

Unheard is an alliance of Black students from the University of Oklahoma organizing for change within the campus administration and atmosphere at the university. Our primary areas of focus revolve around the lack of representation and continuous support on campus. Some of the issues of which we are organizing include but are not limited to: Black faculty beyond the African-American studies department, retention rates among Black students, financial assistance/scholarships received by Black students, supportive programs for Black students, “The Sooner Experience”, lack of a presence within executive hierarchy, and equitable funding for Black student organizations.

Unheard

1. Unheard is a movement dedicated to enact change and address various grievances aimed towards Black students at the University of Oklahoma. Unheard stands as a foundation on which students will unify as one and demand equal opportunities for Black students to succeed.

1.1 Unheard, the framework for campus wide change over the next year, is largely devoid of diverse student input.

1.1.1 Unheard is composed of 9 seats, all of which are undergraduate students.

1.1.1.1 Of these, students are represented from The University of Oklahoma’s College of Arts & Science, College of Engineering, Mewbourne College of Earth and Energy, and the Michael F. Price College of Business. ¹

¹ Please note that this is a living document. In gathering this information, we were limited by the information we had access to.

Grievances

Black Faculty Beyond the African-American Studies Department -

- 1. The university has failed to provide an adequate amount of Black faculty throughout campus to aid in the success of Black students. The university administration has not been transparent in diversifying campus faculty, thus leading to the increased under-representation of marginalized students.**

1.1 As of Fall 2013 the University of Oklahoma had a total enrollment of 27,303, students; with 1,135 African American or Black, and 14,441 White.²

1.1.1 Of the university's total enrollment, the College of Arts & Sciences were the largest school with a 28.9% enrollment of all students. Of this total percentage 449 students are either Black or African American.

1.1.2 Reported through "Profiles of The University of Oklahoma", there were 15 full-time instructional faculty within the College of Arts & Sciences, with 3 serving in the African American Studies department.

1.2 In terms of diversity among faculty, with research via "Profiles of The University of Oklahoma" it has been determined as of Fall 2013, there were 33 full-time Black instructors. However, we recognize there are 30 instructors listed as "not reported."

1.3 Former professor of chemistry at The University of Oklahoma, Dr. Donna J. Nelson published "A National Analysis of Minorities in Science and Engineering Faculties at Research Universities" in January of 2010.³

1.3.1 This comprehensive demographic analysis provides extensive research within tenured and tenure track faculty in the top 100 departments of science and engineering disciplines. Dr. Nelson then goes on to state that minorities are significantly underrepresented.

1.3.2 "There are relatively few tenured and tenure-track underrepresented minority (URM) faculty in these research university departments, even though a growing number and percentage of minorities are completing their Ph.D.s. Qualified minorities are not going to faculties of many science and engineering disciplines."

1.3.3 Dr. Nelson states that without the adequate hiring of minority staff, a lack of mentorship directly correlates with minority students applying and retaining within such educational disciplines.

1.3.3.1 Furthermore, such a lack of mentorship decreases the university's Black retention rate contributing to what Dr. Nelson described as a "perpetuated cycle."

² "Profiles of The University of Oklahoma"

<http://www.ou.edu/content/dam/irr/docs/Fact%20Book/Fact%20Book%202014.pdf>

³ Nelson, Donna, "A National Analysis of Minorities in Science and Engineering Faculties at Research Universities" http://faculty-staff.ou.edu/N/Donna.J.Nelson-1/diversity/Faculty_Tables_FY07/07Report.pdf

Retention Rates Among Black Students -

- 1. The University of Oklahoma has enrolled approximately 4,000 students into its Freshman class for the past two years⁴. Of this 4,000 students enrolled into the university, Black students continue to make up less than one-eighteenth of the population. Furthermore, with such a small number of Black students initially admitted into the university, low retention rates are reported and graduation rates within four or five years continuously remain under 50 percent.**

1.1 A total of 1,124 Black students were enrolled at the university between the years of 2002 and 2007⁵.

1.1.1 Of the 1,124 Black students, an average of 85% were retained after the first year and an average of 73% were retained after the second year.

1.1.1.1 Retention rates for 16,383 white students are reported at an average of 84%, equal to those reported for their 1,124 Black counterparts between the years of 2002 and 2007. In conclusion, when analyzing the totality of these numbers, the proportion is greatly displeasing. We can not understand why it seems the university is able to provide resources to maintain equal retention rate for 16,383 white students, which is roughly 15 times the number of Black students, but not provide resources that proportionally equal White students. We request further insight from the University on this matter.

1.1.2 Graduation rates after 4 years and 5 years remain at a rate of under 50% for Black students. This is an alarming percentage due to the small population of Black students initially enrolled.

1.1.2.1 Of the 1,124 students enrolled, only 240 students, an average of 21.4%, graduated after four years and 47.6% graduated after five years.

1.2 Less than 1,500 total Black students reported were admitted into the university between the years of 2001 - 2006, 2000 - 2005, and 1999 - 2004.

1.2.1 Of these less than 1,500 students enrolled at the university within these consecutive 7 years, low retention rates are continuously reported and furthermore continue to decrease after each year.

1.2.2 Graduation rates after four and five years for Black students have remained at a rate of under 50% over the consecutive seven years, with an average low of 14% graduation after 4 years between 1999 and 2004.⁶

1.3 The university lacks thorough transparency about retention rates.

1.3.1 Among the students retained yearly, how many students are in a low socioeconomic class and have received resources necessary to continue their education and contribute to graduation?

⁴"Incoming Class Profile," <http://www.ou.edu/content/admissions/freshman/incoming-class-profile.html>

⁵ The years of 2002 - 2007 are the most up to date at the time document is written

⁶ "Retention of Undergraduate Students", The University of Oklahoma Institutional Research and Reporting, <http://www.ou.edu/content/irr/data-center/annual-reports.html>

1.4 A constant pattern of low numbers continues in the amount of Black students admitted, low graduation rates among the few students admitted while the university continues to provide resources to retain and graduate equal or higher numbers of groups fifteen times larger than those classified as Black.

Financial Assistance/ Scholarships Received by Black Students -

- 1. Of the thousands of scholarships offered by the university, very few are aimed towards Black students. The university has failed to provide adequate financial assistance to the Black student body, in order to make it feasible for Black students to attend and stay at the university long enough to obtain a degree.**

1.1 Even after being divided into ethnic categories, there is only one scholarship award that is aimed towards Black students at the university. The scholarship is only worth \$500 compared to that of the other races where each award is anywhere from \$1,000 to \$3,200. Other ethnic groups have more than one scholarship that can be awarded to a student of that race, and the award is over \$500.

1.1.2 The only scholarship that is set aside specifically for Black students is the "OU National Black Alumni Society Scholarship". Other ethnic groups are offered multiple scholarships that can be awarded to multiple students.

1.2 Through the University of Oklahoma Foundation both alumni and donors are given the opportunity to financially give back to the University in a way they best see fit.

1.2.1 Such donors "determine where their money goes, and how it will be spent." Within this standard, as fewer black students are graduating from The University of Oklahoma, there are fewer opportunities for Black students to receive assistance from respective donors.

Supportive Programs for Black Students -

- 1. The mission of the University of Oklahoma is to provide the best possible educational experience for [their] students through excellence in teaching, research and creative activity, and service to the state and society.**

1.1 The above mission statement does not apply to all University of Oklahoma students. African American students are constantly fighting racial disadvantages in areas of having the best possible educational experiences through this said "excellence in teaching".

1.1.2 Diversity and inclusion are major facets for the overall well roundedness of a public university. Diversity and inclusion programs are aimed at retaining and aiding underrepresented groups in a university setting. Our university should want to retain as many students and see them graduate no matter what race.

1.1.3. The University of Oklahoma is a higher educational institution that is recognized across the world. An institution with such renown should strive for excellence in everything it does. Such renown would include diversity and inclusion, which the university has not been transparent about.

1.2 There aren't many programs in place that address diversity and inclusion on our campus. The university could benefit from adding more programs similar to the Diversity and Enrichment Program and the Multicultural Engineering Program.⁷

1.2.1 Although both programs aid in the recruitment of minority students, only the Multicultural Engineering Program "aids in the cultivation and impact on the retention efforts for underrepresented students."

1.2.1.1 The Multicultural Engineering Program embodies what a diversity and inclusion program should be on the campus of a public University. The Multicultural Engineering Programs "facilitates the outreach, recruitment, retention, and overall success of underrepresented minorities, including women, first-generation college students and students with disabilities."

1.2.1.2 Furthermore creating a diversity and inclusion program within each college could be a goal for each individual college to continue growing. It is essential that the University makes efforts to aid underrepresented students to provide equal opportunity at gaining a higher education for all students.

1.2.1.2.1 The Diversity and Inclusion program in the College of Engineering is catered to help students acclimate to engineering courses. This same program would be useful if applied to: the College of Architecture, College of Arts and Sciences, College of Atmospheric and Geographic Sciences, College of Continuing Education, College of Liberal Studies, Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication, Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education, Joe C. and Carole Kerr McClendon Honors College, Mewbourne College of Earth and Energy, Michael F. Price College of Business, Weitzenhoffer Family College of Fine Arts.

1.3 Project Threshold

1.3.1 Project Threshold is a program in place whose mission is to increase the retention and graduation rates of program participants. These participants include students that are first generation, economically disadvantaged, and disabled.⁸

1.3.2 Because this program is federally funded, there is only so much that can be done to aid qualified students. This program is not as beneficial as it has the potential to be due to low funding. A fair amount of Black students that attend the University of Oklahoma are first generation and economically disadvantaged; and without programs in place such as Project Threshold, those students cannot perform at their academic best.

⁷ "Multicultural Engineering Program", The University of Oklahoma College of Engineering Williams Student Services Center, http://www.ou.edu/coe/wssc/diversity_inclusion/mep.html

⁸ "Project Threshold", The University of Oklahoma Project Threshold, <http://www.ou.edu/threshold/>

The Sooner Experience -

- 1. The University of Oklahoma prides itself in being a campus where students have the opportunity to find both “a better you” and find “a home.”⁹ The university aims to give students an opportunity at the “Sooner Experience” within the duration of their collegiate career, however Black students do not and for many years, have not received the equal opportunity at this same experience. There is a tremendous lack of black cultural exposure on the University of Oklahoma’s campus, consequently, black students are compelled to leave the campus in which they call “home” to supplement and be exposed to their cultural experiences.**

1.1 Organizations and events that are given adequate resources to have a dominant effect in shaping the atmosphere of the “Sooner Experience” are organizations that are not culturally aware or inclusive of the Black culture.

1.1.1 The University of Oklahoma’s Campus Activity Council (CAC) is an organization that has a great influence on campus atmosphere. Its’ mission statement reads, “CAC initiates and implements quality campus-wide programs throughout the academic school year to all facets of campus life, with an emphasis on students.”¹⁰

1.1.1.1 CAC hosts various events throughout the year, all of which are aimed toward the dominant culture. Events such as “Concert Series” are not geared to appeal to the Black community. Artists brought to the university for “Concert Series” are not those that cater to the popular majority genres in the Black community, some of which the dominant culture also enjoys. Attendance of Black students annually at concerts hosted by CAC is very low due to the fact that their needs and interests are not considered in the planning of the Concert Series.

1.1.1.2 Homecoming week is another large event hosted by CAC. During homecoming week, the Black community’s participation is high only during the pep rally. Other events hosted throughout the week are not structured in a way that is inclusive or appealing to the Black community. After conducting survey, it was found that a great majority of students within the Black community have attested to travelling elsewhere to experience a true collegiate homecoming week that have activities that appeal to their cultural interest.

1.1.1.2.1 The Black Student Association should be given an equal opportunity to contribute and plan a Homecoming week that is culturally inclusive.

⁹ “Your Sooner Experience”, The University of Oklahoma Future Sooners,
<http://www.ou.edu/content/go2/campuslife.html>

¹⁰ “University of Oklahoma Student Government Association Campus Activities Council Constitution”,
<http://www.ou.edu/content/dam/sga/common/CAC/Documents/Constitution/CAC%20Constitution%209-9-14.pdf>

1.2 Camp Crimson is one of the most important aspects of a student's "Sooner Experience". Camp Crimson's primary goal "is that every camper leaves Camp Crimson feeling that they have been connected with a vital support system to help them succeed."¹¹

1.2.1 Given the atmosphere and environmental surroundings of the Camp Crimson weekend, a majority of students in the Black community have voiced they do not feel as connected or as if they have a support system for their success at the same rate as their white counterparts. Throughout each camp session, there is a lack of Black students in attendance at the camp, a lack of Black faculty and staff presence for the Black student to identify with, and lack of exposure to any cultural traditions or opportunity the university has to offer.

1.2.2 Furthermore, it is stated that "...camp activities are designed to teach students about academic expectations, the OU campus, OU's history and traditions, how to get involved and many other things that will help ease their transition to OU." This statement further supports that the "Sooner Experience" the university holds strongly to, is in fact missing a big part; the part that is tailored to create a home for members of the Black community and other underrepresented groups. All in all, there is a clear absence of the presence of Black representation and tradition in every aspect at Camp Crimson.

1.3 In conclusion, none of these events nor organizations, seem to consider the experience of a Black student on OU's campus. Students seek to fill this void by traveling to attend concerts, parties, luncheons, conferences, movie screenings, and more hosted by other universities such as the University of Central Oklahoma, Langston University, and Oklahoma State University. The "Sooner Experience" currently provided by the University of Oklahoma simply is not constructed to cater to a Black students.

Lack of a Presence Within Executive Hierarchy -

- 1. In terms of diversity among faculty, with our research via the "Profiles of the University of Oklahoma", we were able to determine that among the full-time faculty at OU, as of Fall 2013, approximately 2.17% of faculty members are Black. The number of Black part-time faculty is equivalently low, with only 1.57% part-time faculty members of the African American race. The number of black deans, associate deans, and assistant deans at the University is even more alarming at 0%.¹²**

1.1 As of Fall 2013, of the 35 deans, associate deans, and assistant deans present at the University of Oklahoma, 33 of them are of the white race. There is 1 person of color, who is Asian, that holds a position as a dean. There is also 1 other person who

¹¹ "Camp Crimson" http://www.ou.edu/content/campcrimson/is_camp_for_me.html

¹² "Profiles of The University of Oklahoma"
<http://www.ou.edu/content/dam/irr/docs/Fact%20Book/Fact%20Book%202014.pdf>

is of two races that occupies the position of a dean. The lack of diversity among deans shows a lack of representation for Black people.

1.1.1 As of Fall 2006-2007, no Black individual has held a position as a dean.

1.1.2 The lack of Black representation across the list of deans at the University of Oklahoma is alarming. Traditionally, the excuse for the lack of minority leadership within departments is that those minorities are not qualified.

1.1.2.1 According to the National Science Foundation: “The annual Survey of Earned Doctorates reports that universities in the United States conferred 52,749 doctorates in 2013. Of these, 2,167, or 4.1 percent, were earned by African Americans. African Americans gained 6.4 percent of all doctoral degrees awarded to U.S. students. Therefore, African Americans earned about one half the number of doctorates that would be the case if racial parity with the Black population prevailed. Another 485 doctorates were awarded by U.S. universities to Black students from foreign nations. Doctorates to Blacks from foreign nations increased by 19 percent over the past two years. The number of doctorates earned by African Americans in 2013 was just short of the all-time high. The number of Black doctorates was up 5.3 percent from 2013, following an 8.3 percent increase the year before.”¹³

1.1.3 Of the 35 deans, associate deans, and assistant deans at the University of Oklahoma, 31 of the listed retain a Doctoral Degree or Juris Doctor, 3 retain a Master’s Degree, and 1 retains a Bachelor’s Degree.

1.2 According to the “Profiles of the University of Oklahoma”, from the Fall of 1994 to the Fall of 2013, the number of full-time faculty has gradually increased, but yet the number of African American full-time faculty has remained low.

1.3 The excuse of subpar qualifications is no longer valid. There are qualified African American men and women who could be effective members of the University of Oklahoma community.

Equitable Funding for Black Student Organizations -

- 1. There is a considerable lack of opportunity for Black students at the University of Oklahoma to feel at home, as well as a lack of opportunity for students of other races and ethnicities to learn about Black culture. This in part is due to unproportioned funds budgeted for Black student organizations.**

1.1 The Black Student Association is undeniably the hub of the University of Oklahoma’s Black community cultural experience. The Black Student Association houses five umbrella organizations and administers more than six annual events.

1.1.2 The Black Student Association “welcomes all students in programming reflective of our culture and history. We look to provide a welcoming environment for students to achieve academic and social success. Our goal is to create a network of

¹³ “The Racial Gap in Doctoral Degree Awards”, The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, <http://www.jbhe.com/2014/12/the-racial-gap-in-doctoral-degree-awards/>

members who connect culturally; in hopes of creating relationships which enhance their collegiate experience. BSA also serves as an umbrella for various cultural and academic student organizations to help serve the needs OU students.”

1.2 Based on the Student Government Association’s allocations, the Black Student Association is listed and allocated funds of \$7,000 annually as a Registered Student Organization versus an Administrative Organization. Conversely, Campus Activities Council, an organization that serves extremely similar purposes to those of the Black Student Association, is classified as an Administrative Organization and receives nearly twenty times the amount of funds, \$159,000 annually, to serve a similar purpose.

1.2.1 Conversely this argument raises concern, in that organizations listed as Administrative Organizations¹⁴ versus Registered Student Organizations receive proportionally greater funds¹⁵.

1.2.1.1 Criteria that distinguishes organizations for qualifying for an Administrative Organization versus a Registered Student Organization is not transparently stated nor explained.

2. Comparing Campus Activities Council and the Black Student Association

2.1 Campus Activities Council aims to “[present] campus-wide events and traditions for all students. As an organization, we initiate and implement quality campus-wide programs throughout the academic school year to all facets of campus life...”

2.1.1 When comparing the two organizations, it is evident that the two serve the same purpose for university students. The Black Student Association aims to further provide a cultural aspect of the collegiate experience to students of the black culture, including but not limited to those of African, Caribbean, European African, and African American backgrounds.

2.1.2 Although Campus Activities Council claims to “present campus-wide events and traditions for *all* students,” none of the fifteen events put on by the organization cater, teach, or contribute to the need of exposure of black culture on a predominantly white university.

2.1.3 As previously stated, the Black Student Association houses five umbrella organizations and hosts six annual events, as well as additional events that may not be held annually. If allocated more funds, the Black Student Association would have the ability to not only host more events, but also set a concrete foundation of the traditions and events it currently presents to the community. Often times the

¹⁴ “2014 - 2015 Primary Allocation Funding For Administrative Organizations” “2014 - 2015 Primary Allocation Funding for Registered Student Organizations”,
<http://www.ou.edu/dam/sga/common/USG/forms/Administrative%20Allocations.pdf>

¹⁵ “2014 - 2015 Primary Allocation Funding For Administrative Organizations” “2014 - 2015 Primary Allocation Funding for Registered Student Organizations”,
<http://www.ou.edu/dam/sga/common/USG/forms/RSO%20Allocations.pdf>

organization has found itself having to downsize or compromise aspects of its programs due to budget constraints. Every year this has an extreme effect on a large portion of Black students' university experience that further contribute to the problematic grievances listed above.

Needs and Solutions

We, Unheard, expect to engage the administration of The University of Oklahoma in discussion on implementing the following demands and solutions:

An engaged formal sit-down with President David Boren along with other senior leadership of The University of Oklahoma.

Enacted immediately

- 1. The Black student body request full transparency with changes or actions the university plans to take in order to resolve the grievances discussed within this letter.**

1.1 Black Faculty Beyond the African-African Studies Department

1.1.1 We demand an increase in hired Black faculty at The University of Oklahoma. Such faculty should span across all colleges and within individual departments to provide both the best guidance, and opportunity to Black students.

1.2 Retention Rates Among Black Students

1.2.1 The student body demands an effort from the university to significantly increase retention rates for Black students. The university should seek various avenues to provide further resources to increase retention rates among the small population annually enrolled. Additionally, the student body demands transparency in the records of retention rates. We would like to see retention rates further classified by socioeconomic status within each race.

1.3 Financial Assistance/Scholarships Received by Black Students

1.3.1 The University of Oklahoma needs to take a stronger role in contributing to the financial assistance of Black students. The student body demands more scholarships, financial assistance and monetary avenues tailored to Black students. This change will be a contribution for the opportunity to retain a larger number of Black students and lead to graduation.

1.4 Supportive Programs for Black Students

1.4.1 The creation of supportive programs for Black students that are tailored to specifically address issues pertinent to Black students' university experience. These supportive programs should be created in every college on the university's campus.

1.5 The Sooner Experience

1.5.1 The student body demands the administration to take action in creating a culturally inclusive and aware campus environment. The administration should take steps to ensure organizations that have a dominant effect on campus atmosphere host events that are appealing and inclusive of the black community. The Black Student

Association should also be given a larger and more influential role in the planning of campus wide activities such as Homecoming Week, Concert Series, Mom's Day, and Dad's Day Weekend.

1.6 Lack of a Presence Within Executive Hierarchy

1.6.1 We demand the hiring of a Vice President of Diversity. Such a position would give students a confident voice in both senior leadership decisions and changes. As of now there is no such position, nor person of power to relay feelings and oppositions to higher seats within the executive hierarchy.

1.7 Equitable Funding for Black Student Organizations

1.7.1 The student body demands equitable funding allocated to Black student organizations on the university's campus. The funding of the various Black organizations has a great effect on the extent in which the organization performs and can serve its community. Students organizations are not only a social aspect of the university experience, but also act teaching mechanisms beyond the classroom element. Equitable funds provided to Black student organizations will allow for quality learning experiences for students beyond the classroom.

The student body has taken upon this movement in the best interest of the university and the University of Oklahoma's student body in its entirety. We, as members of OU's community and the Black community, are passionate about creating a culturally aware and inclusive campus atmosphere for current and incoming students that allows for "the best possible educational experience for our students through excellence in teaching, research and creative activity, and service to the state and society"¹⁶.

¹⁶"Mission of the University of Oklahoma"
<http://www.ou.edu/publicaffairs/mediacenter/MissionStatement.html>