

Presidential Task Force for Opportunity and Equity

Sept. 2, 2021

Minutes

Attendees: Olasubomi Akintola, Jordan Branchman, Michael Brown, Chacolby Burns-Johnson, Angela Cannon, Taffye Benson Clayton, Kevin Coonrod, Joffery Gaymon, Norman, Godwin, Dustin Johnson, Bridgett King, Ebony Robinson, Jared Russell, Melody Russell, JoEllen Sefton, Bruce Smith, Giovanna Summerfield, Gretel Thornton, Lastella Paradise-Watson, Alan Wilson, Jennifer Adams, and Amy Weaver

- **Stakeholders Update - Dr. Joffery Gaymon**

- Dr. Gaymon asked the members to review the Google doc sent earlier in the week for stakeholder groups and to list themselves if there is a group to which they will report back to the task force progress and developments.

- **Diversity Statement**

- Chacolby Burns-Johnson asked why the task force's diversity statement is not on the new inclusion website. She also asked why the statement was being reviewed by other groups since the task force already approved it?
- Dr. JoEllen Sefton said the statement has been through internal review with AU stakeholders. It now has been sent to the President's cabinet for external stakeholder review. They were given two weeks to review. Their comments are due to Gen. Burgess by Sept. 10.
- Dr. Gaymon said the president's cabinet is a combination of university senior leadership and student representation at the graduate level and undergraduate level. It is about a 40-person body.
 - Dr. Gaymon said President Gogue values and appreciates socializing the statement and collecting feedback so at the very least everyone feels like they've had an opportunity to weigh in. She said the President felt it was important, because it is a university statement, that key leaders from different perspectives have the opportunity to evaluate and weigh in.
 - Dr. Gaymon said Gen. Burgess has been transparent about the process and he will take the cabinet's feedback and then discuss next steps.
- Ms. Burns-Johnson requested that the task force revisit its overall purpose and vision, so that when recommendations are made the members will know the process toward implementation.
- Dr. Sefton said a proposed task force structure and mission have been submitted to President Gogue and Gen. Burgess to review. She is hopeful they will be able to discuss this at the next meeting.
- Gretel Thornton asked if the task force will discuss teaching Critical Race Theory, what Auburn will do if it is banned and how we can talk about equity in the classroom?
- Dr. Gaymon said when the task force reviews its mission, the goals and purpose at an upcoming meeting that we will also discuss what other areas should be evaluated. What are some of the additional topics that we want to fold into the conversation? What are those things that we want another subcommittee to take a deep dive on that we could recommend?

Equity & Social Justice Center

Chair: Dr. Melody Russell

Members: Katrina Akande, Scott Bishop, Molly Boudreaux, Michael Brown, Taffye Clayton, Kevin Coonrod, Norman Godwin, Lady Frances Hamilton, Robin Jaffe, Kimberly Mulligan-Guy, Jared Russell, JoEllen Sefton, Bruce F. Smith, Giovanna Summerfield and Gretel Thornton

We reviewed the feedback from Provost Hardgrave during our proposal meeting. The following summarizes comments made during the meeting:

- Dr. Hardgrave's feedback was insightful.
- We need to be thoughtful about obtaining funding.
- The pointedness of a current successful research strength is important, especially since we want to be a research-focused institute. What are our areas of research excellence? Who are the key stakeholders that would need to agree that they desire an institute be established?
- The value proposition is important -- the "value added" is likewise important, especially in terms of research.
- What funding aspects should be discussed? The Institute of African American Research at University of North Carolina had a Mellon grant that was there for 25 years. That grant is no longer being funded, and the funding of their center is thus in jeopardy.
- A member remarked that there will be competition over funds between the institute and colleges and schools.
- Many agencies and funders will want to know how we will sustain the institute. We have more thinking to do, and we need people outside this subcommittee to be contemplating the institute goals as well. Perhaps those people will be the professors who will be making up the institute. We would like for the people who will comprise the institute to be involved, because the institute will be theirs.
- We need to focus down, start smaller and grow. We feel that research will be the focus. Teaching was not the initial focus for the institute so we will try to keep the focus on research. We need to get "mean and lean." Who will be the faculty members who will use the institute most? What is their research and what are their departments? Deans and associate deans for research need to be part of the conversation. What will they gain from this, and how will the indirect costs share? How will it add value to their college, and how can they agree to share costs with the institute?
- The Provost said it will be appropriate for us to approach potential funders to let them know what our idea is and to ask what they will be willing to put their money into.
- One member stated the institute director will likely have to be a part-time position, after having participated and learned in the Provost's feedback session. Another questioned whether a part-time director will have the time to do an adequate job and pushed for a full-time director.
- What is the intellectual merit for this institute? What will it do, investigate, and examine, and how will that be organized? Starting point: what are we stitching together? Research is going to be the key. What is going to be the focus? We pulled from a body of research submitted to us when we surveyed the campus. How can we package that information together so those professors can pull together to do their research? What is the intellectual merit? That is what the grantors will want to see. We need to be confident, precise, and succinct when we speak to potential funders.
- Definition of Intellectual Merit: Encompasses the potential to advance knowledge.

- How will the institute advance knowledge and take us beyond where we are at Auburn University? This could be our elevator speech.
- We would like to get faculty involved in discussing how they can collaborate.
- How far are we from the 30-second elevator speech? We could review the listening materials and surveys to find particular cluster areas and then bring faculty together to talk about what they can do together (better or how the institute can help them with the work they are already doing).
- From the listening sessions, the sticking points were around social -- in terms of a more liberal arts -- social sciences emphasis, and STEM. What could it mean to be thoughtful about this, considering the African American emphasis, and what does the social impact of certain things look like?
- If we are looking at NSF funding, there is a lot of conversation about social impact. "Covid in the communities", said one member, is an example of social impact.
- We need to think about this process. "Interdisciplinary" does not mean "everything."
- We are also talking about stitching things together at this point.
- What barriers are the researchers facing? If we can give them value, they might be willing to join. What could the institute do for them?
- We need to always think about not what we are asking -- but saying what we are returning.

- We should put together a list of faculty based on information from the listening sessions who can provide insight on the process of developing the "elevator pitch". The question we need to address is:
 - How can this institute help faculty do what they already do better?
 - How will the research advance knowledge? We should ask faculty that intellectual merit question.
 - What list of all the colleges and contact people can we put together as next steps?
- A member suggested that we create a Qualtrics survey that asks what we can do for faculty already doing work in the area that would be the focus of the institute.
- A remark was made about the importance of faculty being more invested in this institute if they had an opportunity to facilitate with its conceptualization. This presents a win-win situation for both the institute and faculty. How can we help them; how can they help us; how can we help each other? Our conversation today is reminiscent of the collaborative research cluster process that we initiated under Provost Boosinger. Are there things the promoters of that initiative did that may help us go forward?
- We were asked to think of next steps for our meeting in two weeks.

Graduate Student Subcommittee

Chairs: George Flowers and Jared Russell

Members: Vinicia Biancardi, Angela Cannon, Astin Cole, Brian Cornish, Dustin Johnson, Bridgett King, Ebony Robinson, Cheryl Seals, Aariyan Tooley, Lastella Paradise-Watson and Alan Wilson

1. Review of previous meeting's notes and discussions
2. Climate survey was sent to 487 graduate students who identified as Black, African American or 2 or more races (with one being Black/African American
 - a. Received 106 responses (final tally 111)
3. Discussion on climate survey data analysis process:
 - a. Quantitative analysis group – Bridgett, LaStella, Alan,

- b. Qualitative analysis group – Jared, Cheryl, Ebony, Angela
- 4. Focus group process and format discussion:
 - a. Virtual
 - b. Approximately 10 sessions (plus weekend options)
 - c. Participants will self-select meeting
 - d. Registration process for meetings (in case sessions need to be collapsed due to low number of participants)
 - e. 4 – 8 participants (max) per session
 - f. Minimum of 2 committee members at each session
 - g. 5 – 7 questions (max) that are used for each session
 - h. Questions based on responses from survey
 - i. Question: Will sessions be recorded? Dr. Dustin Johnson will prepare a statement to include in the invitation disclosing how data will be used. Informed consent. Confidentiality statement.
 - j. Timeline: October (best case), early November (worst case)
 - k. Option for individual sessions (if requested)
 - l. TASK: Draft of invitation with dates and Zoom links
 - m. Invitation will be sent to original list of eligible students
- 5. Asked for funds to incentivize student participation (approved by leadership)
- 6. TASK: Review student data provided by Dean Flowers not discussed in this meeting (ran out of time)
- 7. Adjournment