

Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity

March 18, 2021

Minutes

Updates – Gen. Burgess

- Gen. Burgess was not able to attend the meeting. Dr. Taffye Clayton led the meeting.
 - Dr. Clayton announced that OID put out a statement about stopping Asian hate. The statement is available on the OID website.

Update on Diversity Statement – Dr. Taffye Clayton

- Dr. Clayton said Gen. Burgess shared the diversity statement with EEO.
 - They requested that we change “military status” to “veteran status” to stay consistent with the language used in AU’s job announcements.
- A request was made to change “gender/sex” to “gender, sex.”
 - Dr. Clayton said she would make the change.
- Kevin Coonrod asked if the diversity statement could be endorsed by the Board of Trustees.
 - Dr. Clayton said she would research how to get statement approved by the BoT, which might be a longer process.
 - She said the immediate goal was to get the statement approved by the task force and others internally so that we may start using the statement on the Human Resources website and in job announcements.
 - A request was made not to use the Oxford comma.
 - Dr. Clayton said she would remove the Oxford comma.
 - The requested changes will be made to the diversity statement and a vote on the statement will be taken at the next task force meeting.

Graduate Student Meeting Discussion – An anonymous summary of the discussion

- A graduate student member indicated the graduate students they spoke with were concerned about the intentions of the town hall meeting with the task force. This graduate student reported various statements they heard from graduate students after the meeting, such as: 1) Didn’t think their questions were answered; 2) Thought meeting was performative and didn’t feel sincere; 3) There was a lot of patting the task force on the back; and 4) Students were given opportunities to air their grievances, but were not given any real answers.
- An alumni member said it was a great opportunity to hear what the graduate students had to say. This member said the task force should be active listeners in the process. What the graduate students expressed was not their perspectives, but their lived experiences. They need safe environments to express their feelings.

- An administrative member said they felt as if the graduate students in the town hall meeting didn't trust the task force. They said the task force was asked about its priorities and seemed as if the graduate students don't think we are doing anything.
- A graduate student member said the graduate students have a lot of hurt and a lot of pain. They suggested that the task force think about what it can accomplish quickly and make a list of those items.
- An administrative member spoke to graduate students before the town hall meeting and the students reported they don't feel like they are listened to and they are consistently misrepresented. This member met with the BGPSA before the town hall meeting and asked them about their goals for the meeting. They said they wanted to be heard. They wanted the task force to be reminded that they are adults and have something to contribute. The graduate students want more town halls because it takes time to build trust. People make mistakes when you are building trust, but the task force still needs to be transparent.
- An undergraduate student member agreed that meetings with administrators have felt performative. They said undergraduate students have the same issues and concerns as the graduate students. BSU had several meetings with administrators, where in the moment the administrators seem to understand, and then after the meeting nothing happens. The undergraduate student member said undergraduates are holding people accountable. They are texting each other and recording meetings to document them.
- An administrative member agreed that the task force needs more transparency and the task force needs to act more expediently. They said the graduate students need to be included in the decision-making and action process. Faculty mentors are an important aspect to help graduate students feel supported, thrive and be there to help them. A mentor is not an academic adviser. They agreed that the conversation during the graduate student meeting was rough in spots, but it was a conversation the task force needed to have.
- A faculty member suggested that the graduate students need a student's bill of rights. They said the bill of rights should state explicitly what graduate students can expect to receive while in school, such as having a mentor.
- An administrative member suggested that the task force needs to transition out of Zoom meetings to face-to-face meeting in order to really build relationships. They said the Zoom meetings are not productive.
- An administrative member said the task force is here to listen to how graduate students are hurting. They said it is OK to fail, but not OK to fail the same way twice.
- A faculty member suggested that we need to understand the concept of grace and we don't show each other enough grace. They agreed that the task force needs to meet face-to-face to gain any level of trust with students. With in-person meetings, people can more easily see if someone is being authentic and read body language.
- A graduate student member said the graduate students are afraid of retaliation if the task force meets in person. The graduate student said they are secure and feel safe behind their computer screens. They said they didn't think the task force had enough trust yet from the students to be able to meet in person.

- A faculty member said if the task force is going to build any kind of trust it is going to have to meet in person with students and be able to communicate with each other.
- An administrative member reminded the task force that it was created to look specifically at African American/Black issues. The task force needs to meet specifically with Black graduate students to listen to their concerns.
- A graduate student member said the task force does need to focus on African American/Black student issues and then it could move toward international student issues. The task force needs to be clearer about what it has been doing and where it is going. There needs to be a listening component and an action component.
- An administrative member said work needs to be done on the task force website. Their colleagues don't even know where to find it.
- The meeting was called to a close at 5 p.m., the agreed upon time for task force meetings to end. Because of the time, the subcommittees did not meet on March 18.