



THE UNIVERSITY of
MISSISSIPPI

Action Plan on Consultant Reports and Update on the Work of the Sensitivity and Respect Committee

To: All Who Love The University of Mississippi

From: Dan Jones, Chancellor

Aug. 1, 2014

In the summer of 2013, an expanded Sensitivity and Respect (S&R) Committee completed its review of the university's environment on race and related issues. Following the committee's report, two consultants with relevant experience at major universities were assigned separate but complementary tasks. One was charged with evaluating the University of Mississippi's organizational structure related to diversity and inclusion, and the other explored issues the committee raised concerning building names and symbols. (Both consultant reports are attached.)

We are grateful for the good work of the S&R Committee and our independent advisors. Consultants Ed Ayers and Christy Coleman have been leaders in Richmond, VA, in establishing a more balanced view of history for that community, where symbolism has been a prominent topic. Their recommendations encourage us to broaden the visible symbols of our history to be more intentionally inclusive. Greg Vincent offers insight about our organizational structure out of his own experience reorganizing the approach at the University of Texas, where they adopted several time-tested practices implemented at other flagship universities, including creation of a new senior level leadership position with a focus on diversity.

Both of these reports are candid in suggesting that more can be done here to improve our environment for diversity and inclusion. Both also note the good work and positive spirit for continued progress in our university. Our success in improving diversity within our faculty and student body has been dramatic, but we can do more. And despite negative publicity related to recent bias-related incidents, it is good news that the number of minority applicants to the university continues to increase each year. In addition, the improvement in diversity within our faculty has been extraordinary, placing us among the top three flagship universities in the nation in percentage of African American faculty members. Still, we can and will do more.

It is my hope that the action plan outlined here – reflecting the hard work of the S&R Committee and our consultants – will prove valuable in making us a stronger and healthier university, bringing us closer to our goal of being a warm and welcoming place for every person every day, regardless of race, religious preference, country of origin, ability, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or gender expression. We know that the issues discussed here are associated with many evolving attitudes and opinions. There were and will continue to be differences of opinion among us. But I am encouraged that while our discussions over recent months were frank, even tough, they also were civil and

respectful. My very sincere thanks go out to all of those who demonstrated these values throughout the process.

People with different views will likely find parts of this action plan they like and other parts they do not. Some will agree or disagree with individual comments reported by our consultants. As our consultants noted and as readers should remember, the comments reported here did not result from scientific research or a random sample. They are thoughts from people who felt strongly about the issues we have faced as a university, people who were encouraged to be candid. To whatever degree they do or do not reflect majority opinion, they are important views to air. It was important that we hear from everyone who loves this university. Too often when viewpoints are wide-ranging and emotional, the easy answer for leaders is a non-decision, freezing people at a point in time and putting progress off to another day. To me, that is not leadership. And our mission as a university is to lead.

Whatever the views may be on different aspects of this report, I am hopeful that people who read it and find places to agree or disagree will honor a process that encouraged honest dialogue and valued every idea. I am also hopeful that with decisions made, we have found common ground to move this university forward.

With many months of hard work behind us, we now have a strong foundation for the work ahead. I'll count on your help in making this plan the success I know it can be.

Following are the six specific recommendations from our consultants and the action plan for each:

1. Create a vice chancellor level position for diversity and inclusion at The University of Mississippi.

The Provost is charged with creating a specific position title, portfolio, set of responsibilities, and initial budget for this new administrative position. He will work within policy for creating a new position, including consultation with the faculty and approval by our governing board. He will appoint a search committee to begin work within the Fall 2014 semester.

2. The University of Mississippi should establish a portfolio model of diversity and engagement.

See response to recommendation 1.

3. The University of Mississippi must deal squarely with the issue of race while also addressing the other dimensions of diversity.

This point is important for all of us to grasp. We look forward to a day when it is the norm to embrace and celebrate our differences, when our country and state have become a truly post-racial society. But that day has not yet arrived. Clearly, there are still issues

regarding race that our country must address. And we will need to continue a dialogue on race at our university. Our unique history regarding race provides not only a larger responsibility for providing leadership on race issues, but also a large opportunity – one we should and will embrace. The faculty group focusing on our history with slavery began its work during the last year, and it is a healthy example of the kind of scholarly leadership we can provide. The work of the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation must and will continue, as well. And with advice and support from the new vice chancellor, important work (such as the Critical Race Studies Group) can be supported further and encouraged. This will be an important part of the responsibilities for the new vice chancellor.

4. The University should consider a symbolic and formal dedication of all new students to the ideals of inclusion and fairness to which the University of Mississippi is devoted.

The UM Creed was adopted by our community for this purpose – as a means of communicating and cultivating our community’s core values. Even though as a public university we cannot require any sort of pledge or oath as a condition of enrollment, working with current students and others we will pursue ways to elevate and imbue our community with the values of the Creed through a variety of means, ranging from the formal and ceremonial to the common and pervasive. The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs is charged with implementation of this recommendation.

5. We recommend that the University offer more history, putting the past into context, telling more of the story of Mississippi’s struggles with slavery, secession, segregation, and their aftermath.

Decisions made in the city of Richmond, VA, offer an enlightened example for us. Without attempts to erase history, even some difficult history, and without removing existing statues and building names, the city has moved toward balancing the way its history is represented by offering context for symbols and adding meaningful new symbols. Some of this kind of work began on our campus with the erection of the Meredith statue. Further opportunities lay ahead.

The new vice chancellor will be charged with the long-term management of this recommendation. Until that selection is complete, the Provost and the Assistant to the Chancellor for Multicultural Affairs are charged to lead this effort.

These university leaders should seek suggestions from various interested constituency groups regarding future naming opportunities for centers, buildings, etc., that will lead to a fuller expression of our history. These constituency groups might include, among others, the Faculty Senate, Staff Council, the Associated Student Body, Black Student Union, Alumni Association, Black Alumni Association, the Isom Center, The Winter Institute, and the Center for Inclusion & Cross Cultural Engagement.

They also should initiate an effort to provide contemporary context for some of our existing symbols and names, which are too often viewed as an endorsement of ancient ideas. Any and all symbols and buildings may benefit from this, but some to consider in the early stages include Vardaman Hall, the ballroom in Johnson Commons, and the Confederate Statue. This might be done in a number of ways, including accompanying plaques that provide context and an educational opportunity for students and campus visitors who are interested in our history.

Some immediate steps are being taken to begin the process:

- The entrance of the newly named Manning Center was recently designated the Williams-Reed Foyer. This designation recognizes Ben Williams and James Reed, the first two African American football players at the university. Thanks to Ross Bjork, Hugh Freeze, and others in athletics for their leadership in creating this recognition.
- The new Center for Inclusion and Cross - Cultural Engagement will open in fall 2014 in Stewart Hall and later in the renovated and expanded Student Union, enhancing the quantity and quality of programming and leadership initiatives for underrepresented students. Our students have been and will continue to be instrumental in developing this campus resource.
- We will move forward with changes to two street names. Coliseum Drive will need a new name when the Tad Smith Coliseum is replaced with our new basketball arena. On a recommendation from the University of Mississippi Alumni Association and the M-Club, at the appropriate time the street currently known as Coliseum Drive will be renamed “Roy Lee ‘Chucky’ Mullins Drive.” The spirit of Chucky Mullins is a great unifying force for our university. A second street name change will extend the use of “Chapel Lane” to the single block on the opposite side of Fraternity Row previously named “Confederate Drive”.

6. We recommend that the University consider the implications of calling itself “Ole Miss” in various contexts.

Our longstanding nickname is beloved by the vast majority of our students and alumni. A few, especially among our faculty, are uncomfortable using the term “Ole Miss” – some at all, and some within the academic context. Some object simply because it is a nickname and prefer the more formal name, and some express concern about its origin, believing that the term is racist.

Some of what was learned about the “Ole Miss” name over the last year or so, in a purposeful evaluation, includes:

- The vast majority of current students of all races embraces the name and does not attach any meaning to it other than an affectionate name for the university.
- National research revealed that there is no greater association with negative racial history for either “University of Mississippi” or “Ole Miss.” In fact, a significant

margin likes and prefers the “Ole Miss” name. And a very small percentage of respondents associate the university with negative race issues, whatever the name.

- Regardless of its origin, the vast majority of those associated with our university has a strong affection for “Ole Miss” and do not associate its use with race in any way. And the vast majority of those who view us from a distance associate the term “Ole Miss” with a strong, vibrant, modern university – and the Manning family, *The Blind Side*, The 2008 Presidential Debate, and great sports teams.

We are fortunate to have a highly favorable national reputation for our university, especially our fine academic programs. Applications and enrollment continue to soar. The quality of our applicants improves every year. And the affectionate term “Ole Miss” is and will continue to be an important part of our national identity.

To address some concerns, the Provost and Chief Communications Officer are charged with developing a plan to provide guidance on best uses of the terms “The University of Mississippi” and “Ole Miss.” This plan should broadly follow traditional convention that the term “Ole Miss” is strongly associated with athletics and the broad “spirit” of the university (e.g. the alma mater), and “The University of Mississippi” is strongly associated with the academic context.

University Communications will continue to offer a choice of stationary and name cards that reflect only the use of “The University of Mississippi” without reference to nicknames.

Additional Work of the Sensitivity and Respect Committee

The work of the Sensitivity and Respect Committee has continued on several fronts, with important progress to report.

- The Bias Incidence Response Team (BIRT) was created during the summer of 2013, with a charge to affirm the Creed when incidents of bias arise. This inter-disciplinary team investigates, reports and offers educational outcomes when legal or conduct options are not available. Its goal is to promote educationally driven outcomes that enable students, faculty and staff to learn about discriminatory behavior and language.
- The University of Mississippi Police Department (UPD) provided diversity training for 67 employees, involving experts from the U.S. Department of Justice, and established a process for diversity training for all new hires.
- The Student Affairs division partnered with the Winter Institute to expand diversity training initiatives, with 32 percent of staff having now completed training and all scheduled to complete the program by 2015. Other divisions across campus are being encouraged to schedule training, as well.
- Renderings are being developed to incorporate a National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) garden between Northgate Drive and the new residential facility being constructed beside Crosby hall. This student-centered area will be a visible monument that represents the important history and critical campus engagement opportunities

afforded by our historically black fraternities and sororities. The timeline for completion is uncertain at the early part of the planning phases, but our hope is to begin work after the residence hall opens in fall 2015.

- The Diverse Learning Environment Survey was administered to all sophomores and juniors in the spring of 2013. It will be repeated every three years as a means of measuring campus climate; results will be presented to the S&R Committee.
- A variety of student-focused efforts have been initiated, including enhanced academic advising and support for participants in the Ole Miss Opportunity (OMO) program, increased focus on building relationships with high schools having a high minority concentration, and mandatory “Respect the M” sessions at Orientation, covering both academic and behavioral expectations. EDHE 105 and the related text have been enhanced, resulting in a common curriculum across all sections to uniformly discuss race and sexual orientation. An extended orientation and leadership development training program will be offered as a pilot beginning in the fall of 2015, focusing on diversity training, team building, university history and leadership development.
- To create a culture of research excellence related to race, the Critical Race Studies group invited as its keynote speaker the author Craig Steven Wilder, who wrote *Ebony and Ivy*. In addition, our faculty is creating an inventory of University of Mississippi race-related research. With the assistance of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, a group of 10 UM investigators spanning seven academic and administrative units are collaborating to develop a National Science Foundation Research Traineeship (NRT) proposal. This certificate program that would prepare STEM graduate students to take culturally responsive, multi-method, and interdisciplinary approaches in research, addressing racial and other disparities in disaster readiness and response.