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CFB Meeting Minutes November 17, 1987

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The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Commission for Blacks

COMMISSION FOR BLACKS MEETING

MINUTES

November 18, 1987

1:00 pm

The first meeting of the 1987-88 Commission for Blacks was held on Wednesday, November 18, 1987, at 1:00 p.m. in the Board of Trustees Conference Room located on the 8th Floor of Andy Holt Tower. Members present: John M. Jackson, Jr., Chair; Dennie Littlejohn, Vice-Chair; Marvin Peek; Fred Vendetti; Mary Richards; Otis Stephens; Diane Cudahy; Ann Prentice; Nina Elliott; Dean Rivkin; Jeanette Barker; Beverly Davis; Diane Wight; J. Otis Cochran; Donald Harris; Camille Hazeur; Dhyana Ziegler; Maxine Thompson; John Hodges; 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 all around and introduced the Commission staff to the members.

The Chair advised the members that the Commission office is located at 415-B Alumni Hall and the phone number is 4-2146. The Chair's office is located in Tyson Alumni House and his phone number is 4-5432.

The Chair began the order of business by asking all members to take a few minutes and read and review the Commission's Charge. He asked that all members become familiar with it.

Prof. J. Otis Cochran gave an informal and unofficial report on the work of the Chancellor's Task Force on Race Relations. Cochran reported that the appointment of the Task Force was a direct result of a recommendation from the Commission's Retreat last February. Cochran gave a brief chronology of the events last spring that led to the Chancellor's appointment of the Task Force. The Chancellor's charge to the Task Force was to look at ways to improve the quality of life for all students, faculty, and staff at UTK. To meet these objectives, the Task Force concentrated its efforts on the concerns of the perceptions of UTK by the Knoxville community, the concerns of students on campus, and finally the concerns of faculty and staff on the campus. The Task Force held a series of public meetings, the first of which was located at Austin-East High School and the last two in the Moot Courtroom of the College of Law. Cochran stated that the Task Force had been conducting on-going meetings with key administrators. The Chancellor had asked the Task Force to study the University for six months. Cochran stated that the Task Force intends to submit its written report to the Chancellor by mid January and that it will be publicized by early February.

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Cochran continued the discussion with several observations of the Task Force and to the public hearings. Cochran stated that the community meeting at Austin-East was troubling to many of the Task Force members. Cochran concluded from the remarks, recounts of past stories, and questions posed from the community that community members felt UT had no interest in the Knoxville black community. They commented that UT was not committed to recruiting black students (particularly in athletics) and noted surprise at the low number of black students from Knoxville who actually enroll at UT. The UT Athletics Department, they stated, showed indifference to the entrepreneurial efforts of black businessmen. Cochran stated that the biggest concern that the Task Force members had about black students was their perceptions of faculty members in the classroom. Cochran stated that the Task Force had assumed that most of the complaints/concerns of students would be in relation to dormitory life. With regard to the faculty/staff hearings, many of the concerns dealt with employment issues. There was an overall feeling that black faculty members were always perceived to "be up to something" and that UT was merely a revolving door for black faculty members. Cochran stated that there was no administrative center on campus that effectively handled many of these problems and concerns of minorities. Cochran then made some concluding remarks.

Dhyana Ziegler inquired into the existence of the non-discrimination pledge that the Commission had submitted to the central administration this past June. Neither the Chair nor the members had any knowledge of its status in the implementation process. The Chair stated that he would get the information by the next Commission meeting.

Marvin Peek asked the Chair his views on the role of the Commission and what he expects to accomplish this year. The Chair stated that he first wants to ascertain what the Commission has done since 1975. He would like to find out what impact the Commission has made at UT. And, in order to obtain this information, he would like to get in touch with all past chairs and discuss these issues with them. Second, the Chair stated that he wants to look at the total picture of how all black organizations are operating on campus (i.e. who's doing what, is it working, are they accomplishing their goals) and make sure there is no duplication. And last, he stated that he wants to push toward seeing some accomplishments realized during this year. He wants to maintain and ultimately accelerate Commission progress.

Ziegler stated that she thought we ought to reconstruct the charge. The Chair stated that we need to upgrade the charge, whether that meant amending or simply modifying it. There followed a general discussion as to whether it was really necessary to re-construct the charge.

Diane Cudahy asked whether the Task Force was going to make any recommendations to the Chancellor with regard to the work of the Commission. An exchange of dialogues took place between Cudahy and Cochran. Cochran finally stated that the immediate past history of the Commission is recognizable, but that the Task Force had no information as to the early history

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of the Commission. He stated that the Task Force was waiting for some information from Marvin Peek, Maxine Thompson, and others who had information on their respective organizations (Commission for Blacks and Minority Student Affairs Office). He concluded by stating that the Task Force would ultimately have a recommendation regarding the work of the Commission but that it would be helpful for the leadership of the Commission to submit any recommendations for the functions and goals of the Commission.

John Hodges stated that we need to hear from the past chairs. He said he wanted to hear from them such things as what prevented them from achieving their goals. The Chair reiterated that he thinks it appropriate to invite all the past chairs to Commission meetings.

There was some more dialogue as to Cudahy's previous question. The Chair allowed a few more comments on the issue then he closed the discussion. The Chair then made several announcements with regard to employment opportunities located on the campus. There is a position available in the College of Communications (Dean Leiter for details). Other positions include a Program Advisor for Panhellenic activities and an Assistant Associate Director for Admissions.

Marvin Peek stated his displeasure with the Chair's cutting off the previous debate with regards to the importance of the future of the Commission in relation to the recommendations of the Task Force.

Maxine Thompson asked whether we were going to have the same standing committees as we had last year. The Chair stated that the Executive Committee would decide that issue.

Marvin Peek stated that he would be testifying before the U.S. Civil Rights Commission in Nashville next week and that the Commission was concerned about UT's failure to send them information when they requested it. Cochran stated that the Task Force had just the day before sent a package of information that it had gathered over the past few months to the Commission by Federal Express. Venditti stated that since the Reagan administration has been in office, the Civil Rights Commission has not been requesting much information.

Littlejohn stated that he had received a phone call from a legislator who said that the University had returned approximately \$ 90,000.00 to the Desegregation Monitoring Committee. No one had any information with regard to the issue, so Otis Stephens made a motion that we find out about the issue.

Ziegler stated that students seem to get scholarship information late. Mary Richard made a comment about her experience as a grant writer for the Graduate School and the time limitations she faced and how this inevitably affected the students.

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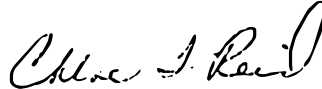
Jeanette Barker asked that the staff send copies of all of last year's Commission minutes to the new members.

Dean Rivkin made a statement as to why are we here. He stated that he didn't think that the Commission should wait for a recommendation from the Task Force before it started its work for the year. He stated that we need to set an agenda and go from there. He made several other comments and then stated that he wanted to see the Commission accomplish something this year.

Cochran suggested a joint Commission and Task Force meeting in December.

The Chair thanked all members for attending the meeting before adjourning at 2:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Chloe T. Reid
Commission Staff