



University Diversity Council Agenda  
June 26, 2020  
WebEx

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**Attendees:** Gifty Ako-Adounvo, Mary Grace Almandrez, Jacquie Britto, Marland Chang, Erin Earle, Maling Ebrahimpour, Corey Fernandez, Michelle Fontes, Nisa Ghonem, Brian Heikes, Trish Morokoff, Holly Nichols, Eileen Orabone, Kristina Perrelli, Jen Riley, Martha Elena Rojas, Mary Stanley, Jacqui Tisdale, Annemarie Vaccaro

**I. Welcome and Announcements**

**University Responses/Statements** – Mary Grace started the meeting with a check-in with the UDC as there has been a lot happening around the world and within the URI community (e.g., continued police brutality against Black bodies in different ways, Pride month, recent decisions from the Supreme Court). There have also been statements issued by various departments across campus and a letter to the President from a group of concerned Black staff with a list of demands. A few of the UDC members had a discussion during Juneteenth about dismantling anti-Black racism.

A discussion ensued regarding an email that was sent by Holly Nichols to the white members of the UDC regarding the cancellation of the UDC meeting on June 19<sup>th</sup>, which was the day of Juneteenth. The email pertained to whether white UDC members should still meet to figure out how can they, as white people, can appropriately support Black colleagues. The feeling is that white colleagues need to engage in the systemic work that Black peers have been demanding for decades at URI.

The Council talked about having mandatory diversity training for all faculty, staff and students. It was shared that having faculty do mandatory training would be hard to tackle, but the feeling is that it should be mandatory. Language would have to be put in the faculty contracts when they are negotiated in 2022.

Mary Grace let the Council know that Dr. Joanna Ravello will be launching the DE&I 365 Symposium. This year's theme is "Black Lives Matter." There are a number of topics being offered, so if anyone is interested in attending one or being a part of this symposium, she would welcome that. Concerns were raised about how the education is great for the University to have, but there are much bigger issues to tackle than just going to these discussions. This Council needs to be challenged to think more broadly and differently as to how to make an impact at the University in this work.

Discussion continued regarding ideas about the training. Some of the ideas were that certain trainings should be mandatory in new faculty contracts, that there should be yearly trainings, such as Sexual Harassment and Title IX training, Responsible Employee, and FERPA training. Another point that was brought up was that trainings should happen in departments, not just with individuals. The need for trainings needs to come from the top administration, and this group needs to insist that things need to change, and URI cannot do things the way they have been done anymore.

**a. Letter to President Dooley** – The “Are You Exhausted Yet” letter will be put in the Google Drive for the committee to read. There was discussion about this letter and the concerns raised by the group of Black faculty and staff who wrote this letter. The UDC would like to see what the President’s response is before making recommendations to the senior leadership team regarding the demands.

**II. Approval of Minutes** – Minutes were approved as written.

**III. General Updates** – It was suggested that we have one or two people on the Council monitor the meeting chat during the meeting. Trish and Gifty volunteered to do this task.

In other updates, Michelle shared with the Council that Bobby Britto-Oliveira will be the interim Assistant Director of the Multicultural Student Services Center (MSSC). In addition, George Gallien, Director of the MSSC, has left the University. Lulu Alryati indicated that she and another student will be meeting with the VP for Student Affairs about when there will be a search and to make sure that students have the opportunity to be on the search. She will keep the UDC posted on any information she can share.

Michelle also indicated that Mary Grace and she are talking about how to get the diversity coordinators in all of the colleges.

Jen shared that she is in the process of doing the paperwork to make Africana Studies a department and that she is in conversations to provide resources for them.

**IV. Campus Climate Survey Timeline** – Mary Grace let the Council know that she and Jen will be meeting with Dr. Sue Rankin and her associates regarding the Campus Climate survey. She indicated that due to the COVID pandemic, the working group meetings originally scheduled in April did not happen and that we need to find out what should we do about the timeline for this survey. There was discussion and it was agreed that when Mary Grace and Jen meet with the consultants that we would like to still move forward and see how we could do a measurement of what the experience has been like during this virtual time, but also what we can do to make sure that it is coupled with

another baseline in a time that might be more face to face than virtual.

V. **August Retreat Planning** - Mary Grace reminded everyone that the retreat is supposed to be held on August 21, 2020, but due to Alton Jones closing, we will not be able to have the retreat there. She also raised the question as to whether the retreat should be face-to-face or virtual. If so, are people comfortable being inside or outside? Discussion ensued about what everyone's preference would be and their level of comfort. It was also suggested that maybe the UDC could do a short face-to-face meeting, then do the rest of the meeting virtually. More discussion took place involving moving the retreat to an earlier date or possibly having two meetings due to the fact that there is a lot of work to be done and the UDC needs to come up with a broad outline of topic areas and start to develop ideas. The UDC also needs a structure for taking action as a Council. It was agreed to develop a brainstorming document of ideas for discussion with the President and to poll the group to set up two meetings in the next few weeks.