

## **Presidential Task Force Meeting Minutes**

### **9/29/2020**

#### **General Ronald Burgess:**

Called the meeting to order and thanked everyone that could be here today for joining. He shared that he had a couple of things the committee would go over. The Presidential Task Force made recommendations for training education for the entire university starting the beginning of the year with a company named EverFi. Since then President Trump has issued orders that has restrictions for training at federally funded entities. Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton, Attorney Jamie Hammer and additional leadership members will meet with EverFi to confirm this and answer any additional questions or concerns that might need to be addressed. Auburn University is federally funded and if we cross the line than we risk the loss of federal funding.

#### **Attorney Jamie Hammer:**

Shared that the meeting is to be proactive while reviewing the models cross the line doing our diligence to ensure there is no need for major changes to the modules that will be provided by the company.

#### **Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton:**

Shared that she does not expect any changes but agreed that we needed to do our due diligence to review the modules. The company has many college and university clients and, given the Executive memo have been reviewing module content for many other universities as well. The conversation with EverFi positions the university to move forward with the plan.

#### **General Ronald Burgess:**

Stated that we want to make sure that we are aware of any potential issues. He shared that he has appreciated the input that he has gotten from the committee so far but would like to have the committee think about two additional ideas. He asked as a committee what will we look at doing in the future and want to discuss with others? Tonight at 6 pm, there will be a continuation of the recommendation presentations. Faculty hires faculty and the clearance for the recommendations that will affect them will have additional process for clearance and we are continuing to get as much input as possible.

#### **Dr. Melody Russell:**

Shared that she will join at 6:30 pm after her class.

#### **General Ronald Burgess:**

Shared that Thursday there will be no Presidential Task Force Meeting. Next Tuesday, he would like for Dr. Taffye Benson- Clayton, Dr. Joffery Gaymon and Mrs. Gretchen VanValkenburg to brief the taskforce where we ended up with recommendations forward and capture this information and place it on the webpage up to now. This will be another show of transparency that the Presidential Task Force is committed to sharing information and its efforts. We will need to in the near future discuss the Presidential Task Force's presence in the future. Typically, task force is short-term by definition. We will need to begin to research and consider the processes needed to have the committee commissioned in the near future. We will need to think about how we go about our request, standing policies and the already 4 governance groups participation. The group will need to decide who the at large memberships would be extended to. He shared BSU and the AU Black Caucus as an example. As

a standing committee we are going to have to take on the fulness. That means all groups will be considered and included along with transparency.

**Dr. Joffery Gaymon:**

Suggested that maybe a sub- committee should be put together to gather this information and make recommendation on how to move forward with making the Presidential Task Force a standing committee.

**General Ronald Burgess:**

Agreed that Dr. Gaymon's idea was great. He added that they could research the standing policies so that the committee could work within the limits.

**Mrs. Elizabeth Devore:**

Shared that there was a Diversity Commission that ended in 2016 when the Climate Study was completed and there might be a need to follow up and see why it ended and how it was started.

**General Ronald Burgess:**

Shared he wasn't aware of the Diversity Commission and he hadn't seen that information.

**Dr. Oladiran Fasina:**

Asked if the Office of Inclusion and Diversity the same thing as we are creating to lead these efforts.

**General Ronald Burgess:**

Stated that we are looking ahead at the recommendations to best determine what will make the most sense for Auburn University. Faculty have specific thoughts and sometime competing interest with the governance.

**Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton:**

Shared that the Office of Inclusion and Diversity has institutional responsibility for coordinating diversity, equity and inclusion efforts as guided by the university and unit-based strategic plans. Diversity is now integral to unit based strategic plans. Faculty sub-committee across all disciplines could work if that is best for the university.

**Dr. Oladiran Fasina:**

Asked does the Office of Inclusion and Diversity have an advisory board.

**Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton:**

Shared that the Office of Inclusion and Diversity has a CDO cabinet that is currently made up of the diversity liaisons that are located across campus in different colleges and offices. These participants have diversity roles at the university so academic and administrative unit diversity work is a part of their responsibilities.

**Dr. Oladiran Fasina:**

Asked was the Office of Inclusion and Diversity advisory board administrative.

**Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton:**

Shared that this is an opportunity to think about the way that we view diversity roles. A commission would be a broader view of the work and with her office and others could provide an opportunity to see what is being done at all levels.

**General Ronald Burgess:**

Stated that the committee could implement the ideas and down the road long term the commission could be working in concert strategizing in this specific area.

**Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton:**

Shared that all these diversity directors and college/school-based offices could be a benefit. This way of dually strategizing with the units would also provide a sense of buy-in/investment and should be considered.

**Provost Bill Hardgrave:**

Stated that he will present at the next meeting the Faculty recommendation in the absence of Dr. Vini Nathan leaving the committee.

**General Ronald Burgess:**

Asked Mrs. Gretchen VanValkenburg where she was with the recommendations from her sub-committee.

**Mrs. Gretchen VanValkenburg:**

Shared that she was awaiting the review of them by Kelly Taylor from the EEOC office.

**Mrs. Ja'lia Taylor:**

Stated that she wanted to discuss trust being brought back to the committee in a positive way. She shared that there have been outside meetings and that the Presidential Task Force Committee members were said to have been disrespectful. She then asked the committee to define disrespectful. From a student prospective, expressing yourself when you don't agree with someone else's view is not being misguided. Everyone's idea of success will not look the same. We all as a committee should want to develop a plan that holds all accountable. Students that are still here since 2016 are super frustrated. There is a lot of frustration and the students are expressing these feelings to others. The black student leaders are hearing these frustrations from students at meetings with BSU and BGPSA. We want to develop buy in from all stakeholders. We as a committee should come up with deliverables and allow everyone's input.

**General Ronald Burgess:**

Stated the committee recommendations are not about him but from his life experience the group makes the decisions. He thanked Mrs. Ja'lia Taylor, Mrs. Mya Strickland and Mrs. Elizabeth Devore for their service on the committee and he believes they are doing a great job representing the student constituents. They are all at the level best to talk to the students like they do. The students are appreciated and input is valued.

**Ombudsman C. Kevin Coonrod:**

Stated that for some of the committee members the success that others see may not be the same success that others feel because they are not being heard and respected or not being used.

**Dr. Joffery Gaymon:**

Stated that committee statute updates will help keep the committee moving forward.

**Mrs. Lastella Paradise:**

Asked when the committee would be meeting with the Staff Council and the A&P governance.

**General Ronald Burgess:**

Stated that the efforts are being coordinated through Mrs. Kim Brown.

**Mrs. Kim Brown:**

Shared that had just heard back from the groups offering dates for the next week or two.

**Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton:**

Stated that the Task Force recommendation presentation road show might use some offline coordinating to address groups that have not been addressed yet.

**Mrs. Elizabeth Devore:**

Shared that Mrs. Ja'lia Taylor's discussion is something to think about. Mrs. Ada Ruth Huntley and her met and talked about how important the students that have spoken have the historical reference to do so. Trust is the core of respect and accountability. She posed the question is there a reason for black students to trust Auburn University? They currently have no reason to trust and speak with her but she shares items with them and that forces them to. She also has the best of intentions when she is interacting with them. The committee results and success should be addressed with the students as well because they want to hear. She mentioned that Jailand from BSU was not asked to participate on the committee when Mrs. Ada Ruth Huntley was asked. The committee aligns with Mrs. Huntley's platform but the platform for SGA might change once they have elections again in February. It is time to change the culture and with all that entails. She feels that the presentations have been done for everyone but students until Mya coordinated the BSU meeting. Students need to be seen and heard.

**General Ronald Burgess:**

Stated that he thanked everyone for their service on the Presidential Task Force and that trust has to be earned by any person and is continuous. He shared that he met with the County Commissioner about positioning Auburn University as a polling site. This will not happen by the November 3 election. The County Commissioner is in full support of the voters' poll being at Auburn University.

**Mrs. Elizabeth Dovore:**

Asked the number of years that Voter location proposal had been presented to the Faculty Senate and executive Faculty Senate.

**Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton:**

Stated that COVID-19 has limited the face-to-face interactions that can be so vital to the continuing conversations for Task Force members outside of official meetings. We don't get to see one another or go to lunch together in ways that we could have before COVID-19. This lack of interaction does not allow us to communicate recommendations as naturally and easily.

**Dr. Melody Russell:**

Expressed the recommendations for recruitment and retention have become personal for her and she is very passionate about them. She stated that when she stated there was showing of passion but no purpose was not personal at all. She also has passion and that was not an attack. There is truth to power. She was speaking in the context in what we are talking about at the time. What is to be gained from this was the questioned posed. Her statement was in reference to the letter from the Auburn Student and Community group. The full letter was not disclosed but they had stated in the letter that they felt that the Presidential Task Force was perpetuating racism. That was a very big statement and in all fairness is that what they really believe. The impact is greater in intent and words speak proof to power. The letter stated that the Presidential Task Force meeting needs weren't being met. The statement that she made was not to silence or not agree but something contrary. She agrees that undergraduate students and graduate students should have more platforms to provide input. Graduate students have a different position and can also help to get the message out. Students should not have to take the blunt end of the criticisms of the Presidential Task Force committee. They should let the senior leadership on the Presidential Task Force handle it. This will be key on moving forward. There are demands for the Presidential Task Force committee to be recorded and release them but we can't even know what they are going to be used for.

**Mrs. Ja'lia Taylor:**

Stated that the nature of what we are talking about is passion with purpose. She couldn't believe the interactions from last Thursday. She is passionate herself and has a purpose. Students responses are looking for solutions. At the institutional level students need their needs addressed and how they feel. There are several different groups that also need to see the presentations and provide feedback at the student level. She shared that she agrees with not being recorded. Students should receive more information as we move forward.

**Dr. Melody Russell:**

Expressed that she saw her interaction with Ms. Mya Strickland as a discussion and was not personal. Iron sharpens iron.

**Mrs. Elizabeth Dovore:**

Thanks Amanda Carr for her notes and Amy Weaver for assisting with getting them posted. After mentioning all the great things that are happening with the recommendations and being transparent will show due respect to the students.

**Dr. Oladiran Fasina:**

Asked if the website with the information from the Presidential Task Force could be added to the AU main website. He shared that he was looking for some information for his son and it was not easily accessible.

**Mrs. Amy Weaver:**

Shared that the university is in the process of redesigning a landing page and the Presidential Task Force page can be added to that. She will look into this and see if it can be included.

**Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton:**

Asked also if the webpage could be linked to the Office of Inclusion and Diversity.

**Dr. Oladiran Fasina:**

Stated that the most institutions are using their websites as a means to provide the information available to whoever is searching and that would be a benefit to students at Auburn University as well. They should also be able to ask for additional information.

**General Ronald Burgess:**

Agreed that the website is not easily accessed and is key to what we are doing as a committee. The input of the committee is vitally important. If anyone has anything that the committee should be considering please let him know. He asked the committee to wear their Unity T-shirt on Friday. He stated that the reports are way ahead but we still need the input from others. The next Presidential Task Force meeting will be via zoom, Tuesday, October 6 at 3:30 pm.

**Mrs. Ja'lia Taylor:**

Shared that on Saturday at 11 am on Cater Lawn there would be an easy yoga session. It would include meditation and yoga. All are invited.

Ada Ruth Huntley  
Amanda Carr  
Amy Weaver  
Angela Cannon  
Bill Hardgrave  
Bruce Pearl  
C. Kevin Coonrod  
Donielle Fagan  
Elizabeth Devore  
Gretchen VanValkenburg  
Ja'lia Taylor  
Jaime Hammer  
Joffery Gaymon  
Katrina Akande  
Kim Brown  
Lastella Paradise  
Madison Birckhead  
Melody Russell  
Mya Strickland  
Oladiran Fasina  
Ronald Burgess  
Ronny Isaac  
Royrickers Cook  
Seymour Irby  
Sylvia Masango  
Taffye Clayton  
Vini Nathan