

## **Message to DePaul University from Faculty, Staff, and Students of African Descent**

The DePaul community of African descent, under the leadership of the DePaul University Black Leadership Coalition (DPUBLIC) and the Black Student Union (BSU), is committed to assisting the DePaul University Officers in ensuring a better DePaul, where the mission of St. Vincent de Paul becomes a lived experience.

In its June 9, 2020 Message of Solidary, the officers of the University acknowledged that DePaul is not immune to racism, recognizing that “DePaul, as an institution, is part of these systems.” They stated that they “...know that statements are not enough. Words must be followed by action.” and that they “...cannot look at the world and say it needs to change, and not seek to transform systems of racial inequality within our own institution.” They further committed to “work[ing] with students, staff, and faculty to address structural racism within our university.”

Responding to this call, DPUBLIC convened a black townhall meeting on April 1, 2021 to discuss the experiences of faculty, staff, and students of African descent, and to make recommendations to the administration and Board of Trustees.

The community of African descent serves an invaluable role in assisting DePaul to carry out its mission to DePaul students and to the community. Much of the diversity and social justice-oriented programming and services at DePaul have been created by and/or administered by faculty and staff of African descent. These programs include the Center for Black Diaspora (CBD), the African and Black Diaspora Studies Department (ABD), the Black Student Resource Center, the Egan Office of Urban Education and Community Partnerships, the Faculty Council Committee on Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity (CEID), and the Center for Access and Attainment. Together, these programs and units form an essential component of DePaul’s diversity initiatives and community engagement. Faculty of African descent teach a significant proportion of courses that assist students in fulfilling course requirements in the Liberal Studies Program-- multiculturalism, Social, Cultural, and Behavioral Inquiry, and experiential learning. Collectively, black faculty and staff facilitate a significant portion of the Vincentian mission by providing opportunities for students to engage in scholarship and social justice related programs and activities that address critical urban problems (i.e., poverty, residential segregation, environmental racism, underfunded schooling, and access to health care and nutrition) that promote social justice.

Faculty, staff, and students of African descent are a vital part of DePaul and deserve to work and matriculate in a supportive and welcoming environment that values our contribution, respects our humanity, provides avenues of leadership development and opportunity, and assists students in successfully matriculating to graduation. Unfortunately, we find that DePaul has fallen short on its stated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Students of African descent have the lowest four- and five-year graduation rates (41.3% and 52% respectively) and are the smallest proportion of students from all racial and ethnic categories. Black students were 6.9% of the 2020 freshmen class, falling behind Asian-American students

(11%) and Hispanic students (25%). Black students are also a lower proportion of total undergraduate (7.9%) and total student population (9.9%). Graduate students of African descent are 13.7% of graduate students, yet occupy only 7.6% of graduate assistantships.

Due to higher service commitments, many faculty of African descent languish in the associate professor category and face greater barriers to promotion to associate and full professor. They are also underrepresented in upper-level leadership.

Staff of African descent occupy fewer positions in the “Executive, Administrative, and Managerial (9%)” and “Other Professional (9%)” categories, and are concentrated in the “Clerical/Secretarial (17%)” and “Service Maintenance (23%)” categories. Conversely, white staff occupy 64% of “Executive, Administrative, and Managerial positions, and 64% of “Other Professional” positions.

DePaul resides in the heart of one of the most diverse cities in America. Its faculty, staff, and students should reflect this diversity.

### **The April 1, 2021 Black Town Hall Meeting**

#### **The Experiences of Faculty, Staff, and Students of African Descent**

Three issues pervaded the discussion about the experiences of faculty, staff, and students of African descent:

1. University Climate
2. Limited opportunities for advancement and promotion;
3. Limited Accountability and Commitment to Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity

#### **University Climate**

Students expressed that they did not feel welcome at DePaul. Among their complaints were a heavy reliance on a Eurocentric curriculum; indifference and a general lack of support on the part of faculty and administrators; racial hostility; and limited advising and career support. Faculty and staff expressed a fear of retaliation, social isolation, and a lack of inclusiveness, particularly when expressing issues related to racism and campus climate. Faculty pointed to the protracted battle getting the Faculty Handbook 4.4.1 misconduct charge removed from the Faculty Handbook, despite support for its removal from the American Association of University Professors, two faculty committees, and two votes of the Faculty Council. They also pointed to enormous stress and stress-related illnesses associated with hostility and discrimination; the feeling that DePaul marginalizes or push out vocal faculty of color; and the burden incurred by faculty having to file lawsuits to resolve conflict and discrimination.

#### **Limited Opportunities for Advancement and Promotion**

Staff and faculty expressed limited opportunities for advancement and promotion. They both expressed cultural taxation—heavy service, mentoring demands, and diversity work that goes uncompensated and undervalued, and frequently made them targets for racial hostility. Faculty felt that this cultural taxation disadvantaged them in the tenure and promotion process. Faculty

also discussed DePaul's heavy reliance on student evaluations in personnel decisions (formal evaluations and tenure and promotion), despite significant evidence of their vulnerability to bias. Staff noted that they do not receive mentoring or leadership development that would position them for promotion for supervisory or executive level positions. Staff also expressed inconsistency in job salary grades and a lack of clear policy for reevaluating/regrading positions as responsibilities change. Faculty also discussed the existence of an exclusionary network that positions less qualified white faculty for appointment to leadership positions.

### **Limited Accountability and Commitment to Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity**

Faculty, staff, and students uniformly discussed a gap between DePaul's stated DEI commitment and their actual record of accomplishment. They noted that the stated commitment was for marketing purposes and was in word only, and that DePaul did not do a good job of creating DEI metrics and goals to hold themselves accountable and measure progress. Faculty and staff also noted that their complaints were often invalidated or not taken seriously.

DePaul faculty, students, and staff, expressed disdain for the continual listening tours. They felt that they are condescending and evince a lack of real commitment to change, and expressed a need for DePaul administrators to move from listening to dedicated action and a commitment of resources.

### **Recommendations**

A hallmark of equity is the recognition that diverse communities have diverse needs and require diverse resources. Dismantling systemic inequities requires greater effort beyond slogans and statements. It necessitates dedicated and intentional action. The following recommendations address key steps needed to enhance black student, faculty, and staff success, and to address systemic inequities.

### **Dismantling Systemic/Structural Inequities**

The following recommendations address key steps required to promote systemic change:

- Conduct a national search for the permanent provost position.
  - We need a chief academic officer who possesses a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of issues of racism and structural inequality. Ensuring that diverse voices are considered for such an important position is paramount.
- Require that future administrative hires demonstrate a record of accomplishment to DEI.
- Diversify the Board of Trustees and create avenues of communication with diverse faculty, staff, and students.
- Create a faculty representative position to the Board of Trustees from and selected by historically under-represented faculty.
- Develop a centralized campus-wide diversity initiative with input from diverse groups that adds coherency to DEI strategies at DePaul.
- Establish formal evaluations of faculty, staff, and administrators that assess diversity competency and commitment to DEI.

- Create a more effective and properly marketed Bias Incident Report Protocol.
- Create and publicize messages that better communicate to faculty, staff, and students the administration's commitment to DEI.
- Ensure greater participation among white faculty and staff in diversity related programs and events.
  - The preamble to Goal 2 of the 2024 Strategic Plan states "It is our collective responsibility—as faculty, staff, and students—to support this commitment, which is grounded in our core values as a Catholic and Vincentian institution." We need to mean this and treat DEI literacy as a condition of working and matriculating at DePaul.
  - We need to create an anti-racist culture where faculty and staff are able to address issues of racial inequity without fear of reprisal or marginalization.
- Create an intermediary administrative body (an Ombuds Council) in Student Affairs to receive and investigate racial complaints made by students against university officials, faculty, and staff.
- Administer a bi-annual climate survey for faculty, staff, and students of African descent.
  - We want frequent data collection on climate issues and want that data to count in decision making.
- Discuss key issues impacting marginalized communities through campus-wide dialogues.
  - We are an educational institution and should commit to teaching faculty, staff, and students about issues affecting marginalized communities.
- Ensure greater representation of faculty, staff, and students of African descent in University brochures and marketing material.
  - Every promotional brochure, newsletter, website, or document emanating from the University should reflect our diverse community.
- Eliminate the 4.4.1 misconduct charge in the Faculty Handbook that refers to "a pattern of extreme intimidation and aggression toward colleagues."

## **Student Success**

- Create a three-year strategic plan to increase black student retention.
- Mandate Implicit Bias training for all faculty and staff.
  - Faculty and staff and called upon to serve an increasingly diverse student body, and need a better understanding of DEI, racism, and structural inequality. Faculty in particular must move to more multicentric approaches to education.
- Increase funding of Black student organizations and programs.
- Develop a three-year strategic plan to increase total black student enrollment to 15%
- Increase teaching assistantships for black graduate students to 15% within three years,
- Hire a Black Student Organization Coordinator.
- Develop a Black Student Resource Handbook.
- Establish a review of the curriculum of each academic unit to ensure greater racial awareness and inclusion, to be completed within two years.

- Develop more effective advising and academic support services, designed to increase black student graduation to 60% in three years.
- Hire additional mental health professionals of color.
- Expand the Black Student Resource Center.
- Increase staffing and funding for the Office of Multicultural Student Success.
- Develop penalties and consequences for public safety officers who profile black students.

### **Faculty and Staff Success**

- Implement a three-year strategy to increase black tenure-line faculty to 15% of total faculty.
- Develop a three-year action plan to increase staff promotion to “Executive, Administrative, and Managerial” and “Other Professional” categories to 15% of total.
- Create a black faculty, staff, and student directory to ensure greater communication.
- Establish a staff Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion plan.
- Eliminate student evaluations from the tenure and promotion process.
- Compensate diverse faculty and staff for cultural and diversity work.
- Develop DEI metrics and goals at each unit level.
- Create a leadership development program for diverse staff.
- Value and reward diversity service and mentoring in the promotion process to full professor.

### **Conclusion**

We join DePaul in its commitment to ending institutional racism and structural inequality, and call on the University Officers to commit to a more engaged approach to ensuring that DePaul is a socially just, equitable, diverse, and inclusive campus. Words matter, but actions transform.

Please contact the following officers of DPUBLIC and the BSU to arrange a meeting with Mr. Gerald Beeson, president of the DePaul University Board of Trustees and President A. Gabriel Esteban, before May 21, 2021:

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