the focus of our proposed institute. “Disparities” fits within the university as a land grant institution, and the research product will help our state. We should have an outline ready to go to discuss with whomever we feel is appropriate, including our new administrators.
- We will begin to work in Box to tweak our proposal to reflect our vision and mission of confronting rural disparities.
- We discussed first meeting with Interim Provost Nathan and then with President Roberts once he commences leading us in that capacity.
- This has been a pivot meeting. We are turning the corner towards a narrowed definition of our vision and mission. A reiteration was made that we should specifically allude to African Americans as being a focus of the institute.
- Our next meeting is the Thursday after Spring Break.
- We will work in Box, and we need a timeline. We want to have our tweaked proposal completed in early April so we can display it to interested parties.

Graduate Students Subcommittee

Chairs: Dr. George Flowers and Dr. Jared Russell

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

- Reviewed previous meeting notes.
- Further discussions were had regarding the format and content of the components of the report. It was agreed that a combined draft report would be assembled and reviewed at our next meeting.