

**Commission for Blacks  
Monthly Meeting Minutes  
May, 2015**

The monthly meeting of the Commission for Blacks was held on May 6, 2015 at the Black Cultural Center.

Co-chair Lilia Neville called the meeting to order at 12:05PM. Present at the meeting were: Rickey Hall, Jimmy G. Cheek, Lilia Neville, Syed Kamal, Mary Lee Stewart, Christine Banks, Eric Stokes, Joanne Hall, Ronald McFadden, Derrick Shepard, Tara Davis, Tenea Lowery, James Lewis King, Mary Lucal, Susan Benner, Marcia Johnson Lane, Joel Kramer, Yolanda Kirkpatrick, Tamara Griffin, Marshall Steward, Anne Hulse, Janice Branch, and Alecia Davis.

Lilia Neville welcomed Chancellor Jimmy Cheek and Vice Chancellor Rikey Hall to the meeting. This is the last meeting of the academic year and this is also the last meeting for Lilia Neville as Co-Chair. She thanked commissioners for their cooperation.

Lilia Neville informed the commissioner that Robert Nobble is travelling and so he could not be here today. Robert Nobble will serve as the sole co-chair till the commission elects another co-chair in December. She also informed the commissioners about the online membership application process. She reported that the Retention Strategic Plan is now at the final revision stage. Once the review is complete, the report will be distributed to all commissioners and workshop participants for their feedback on the report. She also noted that VC Rickey Hall will be hosting the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Diversity Summit this fall. The planning committee is now accepting proposal for the summit.

**Comments from Chancellor Jimmy Cheek**

Lilia Neville informed Chancellor Cheek that the Commission requested the commissioner to submit question to have a more structured and focus meeting with the Chancellor. The collected questions are mainly focused on Campus climate, retention and recruitment of Student, Faculty and Staff Retention and UT's policy on the usage of minority businesses.

Chancellor thanked the members of the commission for their service to the university. The contribution of the 3 commissions are important for the campus. With the campus's focus on diversity and inclusion, UT created the VC Diversity position and the leadership of VC Hall in that position made important contribution.

In response to a question about the top 3 priority for the Commission for Blacks from the Chancellor point of view, Chancellor Cheek reminded that maintaining campus civility has been one of his greatest concern. UT created a civility task force about 4 years ago. This is time to look back and review on the progresses made since then and the initiatives that we need to take to ensure civility on campus. Incidents happen on campus every year that violates civility. So efforts from the Commission to formulate recommendation for improving campus civility will be an important contribution. Student diversity and recruitment has been another top priority for the campus administration. UT is working with community colleges to ensure diverse student recruitment. There are community college coordinators appointed in Knoxville, Nashville and Memphis. Faculty and staff diversity is also another key issue. The statistics related to diversity shows that the campus is in a better state than it were in 2006. The administration continually monitors the diversity metrics across different campus areas. There are still more works to be done to make further progress in diversity. So helping with improving diversity is a top priority. The commission should make recommendation on making the campus more welcoming to the faculty, staff and students. Retention is another top priority. When students and faculty comes to campus, we should make best effort to retain them on campus. We should be proactive to work in the community to keep the talents here in Knoxville.

Chancellor Cheek requested VC Hall to respond to a question about initiatives on recruitment and retention of African American faculty and staff on UT campus. VC Hall informed the commission that the administration is working on to becoming more proactive to get the position announcements tailored to focus on diversity. He also commented that the campus community should think about different approaches to enhancing diversity in recruitment. If we meet any promising young faculty member of color at national conferences, we should make effort to bring him/her on campus for a seminar even if we do not have any position opening at that point. This way, when position becomes available, the faculty member of color will already be in mind of the persons in charge of recruitment. Other important aspect for recruitment is to ensure the new recruits have a quality experience here in campus and community when they get here. If new recruits find that the campus and community climate is not favorable for a successful career and life, it becomes challenging to retain.

Chancellor Cheek added that he monitor faculty hiring statistics and evaluates the hiring practices on diversity matrices. Chancellor meets with HR representative Mary Lucal to evaluate diversity matrices on staff hires regularly on a monthly basis.

In response to a question about formalizing the implicit bias presentation of Stride at UT into a mandatory training, Chancellor Cheek commented that it should be formalized into a mandatory training program for personnel involved with hiring process. Mary Lucal added that the HR recruitment website is now very generic, but the site gets thousands of hits every moth. So making the recruitment website to focus on the diversity issue is very important. This work in process and this is a mandatory preliminary step even before we start talking about training for the recruitment personnel. A collaborative training program involving OED should be in place. There are a lot goes on outside the formal interviews during the lunch and dinners. So we need to improve the training process to include the social sessions as well.

In response to a question about the UT's effort at the high school level for recruitment, Chancellor Cheek commented that there are two or three SEC schools that come to Tennessee and do better in terms of recruitment in this state. Those SEC schools have more than 60% out of state student recruitment. In comparison, UT has only about 10% out of state recruitment. Over the last few years, UT has increased efforts to recruit talented out of state students. UT has expanded communication with the high schools and their students by appointing high school coordinators. More emphasize is now placed on social media and high school visits. UT is also reaching out to alumni for help with recruitment. The administration is using many mechanism to reach to the high schools students at an early stage. However, there are still more to do on this aspect.

Most African American students at UT are in-state and most of them are from low or middle class families. Currently, cost of attending UT as in-state student including Hope scholarship is about \$18000. Considering the economic condition of the African American students in the state, the council attracted the Chancellors attention to know about the plans that are in place to make UT more affordable to minority students. Chancellor Cheek responded that average students pays around \$5000 out of pocket for tuition after all scholarships and grants. So the administration took initiatives to reduce the out of pocket tuition costs substantially. However, the middle class students gets the least amount of financial aid. This is an issue and UT is now formulating plans focusing on to channel funds to reduce costs of the middle class students.

Ronald McFadden raised the issue that some people may have perception that the university in now diverse enough and one of reason behind this perception lies within the city itself. City is still is imbalance. There are large gap on the developmental initiative4s between the west part and east part of the city. Compare to the west side, the condition of the east side of the city is pale. Large part of the African Americans in public schools come from that area. For example, the developmental projects currently going on in Cumberland was originally supposed to be in the East, However, Mayor made the decision to bring it to the Cumberland area. So people in the east side may have different perception about diversity. So he asked about whether UT has any plans to collaborate with the city to bring some changes in this aspect. The Chancellor responded that he did not have any discussion with the Mayor on this issue. Even though the administration's focus is on making the university a batter place, but since the University lies within a community, the community itself must be made a better place

as well. So the chancellor recognized the important of having dialogue with the city on this issue.

LEAD Summer Institute program has been extended for one year. The commissioners presented the issue to the chancellor and asked him about the alternate plan to serve the students in future who were served by the LEAD program. Chancellor Cheek informed the Commission that the funds will be redeployed to enhance diversity in a different mechanism. VC Rickey Hall added that the program will be reevaluated, but a definite timeline cannot be given at this point.

In response to a question about selection of Chancellor's associates and utilizing them for championing the causes of diversity, Chancellor Cheek informed the Commission that 20 associates are selected per year and they serve a 3-year term. They meet once a month. The associates are community members from a broader community that covers Knoxville as well as surrounding areas such as Maryville, Oak Ridge etc. The administration tries to achieve diversity in the selection of the associates and there are fairly good representation in terms of diversity. However, utilizing the associates for advancing diversity issues may an issue that was not considered yet and UT may think about to do in future.

In response to making tutoring service available to upper class students for ensuring student retention, Chancellor commented that he was not aware that the tutoring service was not being offered to the upper class students. He requested to forward this issue to the Chancellor's office and proper actions will be taken to ensure that the adequate tutoring service is available for students at all levels.

Responding to a question about whether the upper administration engages in difficult conversation regarding race and diversity issues, Chancellor Cheek informed the Commission that difficult conversation regarding diversity always takes place at the upper administration. Conversation on difficult race and diversity issues takes place at all levels. The issue is to bring more people to participate in this dialogues. VC Rickey Hall added that it is difficult to mandate participation. The administration is thinking about finding ways to make these dialogues formalized to ensure more participation.

Chancellor Cheek thanked the Commission members for the engaged discussion and requested the Commission to continue its mission in the upcoming academic year.

## **Adjourn**

Lilia Neville adjourned the meeting at 1:00PM.