



**Minutes of a Special Meeting of the
Oakton Community College Board of Trustees
January 12, 2021**

A special meeting of the Board of Trustees of Oakton Community College, District 535 was held in a virtual format on January 12, 2021. Dr. Joianne Smith, president of Oakton Community College, was physically present at the Des Plaines campus, 1600 E. Golf Road for the meeting.

Open Session and Roll Call

Chair Stafford called the meeting to order at 3:10 p.m. All trustees attended virtually.

Trustee Toussaint called the roll:

Mr. Stafford	Chair	Present
Mr. Kotowski	Vice Chair	Present
Ms. Toussaint	Secretary	Present
Dr. Bush		Present
Mr. Salzberg		Present
Ms. Burns		Present
Dr. Yanow		Present
Ms. Suarez		Present

Pledge of Allegiance – Trustee Stafford

Statement by the President

President Smith welcomed everyone to the Spring 2021 semester, wished attendees a Happy New Year, and thanked Trustee Stafford and Trustee Bush for attending the Orientation Week kick-off session on January 11.

Comments by the Chair

Trustee Stafford welcomed everyone, and reminded attendees that there is a meeting scheduled next week starting at 3 p.m. with a Committee of the Whole session to discuss MOU with the Educational Foundation; Katherine Sawyer and Paul Kotowski will facilitate the discussion. The second item of the Committee of the Whole will be a discussion of vendors and purchasing. Executive session will start 4:30, and the general meeting will start at 5 p.m.

Trustee Comments

Hearing none.

Trustee Stafford asked if there was public participation. President Smith confirmed there were no requests for public participation.

1/21-1 Authorization to Approve Purchase

Trustee Bush offered:

“Be it resolved that the Board of Trustees of Community College District 535 authorizes the approval of the attached resolution, as stipulated in the following agenda items, for the purchase of the following:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Page(s)</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Vendor</u>	<u>Amount</u>
1/21-1a	1 - 3	Des Plaines Campus Cafeteria Renovations	Lo Destro Construction Co.	\$ 2,352,256.00
GRAND TOTAL				\$ 2,352,256.00”

Trustee Salzberg seconded the motion.

Trustee Stafford asked President Smith to provide a brief update. President Smith thanked the Board for the opportunity to have a special meeting in advance of the Board meeting to approve the purchase to comply with the bid expiration date. President Smith highlighted the importance and complexity of the process, and indicated it was Trustee Salzberg’s suggestion to renovate the cafeteria. The cafeteria renovation is the final large project that is part of the Master Plan process.

Trustee Toussaint called the roll:

Mr. Kotowski	Aye
Mr. Stafford	Aye
Dr. Bush	Aye
Ms. Burns	Aye
Mr. Salzburg	Aye
Dr. Yanow	Aye
Ms. Toussaint	Aye

The motion carried; Student Trustee Suarez favored the resolution.

Discussion of Evanston Task Force Update

Trustee Bush requested an overview of the item before discussion. President Smith indicated that it was agreed that Trustee Burns would provide an overview, and then there would be a discussion of what the task force has done to date. Kelly Becker will go through the themes that emerged.

Trustee Yanow indicated her desire to explore overarching ideas that she gathered from what Kelly Becker shared regarding the themes that came directly from the conversations. Trustee Yanow expressed her appreciation for the process and the experience; the Board has had the privilege of sitting with members of the Oakton staff and administration, and members of the community, to gather information that will help Oakton to move forward productively. Trustee Yanow is very appreciative of the level of serious input, and she is looking forward to allowing Kelly Becker to contextualize the themes to help the discussion move forward.

President Smith echoed trustee Yanow’s comments on the thoughtfulness of the process. The names of the community stakeholders were shared in the Board packet that was sent on January 8. President Smith, Trustee Yanow, Trustee Burns, Dr. Ileo Lott, Dr. Karl Brooks and Mr. Rick Daniels had the privilege of interviewing these individuals. All participants were asked the same six questions, and Dr. Kelly Becker and her assistant Aleda Thompson transcribed the 13 interviews, and identified seven overarching themes. President Smith expressed her gratitude to the team of people who invested time in these conversations.

Dr. Kelly Becker then proceeded to present the seven major themes identified from the interviews. The first theme that emerged was that building relationships with the community was the key step for Oakton. Almost without fail those interviewed indicated that it would take a real “boots on the ground” approach, especially in places where Black men are, to gain their trust. Those interviewed provided many specific suggestions on how the college “can meet people where they are,” including having an enhanced presence at the high school, developing an ambassador program, and developing specific partnerships with organizations that serve Black men in Evanston.

The second theme that emerged was that not enough Black men know what Oakton has to offer, and it was identified as a major barrier to Black men enrolling at Oakton. It is crucial that the College highlights how the curriculum is relevant to their lives and their interests. While interviewees had ideas for possible new curriculum offerings that would be interesting to Black men in particular, it was clear that we must highlight the College's current offerings of career credentials, particularly short-term stackable credentials, that offer students quicker successes that they can build upon, as well as the benefits of starting at Oakton and transferring to a four-year institution. There was a balance of making sure students understand both sets of offerings. Interviewees also touched on the need to provide more narratives and stories around the Black male student experiences and successes in a variety of areas at Oakton.

The third theme was the need for Oakton to create a welcoming space for Black men. Many of the interviewees reminded Oakton that diversity is not inclusion, and the lack of men enrolled and retained at the College has to do with the culture of the place; that needs to be investigated, and problems need to be remedied in that area. Interviewees challenged the College to recruit and retain more Black faculty and staff, to provide more anti-racism training, as well as creating more social structures that are more intentional about supporting Black men.

The fourth and fifth themes go hand in hand. Part of creating a welcoming atmosphere is having a point person for Black male students, and interviewees suggested to have someone specific (name and phone number) to help prospective Black male students with the process of entering the college. Community partners wanted to ensure a warm hand-off to the College, where they want a name/face of someone they are familiar with and whom they can trust to provide the guidance that students need to navigate the process of entering the College. The fifth theme showed that beyond the warm hand-off, it is important that Black students have someone at the College who helps them once they are enrolled; to check in regularly to provide support and guidance, as well as connecting them with resources. Many of those interviewed referenced that students need strong relationships and individual-level support. This kind of support would be associated with their academic success, persistence, and their being able to reach their academic goals.

The sixth theme was the acknowledgement of racism that poses a barrier to entry and persistence, especially to prospective Black male students. It was noted that educational institutions have shown an indifference towards services to Black men. The College needs to make efforts to engage with students who have not had good educational experiences in high schools, or other post-secondary institutions, and be mindful of the structures that we work within. Many interviewees also noted increased interest in engaging Black men in this particular moment with heightened awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement, and it is important that the urgency around doing this work does not diminish once the moment has passed.

The seventh and final theme was an amalgamation of other specific barriers that Black men face for enrollment and persistence. Those interviewees noted that some prospective students are missing academic skills, and have lower levels of literacy; that may be a challenge to enroll in credit-level work. Some students may be disappointed in having developmental placements. The College was encouraged to meet students where they are academically so they can be successful and make progress towards their academic goals. Interviewees also noted the lack of transportation, difficulty in accessing the campus, as well as the cost (even if tuition cost is seen as a positive attribute of the College). It goes beyond paying tuition and fees: books, technology, balancing school and work, reduced work hours.

After Dr. Becker finished her overview, Trustee Yanow expressed her gratitude for the work done to present the themes in such a clear manner after collecting a great amount of information. Before opening the presentation to discussion, Trustee Yanow wanted to contextualize it in a couple of main ideas that she came up with. She and Trustee Burns had the opportunity to sit and talk to some of the members of the task force individually, and hear their thought about their own experiences as students, as Black men getting in and going through higher education. Two things that stood out for Trustee Yanow were the notion of diversity vs. inclusion, and she would like to focus on it. Oakton is inviting a lot of students to enroll, and doing a lot of work in anti-racism and around diversity and equity, but the College is not recognizing that there are systemic institutional issues that lack

inclusion of Black men in higher education. It is necessary to analyze everything we do around what it means to be inclusive. Using the same discipline we use to think about equity (equity analysis), we also have to think about what it means to be inclusive. Trustee Yanow also added that we try really hard to focus our conversations on a positive approach rather than a deficiency model, but we have to recognize that many of the students have experienced multiple levels of educational trauma (microaggressions, systemic racism, etc.). As a result of that, we have to think about the kind of systems that we need to make sure are in place from a positive perspective as we bring students into school.

Trustee Burns opened the discussion and asked for the opinion of the Board members.

Trustee Toussaint congratulated the task force on an excellent job done. It is evident that there was a lot of thought and time put into the project. The information is very detailed which is what they needed, and very specific to what needs to be done (and how it should be done) and improved to support Black male students. Important to identify organizations and individuals in the community to work with. Many institutions have gotten comfortable saying “everybody is welcome,” but we do not understand why Black males are not seeking higher education or why their persistence rates are so low. Bottom line is that diversity is not inclusion; just because an institution is diverse it doesn’t mean that everyone is welcome. There are ways to bring Black males by having organizations that cater to them. Implementation is not easy, but it will be doable if all hands are on deck.

Trustee Salzberg thanked the committee, and indicated it is important to understand the barriers Black people face. Without understanding these barriers, how are we able to fix anything? This brings to light the different steps and points that we can look at and analyze, and go from there.

Trustee Stafford shared that when attending the last two ACCT conferences, he participated in several sessions about innovative programs in the Los Angeles area with the Hispanic populations with community colleges. He indicated this is where the difference is. Sometimes we talk to equality and equity, and those are two different things. What they have done in Los Angeles schools is running some pilot programs where they get 20 at-risk Hispanic students, and get them enrolled and then provide the kind of support that is being discussed, both in terms of assistance and school work, and also helping them outside of the classroom. Successful programs were the ones that had at least one full-time academic/student counselor whose job it was to check in and help students through the semester. We have to provide solid support without creating unrealistic expectations for the students. President Smith added it is important to be intentional. When we define Oakton as the community’s college, it refers to its diversity, but we have not been strategically focused on how to make sure that we are creating a welcome and supportive environment for Black men in particular. Part of what this initiative allows us to do is to engage with important community stakeholders, many of whom know us in some capacity, but not all of those who interviewed them. It was a way of building important connections, and that is something the College wants to continue to maintain, as well as maintain connections with those in the community who already work with Black men and can help us partner in getting and keeping them at Oakton.

Trustee Toussaint asked what the next steps are. President Smith indicated that some of the clear next steps include circling back with interviewees. It is important to keep them informed. Dr. Becker and her team will be creating an executive summary that will be shared with the participants to keep them connected. The next step will be to share this information with internal college stakeholders and to invite Black employees to a meeting in early February to share the themes, the process, and get input.

Trustee Salzberg asked if any of the external stakeholders offered to help out or asked what they can do to support Oakton in this project. President Smith indicated that all of them, at some level, said that they are interested in helping. They are in different roles depending on what organization they are affiliated with, but all are appreciative that Oakton is invested in serving the community, and want to work with us to help support students. Dr. Ileo Lott added that the task force had a specific ask of everybody who they talked to: “Can you help us identify a group of young Black men who we could talk to?” One hundred percent said they would be happy to help in identifying an audience to talk to. Dr. Lott’s perception beyond that is they are waiting for the

College to deliver. Interviewees are interested in Oakton working with their communities, and they will assist, but they want to be the recipients of the solution.

Trustee Burns indicated that everyone the task force talked to is willing and able to do whatever they can to help Oakton with the project. She also shared that she has worked in education with African Americans at every level for 28 years; she feels Black people need to be discussed a lot, and there is not a lot of progress with the discussions. She indicated that her attitude changed since she joined the project. Former Trustee Emory Williams approached her to join the Oakton Board of Trustees to help with onboarding more African American students. Oakton's district is big, and Evanston is the largest district with the lowest attendance, especially in African American students, and the need is great (in Evanston). She had the perception that this was intentional, and that Oakton was not courting Black students as much as other groups. After going through the process, she realized the question was not if all students were courted or not, or they just arrived at Oakton. She knows it was not intentional, but in the 21st century, with all that is going on that George Floyd and Breanna Taylor have nothing to do with the initiative of the task force. We can operate in a big district without including a segment of it while calling ourselves a community college; we are clearly not addressing the needs of a significant portion of students. During a recent ICCTA meeting, listening to demographic data, she realized the situation is the same for Black people no matter the district. It is important to have messaging that invites Black students to come to Oakton, and identify what it takes for Oakton to open up to African Americans. Black employees at Oakton will be invited to an event to set the stage and the tone for the College going forward.

Trustee Bush thanked the task force and Dr. Becker for their work. Themes are repeated through numerous interviews, and they break down into categories like marketing, staffing, cohort structure, and ongoing equity issues. Dr. Bush presented another vision of what can be done moving forward: This may be a circumstance where we “build the plane as we are flying it.” She suggested to aim for a cohort in the fall 2021 semester. She wants to see an effort starting with marketing targeted to groups suggested by interviewees (churches, NAACP, Childcare Educators Network, Learning Bridge, YMCA, ETHS, etc) to try to call out a cohort of 10-15 students, and staff it appropriately for navigation and persistence; staff responsibilities can be transferred within Oakton. Dr. Bush also suggested this is an educational plan to follow moving forward, so one cohort begets another. She indicated that it is difficult for her to see Oakton as the community's college based on her experiences in the Evanston and Des Plaines community with students and parents, and the disconnection between Oakton and some schools in the district. She believes this may be relationship related, and she suggested that Oakton considers moving forward on a couple of different fronts: 1) doing what needs to be done, and continuing to talk to employees, and 2) taking a leap to make something happen for fall 2021.

Trustee Stafford thinks multitasking is possible in this project. The work done by the task force has brought great ideas that need to be developed. Important to get an idea of what we CAN do. He suggested asking the administration to provide options. Mr. Stafford said the Black Lives Matter movement and grant money might allow Oakton to go after new projects. The College is currently working on the FY2022 budget, and Mr. Stafford believes funds should be allocated for this initiative over the next several years.

Trustee Yanow appreciates the idea to work in parallel, and to challenge ourselves while also running programs, or building a pilot program. She thinks it is important to infuse different areas of the College with resources to support the project; but in order to do this properly, we need to engage in an inclusion audit to make sure we are addressing the root of the issue with a population that has not been traditionally served at the College; we want to focus attention on that until that moment when this is part of the way we serve students. Process should be audited through an inclusion lens from marketing to student services, beginning with the message.

Trustee Burns requested Dr. Karl Brooks, Dr. Ileo Lott and Mr. Rick Daniels to provide their comments. Dr. Lott thinks some of the ideas discussed by the committee can be leveraged, and find potential ways to move forward. Some shared ideas are in line with what the Trustees have shared. Dr. Lott said that the data was not surprising to anyone, and he concurs that the College is not specifically and directly serving the Black male student market. It is possible to start putting together a concept, and to begin exploring the option of an academy-style cohort, and provide the services they need in order to be successful. Oakton needs to ensure this cohort has high-touch

services to allow them to move through the process. He favors a model with a goal in mind with a high percentage of students completing their general education requirements, a certificate or an associate's degree. It will also be important to discuss how students will receive tuition assistance, and make the right messaging approach to get to students (content and location). It is not only about getting them here, but also making sure they are successful by creating a safety net that ushers them through the system.

Dr. Karl Brooks noted the importance of clarity beyond the politics. If we do well, we need to be clear about what we are promising, and we can deliver. When people are invited to be part of something we want to be sustainable, this implicates a cultural shift with a collective involved, and the creation of broader themes of understanding on how to help navigate, and when to intervene (to provide supports and referrals). The main question is the availability of resources, and how to respond to difficulties. Dr. Brooks believes the project requires partnership from the people who were contacted. There is a variety of audiences with different needs, and the College needs to be strategic and intentional on what it wants to deliver and what the outcomes are. What does success look like? Dr. Lott added to Dr. Brooks's comments, and indicated that it is key to get people in the community to commit to help us build the first cohort, starting with providing information about students who can be a part of it. Noted as well, it is important to ensure that we have people that look like the market that we are trying to serve. The College is doing a lot to help people understand microaggressions, but we need to improve.

Trustee Kotowski asked if anyone received comments that could be perceived as negative feedback from any of the stakeholders in the discussion. Trustee Burns indicated that 100% of stakeholders said they were on board. However, 100% of participants also said that the message is off, and Oakton is not inclusive and needs to work on building relationships. Trustees Burns shared that she and Dr. Yanow spoke with Dr. Brooks, Dr. Lott, Dr. Howard and Mr. Daniels, and got a perspective from them in terms of what it took individually for them to make it through. They all recognized the struggle, but dealt with it in a different way. When Black students come to Oakton, we need to be more focused on soft skills, and determine if we have employees who know how to deal with all kinds of people, or provide the appropriate referrals and resources.

Mr. Rick Daniels expressed his full support for the cohort model. He thinks the community aspect will make a big difference, as well as the ways in which Oakton can continue to be more inclusive in its messaging and presentation (internally and externally).

Trustee Bush referred to comments by Dr. Brooks and Dr. Lott. She noted that any fall 2021 action should start being planned over the summer to create the community of the cohort. Dr. Lott added that he and Dr. Brooks are leaving the meeting with a clear understanding of what needs to be done, and noted there are different steps to initiate the planning, starting with the fall class schedules. Meetings would have to start immediately, and Dr. Lott is looking to get faculty engaged. The plan also includes working with College Relations about messaging, and Student Affairs regarding services.

Trustee Burns asked for clarification about whether the Evanston Task Force is going to continue their work, and if there will be a separate committee to work on the academy/cohort plans. President Smith indicated she would be reluctant to add another committee, but administrators at the College can provide and discuss ideas to bring back to the Board. The cohort model has been discussed in previous meetings. Trustee Burns expressed her desire to continue to be organic, in the sense that Dr. Brooks, Dr. Lott, Dr. Howard and Mr. Daniels are a part of the discussion and the creation of the plan for continuity purposes. She also added the task force will welcome input from the Black employees group. Trustee Bush added this is a collaborative process, and we need all hands on deck, and staff who look like the students we are trying to attract, regardless of their position at the College. Ownership needs to be shared. Trustee Stafford looks at this as the first program to come out of the task force, where we learn as we do it. We will have to look at curriculum, decide how it will be structured, determine where funds will come from, and be sure of what we are going to deliver. President Smith noted that there was discussion about focus groups with Black men, including current students, former students, and prospective students in the community to get a sense of what we need to put together to be on target. Dr. Brooks referred to categorization and the different needs of each group to build the appropriate relationship. Trustee Toussaint

indicated the idea for a cohort group is excellent, and shared the experience at her own educational institution about a leap program targeted to Hispanic and African American students with a focus on persistence which was very successful.

Trustee Burns asked President Smith to clarify discussion about next steps and expectations. President Smith shared that there will be a discussion with the Evanston Task Force during their next meeting about planning for a cohort program. First meeting with Black staff is scheduled for February 10, and the Task Force will meet on January 22. The 365 Employee Network is meeting on January 27, and they will be informed the invitation is coming from the Board/administration to join the February 10 meeting to discuss the initiative.

Trustee Burns closed the discussion on the Evanston Task Force. Trustee Stafford announced the next meeting is scheduled for January 19 at 3 p.m.

Adjournment

At 4:23 p.m., Chair Stafford entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting. Trustee Toussaint made the motion, which was seconded by Trustee Kotowski.

Trustee Toussaint called the roll:

Mr. Salzberg	Aye
Dr. Yanow	Aye
Mr. Stafford	Aye
Mr. Kotowski	Aye
Ms. Burns	Aye
Dr. Bush	Aye
Ms. Toussaint	Aye
Ms. Suarez	Aye

Chair Stafford thanked the Board for taking time out of their busy schedules to attend this meeting. President Smith thanked the Board for their time as well.

Marie Lynn Toussaint, Board Secretary

William Stafford, Chair

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1/2021

A video recording of the meeting was made and may be viewed by calling the Media Services office at (847) 635-1998