

Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity Minutes 11/17/2020

General Ronald Burgess:

Began today's meeting by starting with a couple of different things. After working through the agenda, General Burgess referred back to the meeting last Thursday and wanted to see if anybody had any comments or thoughts to share.

Mr. Kevin Coonrod:

Noted how he was confused during most of the things that were being said the other day. He continued that he wasn't surprised by the emotion because the students have been expressing them from the first day. Mr. Coonrod added that his main concern is going forward and inquired if negative feelings like that were felt by the Task Force members that are remaining.

Ms. Lastella Paradise:

Noted how she saw and felt the pain that was expressed by the students who resigned from the Task Force last week. She added that she too was disappointed in how things turned out but also inquired how they had access to so much information? Ms. Paradise continued to note that this was genuine concern speaking from the point of staff representatives. Advised that the students made valid points about the communication to be better and added that this Thanksgiving break needs to be used by all remaining Task Force members as a time to reflect on the work that has been done and that still needs to be completed. Ms. Paradise ended by noting how she hopes the group can move forward from this point in a productive and enriching manner.

General Ronald Burgess:

Thanked Ms. Paradise and asked if there were any other comments.

Dr. Oladiran Fasina:

Mentioned how he was not surprised by these students' reactions and that it is what he expects for students, and believes the Task Force applauds them for continuing to push the group as they do. Dr. Fasina added that he reached out to the four students after the meeting and asked to meet with them; that meeting will occur sometime next week. He also noted how as much as he understands their frustrations, respect is a key factor as well and that they do not always understand what faculty and staff deal with. Dr. Fasina concluded by stating that he does not feel comfortable with moving on with the Task Force without student representation and would like for the group to consider drawing those four individuals back.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Commented that she takes a different stance on Dr. Fasina's points but what he said definitely resonates with her. Dr. Russell added that there were several challenges; she noted how there appeared to be a recurring theme where it almost seemed to her like from the very beginning, the students had some issues or challenges with the Task Force. She went on to note how she

tried to view it from both sides. The first where she understood they may have not felt welcome and on the other side, she did not see them as being very receptive either. Dr. Russell went on to add that never got the sense that they were very open to many of the things that the Task Force did and that was ok because they continuously expressed themselves. She added to her point that there was a break in trust of the Task Force when it was established that they continued to talk about faculty concerns and recommendations of faculty and that they were ultimately representing faculty and not the student body anymore. Dr. Russell concluded that because the trust has been broken, she is unsure how productive the Task Force would be if they returned to the group.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Wanted to add her point of reflection. Dr. Clayton had a call with SEC CDOs about aspects of generational diversity and the expectations about the pace of change. There is a desire for diversity related change to happen sooner. She added that there will always be a debate/conversation around the pace of change when it comes to diversity equity and inclusion work. She reminded the group to be mindful of the generational differences that exist because these differences represent diversity as well. She views herself as a student of this work as well as a practitioner. Dr. Clayton noted that she is trying to understand what she is experiencing that there's something linked to the expectations of the students in this defining moment, that we are not responding to in the way they expect. She is continuing to reflect on that.

Dr. Joffery Gaymon:

Began by stating how she fundamentally struggles with seeing the students in pain and really hated to see them leave but did want to point out the fact that she thinks that I felt like there was a lack of trust from the beginning and that of trust intentions, there is a trust of just a genuine sense of sincerity. Dr. Gaymon also mentioned how she has been working and meeting with BSU's Cabinet monthly and that the next meeting she was attending would be Monday. She added how they discuss Presidential Task Force updates and how the students also continuously provide her with good feedback about retention and some things that the Task Force could look into.

Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley:

Referred back to Dr. Clayton's point about the generational gap and reminded the entire Task Force that there were still students on the Task Force who are committed to serving and contributing as students to this body. She then referenced back to the meeting Black Alumni and some of the leadership in the Task Force and noted that she understood the frustration of the students from the last meeting. Ms. Huntley added that the communication within the Task Force does need to improve and that the entire group needs to be made aware of the time a meeting of that nature occurs. She continued to add that she was taken aback by the reactions last week but was only speaking on her behalf. Ms. Huntley reminded the group that she is excited to continue to serve but was very disheartened by everything that happened last week.

Dr. Oladiran Fasina:

Reminded the group of the reason they were here: to learn and mentor the students. Dr. Fasina

suggested that the Task Force reach out to the four students who left and continue mentoring them.

Ms. Lastella Paradise:

Wanted to provide clarity on her earlier comment and referred back to the importance of civility through our engagements with one another throughout the engagement in the Task Force.

General Ronald Burgess:

Thanked Ms. Paradise for her input. Asked for Ms. Madison Birckhead to provide her thoughts on everything and her reaction to everything so far.

Ms. Madison Birckhead:

Noted that she was not on the call last week Thursday but was filled in about all that transpired. She added that as an undergraduate student, she understood where they (the students who expressed themselves last week) came from and could relate to their frustration. She also added that she was aware of the fact that she was speaking from a place of privilege because she has been involved with a lot of the behind the scenes actions since being involved in various organizations. Ms. Birckhead added that their point on needed transparency was true and that needs to be improved within the Task Force.

General Ronald Burgess:

Thanked Ms. Birckhead for her feedback and asked Dr. Clayton to lead the rest of the meeting as he had to pivot off. General Burgess echoed Ms. Paradise's point and noted how we are not perfect and a lot of work still needed to be done. He added that as much as he resonated and respected the students, he also understood Dr. Russell's point and informed the group of the concern of the fact that information was being shared outside the Presidential Task Force. General Burgess reiterated that the student voices are important and that he wanted to ensure student representatives continued to be in the group. He concluded by stating that he is trying to be as inclusive as possible and appreciates all the hard work the group is doing.

Dr. Melody Russell:

Inquired if the students really wanted to come back because it seemed like they do not. She added that she believes in holding people accountable for their accusations, opinions, and actions and that the Task Force should respect their decision of wanting to leave the group.

General Ronald Burgess:

Agreed with Dr. Russell's point that the group should respect the students' decision to leave the Task Force. He also informed the group that he was notified that an individual may have recorded last week's meeting and could release it online.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Reminded the group that they have generated several recommendations that could be beneficial in implementing. Dr. Clayton added that many of these recommendations came from

Dr. Nathan and Mrs. VanValkenburg's subcommittee. She suggested moving forward with going into an implementation stage for these recommendations – this could vary between 6, 8, 12 week periods depending on the recommendation. Dr. Clayton noted that it would be a collaborative effort and the implementation of the recommendations will also increase the confidence in the Presidential Task Force as a whole.

Ms. Ada Ruth Huntley:

Interjected that she has to pivot off the meeting shortly but wanted to note that she supports the notion to move into an implementation stage and that this would also gain the support of the alumni more.

Dr. Joffery Gaymon:

Noted how it would be important to have a similar document to Dr. Clayton's displaying the various recommendations and how they will be implemented. She also added that some of the students who left the Task Force reached out about still wanting to assist her with her subcommittee work.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Added how the Task Force could gain some traction by accomplishing a diversity statement, and that she has already been in contact with HR representatives.

Ms. Lastella Paradise:

Added that she appreciates Dr. Clayton bringing up the need to move into an implementation stage; noted that it would be beneficial to include long-term and short-term goals. Ms. Paradise also inquired about the updates from the staff side of this.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Expressed that she views this part as two buckets: one is the implementation phase for subcommittees who've already made recommendations – which are posted up on the Task Force website. The other is these two other subcommittees based on the recommendations.

Dr. Joffery Gaymon:

Added how recruitment was easy because that is her area but retention was more challenging because that information is housed in HR, so we would need to reach out to them. Dr. Gaymon also inquired about the timeline and how the implementation plan would also help in the accountability part of it all.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Provided a brief update about the Education and Training Subcommittee recommendations; there is an RFP process underway for EVERFI and that should be completed by the end of the week.

Dr. Oladiran Fasina:

Inquired what is the institutional buy-in and general support for these recommendations? Dr.

Fasina asked who would be providing for these recommendations.

Mrs. Gretchen VanValkenburg:

Added that from a communications standpoint, their initial recommendation list is much longer than what is displayed on the Task Force website; the recommendations that are currently displayed are those that are hoping to be addressed first. Mrs. VanValkenburg informed there was institutional buy-in before any of the recommendations were posted to the website; she met with HR to ensure the available resources at the moment.

Dr. Oladiran Fasina:

Thanked Mrs. VanValkenburg for her update and noted that this was important information for the group to know. Referenced back to the students' point of communicating things across channels.

Ms. Angela Cannon:

Asked how often the information on the Task Force website is updated, communicated to the rest of the University, and about the website analytics.

Mrs. Gretchen VanValkenburg:

Mentioned the need to have somebody specifically designated for the website updates.

Mrs. Kim Brown:

Noted that updating the Task Force website could be done on a faster basis and agreed with Mrs. VanValkenburg's point on needing somebody specifically ensuring the website is kept up to date.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Reminded the group to email General Burgess and Ms. Brown about their thoughts about moving forward with the implementation plan. The remaining Task Force meetings for the year will be based around the response the General receives; once the recommendations occur, the implementations can work.

Mr. Kevin Coonrod:

Added that more opportunities will arise when the Center/Institute comes up. He also reminded the group that they do not solely focus on the voices of the students who have left the Task Force but should highlight and consider the ones who remain.

Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton:

Reminded the Task Force of the importance of the work that is being done in this group. The recommendations generated within the Task Force are impacting DEI action among groups across campus. Dr. Clayton went on to mention how the work of the Task Force and focus on race and other marginalized groups has increased visibility on other issues, like LGBTQ matters and gender equity and that because of such, OI is currently searching for the Women's Initiatives and Gender Equity vacant role. She noted how she will ensure Ms. Brown receives a

proposed implementation phase bullet points to distribute to the rest of the Task Force.

Ms. Kim Brown:

Noted how General Burgess instructed her to inform the group that the next Presidential Task Force meeting will be via zoom, Tuesday, December 1, 2020, at 3:30 pm.

Presidential Task Force for Opportunity & Equity Members:

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Angela Cannon

Bill Hardgrave

Bruce Pearl

C. Kevin Coonrod

Gretchen VanValkenburg

Jaime Hammer

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Katrina Akande

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