

Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity

February 11, 2021

Minutes

- **General Burgess**
 - Spoke about President Gogue's message to the AU community about Black History Month, upcoming campus events and progress made by the Board of Trustees task force and the Presidential Task Force.
 - Discussed that the next subcommittee that will be created will focus on graduate students.
- **Graduate Student Letter**
 - Dr. Taffye Benson Clayton discussed the graduate student letter, which was signed by the seven graduate students concerned about the graduate students who resigned from the task force.
 - The committee discussed the grad students' concerns.
 - There was wide agreement that there needs to be more transparency in the weekly task force meetings and in how the task force is making decisions.
 - Graduate student Akilah Alwan commented that graduate student needs and concerns are different from undergraduate students. She also recommended that there needs to be more transparency and that the committee needs to conduct listening sessions with graduate students.
- **Dr. Clayton gave an update on a couple of initiatives:**
 - Faculty retention and recruitment – She is having conversations with the deans, provost, HR and EEOC on drafting a strategy and developing an implementation team. She hopes to have certain aspects of the plan updated in Spring 2021.
 - DEI education
 - She has been working with the Everfi implementation team
 - The DEI launch date is Fall 2021

Subcommittee Breakouts

Student Retention

- Discussed that at the next two meetings the subcommittee would invite subject matter experts from the academic side and then from the non-academic offices, such as financial aid and student affairs, to discuss student retention issues and best practices developed by various unit on campus to retain underrepresented minority students.
- Discussed how retention is a complex issue. That the subcommittee needs a better understanding of the African American experience at Auburn, areas in which there have been success, areas where we have fallen short and how to make short-term, intermediate and long-term progress.
- Dr. Jared Russell was invited to speak to the subcommittee about student retention best practices in the College of Education. Dr. Russell is the director of diversity for College of Education and the Assistant Director and Professor in the School of Kinesiology.
 - He discussed that in the College of Education that they begin with getting students (from all backgrounds but with a particular interest in those from underrepresented populations) to enroll at Auburn, then they work to ensure inclusion so they would be a valuable member of the "community" while emphasizing equity and advancement so they have a chance to be successful in their chosen fields as students and future professionals.

- Best Practices in the College of Education and/or the School of Kinesiology
 - Ensure that academic advisers have a lot of valuable interactions with students throughout their time at Auburn.
 - Have a feedback loop so that if students have a concern or recommendation they can provide it anonymously or speak to someone in the department or college.
 - Have listening sessions with students to inquire (including but not limited to):
 - Do students feel safe in your department, college, on campus or in the Auburn community?
 - Are the faculty providing a range of perspectives? Are they address diversity, inclusion, equity and social justice in the curriculum?
 - Are their outside-of-the-classroom experiences providing them with a range of experience or reinforcing stereotypes?
 - Are students being told about opportunities, such as funding, assistantships, co-ops or internships.
 - Ask what is working? What can we ramp up?
 - After the listening sessions, you must have strategic and contextualized action.

Institute Subcommittee

- Discussion question: How will the institute serve the university and community as a whole?
 - The following notes were introduced as a starting point for the committee's discussion:
 - Research on history, culture, and experiences of Black and African Americans
 - Promote scholarly engagement and inquiry
 - Race and class are an underlying theme of the scholarly work
 - Embedding research on intersectionality and multiple identities of Black and African Americans
 - Oppression
 - Advance scholarly research, promote equity and collaborations for traditionally marginalized groups
 - Study of African American and Black American history as it relates to their collective identity in the U.S. and southern region of the U.S.
 - Supports the scholarly efforts of Blacks and African Americans
 - Preserve, study, and share knowledge of African American and Black Americans history
 - The committee visited several websites to look at models similar to the institute we are proposing.
 - <https://www.iaismuseum.org/research-and-collections/>
 - <https://www.umb.edu/inenas>
 - <https://yivo.org/About-YIVO>

Discussion

- Things the institute might work toward:
 - Empowering Black populations and providing things to benefit Black populations
 - Empowerment is a future-oriented action word designed to achieve productive goals
 - Inform the university's research
 - "Preserve, study, share, and perpetuate knowledge of the history and culture" of Black populations as transformational change.
- What terminology or language will we use for the institute relative to race/ethnicity?
 - African Americans, Black, Black Americans?
 - "Black Americans" opens up focus to other subgroups and is more national and globally oriented

- It was emphasized that “African Americans” connotes a more regional base
 - We decided to define for our purposes what terminology to use and what it means
- What will this institute represent (e.g. vision or mission)?
 - How will the institute fulfill our mission as a land grant university?
 - What will make the institute uniquely Auburn and our surrounding area?
 - Do we want the focus of the institute to be global, national, solely Alabama, Alabama and contiguous states? What will be our sense of place?
- Continued discussion of an inventory of Auburn scholarly resources already present and functioning.
 - An inventory will show what we have, where the gaps are, and what novel opportunities for interdisciplinary study we can see that can be developed.
 - We need to refine and send the inventory questions for dissemination, together with a transmission letter. Proposed that the inventory questionnaire be sent with a relatively short deadline. This will be accomplished as soon as possible.
 - An email has been crafted to send to Deans and ADRs to gain information on faculty conducting scholarly research on Black and African American people/communities.
- Discussed proposed revisions to rough drafts of Institute Mission and Vision