

Presidential Task Force Meeting Minutes
9/10/2020

General Ronald Burgess:

Called the meeting to order welcoming the committee before turning the floor to Coach Gus Malzahn and Coach Bruce Pearl to do a verbal presentation of the Athletics launch “Together We Will” Initiative followed by the report out of the sub-committees.

Coach Gus Malzahn:

Started the presentation with giving thanks to the committee for allowing him to greet and present to the committee about this exciting initiative. He shared that there has been a lot of positivity around confronting civil injustice and that created an opportunity to bring AU together and Athletics acted. The AU athletic football players were asked what action they wanted to see, and they said that they would like to see more black students that look like them on campus. From that the “Unity Shirt” and “Together We Will” video with guest appearances from Bo Jackson, Tim Cook, Tim Hudson and Octavia Spencer with others were developed to generate funds for scholarships for black and minority students. They not only asked the football players tell them what they wanted but challenged them to commit to selling shirts to meet goals set for them which holds them accountable for the changes they would like to see. The “Unity Shirt” and “Together We Will” Initiative are part of a short-term goal, but they are developing long-term goals that should be reached in 5 to 10 years that will have positive change and unify the Auburn community. Coach Malzahn shared that Coach Pearl really took on the task of the development of the scholarship. The committee was given its “Together We Will” presentation before the press release was to be shared.

Coach Bruce Pearl:

Shared that he had given the basketball players their “Unity Shirt” and watched the video with them. They were pleased with both and had taken pictures not long before the meeting had begun. He joked that Coach Malzahn was almost as passionate about the initiatives as beating the University of Alabama. He said that Coach Malzahn has a servant heart and believes that Auburn University can make an amazing moment. There are a lot of people like coach that believe in Auburn and what we can do together. He suggested that the committee all receive an “Unity Shirt” and take a picture to share.

Coach Gus Malzahn:

Thanked the committee again for their time and asked to be excused to join the football players for a team meeting as they receive their shirts and watched the video for the first time.

General Ronald Burgess:

Shared that once he found out about the “Unity Shirt” and “Together We Will” Initiative that he knew it was great idea. It was something that could really be done and would create a voice for Auburn University and help financially to assist with change. Coach Gus Malzahn, President Gouge and General Burgess met and agreed to move forward with the initiative.

Coach Bruce Pearl:

Shared that the players are willing to help recruit during the summer. He has challenged them to introduce themselves to the students on the campus while practicing social distancing. Stated that the Athletics Department had chosen the inclusive language of black students and minorities. They have agreed to make point to stop and say hello to fellow students in the future. They unfortunately don't have the time available to commit to the student government but when time permits, they can still have an impact on the student experience.

General Ronald Burgess:

Asked the committee to take some time to watch the video. He thanked the many members of the team that helped with getting the "Together We Will" Initiative, Presidential Task Force website and scholarship. They put in a lot of late hours to make this happen. He made the announcement that the Black Student Union had invited him to the September 14th general assembly meeting at 5 pm and encouraged the members to attend as well.

Ms. Elizabeth Devore:

Shared that the Black Student Union meet every Monday.

Ms. Mya Strickland:

Shared that she had sent two emails to Kim Brown with the information about General Burgess confirming attendance and that BSU as an organization like to plan and prepare for their guests so that they have time to prepare answers to pre-chosen questions.

General Ronald Burgess:

Told Mya to work with Kim Brown to find a time when he can be there and make it work on his end.

Ms. Mya Strickland:

Agreed to let Kim and General Burgess know.

General Ronald Burgess:

Turned the floor over to Dr. Vini Nathan to report out for her sub-committee

Dr. Vini Nathan:

Shared that she had a copy of the "Together We Will" video and asked if we could watch it prior to her reporting out.

General Ronald Burgess:

Agreed that the video should be watched by the committee and asked that Kim share screen to allow the committee members to view the "Together We Will" video together.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Asked Mya as the committee waited for the video to start to clarify the expectation of attending the Black Student Union Meeting.

Ms. Mya Strickland:

Explained that the format they typically use for Black Student Union meetings start with organizational housekeeping, announcements, then provide background on the guest(s) roles prior to a 30-minute general discussion and close with a 15-minute Q&A session. The Q&A session uses pre-selected questions that have been shared with the guest prior to the meeting.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Thanked Mya for sharing the BSU expectations.

Mrs. Kim Brown:

Shared the "Together We Will" video with the committee. The sound was inaudible, and the committee waited for her to correct technical difficulty.

Coach Bruce Pearl:

Shared with the committee that through social media campaigning, contributions from donors and the "Unity Shirt" sales that the "Together We Will" initiative will be successful. He thanked General Burgess for his support and moving everything forward, the legal team for the University pushing this the initiative through so fast and all committee members involved.

General Ronald Burgess:

Thanked Attorney Jaime Hammer for her legal expertise around scholarships based on gender and race.

Mrs. Kim Brown:

Shared the "Together We Will" video with the committee.

Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton:

Thanked everyone involved. She recognized that this committee has allyship, commitment and courage to make a change and difference at Auburn University.

Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley:

Shared that she had on her "Unity Shirt" and that the video sent chills. She thanked everyone involved to make the release happen. She believes that this will be well received by the students and plan to use her social media outlets to share and encourage participation.

General Ronald Burgess:

Shared that he would like to plan a special event that would allow everyone on campus one day in the near future and call it "AU Unity T-shirt Day". He felt that wearing them would allow focus on what the committee and Auburn University are trying to do.

Dr. Vini Nathan:

Presented her sub-committee report out recommendations for Recruitment and Retention of African American Faculty & Staff. *Presentation PowerPoint was not available prior to minutes completion.

General Ronald Burgess:

Asked the committee if they had any questions or would like to wait until after both sub-committees had reported out.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Stated that she had some questions but would wait until the conclusion of both presentations.

Mrs. Gretchen VanValkenburg:

Presented her sub-committee report out recommendations for Refocusing Human Resources Employment transactional function to a Business. *Presentation PowerPoint was not available prior to minutes completion.

Ms. Elizabeth Devore:

Shared that if she hadn't met with Lastella Paradise another sub-committee member that she would not have known about the need to have a mentoring program.

General Ronald Burgess:

Thanked Dr. Vini Nathan and Mrs. Gretchen VanValkenburg for their presentations from their respective sub-committees followed by opening up the floor for questions to the sub-committees.

Ms. Elizabeth Devore:

Asked what part does service play in the promotion and tenure process.

Provost Bill Hardgrave:

Shared that the University has created a database of service, that track things like the time that goes into task force etc. He acknowledges that there is a lot of work that goes into different services and time/energy. The biggest difference in the annual review and then promotion and tenure.

Ombudsman C. Kevin Coonrod:

Asked if data in the database tracked service in data groups by gender or the time that was served.

Provost Bill Hardgrave:

Shared that he doesn't think that information has been captured that Ombudsman Coonrod asked about. He recognized that there is an outsized expectation that minority faculty serve and that there has not been a found sweet spot between the outsized weight of being underrepresented.

Ombudsman C. Kevin Coonrod:

Asked if there was any way for protection from faculty feeling the weight of the outsized expectation for service or someone that can step in.

Provost Bill Hardgrave:

Shared that there is nothing in place right now for this protection, but the true solution is to hire underrepresented faculty and have better representation.

Dr. Oladiran Fasina:

Shared that leading roles can be diluted to service and that he is very sensitive to younger faculty hierarchy. If possible, he tries to limit the requests for participation from younger faculty.

Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton:

Shared some strategies that can be used like mentoring junior faculty until mid-career. Search committee supplemental processes until there is better representation creating an ecosystem as ideal as possible.

Ms. Elizabeth Devore:

Agreed with Dr. Clayton's possible strategies.

General Ronald Burgess:

Asked if there were any additional questions for the sub-committees.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Stated that the information was great but challenged the committee to find themes that could be acted on quickly.

General Ronald Burgess:

Thanked Attorney Jaime Hammer for her work and her team for their expertise for lawsuits that might come from some of the recommendations and federal programs and grants that have requirements.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Shared that the biggest theme that came from all the sub-committee recommendations is "Search Committees". So, how should the committee begin to add teeth? The committee can't fear and must commit to the change that we see.

General Ronald Burgess:

Shared that the recommendations made by Mrs. Gretchen VanValkenburg sub-committee can move forward because the bucks stop with him. The recommendations made by Dr. Vini Nathan's sub-committee would need to move through the Faculty senate because they have their own governance processes. As a committee, we all are committing to work through the senate, academics and peers to have these recommendations move forward.

Provost Bill Hardgrave:

Shared that these are some really good suggested recommendations and should start soon with a strategy that will have a cultural shift with individual involvement. Faculty hires faculty

beyond the Provost and Dean although they might have input which is why there will have to be a cultural shift. General Burgess and Provost Hargrave will meet and begin to lay the foundation for the changes that we need to happen.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Stated that leadership will set the tone for faculty. The committee should consider sharing our recommendations and allow senior black faculty representing the Black Caucus to provide us with feedback. The buy in should start right now.

Provost Bill Hargrave:

Agreed that the we should lead by example and provide the right guidance.

Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton:

Added in some cases have ideal representation and infinity groups connections also review and provide feedback.

Dr. Oladiran Fasina:

Added that programs should go to the Dean department and they should have a say in how they diversify their faculty.

General Ronald Burgess:

Stated that Mrs. Gretchen VanValkenburg and Dr. Vini Nathan will reach out to Kim Brown to set up a time that they can further discuss the recommendations and present their presentation to other administration including President Gouge. Shared that from the previous committee homework assignments that only three recommendations were provided for what the committee should discuss next and asked others to please send them in before next Thursday meeting. There will not be a committee meeting next Tuesday. Recommendation to explore looking into black minority business suppliers, education and infinity group set-ups have been given for next Thursday. Faculty is a totally different entity.

Mrs. Lastella Paradise:

Thanked General Burgess for his work in the approval of allowing all AU employees to accrue the same amount of leave without this depending on your years of employment. The change has been approved and will take effect January 2021.

General Ronald Burgess:

Explained that prior to this change AU used a cast system for accrual of leave. Every employee should be treated the same and we should all be doing the right things. The committee will reconvene Thursday and began discussing the items that were requested as a homework assignment and submitted to be added to the agenda. The next Presidential Task Force meeting will be via zoom, Thursday, September 17th at 3:30 pm.

Ada Ruth Huntley

Amanda Carr
Amanda Young
Amy Weaver
Angela Cannon
Bill Hardgrave
Bridget Graba
Bruce Pearl
C. Kevin Coonrod
Donielle Fagan
Elizabeth Devore
Gail Gauntt
Gretchen VanValkenburg
Gwen Whitlock
Ja'lia Taylor
Jaime Hammer
Jennifer Wynn
Joffery Gaymon
Katrina Akande
Kim Brown
Lastella Paradise
Madison Birckhead
Mellissa Watson
Melody Russell
Mya Strickland
Oladiran Fasina
Ronald Burgess
Ronny Isaac
Royrickers Cook
Sandy Krietemeyer
Seymour Irby
Sylvia Masango
Taffye Clayton
Timothy Fair
Vini Nathan