

Black Student Success Council (BSSC)

Meeting Minutes

January 25, 2021

Welcome

- Theresa and Debra welcomed everyone to the Black Student Success Council (BSSC) meeting. Theresa announced that Shiva will not be joining us on the Council this spring due to her busy schedule. Dr. James Henry will be joining us to represent EOP in her stead.

Announcements

- Nyla announced that Dr. Dezell Johnson has joined the Career Center as a career counselor, with an emphasis on our traditionally underserved, and specifically Black/ African American students.
- Takiya announced that IT has received a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) grant to hire student ambassadors to share information about digital literacy and resources on campus. Also, April 22nd will be a full day JAM for diversity, equity, and inclusion, where students will present their work and a faculty member will be speaking on the topic of “belonging” at CSUN, and what that means in terms of digital equity.
- Shelline announced that Financial Aid still has a lot of emergency grant money available to students in the form of a CSU emergency grant, in addition to the MataCare grant. The maximum that a student can receive for either grant is \$1,100.00. She asked that if any Council members know of students who are in situations where they need additional funding, or help, to please refer them to the grant opportunities below:
 - CSU Emergency Assistance Grant:
<https://www.csun.edu/financialaid/csu-emergency-assistance-grant>
 - MataCare Emergency Grant:
<https://www.csun.edu/financialaid/matacare-emergency-grant> USU
 - Bookstore Grant: <https://csun.academicworks.com/opportunities/3214>Shelline noted that there is a total of around \$5 million in funds still available.
- Debra announced the University Student Union (USU) has \$250 bookstore grants that will be given to over 1000 students. Applications are still being accepted for students who have an interest in leadership and/or a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Theresa asked Shay to please add all of the grant information to the BSSC website.

- Pero announced that the Black History Month calendar will have a landing page this year where students will find direct links to all the upcoming virtual events in February. Please send any information about upcoming events you would like added to the calendar to Dominique Moye.

BSSC 2021-22 Goals/Objectives Break-Out Rooms & Report Out/Action Steps

- Council members were placed into their respective breakout rooms from the last meeting to follow up on last week's discussion.
- Debra from Group 2 reported that students want to attend events, but they want to see what is in it for them before they participate in a zoom event. The student survey, sent out in November, indicated that approximately 55% of students want to come back and want to engage, while about 45% want to participate virtually. The Omicron variant has impacted student's willingness to participate. The group also discussed the possibility of having drop-in sessions for students where various members of the BSSC can answer questions students may have. Students have indicated that they want to push back the "Welcome Black" event to April or May due to Covid. Debra also noted that on the first day of school (January 24, 2022), the Student Recreation Center they had 1000 students. On average last semester they had about 500 students a day. This is indicating that students are still seeking opportunities for student engagement outside of the classroom. There were also 90 students in the game room and 44 at the Oasis.
- Elizabeth Adams noted that there are around 500 classes that have some on-campus meetings this semester and starting next week there could be several thousand students on campus Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. The east part of campus is currently busier than the west side of campus.
- Vera requested help from the BSSC in answering questions from students regarding advisement, counseling services, financial aid, technology support, academic success, or tutoring during their upcoming drop-in sessions, once the dates have been finalized. We will also need help promoting these sessions once a letter has been created to notify students of these resources. Help is also needed in creating a letter to students highlighting the resources available to them. Debra also noted that we would need help from Abram with social media.
- Takiya from Group 1 reported that her group discussed the survey materials they created and the upcoming meeting with the Vice President of Student Affairs and the Provost. Progress has been made in coming up with "did you know" statements concerning the data being collected. Janet Oh has been added to the survey to assist with the statistics.
- Del from Group 3 reported that the kick-off for Black History Month is going to be virtual this year. We are currently looking at how we can distribute swag items to students who participate in surveys or focus groups. Del also requested assistance from Council members with getting the word out about BSSC, by sharing information about the group during one of the upcoming Black History

Month virtual events. Del also suggested that we pick a day when students are back on campus where everybody wears a BSSC shirt to help increase visibility.

- Pero from Group 4 reported that her group discussed the need to be creative on social media to help engage with students. Jade recommended asking students an open-ended question such as, "What does Black success mean to you?" or "What does Juneteenth mean to you?" We can then video tape their answers and put everything up on the BSSC website and maybe Instagram. The group will meet again and decide how to move forward once students have returned on February 14th. Theresa added that Vicki recommended developing a campaign toward the end of February with the goal of having students create a video to share a success story with us, and submit it after spring break. We would review those submissions in April, with the plan to share it with the community in May. Help from Marketing and Communications would then be needed to put together a feature story on CSUN Today, in addition to posting it on Instagram, and on the BSSC website. Theresa also added that one of the desired outcomes is to create a resource guide to inspire Black students with the stories of other Black students who are doing well. She asked if Student Outreach and Recruitment (SOAR) could share stories that they may be aware of. She also mentioned the need for funding for incentives to get students to submit their stories. We need to determine a name for the campaign.
- Theresa asked that everyone please let her and Debra know what kind of help or support they need to move things forward.
- Del noted that the library did two similar projects that might be of interest titled, "What is Black?" and "Why Does Black History Matter?" She recommends featuring them on the BSSC website. Pero also noted that the USU had developed one for Juneteenth and perhaps snippets could be spliced together to develop one video.

Student Voices

- Ashley announced that the Black Student Leadership Council (BSLC) has listened to students and have decided to move the Welcome Black event to a later date in April or May, so it can possibly be done in person. She also noted that many of the Black clubs and organizations do not want to be very active in a virtual setting. Zeta and Black Male Scholars are the only two organizations that are active right now. The main goal is to get all the clubs active again in the spring semester.
- Theresa asked Ashley if she had heard much about how students are feeling about returning to campus on February 14. Ashley responded that students are nervous about it. They're concerned about returning to campus this spring and concerned about receiving notices when someone gets COVID, and how social distancing will be maintained. Elizabeth Adams reported that students will be notified whenever a student in their class tests positive with COVID. She noted

that classes will not be socially distanced since it's no longer required by the county, but CSUN is asking everybody to wear upgraded medical masks.

- Ashley suggested that it would be helpful if our professors could reach out directly to their students on Canvas to make sure their students have this information. She said one of her goals is to have this information shared on the Black Student Leadership Council's Instagram page, and to get the Black clubs and organizations to share it on their platforms as well.
- Theresa recommended that Ashley connect with Jennie Skillern (BSSC's Graduate Assistant) to help create the messaging that could be placed on social media platforms.

Recap of BSSC 12/22/21 Meeting

Meeting with Administration

- Theresa provided a quick recap of the discussion with Melanie Bocanegra from the last meeting. She encouraged the Council to review the minutes from the last meeting for more information on what was presented during that discussion. Among other things, Melanie noted that her office identified four core values for the operation of the Office of Student Success. The first being intellectual and cultural humility. The second being community engaged justice. The third is developing high impact practices and programs, and the fourth is inquiry driven processes. These operations are going to unfold based on three different domains that they're working within --- Institution, Interpersonal and Intrapersonal. Theresa noted that the Council and students have shared that there are many concerns around issues that students are having in the classroom with faculty, how those issues are dealt with, and how we move forward with initiatives that are started on campus but never have concrete actions put forth.
- A second meeting was called on December 21st to discuss the kinds of steps that need to be taken, the strategies that need to be implemented, and tactical strategies/action steps that need to be proposed to the administration. Several council members suggested that we meet directly with the President. Dr. Watkins suggested that we meet first with the Provost, Vice Provost, VP for Student Affairs/DOS, William Watkins, and AVP Student Success, Melanie Bocanegra. Theresa suggested including Amanda Quintero-Special Assistant to the President for Inclusive Excellence, and Chief Diversity Officer Natalie Mason-Kinsey, to share some of things that we want to see happen on campus. The feeling is that we are moving backwards, as opposed to forward, and the Omicron variant is not helping the situation.
- Theresa and Debra mentioned several items that were discussed in the meeting on December 21st, including the recruitment and retention efforts for staff and faculty of African descent. Del mentioned concern for having more support for the Black Faculty and Staff Association, in terms of increasing visibility and financial support. Another item involved challenges that students are having in

class with faculty and the reporting of those challenges, but not seeing any action steps to resolve them. Students are feeling disempowered about speaking up. Debra added that we discussed the difference between things that are policy, verses practice, and tendencies to do things because "we've always done it this way," as opposed to making changes. There was discussion about GI 2025 in terms of where Black students are, as compared with other groups. It was noted that there are instructors who are doing damage to students related to the way in which they communicate in dismissive or discouraging ways. Other campuses have strategies for reprimanding those individuals, but CSUN does not appear to. It was also discussed that aspects of the 10 point diversity and inclusion action plan has become a 5 point plan, and not a lot of movement has taken place. The goal now is to come up with strategies for how we address these concerns.

- Other important concerns include sharing Black student success stories, having student voices be at the forefront, and highlighting that the job of the BSSC is to bring these stories to light and to communicate with the campus community.
- The Council needs to come up with some points of action for the meeting with the Provost and develop a better understanding of how Black students align with the roadmap. What do we want to see happen in the short, medium, and long term?
- Debra suggested that we need to hire someone to focus on this effort. Her concern is that we can't start making real changes with the people that are here because we're already experiencing cultural taxation. She recommended hiring someone from the outside who can focus on these issues and then come up with a plan to address them.
- Lissa Stapleton asked what the goal is for the campus, with regard to the percentage of Black students we seeking to recruit? Gigi noted that keeping Black families in California is a statewide problem. Gigi also mentioned that she has made comments to the Provost regarding the history of the campus and how the demographics have changed over time.
- Gigi is concerned that Black students do not seem to be doing well, academically, this semester. There are a few Black students this semester who have under a 1.0 GPA.
- Theresa emphasized that there are two sides of the equation, recruitment and retention. Having a retention plan is the first step before recruitment, because you don't want to recruit someone if you don't know what specific things CSUN can offer them once they get here. Without a retention plan, they can get discouraged or feel disconnected, and leave.
- Vera commented that the budget component is the most concerning for her when it comes to her area. If we are told that we need to increase recruitment for a group of students, then funding should also be allocated to those efforts.

- Takiya asked if we would have the opportunity to share our suggestions with the group that is meeting next week. Theresa asked that members please share any suggestions they have with her and Debra.
- Kandace and Takiya requested to be added to the meeting.
- Debra discussed the possibility of having a strategy meeting on Monday before the meeting on Tuesday to make sure we are on the same page when we meet with the Vice Presidents.
- Lisa asked if it is possible for the BSSC to put together a demand for the number of Black students we would like to see recruited on the campus. Gigi suggested that this group can help with requesting sufficient funding for recruitment, including funds for travel, recruitment brochures, incentives, and giveaways. It was noted that these things are utilized by others who are competing with CSUN and we need to do this as well.
- Takiya stated that the university has to decide how they want to go about reallocating resources to meet those goals. Incremental change is fine, but we need to know the overall goal we want the institution to achieve. We are all experts in our area, so we need to use that expertise to suggest strategies.
- Debra stated that if CSUN cares about Black students on this campus, we need to put appropriate resource allocation and emphasis on Black students at the top of the agenda. There was not a single Black person on the campus roadmap committee at first. The commitment has to come from the top, and then it filters out, down and over, but there has to be an ethic of care about our students. We particularly need to care about the ones who are not the best served.
- Mechelle suggested that in the meeting with the Provost we ask for evidence. CSUN needs to demonstrate how it cares about Black students on our campus. It may be that we are not seeing it and they think it's out there, so let's ask CSUN to show us.
- Michelle and Theresa both commented on the fact that the 10 point action plan committees don't meet on a regular basis.
- Del noted that whenever these questions are raised they tend to point back to the BSSC and to the diversity and equity grants that are available. The administration doesn't look at themselves as part of the solution. The other part of the problem is, as Gigi mentioned, she and Anthony looked at 40 Black students and those 40 students are struggling. Before we can bring more Black students to our campus, we need to help those 40 students that are here.
- Theresa and Debra both acknowledged the need to focus on the issue of retention for students, faculty, and staff.
- Michelle stated that the issue is if these 40 students are freshmen now and it's the beginning of the spring semester, what is CSUN going to do between now and the end of spring to make sure we don't lose them?
- Debra noted that even if we can't hire someone, we should be able to consult with some people who have done this work well. Debra also noted that if you

look at the GPA's of those 40 Black students right now, that may tell the story. They were already getting some assistance from Anthony and Gigi, but what about the other students who slip through the cracks who are not getting any kind of support?

- Theresa mentioned the research project being done by Freddie Sanchez and Marquita Gammage on the identity-based centers, and suggested that something similar might be helpful in assisting Black students in a holistic way.
- Del acknowledged the need for a holistic approach to helping students who are struggling academically.
- Takiya said focusing on the 40 students as a pilot group for wrap-around services is a great concept of what needs to take place to retain Black students at CSUN.
- Takiya also noted that the university doesn't think that it's sustainable or scalable to support Black students in the same way they support student athletes. Theresa said that was a good analogy and noted how graduation rates are better for athletes who receive holistic support.
- Debra asked Michael to send out a doodle poll to the members of the Council who indicated their desire to participate in a pre-meeting strategy session on Monday to discuss how the representatives from the BSSC would approach the discussion with the Provost on Tuesday. Takiya would also be sending out a survey to the rest of the BSSC so they would have the opportunity to share their thoughts before the meeting.

Adjourn