Presidential Task Force for Addressing Black Students’ Concerns

May 15, 2015
Executive Summary

The Task Force for Addressing Black Students’ Concerns was charged on February 17, 2015, by the Office of the President to address the climate at the University of Miami. Late in the Fall 2014 semester, racial, inflammatory comments appeared on GPS location-based social media describing the student demonstrations in response to what has become known as the “BlackLivesMatter” peaceful protests. Comments recorded indicated that at some level there may be challenges to our unique university climate and a general lack of understanding about the benefits of a diverse community. Several undergraduate leaders initiated conversations with university administration, expressed their concerns, and requested an immediate response. President Shalala (in coordination with Dr. Thomas LeBlanc, Provost, and Dr. Patricia Whitely, Vice President for Student Affairs) created the Task Force charged with evaluating and assessing programs, resources, and the climate for Black students, faculty, and staff on campus. Although the Task Force activities are expressly focused on one community, the insights gained will emphasize what has been shown repeatedly with empirical research: that the inclusion of diverse perspectives and life experiences are essential to the basic tenets of an academic institution, which are to produce knowledge, develop cutting-edge solutions to a variety of intellectual and social problems, and prepare globally fluent individuals who can successfully achieve in an increasingly multicultural world.

The committee reviewed recent statistics with respect to representation of black students and faculty. The Task Force team conducted interviews with various offices including student enrollment, faculty affairs, student affairs, and campus security. The Task Force created and conducted a survey to understand the nature of the climate among all students. The Task Force team also reviewed best practices and procedures documents, where available, from the various offices, schools, and colleges. The committee investigated the current processes, procedures, and information technology support in this area to create an as-is workflow of the current state-of-the-practice.

The Task Force team worked diligently to synthesize all information into a set of actionable recommendations that should be addressed in AY16. The committee also generated a set of longer-term recommendations to share with future university leadership. While the high-level recommendations are summarized below, specific rationale and actions are discussed later in the report.

Mid-term Recommendations:

- Supporting our ambition as the premiere elite research institution that also leads the nation in campus diversity, including our Black student population, the University should focus on admitting and matriculating the largest percentage of Black students among our peer institutions (increasing from 8% currently to the 10% that leads the nation among our aspirational peers).

- Considering the benefits to climate, support our ambition to lead the nation in faculty diversity with respect to Black faculty by focusing on recruitment and retention practices. The Task Force recommends that the University develop a multi-year hiring strategy and retention plan that
recruits and retains faculty at a level where undergraduate students of all races and cultural backgrounds have the ability to engage with a Black faculty member during their four-year matriculation.

- Create an adequate organizational structure and corresponding facilities to enable an ongoing, on-campus environment for Black scholars (students, faculty, and staff) to meet and exchange ideas.

- Promote diversity programming (spanning all facets) within the academic units. The University should ensure that Deans monitor and report on diversity programming at a level consistent with the diversity of the underlying student body.

- Incorporate cultural humility and diversity training into the experience of all students, faculty, staff, and UMPD.

**Actionable Recommendations (AY16):**

- The University should create and commission an ongoing, university-wide, Diversity or Race Relations Council that reports to the Provost’s office. The committee should have diverse representation from students, faculty, and relevant university offices (in collaboration with Ombudspersons, Faculty Senate Committee on Women and Minorities, Office of Workplace Equity and Performance). The Council should implement and annually monitor the Task Force’s recommendations to ensure its success.

- To allow Multicultural Student Affairs (MSA) to play a more visible and substantial role in enhancing culture, MSA should have a direct (and more prominent) reporting structure—with an explicit focus on the advancement of the breadth of minority students through a diversity lens. MSA’s budget should be increased to reflect this more directed and substantial role.

- Provide resources for a planning committee (Fall 2015) that develops specific tactical actions (perhaps a series of pilots) to occur in AY16 that enhance recruitment and yield programs with additional (high return-on-investments) initiatives.

The Task Force anticipates that the recommendations, in net effect, will elevate the importance of an inclusive environment here at the University of Miami. By focusing on climate in this way, the Task Force anticipates that students, faculty, or staff who might be knowingly or unknowingly inclined to engage in racial bias will be met with a system that counters such behavior. The recommendations will assist the University in becoming an institution even further distinguished by its attention to diversity. Several recommendations ask for additional administrative units that will institutionalize the functions of monitoring and enhance the culture of the community on an ongoing basis.
The Task Force team consists of the following members:

**Task Force Members (Chair: Vice Provost & Dean M. Brian Blake):**
- Ivann Anderson (Student Leader)
- Matthew Barnes (Orientation & Commuter Student Involvement)
- Amy Bowen (Human Resources)
- Renee Dickens Callan (Multicultural Student Affairs)
- Lisi Carreno (Human Resources)
- Mischael Cetoute (Student Leader)
- Charlton Copeland (Professor, Law)
- Zanita Fenton (Faculty Senate, Professor, Law)
- Rebecca Garcia (Student Leader)
- Dr. Ricardo Hall (Dean of Students)
- Braylond Howard (Student Leader)
- Dr. David Ikard (Professor, English)
- Dr. Laura Kohn-Wood (Professor, Education/Faculty Master)
- Hülya Miclisse-Polat (Student Leader)
- Dr. Michelle Maldonado (Professor, Religious Studies/Faculty Master)
- Brian Malcolm (Student Leader)
- Dr. Tywan Martin (Professor, Sports Management)
- Ashley McBride (Student Leader)
- Ellen McPhillip (Assistant Dean, Business School)
- Dr. Bob Moore (Professor, Education, Faculty Master, Academic Ombudsman, & Office of the Provost (OAE))
- Dr. Andrew Porter (Professor, Public Health)
- Lawrence Rolle (Student Leader)
- Dr. Stephen Symes (Miller School of Medicine, Professor)
- Te'Quan Taylor (Student Leader)
- Guerdiana Thelomar (Student Leader)
- Dr. Monica Webb Hooper (Professor, Psychology/Faculty Associate Master)
- David Wyman (Athletics and Academics)
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Task Force Charge and Committee

The overarching purpose of this Task Force was to evaluate and assess programs, resources, and the climate for Black students, faculty, and staff on campus. The Task Force was asked to convene prior to March 1, 2015, and produce a final report with recommendations by May 15, 2015. The report should contain actionable recommendations that the Office of the President might initiate prior to the change of leadership at the University. The Task Force to Address Black Students’ Concerns was specifically charged to

- Assess the current climate for black students and recommend areas of improvement;
- Learn about our current practices regarding Black student enrollment, retention, and financial assistance and make recommendations for improvement;
- Explore the current resources for programming on diversity and inclusion and make suggestions for improvement;
- Recommend areas for enhancement regarding sensitivity/inclusivity training for faculty, staff, administration, and University of Miami Police Department (UMPD); and
- Explore and discuss our current efforts in the recruitment of faculty and staff.

The Task Force met initially on February 27, 2015. Given the aggressive timeline for the Task Force, the group was separated into five sub-teams with each addressing one of the five areas of charge. Each sub-team was empowered to conduct its own meetings with individuals relevant to their specific area. Each sub-team crafted tentative recommendations that would be discussed in the larger group meeting. **Sub-teams were expressly led by student leaders.** The separation of the Task Force into sub-teams is shown in Table 1. The larger group requested an initial set of information that was provided by the chair of the Task Force on March 29, 2015. The list of information is captured in Table 2. The Task Force team had six additional meetings as a large group, but sub-teams met more frequently at the discretion of the sub-team leads. The chair drafted the report and the recommendations based on discussions in each of the seven meetings while enhancing the document based on comments and concerns throughout the process. In the final two meetings (May 4 and May 12), a set of recommendations were crafted from previous drafts and, as a group, a final set of recommendations was devised. Most recommendations had a strong consensus from the group. When more detail was required for the entire group to be comfortable with a particular recommendation, the Task Force heavily weighed the sentiments of the student leaders. The report was finalized through discussions between the Task Force Chair and sub-team leaders (i.e., student leads).