

Advancing Racial Equity Taskforce Student Life and Support Working Group Report

September 2020

Introduction

The Student Life and Support working group saw its mission as twofold: to shed light on ways that structural racism shapes the experiences, well-being and success of Black students at UIC, and to prioritize a bold vision for direct actions the UIC administration can take to disrupt racist systems at our institution. We see “Black students” as a broad umbrella, including students who are undergraduate, graduate and professional, those who are US-born and immigrant, LGBT students, those with disabilities, etc., all having unique experiences and perspectives. In preparing this report, we reviewed demands from student organizers across campus, elevated student voices through convened panels of Black undergraduate and graduate/professional students, and examined previous reports focused on Black student needs and success, including *The Student Success Initiative: Improving African American Student Success at UIC* (2019) and the report of the *Task Force on the Progression and Success of African American Students, University of Illinois at Chicago* (2016). The working group reaffirms the recommendations of these and other reports that have identified important opportunities to improve the Black student experience at UIC. Our process has resulted in the identification of five action areas that the Chancellor and the university community should focus on moving forward to assure the recruitment and success of Black students at UIC. These include:

1. Implement anti-racism courses, campus-wide trainings, and bias-reporting
2. Increase financial and housing support for Black students
3. Increase the hiring of and support for Black faculty and staff
4. Increase support for Black student wellness and mental health
5. Increase recruitment and support community building efforts for Black students

In the next section of the report, we provide more detail in these five action areas including short term and long term goals and resources needed to achieve success. While the working group saw all these areas as critical to Black student success and thus difficult to rank, their order in the list reflects the degree of attention paid to them in our various discussions and document reviews.

Main Action Areas

1. Implement anti-racism courses, campus-wide trainings, and bias-reporting.

An explicit campus-wide anti-racist agenda is required in order to meet our obligation to produce a well-educated citizenry, and to assure the well-being and success of Black students on the UIC campus. This agenda can and should take a variety of forms including education, training and monitoring, and should be overseen and supported by an Anti-Racism Consortium (ARC) with representation from the Office of Diversity, the Dean of Students Office, the Center for Teaching Excellence and other relevant campus units (e.g. AAAN, the Urban Health Program, student organizations, etc.). It is essential that the campus invest in opportunities and tools for all members of the UIC community (including upper-level administrators) to be able to talk thoughtfully, compassionately, and respectfully about race and structural racism, learn how to identify it within themselves and their work, classroom and co-curricular spaces, and strive to ground their work and engagement in anti-racist principles. The following is a list of priority action items and resources needed:

- a. *Anti-Racism Courses.* Every UIC college and academic program will incorporate inclusive anti-racist pedagogy into its curriculum, and no student will complete a UIC undergraduate or graduate program without exposure to this content. There will be an array of courses with different disciplinary lenses whose primary focus is on racism and anti-blackness, and there will also be racial justice curricular threads in other courses. Standards will be set for elements that must be included for a course to meet the anti-racism requirement, and faculty/programs can submit courses for approval. Curriculum specialists will be available to assist faculty with developing and teaching course content. Searches for new faculty hires will prioritize specialties/background in teaching about racism, Black identities, etc. in relation to the respective disciplines.
- b. *Campus-wide Trainings.* UIC will substantially expand available trainings, consultations and workshops to help faculty, staff and students participate in and contribute to the campus anti-racist agenda. There will be a training requirement, but rather than a single “click through” online training, trained facilitators will be available to help campus units to practice and grow in understanding and engagement with anti-racism. Faculty and teaching assistants will be required to incorporate inclusive teaching pedagogies into their courses and ensure that they are trained support UIC’s diverse student body. The [University of Michigan’s Common Ground Program](#) can serve as one model for growing the number of campus facilitators available to support these efforts by training students to engage their peers in intergroup dialogue and anti-racist education in the classroom and co-curricular settings.

- c. *Bias Reporting.* UIC will expand awareness of and increase support for a [bias reporting system](#) that can be used to monitor instances of perceived racial bias, microaggressions, offensive language, etc. This is meant to be supplemental to and not replace existing official systems for reporting misconduct. The bias reporting system along with other tools like climate surveys will help UIC administrators to monitor the campus climate, particularly as experienced by Black students. Allegations of racial bias, white supremacist language, etc. must be taken very seriously and responded to with appropriate interventions grounded in a restorative justice approach. These interventions may include securing the services of an outside consultant with appropriate expertise and credentials to assess racial climate on campus, assist in developing the anti-racist agenda and recommend amelioration measures.
- d. *Resources Needed.* Salary and operational resources will be needed for faculty, staff and student workers whose responsibilities will be to develop, implement and sustain inclusive anti-racist curricula, training, skilled facilitation and bias monitoring. Suggestions include:
 - i. *Administrative positions (percent time to be determined):* Anti-Racist Consortium (ARC) Executive Director and Administrative Assistant; Director of Faculty Engagement in Inclusive and Anti-Racist Pedagogy; Senior Instructional Designer; Associate Director of Bias Response and Prevention; Associate Director of UIC Dialogue/Common Ground Initiative; Dialogue Initiative Program Coordinator.
 - ii. *Graduate Assistants: 2 each assigned to: Anti-racism Consortium, Instructional Design, Bias Reporting, Dialogue/Common Ground (8 total).*
 - iii. *Additional expenses: funding for undergraduate student workers; stipends for student advisory/advocacy board members; faculty incentives to support curricular innovation/course development*

2. Increase financial and housing support for Black students. The financial support for Black students is one of the most important factors to their success at UIC. Increasing financial aid and scholarship support is an important action item, along with providing financial support for on-campus housing opportunities, which lead to better retention and academic success outcomes for Black students.

Success in this area will include:

- a. *Financial Aid Specialist:* UIC must prioritize hiring or designating a Financial Aid Point Person to assist with FASFA application tracking and navigating financial aid support for Black students. This specialist should be knowledgeable and focus on providing resources to support Black students with some of the barriers and bureaucracies of paying for college. This individual would partner closely with success centers and should be hired or designated by Fall 2021.

- b. *Establish Active Fundraising for Recruitment and Retention Programs of Black Students: UIC will create a fundraising initiative to target funds designated for recruitment and retention of Black Students. This will include resources not just for direct financial assistance, but also for mentoring and professional development opportunities at all educational levels and for all disciplines. Emphasis on grant opportunities will be a part of the university-wide strategy to better fund Black student success. The Chancellor should ensure these efforts are centralized, with advocacy groups and organizations having input on how these funds are designated.*
 - c. *Create Scholarship for Low-Income Black Students: In addition to broad fundraising efforts, a specific scholarship should be established to support low income Black students. UIC should target raising 1 million per year on this initiative and report regularly on the progress of these efforts. Advancement should partner closely with the Office of Diversity and other relevant departments.*
 - d. *Enhanced Dissemination (Marketing) of Resources: UIC will determine more strategic ways to target the Black community with existing financial resources and programs in culturally sensitive methods.*
 - e. *Resources Needed: The resources needed to support this action area could include the following:*
 - i. *Administrative positions: Two positions are likely needed for this area to be successful. One position would focus on Financial Aid support for Black students housed in Student Financial Aid & Scholarships the other position would focus on fundraising for Black student initiatives within University Advancement.*
 - ii. *Financial resources: Financial resources should be invested in culturally sensitive marketing strategies, which might require external consultants, agencies or support. In addition, the university should consider a financial commitment to scholarships and prioritizing grants.*
- 3. Increase the hiring of and support for Black faculty and staff.** Black faculty and staff play a vital role in effective Student Life and Support. Increased recruitment and retention of Black faculty and staff across all departments is needed, and especially in positions of power where decisions are made and policies established. There is a need for Increased recognition and reward for student-focused activities. Strategies for increasing recruitment and retention include:
- a. *Implement a ten-year hiring plan to recruit and retain Black faculty and staff, particularly in fields where few if any now exist, and at higher administrative levels. In addition to zero-percent departments, those units with small numbers of Black faculty and staff shoulder a huge burden in this area (Engineering, Business, etc.) must be bolstered with new hires and support structures. Faculty and staff should come from diverse economic and educational backgrounds. Initiatives can include:*

- i. *Implement faculty cluster-hire programs.*
 - 1. *One target group would be faculty who are leaders in the study of the impact of race in the Americas.*
 - 2. *Another target group is Black faculty in fields like STEM (which have the fewest Black faculty and where Black students feel the most isolated), with a focus on faculty who are explicitly interested mentoring future Black professionals in these field.*
 - 3. *Revitalize and re-implement the Underrepresented Minority and Interdisciplinary cluster hiring initiative.*
 - 4. *Revamp the Target of Opportunity hiring initiative.*
- ii. *Provide recognition and reward for existing Black faculty who participate in formal Black student support activities.*
 - 1. *Allow course releases to provide faculty additional time for student support activities*
 - 2. *Create mechanisms for non-tenure-track faculty to contribute to student support activities.*
- iii. *Examine the Underrepresented Faculty Recruitment Program (UFRP)*
 - 1. *Review the UFRP program to see if it is having the intended impact for which it was originally designed.*
 - 2. *Each Dean's annual report should include an explanation of how UFRP funds are used to recruit or retain URM faculty.*
- iv. *Create an underrepresented minority faculty leadership program*
 - 1. *According to UIC's Diversity at a Glance the university's top leadership has seen a sharp decline in the proportion of university leaders from historically underrepresented minority backgrounds. In 2010-11 URMs represented approximately a third (32%) of campus leadership by 2015-16 it represented 13%.*
 - 2. *This program should include non-tenure track faculty who have been at UIC for at least 5 years.*
- b. *Recognize student-focused support activities as departmental and university service.*
 - i. *Participation in these activities should be formalized in the procedures and policies for faculty tenure and staff promotion decisions.*
- c. *Fund mentoring programs for Black faculty, staff, and students.*
 - i. *Create a position to coordinate and support mentors with specialized knowledge and training appropriate to the enterprise. Training for mentors, to address issues including implicit bias, should be required.*
 - ii. *Bolster existing mentoring programs with additional resources and encourage increased engagement among both mentors and metees Black mentor engagement*
 - iii. *Encourage existing programs to collaborate and coordinate messaging to maximize information dissemination to students*
 - iv. *Intentional support for and expansion of staff members in mentorship roles*

d. Resources Needed for this action area:

- i. Administrative Positions: At least one position will need to be created to coordinate a campus wide mentoring program.*
- ii. Financial Resources: Additional funds are needed to strengthen existing programs to maximize their effectiveness.*

4. Increase support for Black student wellness and mental health. By

expanding, funding and publicizing the student wellness and mental health resources that currently exist on campus, the university will curate not just well-educated professionals but also well-balanced individuals. The key issues that hinder Black student wellness and mental health include students' sense of isolation and un-belonging, lack of resources on campus, and experiences of disempowerment. To address them, the following actions are recommended:

- a. Fund mental health services: Provide more permanent and robust funding to mental health resources, such as the UIC Counseling Center, to hire more staff, especially those who best serve the needs of Black students. UIC Counseling Center staff need to be reflective of UIC's community in terms of overall numbers and ethnoracial representation as a Minority Serving Institution.*
- b. Teletherapy providers: In addition to hiring more Counseling Center staff, a temporary contact with telehealth provider would be helpful to provide additional services to students who at this time are living outside of Illinois. The counseling center is able to provide some services to this group but other services are limited by the boundaries of licensure. Some possible vendors include TalkSpace, Morneau Shepell, BetterHelp or Ginger io.*
- c. Spaces of support for Black students: Although spaces that offer support and learning have been developed, increasing offerings would be useful in building community, dispelling stigma in seeking mental health services, managing imposter syndrome, informing students on how to access available campus services, and teaching stress management and coping skills, provide support, etc.*
- d. Resource guide: Developing a resource guide for students would assist them in accessing help and support from the Counseling Center, Health and Wellness Center, religious centers etc. This resource guide would include actual scenarios with suggestions on how to deal with particular challenges and link students to existing resources.*
- e. Wellness coordinator: Available resources should be shared between staff that assist students, as it would reduce the stress that students face when seeking access to needed services. Creating a permanent position to coordinate and connect current disparate efforts in supporting students' in support of a "one-stop shop" for UIC wellness and mental health.*

- f. *Funds for educational, cultural and community-building events and projects: Allocating additional funds to programs that focus on connecting Black students and faculty and making the Black presence on campus more visible would address the isolation reinforced by students in the commuter campus environment. Funds for this programming, including MLK and Black history month, should be jointly managed by the Department of African American Studies, the African American Cultural Center, the Office of Diversity, and Center for Student Involvement.*
 - g. *Support services on West campus: Extending mental health, wellness and cultural center services on West Campus for Black students is important so that they can have immediate access to necessary resources. A possible solution includes the extension of Cultural Centers and Wellness Centers to West campus.*
 - h. *Resources needed:*
 - i. *Teletherapy providers:*
 - 1. *Approximate Cost: \$30/per student x 35,000 = \$1M*
 - ii. *Spaces of support for Black students*
 - 1. *More staff and/ or release time for current staff to focus on these programs and spaces)*
5. **Increase recruitment and support community building efforts among Black students.** It is critical to strategically focus on the recruitment and retention of Black students at UIC. This action item requires campus and community collaboration with a centralized approach to address pipeline challenges and support the strengthening of a strong Black student community at UIC. Success in this area will include:
- a. *Address pipeline and recruitment challenges: UIC must establish publicly stated aspirational goals with metrics. There should be regular communication on the progress of goals with the campus and Chicagoland community. To address pipeline issues, strong engagement with the community must be prioritized including bridge programs, wrap around services, and the limitations of standardized tests. Current Black students should also participate in the pipeline and recruitment process in intentional ways that yield more students and respect the time and academics of current students. Articulation agreements with community colleges should be a critical part of this strategy.*
 - b. *Continual assessment and refining communication strategies: UIC should continue to assess the experiences of Black students in the areas of recruitment, retention and student community issues. This will consist of yearly independent focus groups with Black students, faculty and staff. Strategic focus groups with various Black Chicagoland communities and prospective students would be a regular aspect of the universities approach. Additional assessment strategies including campus climate surveys and evaluations from support programs should be included in data collection. Analyzing and adjusting specific communication strategies for the Black community must be an integral aspect of this action item.*

- c. *Restructure a position to support strategic engagement and initiatives: A full time position should be devoted to sustaining year-round development, tracking centralized efforts, and supporting Black organizations and programs. This campus leader will work with campus partners on the engagement of Black students, retention and community building. This position should also prioritize strategic participation in events and programs by the Chancellor and campus leadership, which students indicated was important.*
- d. *Reaffirm the importance and support of advisory bodies and initiatives: The Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Blacks, Black focused organizations, programs and initiatives should be strengthened and supported. A regularly scheduled forum with these groups should be convened to share progress, concerns and goals. These structures are critical to the success of Black students and should be prioritized by the university leadership and progress on efforts should be regularly communicated to the university community.*
- e. *Resources Needed: The resources needed to support this action item could include the following:*
 - i. *Administrative positions: Hiring or realigning a full time position to support the centralization of information and to better focus on the Black student experience with campus partners would be critical to achieve this action item.*
 - ii. *Financial Support: Financial resources may include paying current Black students to support recruitment initiatives. In addition, staff time devoted to community engagement and pipeline development as well as determining the appropriate level of financial investment in the Chicagoland community to support this initiative. Other financial costs would include external consultants to manage focus groups and campus climate surveys.*

Conclusion

The purpose of the Student Life and Support working group was to identify action areas that could be implemented at UIC to improve the Black student experience. We followed the process of reviewing demands from student leaders, examining reports that highlighted Black student needs and success, as well as convening student panels to directly engage with students. After completing the process, we prioritized the following action areas:

1. Implementing anti-racism courses, campus-wide trainings, and bias-reporting
2. Increasing financial and housing support for Black students
3. Increasing support for Black student wellness and mental health
4. Increasing the hiring of and support for Black faculty and staff and support for programs focused on Black students

5. Increasing recruitment and support community building efforts among Black students

The Student Life and Support working group's biggest challenges were determining the funding necessary to implement the action areas identified and creating a feasible timeline of implementation. Additionally, the working group developed a significant number of recommendations for additional staffing across campus for faculty, staff, graduate students, and student positions. There should be critical examination on how these positions are developed and exploration of potential consolidation of some of the recommendations around staffing. The Student Life and Support working group attempted to the report as concise as possible and some of the more specific details were not included but are preserved in other documentation. As the implementation phase begins, some of the more specific details should be revisited as they will play an important role in the best strategy to achieve success in these action areas. We recommend that a staff member oversee the funding and implementation of the action areas highlighted throughout the report. In addition to the challenges highlighted above, the working group would also like to emphasize the importance of taking the necessary steps to implement the action areas in the near future.

A common concern that student leaders shared was their disappointment in the lack of action that the university had demonstrated after *Improving African American Student Success at UIC* (2019) and the *Task Force on the Progression and Success of African American Students University of Illinois at Chicago* (2016) concluded. Furthermore, the current political climate has highlighted the importance of immediate action. It is crucial that the university work towards improving the Black student experience by demonstrating urgency in the implementation of the action areas.

Finally, the working group recognizes that although our specific charge was to focus on the needs of Black students on campus, many of these strategies and approaches are relevant to other racialized and historically marginalized groups.