



## Presidential Task Force *for Opportunity and Equity*

April 14, 2022

### Minutes

**Attendees:** Chacolby Burns-Johnson, Angela Cannon, Astin Cole, Kevin Coonrod, George Flowers, Norman Godwin, Dustin Johnson, Melody Russell, Jared Russell, JoEllen Sefton, Bruce Smith, Alan Wilson, Jennifer Adams and Amy Weaver

- **Briefing Document**
  - Task Force will prepare a briefing document for President Roberts.
  - The document will include recommendations for “the way ahead” and details items that still need to be completed.
    - A committee member requested to add land agreement to the list of items that need to be completed.
  - Dean Flowers and some of the graduate committee will work on a draft document.
- **Task Force update**
  - The plan to do an update at the last task force meeting of the term was discussed.
  - Standard update slides will be used as were used the end of the fall term.
- **Diversity Statement**
  - Question was raised as to how we can continue to get the word out about the new diversity statement.
  - It was suggested we provide information to the daily AU updates.
  - We will look into this possibility.
- **Graduate Students Subcommittee Presentation**
  - A PDF of the presentation is available on the task force website.

### **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

- The subcommittee had a long discussion concerning the name and the scope of the research institute.

- A new proposed name by one of our members was the “Auburn University Institute for African American and Black Economic Empowerment and Development.”
- The member stated that this new name is proposed to broaden our focus to help us attract donors from a broader base.
  - We have been purposely narrowing our focus, but this broadens our focus.
- We had a discussion regarding the broadening of our scope after working toward narrowing our scope.
  - A question posed was, “what is the expertise among our researcher base?”
  - Another question was “why do we just focus on disparities?”
  - We could reframe a conversation to excellence in work force development; housing and economic development; cancer, diabetes. Then, we can look at this in the context of disparities.
  - A member stated that an institute in the context of “disparities” won’t be big enough to attract our potential donors.
- We spoke about workplace development and that this was not part of the researcher base we developed.
  - We need a clear identifiable group of scholars already in the field at Auburn University for our institute.
  - We can reach out to scholars in workplace development and also cluster hire to bring in scholars from elsewhere.
  - That latter move will take a lot of money.
- As we continued our discussion on disparities, a member stated that this institute didn’t start with the premise of addressing disparities.
  - The concept of the institute was a way of empowering black excellence.
- What is our local talent and what are the ways of bringing them into the fold?
  - Can we extend an overture to researchers in economic development, have listening sessions so we can learn what resources we have in that area?
- We want to make sure we have an institute that will be accepted and will last; one with a vision that is broad enough that people will be engaged in and that will be valued for those individuals’ work.
  - What is the work we are doing and how?
  - Where have we come from?
  - It wasn’t the Auburn Institute for Disparities.
  - It was the Auburn Institute for Diversity.
- A member spoke of our educational session with the Provost.
  - 3 mechanisms of support. Grants, donors, and institutional funds.
  - What is the institute going to be known for? Being too broad will not give us a brand.
- We listed three things we might focus on.
  - Our own researcher base, the members of which will become the backbone of the institute;
  - Educational disparities, health, property ownership; and

- We don't want to be the institute for "everything." Regarding an African American and Black Institute of Economic Empowerment and Development: We have great expertise in this at Auburn.
- We want to appeal to corporate and alumni donors; education resource grant funding, such as Department of Education.
- Auburn has a new initiative called "AI at AU," headed by Gerry Dozier, in Engineering.
- Because of covid, there is a need for training to get people back into the work force.
- Next steps:
  - Melody will send us a pdf regarding general items donors look for.
  - We will look through that to see if we can incorporate ideas and wordsmithing into our proposal draft. We need to think about 3 or 4 areas that would be under the broader title of the institute. What can we hang our hat on within this broader scope?
- Ideas discussed were:
  - Rural Studio
  - Education
  - Rural health disparities.
  - Technology in Black and African communities
- Cluster hires can be done, but after the institute has its legs and is up and going.
- What is our strength?
  - We won't get the support we need unless we can tie in technology with sciences.
- We decided to have a small group meeting April 28 with the 3 members present today to pull together a more cohesive framework to present to the rest of the committee based on today's discussion. Then this information will be shared at the May 5 meeting with the institute subcommittee.

### **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

- The subcommittee reviewed previous meeting notes.
- Reviewed draft report and suggested edits from previous meeting.
  - It was agreed that a near final version of the report would be completed and discussed at the next meeting.