

Black Student Success Council (BSSC)

Meeting Minutes

September 28, 2021

Welcome

- Theresa and Debra welcomed everyone to the first Black Student Success Council (BSSC) meeting of the semester.

Guest Speaker: Dr. William Watkins, V.P. Student Affairs and Dean of Students

- Dr. Watkins expressed his gratitude to the Council for their work over the past year and acknowledged that word about the work the BSSC is doing is getting around campus. He encouraged the Council to continue to connect with each other for mutual support when not meeting together as a group.
- Dr. Watkins noted that Black student enrollment at CSUN is like a ship out at sea. It doesn't turn on a dime, but there are a number of initiatives at work that he believes over the long term will help bring the enrollment numbers up. He stated that this is an important year for us in terms of strategic planning, and it's important that we are there and telling the story of what the needs are for our Black students. It's also important to encourage Black students to tell their own story.
- Dr. Watkins also noted that the university has a major study on policing that has just been launched as a result of the George Floyd incident and the *Black Lives Matter* movement. The consultants who are spearheading the project just recently completed the first interview with Associated Students. They are beginning to talk to other students; the BSSC can be of assistance in this regard. Studies are also being conducted with respect to [campus] identity-based resource centers. It's important to ensure that no one is left to guess what will serve the best interest of Black students on our campus. Dr. Watkins concluded by reiterating his continued support for the Council, and noted that he is here to assist in any way that he can.
- Debra and Theresa expressed thanks to Dr. Watkins on behalf of the Council for his leadership and continued willingness and support of the BSSC.

Introductions & Check-In

- Theresa and Debra updated the Council on members who are not continuing with the Council this year including Sandy Green, Racquel (Rocky) Holloway, Imani Lebeaud, Teiana Jones, Ryan Mason, Jessica Fred, and Aaron Lindberg. They also introduced a new member to the Council, Kayla Simpkins, who serves as the Associate Students Chief of Staff and the President of the Zeta Phi Beta sorority.
- The Council spent the next few minutes focused on a personal check-in with the members.

Student Voices

- Kayla shared that one positive thing that recently occurred was a campus visit with a CSU Trustee and the AS participated.
- The one challenge they've had is getting students to attend events in the virtual environment. Kayla noted that many students are just not aware of what is happening on campus, or the resources available to them.
- Vicki asked Kayla about her decision to take all online classes and her experience with them this semester. Kayla responded that the syllabi faculty are using are clearer this semester, and that faculty are more understanding if a student has to miss a class. Additionally, there are fewer technical difficulties during the lectures. She also noted that she is seeing more participation from students in breakout rooms and on Zoom in general.
- Deion reported that he will meet with the Black Clubs and Orgs this Thursday to learn about their plans for the semester.
- Theresa thanked Kayla and Deion and asked them to please share with the Council what they learn about the groups they meet with, including their agendas for this coming year and how the BSSC can work together to help support them.

BSSC Executive Summary Accomplishments & Future Impacts

- Theresa highlighted several items from the BSSC Executive Summary, including the Council's collection of data over the last semester, the *Leveraging Our Strengths* presentations, and the success of the focus groups. She also noted that with the assistance of a graduate student assigned to the BSSC, we are aggregating some of that data into a project digest for the purpose of identifying project outcomes and determining "next steps". Our goal is not simply to collect data, but to use the data to advance our advocacy role on the campus.
- Mechelle Best was asked to speak about the focus groups. She pointed out that we had 45 students of African descent participate in 12 focus groups. Several concerns were expressed by Black students including not feeling like they are a part of the CSUN community, not feeling like the Black community is supported on the CSUN campus, feelings of isolation, the lack of Black faculty and staff on campus outside of the Africana Studies Department, and the limited options available to them at the CSUN Food Pantry. Many Black students also expressed concerns about financial issues and the financial support available to them at CSUN, including scholarships that they may be eligible for. Several students also reported dealing with continued mental health issues due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Theresa noted that the BSSC is developing an asset map for Black students to help them locate the resources available to them on campus.
- Shay discussed marketing products that were created to help bring increased visibility of the BSSC to students on campus, including tabling materials, hand sanitizers, pens and stickers. She asked the Council to please let her know about events on campus that should be posted on the BSSC website.
- Abram added that their Instagram account has been a great way to get information about events out to students. He asked members to please email him with any event photos they might have for posting on Instagram.
- Debra announced a tabling opportunity coming up at the Matador Experience Fair happening Oct 4-6 from 10am-2pm. She asked that members please email her and let her

know if they can attend. Based on responses, a determination will be made regarding participation.

- Theresa suggested that one way the BSSC might enhance its visibility and branding might be to have each member of the Council put together a Google slide about themselves to share on the BSSC website.

Breakout Rooms

BSSC 2021-22 Goals & Strategies

- Theresa shared a slide regarding the BSSC goals, which included the following:

Accomplished:

- Leverage BSSC Member Strengths
- Launch Focus Groups - Elevate Student Voices - Build Community
- Implement Branding, Marketing, and Information Sharing

Partially Completed and On-going:

- Promote access and engagement with data driven tools to inform outcomes.

Should the following continue to be BSSC goals in 2021-2022?

- Examine impact of University 10-Point Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) Action Plan.
- Increase focus on health and wellness.
- Explore elements and disseminate results of the GI 2025 Graduation Initiative - reducing equity gaps and high DFU rates.
- Council members were split into breakout rooms and asked the following questions:
 - a). What are the primary things/issues that are impacting students of African descent on the CSUN campus?
 - b). What are at least two things/initiatives that the BSSC should focus on this year related to the above response(s)? Feel free to list additional goals/initiatives.
- **Group 4 reported the following:**
 - Natalie stated that her group was concerned that there were Black students who said they had not had any interaction with other Black students, faculty, or staff. They discussed the possibility of carving out a time to get together, and to just be seen by students. Suggested a monthly luncheon or coffee at the Sierra Center. They also talked about the importance of helping students find their classes and locate study groups to assist them. Another suggestion was to pass out information on the BSSC to students around campus to help raise awareness of the resources available to them.
- **Group 5 reported the following:**
 - Abram reported that his group suggested some of the ways to promote awareness might include council members wearing BSSC gear around campus, using a BSSC zoom background, and serving as special guest speakers in various classes. They noted the importance of collaborating with other campus members to effectively engage with students, start initiatives to raise awareness, create action plans and come up with short term goals to post on the website to show students what the BSSC is currently working on.
- **Group 2 reported the following:**

- Kandace reported on the need to be honest about whether our structures actually support our initiatives. We have to be radically honest about the institution itself, the culture, and how you dismantle a culture that is not serving the students the way we want it to. She discussed the need to do more than just conduct surveys with our Black students and the need to move from inquiry to advocacy. Takiya added that we want to have measurable objectives for us to mark our way forward and identify when things are actually progressing or not progressing, at it pertains to our students.
- **Group 1 reported the following:**
 - Nyla said her group focused on getting students engaged and involved in events. She suggested having an event such as a *meet & greet* with the BSSC. or an event based upon the student's personal interests. Kayla added the need to focus on Freshmen and Transfer students to help welcome them into the community. Mechelle suggested setting up a BSSC table on campus so students can get to know us better.
- **Group 3 reported the following:**
 - Shay noted that her group talked about community and helping students become aware of the events happening on campus such as *Welcome Black*. She mentioned tailoring our social media and web presence to be more direct in terms of what our mission is. The group also suggested the need to highlight the successes of our events for students. Vicki added that one way we can help our students succeed is helping them find "community" on campus.
- Theresa discussed the importance of highlighting the positive and successful things that Black students are doing. She stated that in light of the GI 2025 Initiative it's important that we think about the equity gaps and high DFU rates. What can we do in terms of advocacy along those lines, and in the area of health and wellness? We want to elevate our student voices, videotape conversations with them so we can highlight the successful things our students are doing, as a way to inspire other students.
- Takiya asked about the possibility of becoming a designated Black Student Serving Institution. Debra and Gigi responded that a school/university does not receive such a designation until there is a certain percentage of the student population to warrant such a designation. Del also added that CSUN is a Hispanic Serving Institution because 40%+ of our student population is Hispanic. Takiya also noted that since there is no designation for Black students at the federal level, other than being a Minority Serving Institution, that we should be pushing for special funding for resources under that designation.
- Kandace made a comment about how frustrating it is to have a student come to her office with an issue and struggling to get through the multiple levels of red tape that are in the way. She suggested that there needs to be a conversation within the BSSC on how we come up with ways to talk about the practices and policies that don't serve Black students well.
- Deion suggested that when it comes to social media many students don't want to follow something that overwhelms them with too many posts. He suggested the BSSC be as student friendly as possible in their social media posts. Theresa suggested that Deion and Kayla work with Abraham and Shay on ways to improve our communication with students, both on the website and through social media.

- Debra announced that she and Theresa will be sending some information out to the Council before the next meeting, and will need feedback from everyone at the next BSSC meeting.

Announcements

- Next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 19th.
- Freddie Sanchez and Marquita Gammage will be attending the October meeting to share what they're doing regarding the research on identity-based centers on campus, and to get input from the Council.
- The Provost is scheduled to meet with the BSSC on November 16th.

Adjourn