



June 16th, 2020

To President Benson,

For the past two weeks, the Black Student Body and allies of the community have mourned the loss of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and countless others who have died from senseless violence and racism. The Black Student Body is pleased to hear President Benson publicly express his allyship and commitment to ensuring the "reinforce[ment] of the values of community, diversity, and tolerance we share on our campus" in his Living Our Values address.

As the events occurring in our society escalate, we realize now that there is much more work that needs to be done; being an ally is not enough. We agree with President Benson that "change must occur, and each one of us must play a role in effecting this change". To remedy this, The Black Student Body has compiled a strategic plan that we would like the university to review, and promptly implement effectively.

This letter was composed from different groups and individuals after much deliberation. Should you have any questions, comments, or concerns please contact the representatives of The Black Student Body:

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We, students of The University of Texas at Dallas, call on upon the university to commit to the following proposals immediately;

Budgeting

1. Stop all current and future plans for budget cuts to the Office of Diversity and Student Engagement and the Student Counseling Center.

With the emergence of COVID-19 and increased violence across the country it is imperative that students have a safe space on campus that is adequately budgeted to support each student's needs and mental health. The 5% - 10% cuts proposed by both offices include not hiring staff necessary to fulfill the needs of multicultural students on campus.

2. Increase funding towards the Multicultural Center.

As it stands the Multicultural Center serves students from over 100 different countries. In which the MC puts on discussions, showcases and seminars for each one specifically. The purpose of these events are to raise cultural awareness and insight. These events cost money as the MC has to rent out space on campus for each one. Stretched budgeting within the MC happens on a regular basis and the center can no longer accommodate the needs for all multicultural students as the campus grows. UTD prides itself on being diverse and publicly states that diversity is a constant part of campus culture. As students who are encompassed in those statements, we would like to see that adoration reflected in the financial distribution to our dedicated department and center.

3. Update the Campus Master Plan to include a single space for the Office Diversity and Community Engagement and their corresponding centers.

Currently, the Office of Diversity and Community Engagement, and their perspective centers are housed in different locations across campus. We ask that in future planning of the new Student Union building these locations be combined on one wing or an entire floor. This center should include a properly enclosed office space and large board rooms for staff, as well as a computer lab, lounge, meeting rooms, and a dance practice room for students. These changes would bring more unified energy to campus, as well as prevent wasted financial resources for each center as they would have their own dedicated space to host events. Being as though offices such as the Multicultural Center rely heavily on sign-in-rosters to accurately show the need students have for their resources, it is unfair for them to not have an efficiently sized center to house all the students that

consider this to be the only safe space on campus. Lastly, the desire for a dance practice room is to protect the needs of many of our campus' dance teams which are disproportionately cultural organizations (Such as African Student Union, Filipino Student Association, and Indian Student Association). Most organizations have competed in competitions and have brought in publicity and money to the university.

Recruiting, Admissions and Retention

4. Create a combined Freshman and Transfer multicultural student orientation.*

In addition to the freshman/transfer student orientation our university has, we ask there to be a separate multicultural orientation directed towards minority students. This idea mimics the goal and processes of the International Student Orientation. The multicultural orientation would encompass and satisfy the requirements of the existing orientations, but would also include speeches and workshops from minorities such as Black: faculty, counselors, organizations, greek life, as well as give a campus tour highlighting spaces specifically for multicultural students. An orientation, and supplemental Comet Camp of this type would introduce students to resources and tools available to them as minorities, as well as give a space where current minorities could share their experiences.

5. Create scholarships and/or grants specifically for non-first year African American, and Black students.

Many African American and Black students were admitted into UTD but did not qualify for prime UTD scholarships such as AES, McDermott Scholars, and Terry Scholars that are only offered during admissions. The college admissions process as it stands is said to be discriminatory towards first-generation students and students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Students coming from those areas should not have their entire financial future judged based on their academic background before becoming comets at UTD.

We urge that scholarships should be made available to non-first year African American and Black students based upon one or all the following criteria obtained specifically at UTD: Academic Excellence, Leadership, Community Service, Research and/or Financial Need. Qualified students should automatically be considered the scholarship/grant and be notified by the university as such.

6. Expand recruitment at college fairs and campus visits to include lower-income communities and communities outside of Dallas. *

Many students from the Black Student Body neglected the opportunity to speak with a representative from UTD in person before applying. These students originated from lower-income areas as well as areas outside of Dallas in general. We ask that the office of Admissions and Enrollment expand their efforts in reaching those areas specifically in Austin, Houston, San Antonio and El Paso. UT Austin Admissions and Enrollment has physical offices in different regions across Texas and the US dedicated to recruitment, and we believe UTD could benefit from mimicking that process.^{1 2}

7. Create a program for students who are at a financial disadvantage of receiving a meal plan from the school and cannot get healthy foods at an affordable cost.

Low-income students living on campus are not able to purchase or find healthy food options. The university can assist these students by working with local farmers to get affordable healthy options to students on campus. This program in partnership with the Wellness Center and Comet Cupboard could help the underlying health conditions that minorities face, and could help local farmers who are affected by COVID-19 and other unfortunate events. Students who would benefit greatly from this program are students primarily with a family income that is lower than \$70,000 a year.

Campus-Wide Cultural Competency and Diversity Training

8. Create an African & African Diaspora Studies Department.*

Our university does not offer majors like African American Studies, African Studies, or Africana Studies. A department that is devoted to the fulfillment of these studies should be made. The creation of this department would increase the number of Black faculty in the school, and provide a new field of study to prospective students which explores the cultures, histories, and societies of Africans and Afro-descendants. In addition, these courses should be available to all UTD students and satisfy requirements for core credits, as well as be required for existing majors such as History, Psychology, and Sociology.

¹ "First-Generation Longhorns | The University of Texas at Austin." <https://firstgeneration.utexas.edu/>.

² "Contact Us | Undergraduate Admissions | The University of" <https://admissions.utexas.edu/contact>.

9. Ensure that the Fraternity and Sorority Student Life office has a strict stance on anti-discrimination.

Students in Greek life organizations should go through continuous mandatory cultural sensitivity training and the FSL office should ensure these trainings are carried out continuously. In the way that hazing has been a traditional problem of Greek life culture, racial discrimination and insensitivity has also been an issue that is correlated with Greek life. In addition, a pre-emptive measure our university should take is to make sure that students showing interest in initiation to any Greek-letter organization go through cultural intelligence training as a prerequisite for eligibility. The anti-discrimination policy should be as strict and taken as seriously as Anti-Hazing Policy.

10. Required in-person group Intersectional Equity Training course for all faculty and staff provided by a non affiliated third party.*

Similar to the initiative led by the Gender Center, there should be more opportunities for faculty, and staff to undergo a full day of in-person group intersectional equity training that specifically highlights the cultural competency required in all settings. Many minority students have experienced microaggressions and academic trauma prior to and while attending UTD; because of this specific training should be required so faculty and staff understand how to approach these students and to ensure they do not contribute to further student trauma.

11. Develop and implement new metrics for measuring campus diversity.

As it stands, UTD uses student demographics and programming as a primary metric for diversity progression. These numbers are misleading as the Black and African American students, staff and faculty population specifically has not grown in many years and neither has the resources or programming. These metrics take into consideration the number of people on campus, but not the comfort of those people on campus nor the growth or resources provided to them.

We ask that UTD refactor measures of diversity to include the metrics of racial climate on campus, student feelings of belonging and attachment to the institution as students and alumni.

12. Ensure that the Office of Community Standards and Conduct response teams match the demographics of the university.

The Office of Community Standards and Conduct manage cases regarding difficult student behavior and academic dishonesty. We ask that the Dean of Students actively reviews the teams that handle these cases - such as BAIT - and ensure that demographics of the team match that of the university. This will ensure protection and perspective across varying backgrounds.

We also ask for increased exposure to the OCSC as it relates to reporting difficult student behavior. We ask that it be broadcast more throughout SOC, orientation, and classes that discriminatory behavior amongst students is a punishable offense and the proper process in reporting those instances.

13. Amend all hiring documents and processes to include questions regarding racial discrimination.

To the fullest extent of the law, anybody employed or applying for employment by the University of Texas at Dallas - including contracted employment - should be asked their background and current affiliation to any racially biased organizations as well as prior complaints of racial discrimination in all previous positions. Employees would be required to submit this list or affiliation separate from the criminal background check.

14. Add more diversity to UTD Police immediately.

UTD police officers (not including CSOs) seriously lack diversity. We ask that more Black and women-identifying officers be added, and from here out the administration ensures that the demographics of UTD police stay consistent with student demographics. We also ask that UTD police actively communicate with ODCE for consultation to ensure that no single demographic of students are not disproportionately policed on campus.

15. Prohibit Steven Crowder from coming on campus.

Steven Crowder comes to campus nearly every semester with the intent to antagonize students. He films these interactions and broadcasts them negatively over his platform of 1M+ followers³⁴. His presence and intent go against the

³ "Change My Mind Build The Wall 2nd Edition - Steven Crowder ...https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r88_Tju-cAo

⁴ "I'm Pro-Gun | Change My Mind - YouTube." 21 Oct. 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APC2jnOSfhQ>.

campus mission and is traumatic to students. We understand that recent law changes make it legal for him to be on campus outside academic buildings, but we ask UTD to extend their power in banning him from campus for the safety of students.

* For amendments that violate COVID-19 procedures we ask that a temporary virtual option be created until an in-person option be allowed.

As mentioned on multiple sites UTD has grown so fast our slogan is:

"UT at the speed of BRIGHT"

which stems from the following statement,

"In 50 years, we've earned a reputation for bright students, innovative programs, renowned faculty, dedicated staff, engaged alumni, and research that matters."

With the immediate implementation of these changes, we are sure the university will be able to fully fulfill that statement as well as commit to reinforcing "the values of community, diversity, and tolerance we share on our campus".

