

Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity Meeting Minutes 10/13/2020

General Ronald Burgess:

Called the meeting to order thanking the committee for being here today. Reminded the Task Force members of the in-person meeting on November 10, 2020 in the Basketball Arena. Sixteen have responded 'yes', four responded 'no' and six have not responded yet; President Gouge will be attending. General Burgess delivered today's discussion topics/some updates. The first being Dr. Oladiran Fasina's proposal of introducing STEM into the middle and high schools in and around Auburn; a meeting has been scheduled for this week with a few college deans on the next steps to make Dr. Fasina's vision become a reality. The next update was about a document that Mrs. Elizabeth Devore sent to the General about her research of the student body's opinions/input of all that the Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity had done and is currently doing. The General also brought up the concerns of election season coming up and how campus will react about the results in November. He has met with various figures about the plans for Auburn's and public safety during this time.

Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley:

Added to General Roland Burgess' comments of the University's safety during the election season that she has spoken to several of her student organizations officers about setting a date for a Town Hall to discuss this.

General Ronald Burgess:

Noted Dr. Melody Russell's inquiry of the possibility for Auburn to develop an institute or center that focuses on the history of the Civil Rights Movement. To his knowledge, a center/institute would need to reside within a college or school.

Provost Bill Hardgrave:

Provided definitions of the difference between a center and an institute: a center is within a single department or a single college; an institute is university standing and sits outside of the colleges and will sit at the level of the office of vice president for research. That's the distinction here at Auburn University.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Inquiry about the Civil Rights Movement center/institute came up doing one of the faculty/staff recommendations. This center/institute would tie into the African American Studies course that would potentially be introduced to Auburn. Wanted to know if there was a chance for the Task Force to create a subcommittee dedicated to the development of this potential project. Deferred to Dr. Clayton and Mr. Kevin Coonrod.

Dr. Taffye Clayton:

Also heard about the potential of an African American Studies program at Auburn University; noted that conversations have developed since the hiring of a core group of new diverse faculty

who are engaged in research and scholarship about African American and related topics in the College of Liberal Arts. Dr. Clayton noted the advantages of allowing a committee to explore the topic more formally and agreed with Dr. Russell's suggestion of a new subcommittee being formed.

Mr. Kevin Coonrod:

Noted how he views the idea of the Civil Rights Movement center/institute as a tent; it would need every college and school to collaborate together. Mr. Coonrod mentioned how there already is a solid nucleus at Auburn; this development would help with retention for minority professors and students, and would also aid in positive recruiting efforts. He also noted how the staff would probably enjoy participating (i.e. painting etc.) The development of this center/institute would provide national attention for Auburn University.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Said the Civil Rights Movement center/institute would also serve as a research institute. Asked Coach Pearl how he thought the student-athletes would feel.

Coach Bruce Pearl:

Stated that the student-athletes would definitely appreciate the notion of a Civil Rights Movement center/institute. Also added that all should keep in mind of the busy schedules that the student-athletes have and that they cannot always be present as they are occupied with their sports, extra academic engagements, training etc. – it is a time demand issue as they are focusing on athletic priorities.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Also added the great job Dr. Gretchen VanValkenburg has done with alumni, and how helpful her, Dr. Clayton and Dr. Cook were during the Black Alumni weekend.

Coach Bruce Pearl:

Mentioned how they are also considering some of the donors and how they would want to be involved as well.

Mr. Kevin Coonrod:

Interjected about how Auburn has the Charles Barkley Endowed Professorship and how there could possibly be more of those coming in from other professional athletes as well.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Noted that Dr. Cheryl Seals received the Charles Barkley Endowed Professorship and that she may be the first Black woman to receive full professor in the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering.

Dr. Gretchen VanValkenburg:

Mentioned how, if there is a decision at the administrative level to move forward with the center/institute, she would be willing to have the conversation with newly formed Black Alumni Council. They will be having their second meeting in November.

Provost Bill Hardgrave:

Reminded the Task Force that the curriculum and research is driven by the faculty. Unless this were to be outreach, then it would be out of Dr. Royrickers Cook's department.

General Ronald Burgess:

Wanted to get a general feel about the how everyone in the Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity feels about the idea of the development of a Civil Rights Movement center/institute.

Dr. Oladiran Fasina:

Noted how the contributions of Black individuals in STEM hardly receive any recognition/exposure and it is important that this would be highlighted as well. Used the movie *Hidden Figures* as an example.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Agreed with Dr. Fasina's comment.

Mrs. Elizabeth Devore:

Noted to General Burgess that one point of the center/institute does have to do with history and recognition, and how Dr. Fasina's comment is so important. She added that this accurate display of history and recognition could be play a role as a reconciliatory piece.

Dr. Joffery Gaymon:

Pointed back to General Burgess' comment on how the development of the center/institute would be a journey and that it would be important to note what part of the journey would be possible. She also wanted to highlight that Admissions also needs another building and what a powerful message it would send.

Ms. Donielle Fagan:

Began by apologizing for missing the last meeting as she had academic engagements to attend to. Fagan went on to note the several new courses are doing so well; these courses include Introduction to LGBTQ Studies, Counc 2020 and Counc 2023, and have caused tremendous growth for the College of Education. She went on to note how the department did not expect the Intro to LGBTQ Studies to have such a high enrolment – this is testament to show that students do have an interest and need for these diverse and inclusive courses. She noted that if the development of the center/institute were to happen, they would need to include faculty members from the College of Education.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Congratulated Ms. Fagan on doing well on her dissertation proposal.

General Ronald Burgess:

Noted that there seems to be a general agreement for the possibility of developing a Civil Rights Movement center/institute.

Dr. Joffery Gaymon:

Acknowledged Mrs. Elizabeth Devore's request from last week about the student committee engagement and the requirement to discuss the students' needs as well as how to communicate to them.

Mrs. Elizabeth Devore:

Asked for clarification of the updates from the last few meetings: when will the Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity website be updated? She also noted the opportunity for having several conversations with and for the separate student body's i.e. undergraduate students and graduate students.

Dr. Joffery Gaymon:

Mentioned how there were several recommendations proposed by her subcommittee (Recruitment & Retention) that applied specifically to the graduate student body but that most responses/action would have to go through the Graduate School.

Mrs. Elizabeth Devore:

Mentioned how the student body wants to know what recommendations are being made (and approved) and who is being held accountable for them?

Ms. Donielle Fagan:

Expressed that graduate students generally seem to be happy with the Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity's website.

Ms. Mya Strickland:

Said how the undergraduate student body hopes to see more in-person (and virtual) sessions together to further discuss the recommendations that have been proposed. She hopes that future discussions would begin in smaller spaces i.e. BSU Cabinet etc. to ensure the possibility of a smaller, more in-depth conversation between the Task Force members and students.

Dr. Joffery Gaymon:

Thanked Ms. Strickland for her suggestion and added that if smaller sessions were to occur, it would be more productive to include graduate student representatives as well.

Dr. Oladiran Fasina:

Inquired about the progress of the 'Path to Plains' program.

Dr. Joffery Gaymon:

Responded about how both 'Auburn First' and 'Path to the Plains' programs are functioning; 'Path to the Plains' has smaller enrollment and with transfers, it is delayed since gratification. The students start off at Southern Union and transfer into Auburn University after a few years of being enrolled. This would be the second year of the program, so we will not see the return of this investment until 2021.

Provost Bill Hardgrave:

Added that the good news is that even though the 'Path to the Plains' program started with Southern Union, the University has had several of the 2-year institutions in the state reach out inquiring how to be part of the program as well. So the program will be expanding to several institutions. Provost Hardgrave also noted how the Auburn First program has exceeded the University's expectations at this point.

General Ronald Burgess:

Asked if there were any other thoughts for today?

Mrs. Elizabeth Devore:

Offered to do a 'reply all' email about the follow up meeting with the various student bodies.

Dr. Joffery Gaymon:

Agreed and added that Mrs. Devore needs to include what specific topics would be discussed on which days so all attendees are aware.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Inquired if there will be a meeting on Thursday (October 15, 2020). Dr. Russell asked when would be the next steps to pull together a subcommittee for the development of the Civil Rights Movement center/institute. She suggested that some initial research could begin to happen now.

General Ronald Burgess:

Mentioned that he will need to discuss things with Provost Bill Hardgrave first before any initial steps can be taken and will provided feedback by the next meeting.

Provost Bill Hardgrave:

Added that they will need to think about how to best position this proposal coming from the Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity so that it would be received well.

Ms. Donielle Fagan:

Noted that she will be unable to attend the in-person meeting on November 10, 2020 as she sees her clients on Tuesdays in another state.

General Ronald Burgess:

Thanked everyone for being here today and added that the website will be updated within the next few days. Added that he will be working on the next step regarding Dr. Russell's proposal. The next Presidential Task Force meeting will be via zoom, Thursday, October 15 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