

Dear President Turner,

We, the Black Unity Forum (BUF), are an organization comprising leaders from our affiliate groups which serve the black students, faculty, staff, and alumni of SMU. We advocate for the equitable treatment of past, present, and future black Mustangs. We believe that dialogue and collaboration between our affiliate groups is critical to the advancement of the SMU black community. Equally critical is that our voice resonates to promote accountability and dialogue regarding the University's role in facilitating our advancement. Fortunately, our capacity accomplishes both.

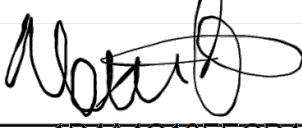
We are pleased with Southern Methodist University's recent steps in affirming their commitment toward the diversity and the inclusion of all Mustangs. We have high expectations for Dr. Dixon-Hall, the newly appointed Chief Diversity Officer, the Ombudsperson, and the University Diversity Council and believe that with proper support they will have the ability to create monumental positive change for Mustangs of all backgrounds. We deeply care about our university. Therefore, we refuse to be content and will not cease diligently working until every Mustang enjoys equally the value they possess at SMU. Sadly, through a lack of representation and opportunity, this is not the case for our black SMU community. This needs to change immediately.

As the BUF, we have created an action plan which highlights the commitments, goals, and criteria we deem as paramount to the success of our black community at SMU. Some points are familiar from previous letters and discussions from our affiliate groups. This is because we firmly acknowledge and support the individualized needs and concerns that each of our affiliate groups have voiced. As a united front we have also introduced areas where our groups can progress together. We greatly appreciate the university administration's patience as we have gathered and clarified our collective voice. With that time, we have created a plan that represents equitable opportunities for black students, faculty, staff, alumni, and administrators alike. With this action plan, the BUF offers SMU an opportunity to engage in a fully accountable partnership with the SMU black community as we quest for a better SMU for black Mustangs, and for all Mustangs. This is possible only with a continuous dialogue, one not confined only to moments of crisis and racial injustice experienced at our university and in the nation. We look forward to your response and hope you join us in seeing this action plan come to fruition.

Signed,

The Black Unity Forum

Signatures


DocuSigned by:

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Lexxi Clinton
President, Association of Black Students

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Sky Arbuckle
Vice President, Black Law Student Association

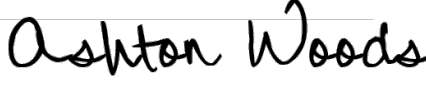
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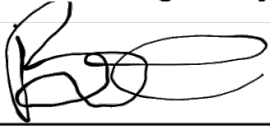
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Emily Newsome
President, Black Faculty and Staff Association

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Dr. Jessica Weaver
BUF Representative, Black Faculty

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Jasmine Tobias
President, Black Alumni Board

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Ashton Woods
President, Student-Athlete Advisory Committee

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Bri Tollie
President, Black Student-Athlete Committee

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Avery Pennywell
Founder, Black Unity Forum

Black Unity Forum (BUF) Expected Commitments

1. Increased Transparency Between the Black Community and Administration;
2. Acknowledgement and Commitment to Continually Collaborate with BUF and its Respective Constituency Groups; and
3. Increased Recruitment and Service of the Greater Dallas community

Black Unity Forum Action Plan

x Goal 1: Increase University Accountability for Equitable Treatment of its Black Community

☞ Hire a Chief Diversity Officer or Associate Provost for Diversity

③ *Why this needs to happen:* The black faculty and staff need a senior administrative position to listen to and address diversity-related academic and workforce issues. This officer will be tasked with improving and expanding upon the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty and staff.

③ *Expected funding:* Operational funding \$400,000/fiscal year ([UM pg.678](#))

③ *Expected timeline:* In progress as of August 12th, 2020

🕒 Hire an Ombudsperson

③ *Why this needs to happen:* SMU faculty and staff should have a person who serves as an unbiased, confidential mediator to address interpersonal or work-related issues that arise between staff, faculty, supervisors, and/or the administration. Having an Ombudsperson will assist in providing agency to diverse staff, faculty, supervisors and/or administrators who have historically been marginalized and who are without recourse to address workplace problems. While maintaining the confidence of individuals, this person will be a critical resource in alerting our CDO about key systemic issues, bottlenecks, and university areas that are hostile to the inclusion and equity of people within our campus community.

③ *Expected funding:* \$80,000/year salary commitment

③ *Expected timeline:* In progress as of August 12, 2020; Position filled by Fall 2021 with search committee comprising members of BUF-affiliate organizations

🕒 Increase black representation in hiring practices across campus

③ *Why this needs to happen:* In order to change the culture of the university to be more inclusive, we recommend an intentional focus on increased diversity in hiring committees with specific attention to black representation. In addition, we suggest that hiring supervisors be precluded from serving as search committee chairs, and these committees be interdisciplinary whenever possible.

③ *Expected funding:* Deliberate time and effort

③ *Expected timeline:* Effective immediately

🕒 Develop or revise written faculty tenure standards and departmental accountability processes where they do not exist or have not been updated within the past decade

- ③ *Why this needs to happen:* The current process for becoming a tenure-track professor and obtaining tenure at SMU is arbitrary and opaque. As a result, several black faculty members have either been denied tenure or left SMU entirely over the past thirty years, but especially in the last decade. Each loss makes recruitment and retention of new faculty and students increasingly difficult. We propose that the CDO and faculty work together to build a publicly accessible criterion which allow faculty from each department and graduate school to measure and justify their body of work toward obtaining tenure-track status and being granted tenure. Furthermore, a standard procedure and timeline needs to be established for department chairs and deans to refer to for the appointment of tenure committees along with the guidance provided from the committee to tenure-track faculty. The standardizing of this process will reduce bias or discrimination against minority groups and create a more level playing field for all faculty. ([Reference](#))
- ③ *Expected funding:* Deliberate time and effort
- ③ *Expected timeline:* Spring 2021 with approval from CDO and diverse faculty
- 🕒 Establish clear violation protocol against acts of racial discrimination in Student Code of Conduct and SMU Policy Manual
 - ③ *Why this needs to happen:* SMU supports a Code of Conduct which outlines behaviors deemed inappropriate for our student body. SMU needs to amend this code to effectively reprimand and reform students who use their platform to promote hateful speech and actions toward diverse members of the SMU community. This can be achieved through both disciplinary and reformative consequences. Additionally, university policy needs to include specific language which hold its other constituents to the same standard as grounds for sanctions, up to and including dismissal, for faculty, staff and board members at all levels of the university. The consequences of enacting such behavior should be made transparent, as current language is sparse and vague. SMU's fight against racism and discrimination must be enacted as a university-wide effort, not a mere student concern.
 - ③ *Acknowledgement:* We acknowledge that all members of the SMU campus community have freedom of speech, a constitutional right as specified in the First Amendment. This freedom can be exercised in several capacities which include, but are not limited to, hate speech. This exercise of hate speech should be approached as a blatant lack of comprehension for critical social constructs, such as equality, diversity, and compassion.

SMU has an equal responsibility to persistently educate those who display social ignorance as it has to those who display academic ignorance, despite all SMU members' individual right to be socially or academically ignorant, if they so choose.

- ③ *Expect funding:* Deliberate time and effort
- ③ *Expected timeline:* Spring 2021 with approval from BUF
- 🕒 Establish mandatory cultural sensitivity training for faculty, staff and board members at all levels
 - ③ *Why this needs to happen:* Cultural sensitivity training is currently not made mandatory for faculty, staff, trustees, boards, and committees at SMU. The current offerings made by the Cultural Intelligence Initiative (CIQ@SMU) are well below the standard of what we should expect from SMU. The training and framework of CIQ@SMU attempts to build intersectional dialogue between various minority groups. This initiative fails to build a foundation that listens to, comprehends, and addresses the specific needs and concerns of each individualized group. Without this foundation, all attempts of intersectionality lack substance. In light of this, CIQ@SMU needs to be replaced with an initiative that, while having elements of intersectionality, has a clear primary focus on building this foundation. With recent revelations made by black students about discriminatory actions and racial profiling, annual training needs to be provided, updated and mandated for all positions in order to make positive impact on black students' quality of life. This training should specifically include, but not be limited to, training on identifying micro-aggressions, as well as anti-racist bystander intervention training.
 - ③ *Expected funding:* A researched financial investment to implement effective training inspired by other universities
 - ③ *Expected timeline:* Fall 2021 with approval from Dr. Dixon Hall and BUF
- 🕒 Creation of a Citizen's Review Board of the SMU Police Department
 - ③ *Why this needs to happen:* Transparency in policing is critical as it maintains trust, safety, and accountability. Currently, incidents of profiling and racial discrimination by the SMU Police Department are reported to a state governing board. The current process to obtain SMUPD performance statistics is tedious and detached from the campus community. Creation of such a board would allow the SMU community a platform for clarity, comprehension, and accountability regarding the performance of the department and addressal of reports and complaints. This review board will furthermore increase transparency to the SMU community, and

specifically, the SMU black community. Such transparency would also encourage the reporting of racial profiling and other police misconduct.

③ *Expected funding:* Deliberate time and effort

③ *Expected timeline:* Spring 2021 with approval of BUF

⌚ Establish staff townhall meetings with President Turner

③ *Why this needs to happen:* The needs of staff in higher education have historically been addressed behind every other constituency. Staff cuts have resulted in staff taking on additional responsibility, in many cases without additional compensation. Considering the climate of racial inequity that has been documented among people of color on our campus, the need for a forum in which black staff members have opportunity to present their concerns directly to President Turner, as well as to hear directly from administration will go a long way to support the message that we are seen as an integral part of the community. This constituency will never feel seen and heard until they are seen and heard in fact. Such a town hall meeting creates the opportunity for exactly that.

③ *Expected funding:* Deliberate time and effort.

③ *Expected timeline:* Fall 2020, to be reviewed for additional meetings after the initial Fall meeting.

x Desired Outcomes

⌚ Increase efforts to recruit, promote and retain black tenure-track professors so they compose at least 10% of total university population of tenure-stream faculty.

⌚ Reduction of reported racial profiling and discrimination by 50%.

⌚ Improve campus quality of life for SMU black community x Goal 2: Increase Financial Aid and Work Compensation for SMU's Current and Future Black Community

⌚ Create an endowment for black students

③ *Why this needs to happen:* For SMU to compete with peer and aspirant universities for black talent, SMU needs to make an intentional financial effort to show prospective black students and families that they will be supported. There's significant ground to be made, especially within the state of Texas.

[\(Reference\)](#)

③ *Expected funding:* University will both triple the current non-athletic aid and scholarship received by black students **AND** introduce a program where it matches funds raised by alumni, BLM at SMU, corporate sponsors, etc.

③ *Expected timeline:* Endowment made accessible to students by Fall 2023



Create a system and budget used to: 1) provide incentives for departmental recruitment and retention of black faculty and 2) create additional endowed chairs

③ *Why this needs to happen:* SMU has half the percentage of black tenure-track and tenured faculty compared to peer institutions and has a poor track record in their retention. We propose instating a unified faculty recruitment search process which includes training faculty search committees about racial, ethnic, and gender bias.

③ *Expected funding:* \$10,000,000; \$8-10M Endowment

③ *Expected timeline:* Fall 2021 - Spring 2026

⌚ Increase the compensation of faculty members working on inclusion-focused initiatives

③ *Why this needs to happen:* Women and people of color are commonly asked to engage in more frequent and extensive service compared to their peers, usually without consideration to their compensation or career progression. SMU must create a university standard to provide additional compensation to faculty and staff that work on committees and other initiatives that promote opportunities for women and people of color. This work positively addresses a direct need of the university without providing mutual benefit to faculty members in advancing their scholarship or competitiveness toward promotions or tenure. Similarly, the critical equity work of staff who go above and beyond their responsibilities is lacking in overall recognition and consideration for advancement or promotions. Therefore, in the absence of such benefit, this work warrants financial compensation.

③ *Expected funding:* \$200,000 - \$225,000

③ *Expected timeline:* Summer (June) 2021 ⌚ Introduce a No Loan Assistance Program

③ *Why this needs to happen:* SMU needs to work toward attracting and retaining students from diverse economic backgrounds. One consistent theme for a lack of retention is a lack of financial assistance. SMU needs to commit to Pell Grant and low EFC students beyond the scope of the Mustang Scholars Program. Additionally, we have peer and aspirant universities with similar programs and policies installed. (References: [Peer](#), [Peer 2](#), [Aspirant](#))

③ *Expected funding:* \$1,000,000/year – to families with an annual gross income of <\$70,000

③ *Expected timeline:* Fall 2022

x Desired Outcomes



- ⌚ Increase of black student population in all schools of study until total population reaches 12%
- ⌚ Increase 5-year graduation rate of black first-year students enrolled in SMU by 50%

x Goal 3: Increase Opportunities for Success Offered by SMU to its Current and Future Black Community



- ⌚ Establish clear career paths for staff to increase retention of black staff

- ③ *Why this needs to happen:* SMU has lost talented staff of color over the last several years because they could not see a path for promotion. This lack of clear career progression opportunities combined with a culture of racial inequity, creates self-inflicted employee turnover. In order to retain talented resources, clear career paths should be established, beginning with employee onboarding, equitable professional development opportunities and clear and consistent performance expectations for all categories of staff.

- ③ *Expected funding:* Deliberate time and effort

- ③ *Expected timeline:* Fall 2021



- ⌚ Establish a paid internship and mentorship program for black students

- ③ *Why this needs to happen:* Several black students are disadvantaged in obtaining meaningful internships in their fields of study due to a lack of financial compensation for the time spent contributing to the company. SMU needs to offer financial scholarship and incentives for black students to seek opportunities they would benefit from but normally not seek out due to cost. This would also be partnered with a mentorship program between ABS and the Black Alumni of SMU who can utilize their experience to better prepare students and connect them with corporate sponsors.

- ③ *Expected funding:* \$300,000/year (20 students/semester, ~15 weeks/semester, 20 hours/week, \$25/hour) - funding can come from the university or corporate sponsors wanting to invest in black students

- ③ *Expected timeline:* Fall 2021



- ⌚ Increase representation in pivotal meetings for students and BUF

- ③ *Why this needs to happen:* To promote partnership, continuity and transparency between the administration and the SMU black community. One student representative should not be expected to have the capacity to both make meaningful contributions to discussions/proposed actions and disperse important information to the at-large SMU black community. SMU needs to commit to involving black faculty and staff representatives



in relevant meetings along with always having multiple student representatives involved at a time.

- ③ *Expected funding:* Deliberate time and effort
- ③ *Expected timeline:* Effective Immediately

Create a new SMU multicultural admissions recruitment program

- ③ *Why this needs to happen:* In addition to showing black and other minority students that they are supported financially, SMU needs to personally identify the on-campus resources and supportive faculty and staff that will guide them through this 4+ year journey. SMU is more than willing to wine and dine premier students to raise the academic and leadership standard through Interview Weekend for its President's and Hunt Scholars. SMU needs to host a similar event to invite 150-200 academically excellent students of color with a special focus on Texas students, and a minimum of 30% black students. (Reference: [Aspirant 1](#), [Aspirant 2](#))
- ③ *Expected funding:* A researched financial investment based on comparable offerings + appropriate reimbursement toward student hosts/participation
- ③ *Expected timeline:* Spring 2023

⌚ Start a black student/alumni summit sponsored by SMU

- ③ *Why this needs to happen:* This summit would allow black students and alumni from different fields of study and graduation years to biennially network with one another and collaborate on how to create a sustainable impact on the SMU community, both black and at-large. This would grant an opportunity to bring awareness to the scholarship and impact that black faculty have made in fields of study relevant to the breadth of career interests that our alumni and student possess. This would also be a strategic opportunity to invite black prospective students during the summit to participate and connect with some of the campus community that they would interact with should they matriculate at SMU. ([Reference](#))
- ③ *Expected funding:* \$75,000-\$100,000/ biennial summit
- ③ *Expected timeline:* Fall 2022

x Desired Outcome

- ⌚ Improve access and create more opportunities to facilitate the matriculation of black talent at all levels of our campus community

x Goal 4: Increase Black Student-Athlete Equity and Involvement in the General Student Population

- ⌚ Create a mandatory racial inequality and implicit bias workshop specific to SMU



Athletics

- ③ *Why this needs to happen:* Currently, there is no mandatory cultural sensitivity training for student-athletes. Student-Athletes are recruited domestically and internationally to work together in a highly competitive, high stress environment. With recent revelations made by black students about discriminatory actions and racial profiling, it is more important than ever that all student-athletes understand the perspectives and experiences

of their peers, especially those who are black, indigenous, or people of color. A mandatory training/workshop will develop a supportive community and encourage open and honest dialogue throughout the department. This training should specifically include, but not be limited to, training on identifying micro-aggressions, anti-racist bystander intervention training, and intersectionality. The training should begin in larger group settings before moving into smaller groups to encourage active participation.

③ *Expected funding:* A researched financial investment based on comparable offerings at peer and aspirant institutions

③ *Expected timeline:* Fall 2021

⌚ Establish opportunities for SMU Athletics to serve the greater Dallas community

③ *Why this needs to happen:* Currently, an overwhelming majority of SMU's athletic outreach and community service is limited to the neighboring Park Cities of Dallas. As SMU is working to become "Dallas's Team," their service should instead have an impact on their Greater Dallas community. Furthermore, since the Park Cities can be identified as an affluent area of Dallas, student-athletes fairly evaluate that some of their service could have a greater impact in areas of need within Dallas. SMU Athletics has built a platform to create positive change for the Dallas community as a whole and their service should reflect this capacity. Additionally, service opportunities should not be segregated by specific sport affiliations since we are an SMU Mustang community before members of our respective sports.

③ *Expected funding:* Deliberate time and effort

③ *Expected timeline:* Fall 2021

⌚ Hire a black mental health professional for student-athletes

③ *Why this needs to happen:* Currently, the only mental health professional dedicated to student-athletes is Dr. Ally Wade, a white woman. While Dr. Wade does an amazing job, there are noticeable disconnects when black and other minority athletes' shared experiences are missing the needed empathy only a fellow minority can offer. As recent tragedies highlighted through #Black@SMU have shown, the black experience can be uniquely burdensome, especially on the SMU campus. The student-athlete experience is high pressure, high stress, and requires a large time commitment, making their experience at times even more difficult. They deserve a mental health professional who looks like them, can relate to their lived experience, and has a time schedule catered to fit their needs.

③ *Expected funding:* \$60,000/year salary commitment

- ③ *Expected timeline:* Fall 2021
- 🕒 Create access to educational classes for student-athletes
 - ③ *Why this needs to happen:* It is the responsibility of SMU Athletics to cultivate an environment that will enrich the lives of their student-athletes, help them develop a personal identity which reaches beyond athletics, and prepare their student-athletes for life after sport. To fulfill this duty, SMU Athletics should implement educational classes including, but not limited to financial literacy, voter education, and career development with focuses in interview preparation, branding, and networking.
 - ③ *Expected funding:* A researched financial investment based on comparable institutional offerings
 - ③ *Expected timeline:* Fall 2021, added urgency on Voter Education
- 🕒 Mandate Election Day as a day off for all athletic teams
 - ③ *Why this needs to happen:* Before their obligations to the university, student-athletes have civic duties as citizens to their respective country. For most SMU student-athletes, they are citizens of the United States which holds presidential elections every four years on the first Tuesday of November. To minimize conflict between these responsibilities, SMU Athletics administration must mandate that coaches allocate a day off on Election Day to allow for student-athletes to act upon this civic duty. If a team scheduling conflict occurs on Election Day, an early voting day may be set aside as an alternate with team approval.
 - ③ *Expected funding:* Deliberate time and effort
 - ③ *Expected timeline:* Effective immediately
- 🕒 Cease the stifling of student-athletes' academic breadth and opportunity for the sake of scheduling simplicity
 - ③ *Why this needs to happen:* Currently, many student-athletes, and particularly those who are people of color, are pushed into majors such as Applied Physiology and Sports Management (APSM) in order to accommodate their rigorous practice schedules. Student-Athletes are not given the opportunity to explore their academic interests. At times, they are discouraged from more demanding majors for the sake of their athletic commitment. This stifles the ability of student-athletes to fully realize their academic goals and desires, thereby diluting their SMU diploma. No student-athlete, regardless of sport or scholarship status, should have his or her academic opportunity diminished for athletics.
 - ③ *Expected funding:* Deliberate time and effort
 - ③ *Expected timeline:* Effective immediately

- ⌚ Enforce a zero-tolerance policy for racist behaviors in academic or athletic settings
 - ③ *Why this needs to happen:* We echo the language established under the above point entitled “Establish clear violation protocol against acts of racial discrimination in Student Code of Conduct and SMU Policy Manual.” Reprehensible, offensive language should not be tolerated in any parts of our institution. To that point, we desire that the amended code of conduct which should target racist language and behavior for appropriate consequences include not only SMU student-athletes and Athletics staff at all levels, but also to include University donors. University donors have a particularly visible presence on and off the SMU campus, and their behavior should reflect that of the culture that we hope to create. In order to be effective, this must include student-athletes, staff at all levels, and donors.
 - ③ *Expected funding:* Deliberate time and effort
 - ③ *Expected timeline:* Effective immediately
- ⌚ Create a space for the fellowship of student-athletes beyond study-hall requirements, as well as, opportunities to connect with student-athlete alumni
 - ③ *Why this needs to happen:* Student-athletes are currently not given intentional opportunities to meet, socialize, and support student-athletes from other athletic teams. This goes beyond watching other studentathlete's athletic events, which are high intensity environments which focus on their roles as performers instead of their depth as people. In order to truly foster a supportive and tight-knit, wholistic athletic community, there needs to be a space and/or events which have the primary agenda to allow student-athletes to socialize and familiarize themselves with their peers. Furthermore, there is a wealth of knowledge and wisdom that our student-athletes are currently underutilizing in their alumni network. Athletic teams need to better foster relationships with their alumni to give current student-athletes the ability to connect with and learn from those who came before them.
 - ③ *Expected funding:* A financial investment in a new or repurposed space for the primary focus of student-athlete fellowship, Deliberate time and effort
 - ③ *Expected timeline:* Implemented by Fall 2021

x Desired Outcomes

- ⌚ Create a more welcoming culture for black student-athletes within the SMU Athletic Department

- ⌚ Encourage the equal development of student-athletes' academic, athletic, and career goals
- ⌚ Strengthen ties within the SMU black community both within Athletics and the greater campus community.