

MINUTES

SPECIAL JOINT TELEPHONE MEETING

UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT BOARD OF TRUSTEES COMMITTEE FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION AND STUDENT LIFE COMMITTEE

Meeting held by Telephone

May 17, 2021

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
Committee Trustees: Andrea Dennis-LaVigne, Andy Bessette, Charles Bunnell,
Shari Cantor, Sanford Cloud, Jr., Marilda Gandara, Rebecca Lobo,
and Bryan Pollard

Student Life Committee
Trustees: Shari Cantor, Andrea Dennis-LaVigne, Justin Fang,
Bryan Pollard, and Ethan Werstler

Other Trustees: Board Chair Daniel Toscano and Trustee-elect Noah Frank.

University Staff: Andrew Agwunobi, Lloyd Blanchard, Michael Bradford, Eleanor
Daugherty, Edina Oestreicher, Nathan Fuerst, Michael Gilbert, Carl
Lejuez, Gerald Lewis, Jr., Jonelle Reynolds, Hans Rhynhart, Angela
Rola, Rachel Rubin, Frank Tuitt, and Daniel Weiner

University Students: Cal Benitex, Jenny Challagundla, Xingyi Chen, Mason Holland,
Dori Jacobs, Mateen Karimi, I'Jaz Muhammad, Sage Phillips, and
Omar Romandia

University Senate Representatives: Maria-Luz Fernandez and Jaci Van Heest

Vice-Chair Dennis-LaVigne convened the joint meeting of the Committees for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion and Student Life at 11:00 a.m.

1. Public Participation (limited to agenda items)

There were no members of the public who wished to address the Committee.

2. Student Leaders Reflections and Recommendations

Vice-Chairs Dennis-LaVigne and Cantor welcomed the members of the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) and Student Life Committees, University staff, and students.

Vice-Chair Dennis-LaVigne expressed concerns about bias-related incidents on campus, improved communication across campus communities, and student safety in preparation for the Fall 2021 semester.

Students representing Black/African American, International, Jewish, LGBT+, Middle Eastern, Native & Indigenous, and undocumented populations offered perspectives on the University's DEI progress and needs. They agreed that the University has been effective in COVID responses and noted progress in the ability to report bias-related incidents, in promoting faculty and staff diversity through cluster hires, and in the University's willingness to engage in conversations about diversity.

Students raised concerns about response times to bias-related incidents on campus. Other topics of concern were food insecurity, inadequate mental health resources, and COVID-related financial issues. As a group, they advocated for prioritizing the development and resources for cultural centers, better advertising of the resources that already exist, mandatory diversity training for all members of the UConn community, and improvement in the administration's communications.

Vice-Chair Dennis-LaVigne opened the floor to questions from the Board for the student leaders. Students gave their perspective on the effectiveness of the cultural centers. Students noted that the centers and their programming provided space for increased intellectual conversation and have expanded communication across cultures. However, the students pointed out that participation is a choice, and that those who most need to participate do not. This opened a conversation about mandatory one-credit classes.

Trustee Cloud then asked about how students felt about diversity in classroom spaces. Students expressed concerns over a lack of diversity in instructors, course offerings, and course materials, which creates an environment that inhibits their ability to learn. It was suggested to embed diversity in curriculum instead of limiting it to a single unit.

Students expressed frustration with mental health resources and the inability to get timely care that fits their schedules, as well as limited options.

Chief of Police Lewis discussed the importance of education and inviting people to the conversation. After discussing his reaction to police action against George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery, Chief Lewis suggested creating a liaison position between the Office for Diversity and Inclusion and the UConn Police Department.

In response to student concerns about mental healthcare at UConn, Dr. Daugherty reaffirmed the University's commitment to mental healthcare. She mentioned a recent task force that recommended putting mental health and well-being in concert with transformative education. She then discussed the Board's considerations of expanding services, making changes to crisis response protocol, and evaluating regional health care to better attend to the mental health care of regional campus students.

Dr. Tuitt affirmed that the University is taking steps to put plans in motion regarding diversity issues. He noted more meeting with student groups, bias education for employees, and efforts to expand anti-racism coursework. He also discussed the continued meetings of the Incident Response Team, which include discussions on programmatic and educational changes. He also discussed a proposed special position for strategic initiatives, the Access, Inclusion, and Success Network, as well as seeking new cultural programming spaces in the Student Union.

Provost Carl Lejuez remarked on diversity's role in UConn's Educational Mission.

3. Executive Session (as needed)
4. Adjournment

There being no further business appearing, the Committee meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jonelle Reynolds, Ph.D.
Committee Secretary