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Student Panel: Solutions and Next Steps

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Student Panel: Solutions and Next Steps

*Thomas Morgan, moderator; Mike Brill, Shanir Carter,
ShayLynn Hespeth, Emily Kegel, Devin Mallett,
Khristian Santiago*

Introduction

The direction of this morning's "Solutions and Next Steps" panel is two-fold: 1) We are first going to hear from students. 2) After a brief introduction of our panelists, each will provide their insights regarding their experiences as students on campus.

Some possible issues I asked them to consider included:

- Your initial reactions to the campus and community
- Support you've found on campus
- Groups/organizations you've been a part of on campus
- How you've participated in changing campus climate
- What still needs to be done to make UD a truly inclusive community
- Ways your particular school/program has influenced your experiences on campus (Engineering, Law, SBA, Humanities, etc.)
- And anything else you thought was pertinent.

After hearing their experiences, we'll turn to questions and answers with the audience, in part to begin to build a dialogue regarding the next steps UD needs to take to improve the campus racial climate. We will draw in some of the faculty organizers to continue to dialogue about where we want to go as a campus. As needed, we'll recap the ideas presented earlier in the symposium, and talk about ways to create structural change that can address the issues of race we've heard over the last couple of days.

Panelists

Mike Brill is a senior political science and psychology double major with a minor in public relations. He is the current SGA President and will be graduating this May. His priorities as SGA President have been supporting underrepresented populations at the University, mental-health awareness, and sexual-violence prevention. In collaboration with other campus groups, over the last year SGA has worked to support underrepresented students by: hosting forums on the use of the word "ghetto" to promote mutual understanding and productive dialogue, hosting a forum for African American students to share accounts of campus experiences, hosting an educational speaker to debunk popular myths of Islam, creating a document of response guidelines to pass along to future SGA executives on how to effectively respond in a supportive way to instances of discrimination, releasing a statement condemning discrimination and derogatory language, passing a resolution in regards to racial turbulence on campus, expressing support for students of all backgrounds, and condemning racial injustice and discrimination on campus.

Shanir Carter is a second-year student at the University of Dayton School of Law. She hails from Baltimore, Maryland, and has lived in Daytona Beach, Florida, for ten years. Before entering law school she was employed at various agencies whose goals are to benefit the poor, marginalized, abused and

disenfranchised population of children and adults. Her positions have included providing community mental health, supportive substance abuse services, and supportive counseling services to families involved in the child welfare system. She has been a member of the Black Law Student Association since 2014 and currently serves in the position of Secretary. She is also a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority. Shanir obtained her B.S. in psychology in 2009, from Bethune–Cookman University in Daytona Beach, Florida.

ShayLynn Hespeth is a Dayton native majoring in political science and minoring in history at UD. In 2015 ShayLynn graduated from the Dayton Early College Academy (DECA), and was awarded the W. S. McIntosh Award Scholarship to attend the University of Dayton. She currently interns for the City of Dayton Public Affairs Department, where she is working on the city’s social media and leading the 220th Dayton anniversary campaign. ShayLynn is an active member at Greater Allen AME (African Methodist Episcopalian) Church. At UD, she is a member of the NAACP and Women of Remarkable Distinction (WORD) group on campus. She serves as a mentor for the DECA Love mentoring program and participates in OMA’s PEERS mentoring initiative. ShayLynn enjoys spending time on campus with friends and reading. She also enjoys trying to understand cultural difference on campus, and proudly representing her culture and heritage as a woman of color at the university.

Emily Kegel is a junior pre-med major with a double minor in medical humanities and psychology. She was a participant in the Cross Cultural Immersion Program in Cameroon during the summer of 2014, where she worked in the Kumba District Hospital. She is also an active mentor for Big Brothers Big Sisters at Camino da Vida in Dayton, Ohio.

Devin Mallett is a junior mechanical engineering major with a concentration in energy systems. He is a native of Cleveland.

Using his mechanical engineering degree, he plans on going into the renewable- and clean-energy field. Devin also doubles as a Student Engagement Assistant (SEA) for the Office of Multicultural Affairs. In his role as an SEA he works on a monthly section known as Brother to Brother, where men come together on campus to discuss issues on campus. During his tenure at the University of Dayton, he has been a part of the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) and Black Action THRU Unity (BATU), and has been a mentor for the Program to Engage and Exchange Resources (PEERS).

Khristian Santiago is a senior operations management major from San Juan, Puerto Rico. During his time at UD, he's been involved with different student organizations, including Flyer Enterprises and President's Emissaries. Additionally, he's helped with the development of different campus inclusion and diversity initiatives, including the Creating Inclusive Communities student cohort. As a graduating senior, Khristian feels that the University is beginning to have the necessary amount of work to have conversations about our campus climate and how we, as a community, can make the needed changes.

Presentations

Many of the presenters worked with minimal notes, focusing more on their experiences. Several of the presenters agreed to share the outlines and impressions that they focused on in their presentations.

Mike Brill

Three Main Takeaways from Our Discussion

1. The conversations about race taking place on our campus are important and must continue.
2. We must act progressively to improve our campus climate, not reactively.

3. Those dedicated to fostering an inclusive campus must go out and bring the conversation to others; we can't wait for them to come to us.

How I Personally Got Involved with Racial Justice

- My background is in politics and government, which informs my perspective
- Social science floor freshman year, in my major you get to know everyone, exposes you to a wide range of political beliefs
- I got into supporting the party and the candidates that I believed supported racial justice
- Didn't get involved with anything on campus until junior year
- My viewpoint has shifted over time—no longer a liberal vs. conservative thing, but an individual thing
 - Incident at Kent State regarding CDs and USG
- Ran for SGA with inclusiveness on my platform
- Incidents this past October and November were a spark to the flame
- It's weird how involved I've become in such a short time

SGA Accomplishments in Supporting Underrepresented Students Fall 2015

- Passed a resolution on racial turbulence, condemning racial injustice and discrimination on the campus, while expressing support for students of all backgrounds
- Released a statement condemning discrimination and derogatory language that was circulated on social media, reaching over 17,000 people
- Created response guidelines for future SGA executives on how to effectively respond in a supportive way to instances of discrimination

- Passed a resolution calling for administrative statement on racial turbulence
- Just passed a resolution supporting hires in favor of a diverse campus community
- Successfully negotiated a scholarship that benefits African American students to be included on the February Advancement pledge card in honor of Black History Month
- Hosted two unbiased forums on the use of the word “ghetto” in our community to promote a mutual understanding and productive dialogue
- Hosted a forum for African American students to share accounts of their campus experiences
- Hosted an educational speaker to debunk popular myths of Islam

What Still Needs to be Done?

- Support is strong when times are hard, but many here are complacent when there is no racial turbulence
 - Visible support is very necessary all the time - research on LGBTQ+ Task Force
- Continued outreach needs to be performed to be inclusive of underrepresented groups
 - Danny Martin’s comment at “Ghetto” forums
 - Need to get people from various groups intermingling
- It’s too easy here to live in a bubble of whiteness, need to break down the walls and expand perspectives
 - Students here are too concerned with trivial matters such as PC culture and focus on the underlying issues

- I've been fortunate to have had experiences where I've gotten to interact with all kinds of people and experience
- A lot is being done, speaker series, etc. but there is a whole segment of the UD student body who would never attend anything like that
- The University community needs to find ways to reach those people
- More needs to be done to address Islamophobia on campus
 - Not enough outreach being done to Muslim student groups
 - Promote a better understanding of Islam

ShayLynn Hespeth

I focused on providing my perception of campus as a freshman African American woman who has already been on campus for six years from 7–12th grades via the Dayton Early College Academy (DECA) student. Mostly, my experience in transitioning from DECA to becoming a college student at the University of Dayton was that of culture shock. I was shocked at how mean and rude people could be just because of the way my hair curled and how my skin responded to the sun collecting melanin. And I was shocked by the difference between UD's public focus on "community" and the actual experiences I had when I got on campus. It was the opposite for me. I felt excluded and never included. It was nothing like a community, unless the community was only for the elite and I wasn't invited.

Emily Kegel

After my freshman year, I had the privilege of traveling to Africa where I was part of the cross-cultural immersion program in Cameroon, which is based on the concept of living and taking part in a community whose culture is vastly different from your own. This experience challenged my beliefs about the world

around me and led me to some insights about racism both on a global and local scale. I had often heard the term white privilege and understood its rudimentary principles, but it was not something I had actively thought about in my everyday life until my time in Africa.

Throughout my experience in Africa, I was approached and treated with a strange sense of respect solely based upon my race. Being white to me had never been a factor about myself that I had previously given thought to; but in a place where I was given such different treatment, it became a factor I was acutely aware and conscious of. I also noticed how in the streets and in the market places, white mannequins and posters showing only white models could be seen; it appeared that the standard of beauty was completely westernized to this “white ideal.” It was startling to see firsthand the reach of American culture. And the distant concept of white privilege was made very apparent in those that I encountered, as being white in some way was equated with power and reverence.

Another poignant experience of my time in Africa was a student panel conducted at an African college (similar to the one held here) in which other African college students asked questions pertaining to American culture. The question they had most interest in was: Why was racism so prevalent in America? In my response to them, I stated that I believed racism was rooted in an ignorance that stemmed from the inability to view the world from someone else’s perspective. It is exactly this ignorance that I was surprised to find was almost considered the “norm” upon arriving back to campus. I felt as though the homogenously concentrated culture on campus allowed for the perpetuation of ignorance and stereotypes, as so many students were highly insensitive to the issues specifically facing black students on campus. People were using anonymous social media and other outlets as ways to downplay the serious issues occurring in today’s society, while other students simply made

inappropriate jokes publicly displaying disrespect for others cultures. Although I had noticed it before, it was now a subject I felt more strongly about since my time abroad, and something I was much more active in discussing.

I have used my experiences in Africa as a platform to talk about race with other students, and discuss the implications of white privilege in today's society especially in regards to the college environment. Since my trip, I have given several presentations on my involvement in Africa, and I have urged others to challenge themselves to learning and experiencing another way of life. I truly think the best way to break down these barriers is for one to gain a different perspective by experiencing a culture different from your own—no matter how big or small the difference, I believe every bit helps. It may not solve the issue altogether, but it would provide a stepping stone to the conversations that need to happen in order to create a more inclusive environment on campus. I feel as though a large part of people's prejudices stem from a fear of things they believe to be foreign to their way of life; and allowing for more opportunities on campus for students to immerse themselves in other cultures could help, even in a small way, to foster a better sense of community and understanding.

I unfortunately do not feel as though I have made as significant an impact as I would have liked concerning the climate on campus. But I believe sparking conversations with individuals can lead to important breakthroughs allowing for students to be more receptive to talking about these tough issues.

Devin Mallett

Initial reactions to campus and community

- Warm reactions, open arms, everyone knew who my friends were

- Not all minority students are outgoing, so it can be difficult to come out of their comfort zone

Group supporters

- OMA
- MEP (Minority Engineering Program)
- Students in general

Groups/organizations that you are involved with

- NSBE, BATU, PEERs mentoring program, Upward bound tutoring

How you've participated in climate change

- Participated in die-ins
- Constantly educating my peers on factual tendencies
- Breaking stereotypes

How to make UD truly inclusive

- Diversity events are great: What people put in is what people will get out
- Having these events during NSO
- Taking advantage of aviate programming on campus
- Not ignoring differences

How has your program influenced you

- Rough start: First it was hard to speak in class
- Once I broke that barrier school became easier
- Detentions: Went to detention every night
- Engineering is very helpful, MEP & my advisor: They all want you to succeed in life

Other comments

- Get people to care: how bad hate can be
- People are uncomfortable going to all minority events, fail to realize that is an average day for minorities
- Challenge students to step out of their comfort zones

Khristian Santiago

My presentation was mostly recounting my story and time at UD: essentially, walking through my time here and the different initiatives that I've helped with, as well as personal encounters that impacted my time. The curriculum also impacted my time here early on (SOC, ENG, PHL, WPC). In essence, UD has the opportunities to have the conversations; now we have to engage people to start the conversations.

From the conversation, I think the biggest point is to make sure the leadership team and leadership transition coming up takes these issues as part of its DNA in leading UD. Additionally, faculty and staff need to maintain their continued support of students, both engaging them in becoming part of the conversation and solution, as well as walking through the different experiences they have on campus.