

Notes from Meeting with BSU Leadership

January 25, 2016

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These are notes from a two-hour meeting with BSU's leadership, where BSU members presented their concerns as well as the concerns they surfaced while speaking with other representative groups of the African American student community at DePaul. They spoke of their love for DePaul and their sense of feeling part of the community, and described DePaul as their "home," but also proposed a number of ways the university's practice could be improved. They grouped these concerns under five topic areas and concluded with a larger request.

Microaggressions

- Well-meaning faculty discuss race in class, frequently turning to students of color to explain issues to the rest of the class. Fellow students do the same in conversations outside of class. This happens constantly and is frustrating.
- Students find that when they do offer their reflections on race, students and faculty alike can become defensive and/or dismissive. Black students are perceived as "aggressive" in such situations, which is even more frustrating.
- They wonder if more extensive cultural competency training could be provided and required of undergraduates, transfer students, full- and part-time faculty.
- They are shocked and disheartened by the blatant racism from our students on Snapchat and Yik Yak and wondered what we could do to educate and sensitize students about this.

Racial Profiling

- Black students perceive that they – and other students of color—are asked more frequently than white students for IDs by Public Safety officers trying to determine if they are DePaul students and therefore permitted in campus facilities. They specifically feel that Public Safety watches over their Soulful Monday evening events more closely than they do other student gatherings. They find this especially embarrassing when invited black students from various Chicago universities attend and notice this as well.
- They also report being pressured to end their Soulful Monday events earlier than the Student Center actually closes, and to move their events at the last moment to new locations. If the students ask "Why?" they find that PS becomes defensive.
- They report that many black students continue to feel profiled by the Rush events in the Quad in spring of 2015, when public safety officers asked for IDs as the black students were inducting their pledges into their fraternity/sorority.
- They desire some process by which their concerns can be taken seriously if they complain about this matter. They feel these concerns are dismissed when they are raised, and that there is no follow-up. They wonder if OIDE can take a role here.

Financial Aid

- They emphasized that many black students come from limited-income situations and are feeling particularly stretched financially.
- They asked that the university revise its policy on "holds," reporting that students can be caught in situations where their financial accounts have not received government funding or loan processing, and through no fault of their own, they cannot register for classes. They further

asked that the holds policy be removed in cases where students have not paid their bills in a timely way. They feel it is more important to keep students on track toward graduation.

- They asked that the annual budget surplus be applied to additional financial aid.
- They asked that the financial aid appeals process be accelerated, as that too can keep a student from registering for classes, and then needed classes are filled.
- They report one person (by name) is superb at addressing their financial concerns in DePaul Central, and so they share her name among their membership and ask for her when they go to DePaul Central. They are frustrated when the DePaul Central staff force them to go online or to others for assistance, when they know they'll eventually have to speak with her anyway to eventually resolve the problem.
- They are frustrated when the frontline staff at DePaul Central asks them to explain their problems at the counter – in the hearing of others in the room – and would prefer a more private space to explain their situations.
- They desire a clearer web-based source of all scholarships for which they might apply.
- They asked if DePaul accepted scholarships from the United Negro Scholarship Fund or the Latino Fund.
- They asked about a scholarship for black students at DePaul Prep to attend DePaul.

Black Faculty/Staff

- They asked if the pool of finalists for Music Dean includes an African-American, and were told it does.
- They are concerned that there are not sufficient black mentors among the faculty and advisors, especially in CSH and CDM.
- They are concerned that our counselling team in Student Affairs has no black counsellors for students to turn to. They believe students in a counselling situation should not also have to manage cross-cultural misunderstandings.
- They report that faculty of color are much more likely to offer them extra time toward completing projects, or simply understanding the pressures they feel trying to manage home, work and school.
- They report that the black faculty and staff tell them that they are glad to advise and support students of color, but that the faculty and staff feel burdened by the heavier workload this requires.

Black Student Academic Success

- They are aware of the lower enrollment, retention, graduation rates for black students at DePaul and wonder what more can be done.

Black Center

- They propose that DePaul open a "Black Center" similar to the one at Northwestern, and this center provide academic, financial and personal counselling; social programming; and serve as a meeting place for students to find one another.
- They realize this is a long term goal and that it won't be accomplished in their years at DePaul, but ask us to begin its planning.

Comments Received from my Campuswide Email

1. Many letters of thanks for the email.
2. Faculty turning to students of color to educate the rest of the class about issues of race. Students refer to this as a “micro-aggression.”
3. Report from an employee/parent regarding three white roommates in one of our dorms who socially ostracized their black roommate. We addressed this immediately using existing processes in residential life.
4. A student in the School of Music wrote a moving letter about seeking ways in which the School might develop more sophisticated ways of assembling a more diverse student body.
5. A lovely testament to the ways ELA is incorporating diverse voices into its English language instruction.
6. A concern that black student athletes nationally are often exploited by their universities and expressing interest as to how DePaul does on these matters.