

Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity Minutes 12/01/2020

Task Force Member:

Welcomed the group back from the Thanksgiving break.

Task Force Member:

Inquired what the plans were for the fall commencement ceremony concerning Dr. Harold A. Franklin.

Task Force Member:

Mentioned that this ceremony would operate differently due to COVID-19 restrictions. Added that AU will commemorate Dr. Franklin's achievements but will provide more details closer to the time. General Burgess welcomed all new attendees to the Task Force and prompted a round of introductions from everybody. He proceeded to provide updates about the COVID-19 cases in Auburn before going over the agenda, which included the two new subcommittees (Equity & Justice Center/Institute and Student Retention).

Task Force Member:

Thanked General Burgess for all the work he has done and noted the origins of the idea for the center/institute was from one of the earlier subcommittees.

Task Force Member:

Added that the center/institute idea was introduced in the Recruitment and Retention subcommittee. Mr. Coonrod noted the importance of the center/institute in assisting with the creation of degree confirming majors in African American Studies and Gender Equity Studies as both are offered as degree minors but not majors.

Task Force Member:

Provided a synopsis of her presentation about the center/institute to the new members of the Task Force. Dr. Russell informed them what some of the goals were, how it is still to be decided if it will be a center or an institute, and that it would be a strong academic hub that particularly focuses on top-tier African American research. She added that it is vital for the center/institute to be inclusive while focusing on the history and traditions of African Americans. Dr. Russell mentioned institutes from other institutions as examples and how it would be important that this center/institute be uniquely Auburn centric. She added the importance of this development would have a heavy student involvement and was excited about all the new students on the call.

Task Force Member:

Agreed and noted they summarized everything well.

Task Force Member:

Mentioned the importance of identifying if it will be a center or an institute and suggested it would be better to select an institute, as it would be easier to collaborate with various schools/colleges.

Task Force Member:

Agreed with them and asked Dr. X to provide the Task Force with updates on their work.

Task Force Member:

Transferred to Auburn in 2018 and has been collaborating on the Africana Studies minor since; they are pushing to have this as a major course offered. Dr. X added that he and his colleagues have drafted what this African American Studies major would look like and that it would be spearheaded by the College of Liberal Arts. He added how Auburn University does not have an Africana major and how it is a negative look for the university but that faculty involvement has been key and is increasing.

Task Force Member:

Commended Dr. X for the work she has done so far. She added that because the efforts with the Women's Gender Studies Major did not receive as much buy-in from the students, it aided in the research efforts for the Africana Studies – which in turn has had a lot of traction and interest from the students. Dr. X also added that the library has increased the number of resources about Africana Studies to aid in the research element (for faculty and students) and mentioned that it is vital to determine if the Equity & Justice initiative will be a center or an institute.

Task Force Member:

Concurred with Dr. X and added that if any of the new members had additional comments or thoughts, they should feel free to do so.

Task Force Member:

Echoed the importance of identifying whether it will be a center or institute. Added it is also important to identify other key factors: mission, vision, strategic priority, etc.

Task Force Member:

Shared what the difference is between a center and an institute: a center is only housed/utilized by one department or college while an institute will have several collaborators and is shared by multiple departments or colleges.

Task Force Member:

Noted the importance of what this center/instate would look like and mean for Auburn. Also added how excited she was when she heard Dr. X was collaborating with these efforts.

Task Force Member:

Asked Mr. X to provide his thoughts coming from the student perspective.

Task Force Member:

Noted that a lot of African American students do not feel like they have a place at Auburn. He added how this center/institute will be very important for the African American student experience at Auburn. Mr. X added that it would have a positive impact on the Auburn community as a whole.

Task Force Member:

Added that there are important impact indicators, which show what track Auburn is on. These include having a degree-conferring program in African American Studies, as it would be a positive nod for students and faculty alike who are interested in attending Auburn.

Task Force Member:

Asked about the multicultural center and where on campus it was housed. Dr. X added that he wanted to ensure that the new Equity & Justice Center/Institute would not be duplicating the multicultural center.

Task Force Member:

Informed Dr. X that the Cross Cultural Center for Excellence (CCCE) was housed in the Student Center and that CCCE was a result of the 2016 Climate Assessment. The focus of the CCCE is on multicultural students, learning, engagement, development, and enhancing the multicultural student experience.

Task Force Member:

Added that he wanted to ensure the Task Force was not being redundant with this new center/institute and he could see that was not the case. Dr. X added how excited he is about the initiative and that it is something well needed at Auburn.

Task Force Member:

Mentioned that there seem to be some definitional scope issues that need to be identified; these include figuring out if the research itself would be of a more focused approach or a broad-based approach.

Task Force Member:

Noted that the center/institute will have more of a research and academic approach while intentionally being African American centric and make it unique to Auburn, AL.

Task Force Member:

Provided examples of institutions that have centers/institutes (Yale, South Carolina, Tuskegee). Mr. X added how the physical location of Auburn University is beneficial for this initiative and would be a gateway for researchers.

Task Force Member:

Asked if this center/institute would solely focus on the research of African America Studies or other topics that could make a difference. She added that there is currently a program that focuses on health equity research and health issues among African Americans. Added that there are several individuals to potentially bring in. Also asked what the exact vision was as this needs to be discussed.

Task Force Member:

Excited about the conversation that has been underway, is looking for the subcommittee to bring form and shape to what the Equity & Justice Center/Institute would be, and reminded the group that it would be focused on the research that would occur. X added that he hates to hear how African American students feel like they do not have a place/space at Auburn, wants to change that narrative and experience. He went on to thank everybody for all the work they and continue to do at Auburn. X added that he will regroup with Dr. Dr. Russell to begin working on setting up schedules, in-progress reports, etc., to aid in the growth of this subcommittee. He added that the second subcommittee (focusing on Student Retention) is still being formed and that Dr. Gaymon will spearhead that.

Task Force Member:

Informed the Task Force that Mr. X came highly recommended.

Task Force Member:

Agreed with all of the points made about defining the focus and added that if the center/institute decides to move towards a research-based focus, there are opportunities for student engagement in that research.

Task Force Member:

Inquired what the opinions were about having a confidentiality agreement for all the Task Force members to sign. Reflected a phrase that Dr. X used to always mention at the beginning of the meetings, "what is said here stays here, what is learned here, leaves here." He added the importance of having civil discourse with one another and noted that due to some experiences in the past, the idea of a confidentiality agreement was brought up.

Task Force Member:

Noted a comment in the chat about the ability to engage the tension between a call for confidentiality and confidentiality agreements, and the call from students, faculty, and alumni for greater transparency from the Task Force.

Task Force Member:

Noted that it is important to have a voice and provide some context as to why this confidentiality agreement arose. Dr. X noted that voice is what matters and she raised the point about the confidentiality agreement.

Task Force Member:

Added that it is important that the Task Force members are clear about the transparency of the information that comes out of the group. Added there should be an executive summary of each meeting but questioned how far it should go when including each individual's comments.

Task Force Member:

Noted that he would prefer if the group discussed what would happen if the confidentiality agreement were not abided by and what would (if any) the consequences be.

Task Force Member:

Added that people outside of the Task Force are looking for clarity of what are some of the big picture goals the group is trying to achieve as well as finding out summaries of the meetings, how the group progresses after every meeting and ultimate transparency.

Task Force Member:

Mentioned how Amy Weaver (from OCM) was in the group and she could be the designated person to deliver the meeting minutes/summaries. He noted that he was worried about having names attached to the comments, as he feared it would result in individuals being reluctant to speak for fear of their words being published.

Task Force Member:

Added that the student body would appreciate more frequent updates of what the Task Force was doing during each meeting. He mentioned the students would like an executive summary/breakdown of that.

Task Force Member:

Read another comment in the chat about not needing to add names to comments from the meetings as it can chill people's willingness to speak; if a confidentiality agreement were to be drafted, it would need to be carefully tailored to the idea of sharing substance/themes but not specific attributions or names with comments.

Task Force Member:

Added to Mr. X's comment on the need to update the students more regularly and consistently. Noted the need for awareness of the extent of the conversation of the confidentiality agreement as it is almost hindering the work being done. Referenced back to a question placed in the group chat about the possibility of having an executive summary of the Task Force Meetings being added to *This Week at AU* and *Auburn News*.

Task Force Member:

Agreed with Ms. X and added that the group needs to decide on the confidential agreement and that he would sign it if it stipulated the names would not be attached to what is being said. He added that the executive summary should still be posted but without people's names attached to it.

Task Force Member:

Also agreed with Ms. Birckhead's point about the Task Force deciding on what to do about the confidentiality agreement as the conversation would become distracting to the work trying to be done. Dr. X added that in terms of discussing the work with individuals outside of the Task Force, there needs to be a certain level of respect about how things are talked about the things that occur.

Task Force Member:

Suggested that the Task Force invests in an individual from the Office of Communications and Marketing (OCM) to officially be in charge of taking notes, posting, and keeping the Presidential Task Force website updated. Dr. X added that having an individual from OCM responsible for this role would help with the uniformity of the information distributed.

Task Force Member:

Began by noting that he was neither for nor against the idea of a confidentiality agreement but wanted to highlight how the conversation was focused on how to protect people from shame or blame and not how to protect people from violence. Wanted to ensure that the confidentiality agreement would not insulate any potential discursive violence imposed on any person and wanted to ensure that there was space for some tension to be discussed.

Task Force Member:

Agreed with Dr. X and added that she bought up the confidentiality agreement because she ultimately wanted to ensure that Task Force members do not gossip about what is discussed during the meetings. Dr. X added that she wanted everybody to feel like this is an empowering space where the group is free to share the information, as long as it is done so in a truthful way.

Task Force Member:

Mentioned that another option besides a confidentiality agreement was having group rules the Task Force would abide by. Dr. X added she was neither for nor against both, but merely wanted to provide another option.

Task Force Member:

Referred back to his point about the importance of having consequences for going against the confidential agreement or ground rules. He liked Dr. X's suggestion of the ground rules and noted that signing an agreement could make it appear as if the Task Force is doing things it does not want people outside of the group to know of.

Task Force Member:

Respectfully disagreed with Dr. X but noted that she is for the success of the Task Force and would go with whatever the majority decided on.

Task Force Member:

Informed the group that there are three options on the table: the confidentiality agreement, ground rules or to do nothing. He asked everyone to email and let him know which option they would like to go with. X addressed Dr. X and thanked him for what he said, as it was a learning moment for him. He also wanted it to be known that he would not tolerate that behavior at all and reminded the group of his goal for all to be able to engage in civil discourse.

Task Force Member:

Added that the ground rules can be shared with the group, co-created, and co-reviewed in a collaborative effort with the entire Task Force.

Task Force Member:

Noted that she could see the Equity & Justice Center/Institute subcommittee going a lot further than just a feasibility study and she was grateful to be working with all involved.

Task Force Member:

Provided the group with updates about the implementation plan; noted that a lot of work was already underway and would be moving forward next semester. With regards to the CLA plaques being put at Pebble Hill, Dr. X had been in contact with the Creek Indians.

Task Force Member:

Informed X that the contact from the Porch Band of Creek Indians would be referring to their tribal elders to ensure the language on the plaques was correct and factual and that they would provide additional insights.

Task Force Member:

Inquired about the update on the African American plaques.

Task Force Member:

Noted that one of the recommendations was to reach out to the decedents of those families to help articulate what language should be added to those plaques.

Task Force Member:

Added that both plaques needed additional information to be more factual as some of the languages seemed like it was based off perspective.

Task Force Member:

Thanked everybody for being in attendance and reminded the group to reach out to him about their choice of the confidentiality agreement. He added that they would be discussing Dr. Gaymon's Student Retention subcommittee during the next meeting. The next Presidential Task Force meeting will be via zoom, Tuesday, December 8, 2020, 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

Ernest Gibson

Giovanna Summerfield

Gretchen VanValkenburg

Jaime Hammer

Jarred Russell

Jailin Sanders

Joellen Sefton

Joffery Gaymon

Kamden K. Strunk

Katrina Akande

Kim Brown

Kimberly Mulligan-Guy

Lastella Paradise

Madison Birckhead

Melody Russell

Michael Bennett

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Robin Jaffe

Ronald Burgess

Ronny Isaac

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