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The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Commission for Blacks

COMMISSION FOR BLACKS MEETING

MINUTES

December 11, 1987

1:00 pm

The second meeting of the 1987-88 Commission for Blacks was held in the UT Board of Trustees Conference Room located on the 8th floor of Andy Holt Tower. Members present: John M. Jackson, Jr., Chair; Jeanette Barker, Beverly Davis, Nina Elliott, Michael Fitzgerald, Norma Mertz, Diane Morrow, Marvin Peek, Carl Pierce, Larry Ratner, Dean Rivkin, Maxine Thompson, Fred Venditti, David Wyatt, and staff members, Tamara Cunningham and Chloe Reid.

The Chair called the meeting to order and welcomed the Commission members. The Chair asked for introductions of all members who had not attended the first 1987-88 Commission meeting.

The Chair began the order of business by asking the members if there was any old business to be discussed. There was no response, so in addressing an item of old business, the Chair stated that he had talked with Chancellor Reese about the status of the non-discrimination pledge that the Commission had submitted to the UT central administration during this past June. Chairperson Jackson told the Commission that Chancellor Reese had instructed him to work with Bob Greenberg in obtaining the current status of the pledge. The Chair informed the Commission that he would yield relevant information to the body in regard to the pledge as soon as such information became known.

The Chair then moved on to the Executive Committee Report and stated that the report concerned some of the old business that had been addressed at the first meeting. This report concerned the issue of what the Commission should expect to accomplish this year. The Chair stated that the Executive Committee had been appointed by the Chair and met on December 1, 1987. At that meeting the Committee decided to focus on four issues of concern to be addressed this year. The issues are: 1) evaluation of the existing Affirmative Action Program as well as the new reorganization; 2) study the recruitment and retention of students; 3) the status of the Black athlete; and 4) faculty and staff concerns.

The Chair then asked each member to look at the suggested committee member assignment sheet. After the members reviewed the assignments, the Chair opened the floor for discussion.

Dean Rivkin conveyed his concern for the number of members that had been assigned to more than one committee. He strongly felt that this request would be asking too much of each member, based on the effective usage of one's time. Rivkin made a motion that each commission member only have one committee assignment.

Diane Morrow seconded Dean Rivkin's motion and further suggested that it

would be difficult to get all of the persons currently assigned to meet as a group because of the large number of people on each committee. In order to avoid this problem, she recommended that only eight persons be assigned to each committee.

The Chair responded by stating his rationale for having each person assigned to more than one committee. He had intended for the dual committee assignments to serve as initial incentive and encouragement for each member to become an active working integral of the overall Commission function. Furthermore, he explained that since there are always a few members that are not as contributive as others for various reasons, the dual committee assignment plan tended to ensure that everybody would indeed be doing something.

Marvin Peek then addressed the issue of why Objective Two of the Executive Committee Report was included as a concern for the Commission for this year. He did not understand why we wanted to deal with black recruitment while so many other undergraduate and graduate organizations address and deal with this issue. He felt that we would be duplicating an issue that is already addressed throughout the University. He also felt that staff concerns needed to be broken down into several categories because the issue was too broad to be grouped as stated. It would be difficult to achieve any headway if it is left as broadly as it is now.

The Chair then responded to Peek's question of why Objective Two (Student Recruitment and Retention) of the Executive Committee Report was included as a Commission concern. He said that before any action concerning this matter is initiated, the Executive Committee would first find out exactly what is being done with this issue, how it is being addressed, and if it is being addressed effectively throughout the University. The Chair stated he had no intentions of duplicating any efforts in regard to how the issue is currently being handled on campus. The Chair then addressed the issue of the selection of the committee persons. He stated that the selection was done as such, because the Executive Committee was trying to establish the direction in which the Commission would proceed during the year. The Chair also stated the committees did not have to stand as is, however the Executive Committee felt compelled to bring something before the body.

Marvin Peek responded that he felt that the committees as they stood now should be broken down into smaller sub-groups or committees.

David Wyatt expressed the view that the Task Force has been assigned and that we should not burden the Commission with duplication of issues that the Task Force would be addressing.

Carl Pierce made a comment concerning the Committee structure and the business of the Commission. He felt that the goals and work of the Commission should be carried on beyond this calendar year. He insisted that the success of the committees would greatly depend on who would chair each of the committees, since the Commission Chair would select the members whom he felt would work effectively on each of the committees. He further suggested that whomever is chosen to chair these committees should be someone who is not overextended throughout the University. He stated that each committee chair should be totally receptive to the task.

The Chair stated that he leaned toward the selection of chairs as being an executive function and that this year the Executive Committee would choose who would serve as chairperson of each committee.

Marvin Peek then stated that at the last meeting it was agreed upon that we could not do everything or address every issue on campus. As stated by the list given, he felt that we were expanding and doing what we said that we would not do.

Dean Rivkin responded that each committee objective was only a potential list of concerns that came up in the Executive Committee meeting. He too, agreed that in order for the Commission to accomplish anything this year that all of these objectives could not be dealt with, and that it was up to the Commission to decide which issues that it would focus on.

The Chair suggested that we list, according to priority, those issues that we would like to address first and then deal with each issue according to how they were listed.

Marvin Peek then stated that he was confused as to how the Commission and the committees fit together. Was the goal of the Commission a holistic one or was the Commission, committee driven? Also, he did not understand what each committee was to do and what was the function of each committee.

The Chair responded by stating that he did not perceive the Commission/committee relationship as being an either/or situation. He views each committee as being a satellite of the Commission while researching and reporting information in a timely fashion to the Commission. The Chair insisted that all committee units would indeed be embraced as parts that constitute the whole function.

Carl Pierce then asked if there were any specific identifiable issues that needed to be addressed now by the Commission, other than those currently being addressed by the Task Force. He felt that the committees should immediately start working on any sub-issues the Commission is presently engaged in.

Fred Venditti suggested that an alternative means of getting issues that the Commission will address is to charge the committees with the task of coming forward with the issues that they want to give priority to for the year, unless some kind of objectives are established.

The Chair responded by saying that Venditti's suggestion was an excellent recommendation.

Venditti further stated since all of the Commission members who will make up the committees have come from all aspects of the campus, we should let them come up with issues that they feel are vital issues that need to be addressed.

Marvin Peek stated that he still did not understand what the important issues of each committee would be or how they would be arrived at. He stated again that he felt the Commission members should come together and then set out which issues should be a priority and which issues were less important.

Larry Ratner stated that he did not understand the problem of the issues of the Commission versus the committees. He sees the committees as investigating the various issues and then bringing the findings to the chair of each committee who will, in turn, convey these findings to the body. The committees, he stated, are the arms of the Commission and thus should not be a problem. He stated that he did not think we should prioritize what the committees will and will not do. All matters should be decided upon when the reports are yielded to the body.

David Wyatt agreed with Ratner's comment and stated that after the committee reports come in, the committees should then decide what needs to be brought to the Commission body. Success will be realized with aggressive people chairing the committees. Wyatt sees this as the key function.

Maxine Thompson asked what we would do with all of the information. Will we compile a report to the Chancellor?

The Chair assured the Commission members that a comprehensive report would be submitted to the Chancellor.

Fred Venditti said as the Commission looks at the list of committees, it would be a mistake not to look at all the data that is available on these committee topics. The sources of this information also need to be addressed. A great deal of information currently exists on the Black Athlete and persons throughout the University can be utilized as resources in order to obtain this information.

Carl Pierce suggested that we utilize all of the records that the University has available. The Commission must determine if the University has needed information available.

David Wyatt felt that the information the Commission seeks is available, but not located in one centralized place.

The Chair stated that the discussion for the last 10 minutes had been full and that the committees would be streamlined. Chairperson Jackson said that he would revise the committee member assignments and bring amended assignments to the next meeting. The Chair announced to the body that the Affirmative Action Office, through the Black Recruitment Advisory Committee, would soon be suggesting some consolidated method of handling job search information. The Commission will be advised as developments occur. The Chair also announced that there would be a social function for new black faculty, staff, and Commission members in either January or February. Further details would be given at the next meeting.

Marvin Peek requested that members be allowed to keep their Commission notebooks between meetings. A discussion ensued and it was decided that the members would be allowed to take the notebooks with them after each meeting. Peek also requested that a list of the Executive Committee members be given to each member of the Commission.

The Chair thanked all the members for attending before adjourning at 1:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Tamara Y. Cunningham