

Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity Meeting Minutes 10/06/2020

General Ronald Burgess:

Called the meeting to order thanking the committee for being here today. Shared that there will be four presentations today from the four subcommittee leaders and these presentations will be an update of the recommendations from each subcommittee. He requested that all presenters share their documents/presentations with him at the end of the meeting. Introduced the first presenter, Provost Bill Hardgrave.

Provost Bill Hardgrave:

Shared that he will be presenting today on behalf of Dr. Vini Nathan's subcommittee (Recruitment/Retention of African American Faculty) as she could not attend today's meeting. He shared that Dr. Nathan and himself met with the Black Caucus twice and have also been in communication with all the College/School deans about the recommendations and noted that all have to be on the same page in order for this to be successful. He noted that the main objective has been to compose a document identifying what has been done so far and what could still be done now in regards to measuring the recruitment/retention for the University. He noted that they have identified best practices of the colleges and schools and also mentioned what some of the short and long-term goals are. He also provided some examples of the current best practices and goals.

General Ronald Burgess:

Requested Provost Bill Hardgrave to send a synopsis of the document he referred to.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Asked Provost Bill Hardgrave if there will be an implementation committee that would keep deans accountable for the steps hoping to achieve across the colleges and schools. She asked what measures are going to be used for the pre/post implementation assessments. Dr. Russell also inquired what are some of the formative assessments compared to the summative assessments Provost Bill Hardgrave provided that will be put in place?

Provost Bill Hardgrave:

Let Dr. Melody Russell know that some colleges/schools are already using diversity score cards and hope to implement that throughout the University. These score cards are a means of measurement. He also noted that formative faculty hiring could be a means of formative assessment but knows that there is still a long way to go.

General Ronald Burgess:

Introduced Dr. Gretchen VanValkenburg to present next as she has to pivot off to another meeting.

Dr. Gretchen VanValkenburg:

Shared her subcommittee's (Recruitment/Retention of African American Employees) recommendations by providing recommendations/goals for recruitment and retention respectfully. Not the things that are feasible in the short-term opposed to the long-term. The goal is to add more personnel in the HR department. There are three main goals/recommendations for the recruitment of African American Employees: Refocus on HR personnel; Establish a Diversity Statement; and Deploy Inclusive Hiring Practices and develop an inclusive Hiring Toolkit. There are five main goals/recommendations for the retention of African American Employees: Expand and Fully Support University's Onboarding Center and Decentralized Process; Enhancing Supervisor Training; Implement Mandatory Exit Meetings; Create University-Supported and Encouraged Pathways for Professional Advancement; and Recognize and Appreciate Employees.

Mrs. Elizabeth Devore:

Inquired about the Black Caucus Meeting.

Dr. Gretchen VanValkenburg:

Had to pivot off to another meeting

General Ronald Burgess:

Introduced Dr. Joffery Gaymon to present next.

Dr. Joffery Gaymon:

Shared her subcommittee's (Recruitment & Retention) recommendations. Dr. Gaymon's subcommittee proposed four main recommendations for the recruitment and retention of African American students: Increase Black Student Enrollment; Increase Aid Allocated to Black Students; Improve Racial Climate; and Improve Retention and Graduation Rate of Black Students. Dr. Gaymon noted what has already been completed, the immediate goals and future planning required for each recommendation.

Coach Bruce Pearl:

Asked what the current plans are for the retention of students? He suggested that Student Affairs should reach out to the Student-Athlete Development Center to see if they can help with retention efforts. Coach Pearl mentioned that the coaches and staff in Athletics can assist with the University's recruiting efforts. He also noted the fact that resources required for retention and recruitment should be addressed. Coach Pearl inquired about what the marketing strategy looks like. He also noted that he would like for the Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity to have an in-person meeting in the near future.

Mr. Kevin Coonrod:

Noted how the 'TogetherWeWill' campaign was placed on the complete list of Dr. Joffery Gaymon's presentation and inquired if this campaign could be an ongoing project.

General Ronald Burgess:

Noted how the University is urging faculty, staff and the entire Auburn Community to wear their Auburn Unity/'TogetherWeWill' t-shirt this Friday (10/09).

Coach Bruce Pearl:

Added that the point of using the phrase "TogetherWeWill" is to keep it an ongoing campaign i.e. TogetherWeWill wear the t-shirts, TogetherWeWill have a donor matching initiative etc. Coach Pearl also informed the Task Force that the funds raised from the t-shirt are north of \$100,000.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Asked what are some interventions used to help the retention of students; what are some of the intentional things being done to keep the students at Auburn? Dr. Russell also reflected on the Black Alumni Week events and how a current student's mother commended the effort she has noticed with the increase in African American faculty and staff. She noted the incredible difference between her time at Auburn as a student and how it currently makes her feel so much better for sending her daughter here.

General Ronald Burgess:

Thanked Dr. Royrickers Cook for his department's (Office of Outreach) assistance in multiple projects. The General continued by introducing Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton to make her presentation.

Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton:

Shared her subcommittee's (DEI Education and Training) recommendations. The main recommendation from the DEI Education and Training subcommittee is the securing and implementation of EVERFI Learning Modules.

General Ronald Burgess:

Interjected noting the effort and time it has taken to acquire the EVERFI partnership and not just how the University's procurement process typically is handled, but how challenging this specific project has been.

Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton:

Dr. Clayton continued with her presentation about the DEI Education and Training recommendation of EVERFI and noted that the office of Inclusion and Diversity are in discussions with Procurement Office for this partnership. She informed the Task Force of the breakdown of the socialization process and how Auburn University is compliant with the Executive Order as the diligence review has occurred. Dr. Clayton also explained the next steps of this phase to implement the EVERFI Learning Modules.

General Ronald Burgess:

General Burgess noted how he has joined Dr. Clifford Jones' group (the group has an affiliation with 100 Black Men of Auburn and Opelika). He also reminded the Task Force members to feel free to email him about future discussion topics. The General noted that he will make a point of

bringing together the Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity for an in-person meeting in the near future. He will need to figure out a way to do so that abides with COVID-19/University guidelines. He then proceeded to open the floor to thoughts and questions while deferring to Dr. Melody Russell first as she had emailed him about discussion points.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Noted that most of the items she mentioned had already been discussed today or previous meetings. These items being the implementation teams, 2016 Climate Study, Bridge Program and working with some of the local schools (partnerships).

Dr. Oladiran Fasina:

Commented on his passion for STEM students; since his time at Auburn University, has definitely noticed the growth in the STEM program but is currently working on a proposal for the retention of Black STEM students. Asked about the supply chain: how do we go back to the middle and high schools to better prepare the students for college and specifically majors in STEM?

General Ronald Burgess:

The cities of Auburn and Opelika have partnered with University of Alabama to bring a specific professor to help in the middle and high schools. Would like to propose for Auburn University to have the same opportunity.

Mrs. Elizabeth Devore:

Agreed with General Ronald Burgess and noted how schools in her area of residence - and Lee County as a whole – need to make connections with the larger schools and Auburn.

Dr. Oladiran Fasina:

Again asked how do we go back to the middle and high schools and adequately prepare the students for university?

Dr. Taffye Benson-Clayton:

Provided an example of how some colleges and schools have university professors go into the middle and high schools and teach the students in summer programs. This gives these students an opportunity to be exposed to university level learning and an understanding of what would be expected of them once they graduate from high school. These types of programs also give the university professors an opportunity to introduce new courses/topics into the middle and high school curriculums.

General Ronald Burgess:

Informed the Task Force how the state of Alabama has taken the change in having a middle/high school in Huntsville, AL to be the forefront for cyber learning. He also noted that there has been a decrease in the amount of learners who go into STEM from a young age.

Mrs. Elizabeth Devore:

Asked General Roland Burgess to add Education to the conversation when wanting to provide more exposure for middle/high school students' guidance on paths of study. This also is for the university level as professors/teacher need to be taught to teach.

Ms. Maya Strickland:

Notified the Task Force members of her internship experience with Purdue University. It was a summer internship in STEM that included various aspects included mentorship exposure. She also agreed with Mrs. Elizabeth Devore about the need for focus on training for educators.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Commended Dr. Oladiran Fasina, Mrs. Elizabeth Devore and Ms. Maya Strickland for bringing up the points in extending the conversation to include more education/training.

Mrs. Elizabeth Devore:

Noted the importance of the accountability/intervention aspects for the students and how there have been mixed reviews to the BSU and Breaking Barriers events. She mentioned how there needs to be a better way to make the entire student body feel like they are being included in the decision making process of the recommendations that are coming out of the Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity...possibly provide an avenue for them to be able to provide feedback.

General Ronald Burgess:

Informed Mrs. Devore that communication with the student body is done through the SGA but understands that more needs to be done to ensure the graduate student body also feel included.

Mrs. Elizabeth Devore:

Also added to keep in mind that the SGA (and all student organizations) change their leadership in the spring and that the new leadership groups need to be caught up to speed about everything.

General Ronald Burgess:

Stated that he has been in conversation with the City of Auburn about having Auburn University house a polling station. This is will be happening but everybody needs to understand that once the precinct is drawn up, this polling station will only be open to people who live in and around that area. He noted that Auburn Mayor, Ron Anders and himself will be meeting about this topic.

The next Presidential Task Force meeting will be via zoom, Thursday, October 9 at 3:30 pm; there is a possibility Thursday's meeting will be cancelled.

Presidential Task Force for Opportunity & Equity Members:

Ada Ruth Huntley

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