

Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity Minutes 11/12/2020

General Ronald Burgess:

Called the meeting to order by thanking all members for attending and thanked all who were able to attend the meet and greet on Tuesday, November 10 at the Basketball Arena. General Burgess referred back to Coach Pearl's comment about ensuring the correct support mechanisms/resources are in place for students after the elections and during the December break. He went on to add that Dr. Bobby Woodard would be joining today's meeting to provide more information about Coach Pearl's inquiry.

Dr. Bobby Woodard:

Thanked General Burgess for the welcome and added what all he would discuss during his time with the Task Force. Dr. Woodard informed the group that he will be discussing all the available resources and services from Student Affairs. He began discussing how mental health is an important factor of Student Affairs and that the Counseling Center will remain open for in-person and virtual sessions until December 20, 2020, and will reopen January 4, 2021. Dr. Woodard informed the group of all the available services in the counseling center. He went on to add how Student Services also caters to ensure the student body's basic needs are met and this is done through providing food from Auburn Cares. Dr. Woodard ending by providing a way to contact him and opened the floor to questions.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Thanked Dr. Woodard for his time today and informed him about a graduate student's experience with their mental health and engagement with the counseling services. Dr. Russell noted that the graduate student still has counseling sessions and appreciates the support they have received so far. She added that the graduate student did feel like engaging with the counseling services is a need/priority-based experience; it is challenging to obtain an appointment and when it does occur, certain cases/students take priority. Dr. Russell also asked Dr. Woodard about the educational piece in Student Services.

Dr. Bobby Woodard:

Informed Dr. Russell that the need/priority-based scheduling depends on the case of the student at hand. He added that some do receive attention faster because they are at-risk students but that it does not change the level of importance for each case. He went on to add that they are short-staffed but are currently in the hiring process as well.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Thanked Dr. Woodard once more and proceeded to inform the group that she will be pivoting off the call and will rejoin momentarily.

General Ronald Burgess:

Asked Amy Weaver to work with Student Affairs on ensuring information is distributed to the student body about services available and to emphasize the mental health resources. General Burgess informed the Task Force members that resident halls will be kept open during Thanksgiving and December break for those who are unable to travel home.

Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley:

Inquired if the students would be staying in their same dorms or if they would be moved to different dorms?

Dr. Bobby Woodard:

Noted that the students will stay in their own dorms during Thanksgiving break and will be moved to another dorm once the University closes on December 20.

Mr. Kevin Coonrod:

Added how the Office of International Programs used to have programs where host families would welcome international students during the holidays and provide them with meals but were unsure how or if that program would still occur during the pandemic.

Dr. Bobby Woodard:

Noted how that program is no longer running but also added how the University was very intentional about making it known that was not a program run through Auburn.

General Ronald Burgess:

Updated the Task Force members about last week's meeting between AU Black Alumni and some of the Leadership Task Force members. He noted how the Black Alumni enjoyed speaking with them but asked for the next meeting to include some of the student representatives. General Burgess then referred back to Ms. Angela Cannon's point about the graffiti that was on the sidewalk after the election results were announced. He noted that after speaking to campus security, it was identified that the graffiti was added during the same time Toomer's Corner was rolled and that there was no way to identify who did it.

Mr. Kevin Coonrod:

Interjected by noting that even though there was no way of telling who was responsible, the intent behind it was clear.

General Ronald Burgess:

Added that this matter was taken care of by the City of Auburn and not the University. General Burgess went on to inform the group that Dr. Clayton would be sharing a presentation and welcomed her to the floor.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Shared her screen to showcase a slide deck about Presidential Task Force DEI Considerations. The presentation provided some examples of the considerations and these include: establishing

Auburn Affinity Groups; engaging a subcommittee in Spring 2021 to begin the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award institutional assessment process; reviewing and assessing DEI liaison roles (director, assistant dean, faculty representative) to standardize and incentivize roles across academic units; and continuing use of existing or updating an Auburn institutional diversity statement throughout campus.

General Ronald Burgess:

Asked about the process of having the institutional diversity statement updated and it being placed on the University website homepage.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Responded by notifying the General that HR has already been in contact with her. They support the development of an institutional diversity statement but do not want the responsibility of generating the language; that task will fall on the Presidential Task Force and OID.

General Ronald Burgess:

Noted how the conversation about the institutional diversity statement will be addressed in a later meeting; General Burgess added that the Presidential Task Force will collectively work on generating the language and progress through various channels.

Dr. Joffery Gaymon:

Asked if every college or school has a DEI representative/role?

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Informed her that they do.

Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley:

Expressed her excitement about Dr. Clayton's third point on the plan to review and assess DEI standardize and incentivize roles across academic units.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Provided the group with updates about the upcoming CDO Cabinet Meeting.

General Ronald Burgess:

Informed the group that he will be sharing a few items that need their review. General Burgess noted that the College of Liberal Arts plans to recognize a heritage site at Pebble Hill and were concerned about the potential duality of a diversity issue that could be faced due to the nature of the area – African American Slaves and the land it was taken from (Indigenous Indians). He noted how CLA would like to highlight two plaques and required the Presidential Task Force to assess the language of the two plaques that will be included.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Suggested that the group takes an evidence-based approach in the reviewing of these two plaques. Dr. Clayton noted the importance of including some history professors and/or

individuals with specific expertise in the areas of the cultures that the historical site would be at.

General Ronald Burgess:

Agreed and noted that some of the professors in the College of Liberal Arts were just that. Also noted how Dr. Gaymon inquired if President Jay Gogue could release another statement/message about the updates from the Task Force before the end of the semester. Noted that some of the students had asked for some time during today's meeting to engage with the group.

Ms. Mya Strickland:

Noted the updates of the renaming of some of the buildings on campus like Wallace Hall, etc., and how upsetting that information is due to the possible fines that could be posed with changing the names of said buildings. Ms. Strickland added that this information seemed to have been masked by the announcement of naming the student center after Georgia Supreme Court Chief Justice, Harold D. Melton. She went on to add that there was some frustration in inviting certain Black Student Organizations to this event and inquired about how the Presidential Task Force Members could go about changing some of these policies. Ms. Strickland continued on about meeting some of the members of the Task Force for the first time during the in-person meeting on November 10 and how during that time, there was a 400-person Faculty Senate Call where she was informed was met with a mix of reactions/reviews. She added that having some of the leadership attend the in-person meeting rather than being on that call seemed performative and that she was unsure if she would be willing to support that. Ms. Strickland motioned to others to add their comments.

Ms. Elizabeth Devore:

Began by noting how she believes the members of the Task Force have the best of intentions but the willingness for some individuals does not match others and that there is still at times some levels of disrespect. Ms. Devore went on to note General Burgess' comment about the meeting between AU Black Alumni and some of the Leadership Task Force members and was hurt and embarrassed that students were not included in that meeting. She went on to add that she had met with several alumni constituents about that meeting and shared her frustration about the level of commitment and respect that fluctuates within the Task Force and that the lack of communication. She went on to note some of the personal challenges she has been facing this year and also how she experienced occasions of people not being empathetic to all that has been going on this year. Ms. Devore asked to step down from her position on the Presidential Task Force. She added that she will put a name forward to take her place as the Graduate Student Union representative.

Ms. Donielle Fagan:

Began by noting that she was speaking for herself and herself only. She noted all of the meetings and efforts she is part of noted the collection of experiences she's had while being a member of the Presidential Task Force; she began with how she had to fight to even be part of the group. She informed the group how she has been meeting with a host of constituents since

July and has kept a clear record of notes and concerns that have been voiced. She went on to note all the organizations she has met with including the DIU Working group within Student Affairs, The Association of Counseling Psychologists, APA, BGPSA, BSU, and Auburn for Change, The Auburn Justice Coalition, Black faculty and Black alum. Ms. Fagan also noted her diligence in seeking mentors and stated their respective roles. She went on to note how her concerns and that of numerous amount of her constituents have continued to be ignored during her time within the Task Force. Ms. Fagan informed the group that she met with her constituents and Black Alum last week and that was how she was notified about their meeting with the Task Force members; and expressed how she was not a part of nor made aware of the meeting. She went on to add that she has been meeting with said Black Alumni since July. Ms. Fagan added that the last few weeks made it evident in the lack of communication that is being shared within the Task Force. She noted that she has met with a number of Black faculty from the College of Education and COSAM who expressed they were not pleased with the suggestions the subcommittee presented on the recruitment and retention of Black Faculty. She added that she will be resigning from her position in the Task Force and so would Ms. Ja'lia Taylor, who noted would be late to the meeting.

Mr. Kevin Coonrod:

Thanked the students for sharing their opinions and was sorry to hear how they are feeling. He noted how they brought up communication and transparency and inquired which lack thereof are they referring to? Mr. Coonrod asked what things that could help improve the Task Force.

Ms. Donielle Fagan:

Noted that she has been meeting with Black Alums since July and had been going over their list of demands. She added how offended she was when it was mentioned at the end of September how Task Force members were having outside meetings. She was under the impression she was engaging in diligent work. She noted how she would have appreciated being notified about the meeting that occurred with the Black Alumni. Ms. Fagan continued about how General Burges only invited Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley to be part of the next meeting and how she was aware that that was not the Black Alumni's request. She went on to add how there is a list of Black faculty who are unhappy with the list of recommendations that have been proposed; she reminded the group that she was a part of that subcommittee and was shocked to hear about how that feedback was not shared with the Task Force.

Ms. Elizabeth Devore:

Referred back to how the last time things were presented in an upfront manner was when Dr. Russell shared her points of moving a meeting and presenting the recommendations for Black faculty recruitment and retention to be shared with the Black Caucus before moving forward with the deans. Ms. Devore referred back to the need to build trust within the Task Force. Added that she is not a quitter and that it took much thought to resign from her position.

Mr. Kevin Coonrod:

Assured Ms. Devore and the rest of the students that this is not viewed as an action of quitting as they are all retaining the same goals that they had in coming into this Task Force.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Inquired about where the feedback from the Black Faculty meeting was communicated from, where it is now and how was it missed within the Presidential Task Force?

Ms. Donielle Fagan:

Responded saying that the feedback was provided in a meeting she attended with Black faculty after Dr. Vini Nathan's presentation. Ms. Fagan added how the feedback/suggestions were presented during the time when Dr. Nathan did her presentation and that nobody in the Task Force was informed that there even was any feedback. She noted how the final straw for her was the updates about the last week's meeting with the Black alumni and how Ms. Devore inquired why the Task Force meeting was being canceled that day (November, 5) and was not made aware of said meeting.

Ms. Elizabeth Devore:

Interjected that when she emailed General Burgess about the Task Force meeting that day, she was unaware the meeting with Black alumni was occurring at the same time.

General Ronald Burgess:

Stated that he wanted to address all the students' comments and questions and started with Ms. Strickland's points. He noted that with regards to the General Faculty meeting, the in-person Task Force meeting was scheduled on that day because it was the first available day on the calendar and after that date was established, they had two occurrences arise from the faculty calendar. The first being a recognition event of endowed chairs on the faculty side and the other was the General Faculty meeting as the faculty had been concerned about the modalities of learning – which was decided before the meeting. It was decided that the in-person meeting went on as scheduled and that all faculty who had to attend the other two meetings would do so. He went on to comment about the meeting with Black Alumni.

General Burgess addressed Ms. Fagan and informed her that his first meeting with them was in August with Dr. Gaymon and Provost Hardgrave. He went on to add that when they sent an email to Dr. Gogue, he specifically responded, not knowing what they were looking for, with proposed dates to meet and said, “representatives of the Task Force would be happy to meet with them.” General Burgess added that of the four individuals in that group, only one of them was part of the original group he met with in August. He added that when they asked for students, he noted that he ensured what the expectations of that meeting were but would be sure to include them for the next one. He reiterated that when he specifically mentioned Ada Ruth, he was including all the student representatives in the Task Force and added that his choice on which Task Force members attended was based on the agenda that Black alumni provided.

Ms. Donielle Fagan:

Asked about the list of demands that were presented from Black Alumni in July and if it was not clear enough.

General Ronald Burgess:

Reiterated how he was unaware of what the Black Alumni wanted to discuss for this last meeting until the agenda was presented as leadership was under the impression they had already responded to those demands provided in July. General Burgess addressed Ms. Devore about her email and why he responded the way he did and acknowledged that response could have been clearer but reiterated that it was an honest response.

Ms. Elizabeth Devore:

Responded saying that as that meeting with Black Alumni was treated as meeting with members of the Task Force, it should have been something that was shared. Ms. Devore added that in their meeting with Black Alumni, it was shared with the students of the list of demands they had as well as the fact that they received a letter from President Gogue stating that the entire Task Force had been told about the demands. She continued that she knew nothing of that until now.

General Ronald Burgess:

Added that he will not respond to that at this time because he would have to go back to the letter and check the language. General Burgess reiterated that they were not trying to keep anything from the Task Force members.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Asked to comment when General Burgess was finished. Noted that she resents how it was implied that the faculty that attended the Task Force in-person meeting instead of the General Faculty Meeting did not think it was as important as she has been at the previous meetings too. Dr. Russell noted how she was actually still able to attend that meeting and did not appreciate how it was insinuated that the faculty and/or administrators lacked commitment. Dr. Russell specifically addresses Ms. Fagan in wanting to unpack more of what she said about Black faculty having talked to her. She added that she has not been approached by Black faculty with issues in regards to recommendations and was very curious because there have been multiple meetings with the ABC where they could have shared their concerns with task force members. Dr. Russell asked for the specific number of Black faculty that Ms. Fagan had met with as it would put things into context because this then becomes a point of addressing if there is a reason Black faculty feel they cannot express themselves to her as a representative on the task force or during the Black Caucus meetings.

Ms. Elizabeth Devore:

Wanted to add a note about the General Faculty meeting that Ms. Strickland mentioned; that had more to do with certain representatives asking about administrators that were not there. Ms. Devore wanted to reiterate that was nothing directed at Dr. Russell.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Commented that it doesn't matter – and then was interjected...

Ms. Mya Strickland:

Noted how if Dr. Russell felt that it was so important, she should have been calling General Burgess.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Remarked that she did not think it was appropriate to call out someone else and what they should be doing.

Ms. Mya Strickland:

Referred back to Dr. Russell's request on the information from Ms. Fagan regarding Black faculty who had issues with the recommendations.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Reiterated that she was able to attend that General Faculty meeting.

Mr. Kevin Coonrod:

Added how people are speaking over each other and it was getting difficult to understand what was being said.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Asked the group to "share the mic" (respectfully allow one another to speak without interruption).

Dr. Melody Russell:

Stated that she had asked Ms. Fagan to respond and provide more depth to the Black faculty she was referring to. Added that from a qualitative perspective, more information needs to be provided as to why the job is not being done. It is important to state that we are all on the same team and being pitted against each other is counterproductive to the goals being made. She added that she wants to understand directly from the (the Black Faculty) about their concerns and have that shared with the entire Task Force.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Asked if there was time to hear from Ms. Fagan, then Ms. Strickland, and finally Ms. Huntley as she posed a question in the group chat.

General Ronald Burgess:

Addressed Ms. Strickland about his awareness of the concern during the General Faculty meeting as to why some faculty members were not intending. He went back to the concern about the lack of information provided to the Task Force about the meeting with Black Alumni. General Burgess ended by stating that he was unaware of the Black faculty's input back into the recommendations as this is the first he is hearing of this.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Commented that she had not heard about this Black faculty input either.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Agreed with General Burgess and noted that she sincerely wants the Task Force to get to the root of it all.

Ms. Donielle Fagan:

Noted that she has met with 6-7 Black faculty who are not tenured, and that is a part of the conversation. Ms. Fagan added that she will not be sharing their names.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Added she does not want their names but inquired if they have attended the Black Faculty meetings and Auburn Black Caucus when they have open forums as these are the platforms where they are trying to provide a shared, empowering space. Dr. Russell went on that she understands what Ms. Fagan is saying and where she comes from but we need to get to a point where we all have a general understanding of civility about it all and that it is not helpful if that information from the Black faculty is only shared with a certain group of people. She added she wants to understand their lived experiences and to ask what is not being met.

Ms. Ja'lia Taylor:

Noted that some of the Black Faculty and staff did not know about the Black Caucus and she informed them about it and inquired how they can be kept informed of these meetings?

Mr. Kevin Coonrod:

Noted that Ms. Huntley has been waiting to say something as well.

Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley:

Thanked Mr. Coonrod and began by respectfully and gracefully stated how she did not think her team would function if they discussed over one another and did not allow each to fully articulate their thoughts and she encouraged that the group continues with the rest of the meeting in that way. Ms. Huntley then noted back to Ms. Strickland's comment about the Milton Celebration and addressed that she was initially approached about what student groups should have been reached out to attend the ceremony. She added that from her understanding of having the first building on campus dedicated to an African American, she thought it would be impactful that the Black student organization got to share at that moment. Ms. Huntley apologized if that was a lapse in judgment on her end but did reiterate that was a note that came directly from herself, understood where Ms. Strickland was coming from in the perception of what that might have looked like.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Noted how the matter of inclusion has been a theme throughout all that was shared today and how it was certain that many people did not feel like they are included, not being as valued and that the Task Force is fractured at this time. Dr. Clayton added that she understands and

respects where the students are coming from in terms of their decisions and she hopes there is an opportunity to consider what was shared and how to move forward.

Ms. Elizabeth Devore:

Wanted to add to her comment about the trust aspect that she has bought up before. She addressed Dr. Russell and noted that is a large factor of what she asked. She went on to say she does not have the answers at this time.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Agreed and thanked the students for sharing their thoughts and feelings.

Ms. Donielle Fagan:

Added that there are Black faculty who have been providing her with feedback but are afraid to share the information publically due to the fear of having their jobs on the line. She continued that she is here to diligently be that ally to them and be their voice. She reiterated that she meant no disrespect in any form.

Ms. Mya Strickland:

Mentioned how if it was not obvious before, she would also be resigning from her role as an undergraduate student representative on the Task Force. She added that as she still has some time before graduating, she will continue to apply the pressure and will keep tabs on everything that is said and done through the Task Force.

Ms. Ja'lia Taylor:

Thanked the entire Task Force for providing her with the opportunity to serve as a graduate student representative. Ms. Taylor also brought to the attention a new mentoring and tutoring initiative at Auburn called *Young Professionals in Training*. She added that it is a pipeline program that provides back to the kids in the Lee County area and invited any of the Task Force members to join.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

inquired if the students who have stepped away would be willing to have a discussion outside of the Presidential Task Force?

Dr. Melody Russell:

Second Dr. Clayton's inquiry and noted the importance of identifying how to support the Black faculty and staff.

General Ronald Burgess:

Echoed Dr. Clayton's inquiry and stated that he would like to meet with the students offline to further discuss things. The next Presidential Task Force meeting will be via zoom, Tuesday, November 17, 2020, at 3:30 pm. There will be no meeting on November 19 due to Board of Trustee workshop. General Burgess adds that the COCID-19 cases are steadily rising and urged everyone to stay safe.

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 Benson Clayton