

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON
BLACK CONCERNS
Monday, April 7, 1980, 7-9 PM

Leslie Eliason, Vice President for Services and Projects started the discussion off, explaining the purpose of the discussion as well as why this particular group of people was called together. In an effort to get a more diverse involvement in determining Student Council policy and projects, Leslie explained that the group was composed of people who had expressed interest, concern, and solutions to the problems listed on the original memo.

After introductions, discussion proceeded around the table with each person responding to the first question dealing with the rôle of Student Council, its Black Concerns Committee, and its relations with the Black Student Alliance.

Marshella: Students need to get more information on Student Council and its activities. They need to know how to get a hold on the mechanism so that they can get involved. We need to do more than just media publicity. Perhaps we could talk more with resident staff members and emphasize minorities' contribution.

Bridgette: Student Council needs to do more communication with black students about all committees as well as work closely with BSA.

Culver: We need to continue to approach black students and talk with them. Student Council must take whatever steps necessary--even symbolic ones--to educate students and demonstrate our support.

David F.: It seems there are two student governments at U.Va.--Student Council and BSA. Student Council has an obvious communications problem. Students get involved and then tell their friends. We need to get more black students involved so that these kinds of contacts can be developed. One way would be to develop better ties between Council committees and the BSA committees. Eventually by joint cooperation black students will be more comfortable in the "Student Council environment."

Cecil: The role of the Black Concerns Committee should be to watch what comes up around grounds...a sort of watchdog committee to be in touch with BSA and Student Council. Their contacts should include the chairperson, vice chairperson, and chairperson for internal affairs in the BSA. The chairperson of Student Council's committee should get in touch immediately with BSA and Council when something of importance happens.

Dave G.: There are really two roles for the Student Council Black Concerns Committee: (1) to define problems and coordinate closely with black groups, and (2) to act as a cutting edge on initiatives to break down barriers. To accomplish these tasks it will be necessary for the committee to break down their objectives to specific deadline requirements in order to make sure things do happen.

Earl: Student Council doesn't react quickly enough. Communications, both internal and external, are vitally important. The Liaison Committee needs major revamping. Black Concerns should work closely with BSA and react quickly. People need to know Student Council is helping to work things out.

Jeff V.: Work with BSA to get black students informed about Student Council's services. We could also work with other black organizations to help them become better at working with the Administration and within the system. Last year we focused attention on the issues surrounding the Afro-American Studies program. Unfortunately this year we did not hop right back on the issue. We need to continue through more thoroughly on joint projects.

The Black Concerns Committee was formerly the Minority Affairs Committee. It has been transformed from merely a facade to a working committee. BSA has better capabilities to deal with some areas--especially those of direct concern to the black student community. The Black Concerns Committee is sometimes better equipped to deal with issues where the white community needs to be informed. The whole issue of territoriality needs to be settled.

Jackie: Black students do not know about the accomplishments of the Black Concerns Committee and Student Council. Students go directly to BSA and perhaps it would be helpful if they could approach Student Council as well. Student Council should encourage and approach black students via fraternities and sororities. Joint meetings with BSA could also be arranged as well as appointing people to attend Student Council committee meetings. We could hold joint meetings in the BSA office. It is also important for Council to remember that the Black Student Alliance does not represent everyone and that some black students resent always being identified with the BSA.

Mike: There is a need for two student governments. I don't want to see Student Council's Black Concerns Committee turn into the Black Committee of Student Council. Council should integrate black concerns into other committees as well.

Tanya: Student Council needs to follow up on contacting students. University Union is not very good about this either. When we hit first-year students up to work for Council, it is important to get them involved right away. Hall meetings are often a good way to reach first-year students.

The discussion continued in a more free-floating manner.

Dave G.: We need to have a day-to-day effort. We can work together and both Student Council and the BSA can take credit for the results. Territoriality gets in the way. Effectiveness is the important determining factor.

Bridgette: There is power in multiple signatures on letters. It shows administrators that there is the strength in numbers behind the words. Joint planning along with division of labor according to our specific skills will lead to enrichment for everyone.

Cecil: BSA would have wanted to be contacted on major issues this year. This is especially true of the sticky ones like the Karen Rose incident. We can meet here, at Student Council more often. Ideally it should alternate back and forth. We must pay attention to non-Greeks as well. It is unfortunate that the Cavalier Daily didn't make a big deal out of the success of the rally.

Earl: Black Concerns should go to the Student Council committee related to the concern and get something going and then return to the BSA with the proposal for comment.

Bridgette: As a result of having been heavily involved with BSA, Student Council has been a second priority this semester. That has meant that there was less time to spend on the Black Concerns Committee than hoped. The next chair of the committee should not be on the Executive Board of BSA.

Culver: The co-chairpersons from Student Council and BSA might be one way to establish ties.

Cecil: Key members of the black and white communities should be contacted by Student Council. This puts the responsibility on Student Council, the larger entity. There is perhaps a big-little brother relationship between BSA and Student Council.

Dave G.: As I see it there are three problems: (1) informational, (2) activity planning (tangible), and (3) coordinating efforts (getting together on specifics).

Addressing the specific grievances listed in the rally handout:

(1) Student Council should establish either a loan fund or reduce the amount of the elections bond. (Actually Student Council can waive the bond.--L.E.) Then Council should make it known that the bond can be waived.

(2) Council should restructure the handling of volunteers and improve orientation materials.

(3) Council should establish a recontacting committee to introduce people to committee chairpersons. The committees must also be made to do more objective planning and then do the project. The Vice President for Services and Projects needs to monitor committee work closely.

(4) Investigate the possibility in assisting with the black student contact program and Spring Fling.

(5) Mailings could be sent specifically to black students and groups over the summer.

(6) There should be joint meetings between Student Council and Black groups' officers to establish lines of communication.

(7) Black Concerns should not be the only committee to deal with black students. The Black Concerns committee should look to move black student volunteers into other committees so that there is greater input of the black perspective on all committees of Council.

Jackie: BSA could assign people to committees.

Dave G.: We (Student Council) should reach out.

Cecil: BSA has the initial responsibility to contact people. Student Council should too.

Dave G.: If the President of Student Council would take the time, perhaps five minutes, every week at a set time to check things out with the chairperson of the BSA, the line of communication would be established and open.

Culver: I believe there is a need for affirmative action. Student Council should actively recruit black students either at the beginning of the year or at the beginning of second semester. (We do this to some extent already it was pointed out.--L.E.)

Bridgette: We need the social-type functions like the event at Alumni Hall but it would be better if there were some kind of formal introductions conducted. This might include a brief explanation of the opportunities available.

Dave G.: The orientation was not as effective as it could have been due to some confusion. At Alumni Hall things should have been more organized and student leaders should have gone up to individuals and introduced themselves.

Earl: FYC got people involved. It may take a while for people to filter up to Council but we have built a foundation of involvement among first-year people. FYC is the key.

Dave F.: All of the big FYC people from my year have at one point or another been actively involved in leading student government.

Jeff V.: The Legislative Committee needs to know the Black viewpoint on issues like Birdwood and student representation on the Board of Visitors. We need some cross-communication on legislative concerns.

Bridgette: When Student Council speaks to BSA they should mention these issues like Birdwood. Often we haven't addressed how they affect us as black students.

Sandy: Minority concerns do outweigh others. However, Student Council should include the black perspective in anything it does. We must contact people back when they have an interest in joining Council. Council should include multicultural events in its planning. Otherwise Blacks are not going to come.

Mike: How close to University Union is Student Council? Do we have any influence or persuasive power?

Jeff: Not directly. However we can and should take the time to talk to them about programming. People can go to them for the planning of social activities.

Dave G.: As I see it, there are basically three topics for discussion: (1) recruitment, (2) project development, and (3) coordinated project planning.

Culver: Student Council should go to Union when there are problems and suggest a program. We can put on events which unite communities, instead of encouraging separation. We can talk to other cities and find out what kind events they have sponsored.

Deb C.: Union needs to program for both black and white students.

Dave G.: Both Council and University Union need to do more on planning and discussion of the problem.

Jackie: Mention to upcoming committee chairs to hold a similar kind of roundtable on black concerns. Perhaps the spokesperson for Union could organize it.

Sandy: U. Union said prove that support is there for events like "Shiek." They have a completely different musical perspective and it appears to be inconsistent with what people want to hear. Black groups must demonstrate a demand while whites do not. Pressure should be exerted on WUVA for more black programming during the week.

Dave G.: We could get up petitions supporting the desire for more black programs and also stimulate the "town" market. There is a certain reluctance to do this in light of some bad experiences but I suggest we figure out what the problem is there so that we can appeal to the town groups.

Sandy: The charts should be proof enough. Why can't Union call Back Alley Disc and some of the other record stores in town and find out what people are buying.

Tanya: As far as Fine Arts goes, it is important to get people to come to U.Va. to perform. We can tap groups who are in the Washington-Richmond-Norfolk area to come here.

Sandy: Student Council should establish a connection with the Alumni Association to get contacts for black students so that they can tap the "old boy" system when they graduate. It is vital to have contacts in the job market. There should also be externships geared toward blacks.

Marshella: We should draw on the expertise of other university communities in the area like Howard, Hampton, VCU, etc. to get input.

David Fields suggested we discuss the relationship between the number of black professors and the retention rate of black students.

Earl: This is particularly a problem in the Engineering School. About half of the first-year black engineering students are behind already. There did not seem to be any effort on the part of the University to prepare students for this.

Tanya: Perhaps there should be some prep courses available.

Mike: The Office of Afro-American Affairs sponsors a summer preparatory program which is quite successful.

Sandy: There needs to be a greater effort to promulgate information about that program.

Mike: Right now the program is directed toward students who are offered a conditional acceptance with the provision that they must attend this program the summer before matriculation. It might be worthwhile to open the program up to anyone who requests and needs it.

Cecil: There could be a general test made available with acceptance materials so that certain people could volunteer for the program. That way they will be able to beat that 'zap' which comes early on and discourages them from continuing.

Earl: There should be more attention given to the five-year program so that black students understand that it is an option.

Sandy: Acceptance should not be contingent on attendance at the remedial program for those people who volunteer.

Earl: Student Council should communicate more with Engineering Council. Black engineers need to seek out representatives on Council and make sure they do a better job.

Dave G.: We need to get Student Council reps to better define their roles and responsibilities to Student Council and their school.

Deb C.: The Hook Book can be a tangible piece of evidence to how cooperation can contribute to better understanding. The Black Greeks published a supplement to the Hook Book and hopefully in the new edition we can incorporate that information as well.

Mike: The Tutorial Service needs expanding. College Council should work with the Luther P. Jackson house to beef up their program. See Hortense Hinton. We need to get better participation to make College Council's program working well.

Also the retention rate does not reflect wholly the numbers of students who do not graduate. Many change their major while others are busy playing this game of catch-up. It is all related to atmosphere. Once students start improving the atmosphere here, they can link in with the faculty and the administration and push for change.

Cecil: We need to keep our student leaders honest. Otherwise there is little chance that administrators and faculty will follow.

Dave G: I think we can attack the issue from both sides--that of the students and that of the administrators and faculty members.

Cecil: The bottom line is who holds the purse strings and who can control what people will do. A faculty or staff member is going to be conscious of where his paycheck is coming from.

Black faculty hiring should be supported by Student Council. Student Council should sit down with BSA to hear all of the arguments. We need the support and strength of such joint efforts.

Jackie: The EEOOR committee has gone to every individual department and has asked how the departments are attracting faculty--especially minority faculty. Their tangible results will be evaluated. The BSA officers should keep in touch with the committee.

Cecil: We should do more than just report back. We should push for change, as well as a response.

Sandy: Student Council can push in the professional areas to get the University to recruit there since many blacks sought jobs in the commercial market as opposed to the academic realm.

Jeff: Don't get caught up in more bureaucracy. The administration can often blunt the effects of any desire for change by handing it off to another committee. The administration often has different uses for student input. There needs to be more constant listening on the part of all administrators.

At this point the time was rapidly approaching nine o'clock. Leslie described where the information that had been gathered in the course of the discussion would go. She agreed to put the discussion in writing and to distribute copies of the recommendations among the University community, with the proviso that members of the panel were more than welcomed to submit their comments and criticisms as well as any additional ideas.