

Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity Meeting Minutes 10/20/2020

General Ronald Burgess:

Called the meeting to order thanking the committee for being here today. Noted that he is still looking for input from the Task Force group on the next idea of focus. General Burgess also offered that Dr. Russell would be making a presentation today on standing up a center or institute to gauge the task force's interest in pursuing.

Coach Bruce Pearl:

Informed the Task Force members that former football player, Damon West will be speaking to student-athletes on November 2nd. Coach Pearl mentioned that Dr. Clayton and he are trying to identify what group of students would also benefit from talking to him on November 3rd. He also reminded the Task Force members of the in-person meeting on November 10th.

General Ronald Burgess:

Introduced Dr. Melody Russell to begin her presentation.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Asked Ms. Kim Brown to share her screen of the presentation for the Auburn University Center for Civil and Human Rights. Dr. Russell began by noting that the idea of this institute/center was the brainchild of several members in the Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity. She began her presentation with an overview of the recommendation by mentioning several points including the center/institute would serve as an active center that captures the rich history of Auburn and the surrounding areas; would be a hub for research, outreach, and community engagements; support the degree-conferring majors; use AU faculty, staff and students expertise, and talents; and to generate top-tier research. The next few points Dr. Russell brought up were about the center/institute's benefits to Auburn University, these include the positive recruitment of diverse faculty and students; visiting scholars, cross-institutional and regional research endeavors enhanced opportunities; promote a sense of belonging and community; and collaborations across the colleges. Dr. Russell mentioned how the establishment of the center/institute would continue the notion of how Auburn is the Loveliest Village on the Plains and provided a few examples. She went on to note the keys to success would include: research, education, financial support, community engagement, and being intentionally interdisciplinary and collaborative. Dr. Russell also included the feasibility of this project and noted the various resources that Auburn University already has to offer that could bring this project to life. At this point, Dr. Russell offered Dr. Taffye Clayton and Mr. Kevin Coonrod to add their input.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Referenced Provost Bill Hardgrave's point from the last meeting about the importance of faculty involvement in this project – especially being included in any subcommittee that would be formed as many of them have diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) knowledge and

experience; these include some of the former deans of research. She went on to note that it would be a good pool to consider. Dr. Clayton also noted that the University of Alabama recently opened an interim intercultural center. They plan to open a full-scale center of which civil rights, human rights, etc. will be a component.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Motioned to Mr. Coonrod to add his findings from all the different pieces in Alabama.

Mr. Kevin Coonrod:

Noted that Dr. Russell covered it all well. Fed off of Dr. Clayton's note about the importance of the faculty/staff participation in this project. This would be strategic in ensuring faculty participation and adding in the funding. Mr. Coonrod also noted how there are already faculty members who have been pushing for several aspects of this project to happen (i.e. the establishment of new courses). He also reminded the group of Provost Hardgrave's comment in the last meeting about the need for a business plan for the project – we may have that expertise on this committee already but if not, we might be a need to seek outside assistance for this. These could serve as consultants for the Task Force or become new members for the Task Force.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Referred back to the presentation and reflected on a comment that Ms. Mya Strickland made a few weeks ago about what impact the Task Force would have, what would be left behind when she leaves the Task Force, and how transformational it would be? Understanding that some of these recommendations may not be immediate but how powerful it would be for students and faculty to hear this proposal. Dr. Russell continued to note her references on the presentation and thanked the entire Task Force for their input with this project.

General Ronald Burgess:

Thanked Dr. Russell for her presentation and asked Ms. Kim Brown to stop sharing the screen. Noted he would like to hear the general thinking about this center/institute from the members of the Task Force. He went on to note his involvement when he first started at Auburn University and how there was a vision to expand Auburn's footprint inside cyberspace; he worked with the Provost, Development, and several others and as a result, the McCrary Institute was developed. Alabama Power provided a \$10 million gift that was shared between Samuel Ginn College of Engineering and School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences. General Burgess noted how the development of the center/institute will take some time to come to life; he fully supports the idea but will have to gain more support from outside the Task Force. The General went on to note that academic programs cannot reside inside a center/institute; they have to reside inside an academic department which then works and collaborates with a center/institute. He ended by asking the Task Force members for their input and feedback.

Mrs. Gretchen VanValkenburg:

Noted the importance of a physical space for academic structures. Inquired if the Task Force on the executive level; how have developments been on the Board level? Are they are thinking

about developing structures etc.? Mrs. VanValkenburg also wanted to note that this center/institute should not come across as copying the University of Alabama's. She also messaged in the chat that there could be a benefit in speaking to Lakami Baker, the Lowder Center for Family Business and Entrepreneurship, to assist with the creation of a business plan.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Asked to hear the students' input.

Ms. Ja'Lia Taylor:

Loves the idea of the center/institute, especially excited about the opportunities that would be provided to students.

Ms. Donielle Fagan:

Excited to see what this institute would mean for the graduate student body.

Ms. Elizabeth Devore:

Believes this is a great idea but noted that there needs to be further discussions about feasibility.

Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley:

Agreed with all points made by the students; feels this center/institute would do very well for Auburn University. She noted her excitement about what this would mean for the entire student body.

Dr. Royrickers Cook:

Agreed with the comments thus far. Also noted the need for a continued discussion about the feasibility. Dr. Cook added that there is a local group in Auburn who has been having discussions for the last two years about the possibility of a Civil Rights museum being erected in Auburn; a location on Donahue Avenue is being considered for future activities in Auburn. He mentioned reaching out to Scott Bishop of Sunny Slope.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Asked if General Burgess was satisfied with the responses so far?

General Ronald Burgess:

Noted that the sense of the Task Force is to proceed; he will meet with Dr. Russell, Provost Hardgrave and discuss who within this group would be best suited to be on the subgroup and will provide feedback to the group.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Asked General Burgess if people could volunteer to be part of this project, even just to help in teeing it off.

General Ronald Burgess:

Agrees with Dr. Russell and noted that those interested should let Ms. Kim Brown know.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Noted that she will make final edits to her presentation and send it to Kim Brown for distribution to the members of the Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity.

General Ronald Burgess:

Asked if any other updates needed attention?

Mrs. Gretchen VanValkenburg:

Informed the group that because of the success of the Auburn Unity T-Shirt campaign, Ms. Octavia Spencer has made a large gift to the University. Spencer will also sponsor an event for the student body to watch *Ma*, as well as sponsoring an in-person CDC approved event (brunch) on campus in the coming weeks ahead.

General Ronald Burgess:

Asked if anybody else had any other additions.

Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley:

Noted that she had two points she would like to discuss: the first being that she and her feedback and assessment team has completed a comprehensive research report about Auburn University's peer institutions and the different things/partnerships they have with HBCUs in their different areas. She noted that she can send the report to the Task Force members for review and hopes to start a discussion of how Auburn University can further establish partnerships with HBCUs as well. Went on to ask for the group's feedback.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Said Ms. Huntley's suggestion is a great idea and noted current efforts are going on across the campus involving HBCU collaborations and seeing the report that Ada and her team did would help in being able to pull together a comprehensive inventory of the various collaborations that Auburn currently has. Dr. Clayton mentioned the project that Kinesiology is doing as well as the work that Dr. Cook is doing with Tuskegee.

Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley:

Can forward the report to Ms. Kim Brown and she can further disseminate it to the rest of the group. Ms. Huntley gained a lot of feedback from the SGA president at Tuskegee University and would like to discuss more with the group in the future.

General Ronald Burgess:

Echoed Dr. Clayton's comments and noted how he is aware of the various collaborative projects that are ongoing. He noted that because of Auburn's relationship with the extension service

with Alabama A&M, the University reaches more people in the state of Alabama than they are aware of and thanked Ms. Huntley for teeing that up.

Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley:

Will forward the report to Ms. Kim Brown to share with the rest of the group. The second point she wanted to bring up was that of her executive goal of cultural competency. She and her team have been working with Culture Bump and for student organization groups and will begin the training in the spring. Ms. Huntley and her team will begin four 1.5 hour training sessions over the next four weeks. After that training, SGA hopes to undergo a soft launch (in the spring) which would include 20 students from various organizations. SGA needs assistance with funding for the soft launch and asked the Task Force members to provide ideas for funds.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Asked if this was a question about funding.

Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley:

Responded that it was. They can cover the cost for this year but need assistance for the spring.

Ms. Elizabeth Devore:

Inquired if this has been a discussion with some of the admin in Student Affairs?

Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley:

Noted that SGA has not approached Student Affairs admin yet as she wanted to discuss with the Task Force first as their work is closely aligned with the work SGA does.

Ms. Elizabeth Devore:

Inquired because she had also faced similar experiences when she was on a student board in the past. She inquired about how to get a representative from Student Affairs to be part of the Task Force.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Inquired what the annual amount of funding needed was.

Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley:

Noted that a cohort of 20 individuals from various organizations, would be just over \$4,000. The additional \$2,500 would only be a one-time fee for the pilot program. The total cost would be \$4,000 for the 20 students of the official soft launch.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Responded that she would be happy to further that conversation with her.

Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley:

Thanked the Task Force members for listening and expressed her excitement for the training starting next Monday. Noted that she will be following up with Dr. Clayton.

General Ronald Burgess:

Addressed Ms. Devore and noted how the decision still needs to be made about whether this Task Force will become a committee or remain a task force. He noted that a representative from Student Affairs will be added. Ask for Dr. Clayton's input about the procurement process.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Informed General Burgess that they are in round two of revision on the RFP and the goal is to have that done by the end of this week.

General Ronald Burgess:

Reminded Dr. Clayton to let him know if he was needed during this process. Asked if anybody else had anything else to add?

Ms. Elizabeth Devore:

Asked about the updates in regards to the faculty senate and the polling location?

General Ronald Burgess:

Has sent a note but have not received feedback as of yet. Will be going ahead with the motion and will proceed until instructed otherwise.

Ms. Elizabeth Devore:

Bought up how there have been several conversations about mental health as well as safety concerns because of the elections, and that a college of hers will be having a session about Self Care and ways to support individuals who are disenfranchised during the election season – leading up to the election, election day and the day afterward. Will be sending the Google Hangout information to Ms. Kim Brown to share with the group.

General Ronald Burgess:

Asked if anybody had anything else for the good of the order today?

Ms. Angela Cannon:

Reflected on subcommittee work and how she reached out to the Onboarding Center about some of the work they are doing there. They reached out to her and asked for advice about a Qualtrics survey about the sense of belonging to the Auburn community for new hires since June. Asked if Task Force members could assist in this regard. She noted how the survey responses are needed by EOD tomorrow.

General Ronald Burgess:

Responded that Kim has forwarded the Qualtrics links and informed the group to provide their responses and input about that to Ms. Cannon. Thanked everyone for being here today and added that he will be meeting with Dr. Russell about her presentation and plans to move forward with plans for the center/institute. The next Presidential Task Force meeting will be via zoom, Thursday, October 22 at 3:30 pm.

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