



**Report, Findings and Recommendations  
of the Extended Sensitivity and Respect Committee**

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## Charge and Membership

On the night of Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2012, when the 57th quadrennial U.S. presidential election was held, a series of racially charged events occurred at the University of Mississippi's Oxford campus, which highlighted the challenges of bringing racial harmony to a community that has seen its share of racial incidents in the past. The events of that night reminded us that considerable work needs to be done by the university to promote a safe environment for all stakeholders, especially students. Further information on the incident that occurred can be found in the Incident Review Report found in Appendix A.

In light of the Election Night incident, Chancellor Daniel W. Jones presented a charge to the university's Standing Committee on Sensitivity and Respect to study race relations and make recommendations with the aim of improving the racial climate on campus.

An ad hoc, extended version of the Sensitivity and Respect Committee was formed, wherein all university stakeholders, including students, faculty and staff, were well-represented. The extended subcommittee was led by Drs. Donald R. Cole and Brandi Hephner LaBanc. Given the wide scope of the work to be performed, six subcommittees were constituted to study different elements of racial climate at the university. The full membership of the extended committee is listed below:

Dr. Donald Cole, Co-Chair  
*Chancellor's Office*

Dr. Brandi Hephner LaBanc, Co-Chair  
*Student Affairs*

Mr. Ross Bjork  
*Intercollegiate Athletics*

Dr. Kirsten Dellinger  
*Sociology & Anthropology*

Mr. Thomas E. Eppes  
*Chancellor's Office*

Dr. Susan M. Glisson  
*William Winter Institute*

Ms. Donna Gurley  
*Equal Opportunity Office*

Ms. Lynnette Y. Johnson  
*Intercollegiate Athletics*

Ms. Cynthia L. Joyce  
*School of Journalism and New Media*

Dr. Rahul Khanna  
*Faculty Senate Representative*

Dr. Marvin King  
*Political Science & African-American Studies*

Dr. Andrew P. Mullins  
*Chancellor's Office*

Ms. Stacey Reycraft  
*Student Disability Services*

Dr. Charles Ross  
*African-American Studies*

Ms. Valeria Ross  
*Dean of Students*

Ms. Patricia D. Stewart  
*Physical Plant*

Mr. Joe Turner Cantu  
*Theatre Arts*

Mr. Lee Tyner  
*University Attorney's Office*

Ms. Jacqueline A. Vinson  
*Staff Council Representative*

Dr. Joseph Ward  
*History*

Ms. Benita Whitehorn  
*University Communications*

Dr. Ethel Young-Minor  
*English & African-American Studies*

*Student Members:*

Timothy Abram  
Gregory Alston  
Kevin Cozart  
Kimbrelly Dandridge  
Sean Higgins  
Kendrick Hunt  
Gabe LaBonia  
Natalie Miller  
Denzel Nkemdiche  
Ta'boris Osborne  
Courtney Pearson  
Hope Owens Wilson  
Lauren Wright

*Meeting Scribes:*

Ms. Pam Barefield  
*Student Affairs*

Ms. Janet Crowell  
*Chancellor's Office*

## Executive Summary

The Sensitivity and Respect Committee is a standing committee of the university that encourages community harmony and respect for the dignity of individuals. Per the University of Mississippi website (<http://www.olemiss.edu/info/committee/?id=10858684&n=SENSITIVITY%20AND%20RESPECT>), “the committee [typically serves] as an immediate point of contact for any member of our university community who is subjected to actions or words that are in conflict with our EEO anti-discrimination policy. The committee [may also] receive and review any such complaints as well as consider proactive measures to encourage community harmony and emphasize the high value we place on respect for the dignity of individuals.”

Following the release of the Incident Review Committee’s report from the Nov. 6, 2012 Election Night events occurring on campus, an ad hoc, extended Sensitivity and Respect Committee was appointed to review the Incident Review Committee’s report and make recommendations on ways to improve the university’s culture and environment relative to race and inclusivity.

Because of the university’s well-documented history with regard to racial exclusion, the importance of effectively working to create an inclusive racial climate and the diversity of opinions about how this should be achieved, care was taken to be inclusive of all viewpoints and specific agendas. The recommendations presented are a result of spirited discussions, consultations with many students, staff and faculty as well as best practices determined from other institutions. While the report is not an exhaustive survey on “race relations at UM,” the committee worked to include major themes and suggested further deliberations on those items or initiatives that require a much more detailed review. Additionally, we believe there may be an opportunity to engage an outside consultant to expand on this report and our overall efforts toward making the University of Mississippi a more inclusive environment for all.

While race and the Election Night events were the driving force behind the efforts of the extended Sensitivity and Respect Committee, committee members recognize that other underrepresented populations of people are also targeted by intolerance, bias and incivility. It is the intention of the committee that all students, faculty, staff and visitors to the university enjoy a safe, nurturing and diverse environment without fear of discrimination or lack of respect. Embracing a wide spectrum of people with diverse opinions, ideas, backgrounds and life experiences can only enhance an educational community such as the University of Mississippi.

Subcommittees were formed, and recommendations provided by these groups underwent stringent scrutiny of the entire committee for inclusion. Subcommittees included:

- First-Year Experience
- Institutional Assessment
- Campus Symbols, Structure and Greek Life
- University Policies and Preparation
- Diverse Alumni Relations
- Sensitivity and Respect Committee Workshop (see Appendix B for complete minutes)

The committee did not attempt to order the recommendations in terms of importance or ease of implementation; nor was there any effort made to omit or include a recommendation based on financial implications, complexity of implementation or popularity. Moreover, student input was valued equally with that of staff/faculty.

The committee recognized early that institutionalized racism can be unknowingly disguised within normal, habitual operations. Where possible, the committee made recommendations with suggestions on how it believes those recommendations can be implemented. When suggestions are absent, one should not imply that the recommendation is less important; instead, it is more likely that a majority of the committee did not agree on how to best incorporate it.

A complete list of the recommendations and their rationale is given in the main report, but here are some of the key recommendations:

- Develop and plainly display a clear message that explains our institutional commitment to diversity
- Evaluate current administrative structure and increase resources to support diversity efforts
- Create a culture of research excellence related to race
- Enhance our communications and marketing strategies to ensure that race and inclusiveness are a central part of our messages
- Better prepare our faculty and staff to respond to and address incidents of bias
- Conduct a review of all of our divisive symbols
- Adopt a comprehensive, holistic diversity plan with strategies tied to measurable goals
- Incorporate an emphasis on racial climate and diversity into all aspects of university planning and assessment
- Provide an ongoing assessment of campus climate
- Engage diverse, prospective students earlier (with an emphasis on Mississippians) and aid in their transition to UM
- Initiate a new student program (or enhance our current offerings) to more intentionally educate students about our commitment to inclusion and reinforce our shared values
- Further explore how we engage diverse alumni

Many of the committee members welcome the opportunity to further develop the long-range recommendations to ensure their intent is preserved throughout the implementation process.

Each member thanks the Chancellor for the opportunity to serve on the extended Sensitivity and Respect Committee, for his recognition of its importance to the university, and for his devotion to equity and inclusion at the University of Mississippi.

## Report and Related Recommendations

### OVERVIEW

In various university documents, you will read about the institution's commitment to diversity, and it is not uncommon to hear key university administrators echo this commitment. For example, in the University of Mississippi Creed, you will read:

*"I believe in respect for the dignity of each person"*

while in the university's Diversity Plan, you will find the following statement:

*"The University of Mississippi is committed to diversity in all aspects of its existence; this commitment is borne out of the necessity to its very mission as an institution of higher education as a diverse populace enhances teaching, research and service. Moreover, as an institution that once opposed access, equity and diversity, the University of Mississippi realizes its unique obligation to educate, exemplify and lead her citizenry with unquestionable commitments toward these goals, and to develop action plans commensurate with its commitments toward these goals."*

The events of Nov. 6, 2012 (see Appendix A) caused people to reflect on whether these statements on diversity (written and spoken) were indeed sincere; it made community members question the institution's real progress on racial relations over the past 50 years. For many, this incident was reminiscent of attitudes associated with the dark history of the "Meredith Incident" in 1962<sup>1</sup> that thrust the university into the eyes of national media for its role in actively and violently blocking the admission of James Meredith as a student. Indeed, it is the memories of and reflection upon the embarrassing actions in 1962 that elevated the activities of Election Night in 2012.

Occurring on the heels of a yearlong, university wide commemoration of the "50 Years of Integration: Opening the Closed Society," this event sparked sincere dialogue within the university community. This discourse resulted in: 1) the appointment of an Incident Review Committee to gather and uncover facts related to the behavior on Election Night, and 2) extended membership of the university's Standing Committee for Sensitivity and Respect to review the Incident Review Committee's findings and make recommendations on ways to improve the university's culture and environment relative to race and inclusion.

The ad hoc, extended Sensitivity and Respect Committee convened and began its collaboration on Dec. 5, 2012 with a charge from Chancellor Dan Jones. The diversity of thought within the committee soon became evident. Some viewed the "incident" as an isolated event involving a few disgruntled (intoxicated) students that was blown out of proportion and perpetuated by social media. Others' view of the "incident" unveiled a chronic underlying problem of racism at an institution that is implicitly tolerant of racist attitudes and behaviors and, therefore, may attract

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<sup>1</sup> "An American Insurrection: James Meredith and the Battle of Oxford, Mississippi, 1962" by William Doyle, Doubleday, 2001

students who embrace these perspectives. Some members called upon the immediate expulsion of all involved, while others considered the incident closed. Differing views of committee members often mirrored their constituencies, and the need for much research and dialogue was evident.

## PROCEDURE

In the committee's ensuing discussions, themes quickly developed. In addition, it became evident that working in smaller groups around common themes could enhance efficiency. As a result, subcommittees were assigned and tasked to explore and develop the themes into preliminary recommendations. Subcommittees were encouraged to explore their topic broadly, but final recommendations would require approval of the entire committee. Additionally, it was decided that the committee needed to canvas ideas and feedback from the general university community and allow opportunity for direct input. The Sensitivity and Respect Workshop subcommittee became responsible for oversight of this endeavor.

The subcommittees and their broad charge included:

- First-Year Experience – explore innovative ways to teach new members of the university community what we value
- Institutional Research – review existing data and research related to race, diversity and campus climate, then explore ways to expand these efforts
- Campus Symbols and Structure – explore the unintentional messages communicated regarding race and diversity by official use of names and symbols
- University Policies and Preparation – explore the university's preparedness and effective response mechanisms with regard to racially charged events, then explore ways to improve upon our practices
- Diverse Alumni Relations – explore ways in which the university can enhance connections with and increase participation of African-American alumni, as well as other diverse populations
- Sensitivity and Respect Committee Workshop – conduct a forum to solicit feedback from members of the university community

Each subcommittee provided a summary report to the full S&R committee. Contradictory findings were sometimes resolved within subcommittees, and on other occasions the full committee had to resolve opposing opinions. When the full committee was unable to agree on proposed language or strategies, no collective recommendation was brought forth.

The complexity of many of the issues tackled by the extended Sensitivity and Respect Committee, along with the members' normal workload and demands of the spring semester resulted in the co-chairs requesting a time extension for the final report. Each committee member



had an opportunity to review and comment on each section of the report before it was formally submitted.

## COLLECTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

The committee collectively recommends the actions/initiatives listed below.

*Important to note: We use the words “diverse” or “diversity” in lieu of race, racial, ethnic, etc., throughout this section to reinforce our larger commitment to all underrepresented populations.*

The recommendations can often be tied to the suggestions provided by subcommittees that were formed to accomplish the work of the broader committee. For further context, you will find these connections noted throughout this section. The full subcommittee reports can be found beginning on page 15 and in Appendix B.

## **UNIVERSITY OPERATIONS**

### **1. Develop and plainly display a clear message that explains our institutional commitment to diversity.**

A group of UM faculty, staff and students that reflects the diversity of our community should develop a clear message, based upon the UM Creed, that explains our institutional commitment to diversity. UM faculty and staff who work with new students — as well as potential students — should then be sure to incorporate this message in their teaching and other types of communication (from the *Report of the Subcommittee on the First-Year Experience*).

### **2. Evaluate current administrative structure and increase resources to support diversity efforts.**

Consistent with the action item identified in the UM Diversity Plan to “establish an Office of Diversity Affairs – Equity & Inclusion” (see *UM Diversity Plan, page 8*), the subcommittee generally recommends that the university increases the resources devoted to coordinating the considerable campus efforts to promote the core UM values of diversity, civility and inclusiveness (*Institutional Assessment*).

Specific actions that would support this recommendation include the following:

- a. Identify a senior-level, full-time chief diversity officer.
- b. Establish a multicultural center (*Campus Symbols, Structure and Greek Life and University Policies and Preparation*).
- c. Implement a procedure or team to track incidents of bias (*University Policies and Preparation and Institutional Assessment*).
- d. Strengthen our discrimination compliance policy, and make it more visible to all members of our community (*University Policies and Preparation*).

**3. Create a culture of research excellence related to race.**

UM is well-positioned to become a leader in academic scholarship on race and diversity. In addition to publishing this work in traditional academic outlets, an opportunity exists to take the lead by applying empirically based and theoretically informed solutions to racial inequality within our own organization, the state of Mississippi and beyond (*Institutional Assessment*).

Specific actions that would support this recommendation include the following:

- a. Create an Academic Center for the Study of Race on campus (*Institutional Assessment*).
- b. Create a summer grant program to support campus faculty and graduate student research on projects that directly explore the racial climate at the University of Mississippi or in the state of Mississippi (*Institutional Assessment*).
- c. Establish funding for an annual, university-wide lecture or symposium on diversity (*Institutional Assessment*).
- d. Secure funding through the National Science Foundation ADVANCE Institutional Transformation grant program (*Institutional Assessment*).

**4. Enhance our communications and marketing strategies to ensure that race and inclusiveness are a central part of our messages.**

Specific actions that would support this recommendation include the following:

- a. Promote “The University of Mississippi” along with “Ole Miss” (*Campus Symbols, Structure and Greek Life*).
- b. Increase the promotion of “Rebel Bear” as the mascot (*Campus Symbols, Structure and Greek Life*).
- c. Conduct studies to learn more about how underrepresented groups perceive the University of Mississippi’s commitment to diversity and equality; outcomes should drive outreach and marketing efforts (*First-Year Experience*).
- d. A range of UM stakeholders — including faculty, staff and students — should review print materials (e.g., recruitment, promotion, etc.) and offer suggestions for bolstering the presence of language and images that affirm our shared values related to an open and diverse community (*First-Year Experience*).
- e. Determine how the Creed and other written traditions will be viewed and used (*University Policies and Preparation*).
- f. Create a multicultural report to be distributed each semester that highlights diverse alumni giving and diverse student organizations’ activities (*Diverse Alumni Relations*).

**5. Better prepare our faculty and staff to respond to and address incidents of bias.**

Many individuals within our campus community feel ineffective or unprepared when it comes to responding to incidents of bias. The university should develop education and training modules that address race/diversity relations and incident response (*University Policies and Preparation*).

Specific actions that would support this recommendation include the following:

- a. Require training for specific campus populations (e.g., staff with after-hours responsibilities, instructors responsible for large classrooms) (*University Policies and Preparation and First-Year Experience*).
- b. Develop a comprehensive first-year faculty/staff transition program that aims to educate and establish expectations regarding diversity and inclusivity on campus (*University Policies and Preparation*).
- c. Instructional materials related to our community values should be readily available to all faculty and staff, potentially through a website and/or easily accessible podcasts and similar means (*First-Year Experience*).

**6. Conduct a review of all of our divisive symbols.**

Campus symbols, particularly those that became associated with the university during Jim Crow segregation and the resistance to civil rights (e.g., the Confederate monument, Rebels, Colonel Rebel/Colonel Reb and Dixie) are a source of contention among different members of the university community. UM should strive to support symbols that represent all on our campus (*Campus Symbols, Structure and Greek Life*).

Specific actions that would support this recommendation include the following:

- a. Rename Vardaman Hall; consider renaming it for an individual whose admission to the university was blocked because of the color of his or her skin (*Campus Symbols, Structure and Greek Life*).
- b. Consider renaming Paul B. Johnson Ballroom, and review other halls' names (*Campus Symbols, Structure and Greek Life*).

**PLANNING and ASSESSMENT**

**7. Adopt a comprehensive, holistic diversity plan with strategies tied to measurable goals.**

UM should develop an integrated, coordinated plan to achieve specific, measurable goals with respect to diversity and the campus climate; UM faculty, staff, students and alumni should develop explicit, measurable goals for the enhancement of diversity in our community (*Institutional Assessment, First-Year Experience and Diverse Alumni Relations*).

**8. Incorporate an emphasis on racial climate and diversity into all aspects of university planning and assessment.**

The university's strategic plan, UM 2020, includes "Diversity & Inclusion" and "Hospitality & Community" as two of seven planning principles that should be incorporated into all aspects of the university's planning. As a part of assessing and understanding the university's efforts to advance these planning principles, it is recommended that the university's Strategic Planning Council require unit-level planning and self-assessment to include strategies for promoting diversity and a welcoming and inclusive climate (*Institutional Assessment*).

**9. Provide an ongoing assessment of campus climate.**

The university should continue to participate in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and continue its efforts to implement the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) Diverse Environments Survey to further assess the campus climate over time (*Institutional Assessment*).

## **RECRUITMENT and RETENTION OF STUDENTS**

### **10. Engage diverse, prospective students earlier (with an emphasis on Mississippians), and aid in their transition to UM.**

By investing additional resources in recruiting underrepresented students, the university creates a welcome mat for a broader community of learners. The university should invest in new initiatives to encourage potential students who are minorities to consider UM, which may well involve actively recruiting students from communities from which UM currently recruits few, if any, students (*First-Year Experience*).

Specific actions that would support this recommendation include the following:

- a. Hire diverse recruiters, orientation leaders and student ambassadors (*First-Year Experience*).
- b. Diversity of the faculty, staff and senior administrators should be evident to both potential and current students (*First-Year Experience*).
- c. Identify practices that would encourage and support the participation of diverse groups of incoming students at every orientation session (*First-Year Experience*).
- d. Partnerships between Alumni Affairs and the Office of Admissions should be explored to expand recruitment and retention initiatives (*Diverse Alumni Relations*).
- e. Establish visibility and a physical meeting space for the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) Greek-letter organizations (*Campus Symbols, Structure and Greek Life*).

### **11. Initiate a new student program (or enhance our current offerings) to more intentionally educate students about our commitment to inclusion and reinforce our shared values.**

The window of opportunity to influence student attitudes declines precipitously as the first semester begins. UM should consider implementing a “Freshman Week” or similar program (such as a camp or retreat) that would bring new students to campus sooner and enable additional programming to encourage students to embrace our community values (*First-Year Experience and University Policies and Preparation*).

Specific actions that would support this recommendation include the following:

- a. Residential curricula should reinforce commitment to diversity (*First-Year Experience*).
- b. Explore additional living-learning community concepts; encourage students to share a room with someone from a different background (*First-Year Experience*).
- c. The EDHE 105 common core should be developed with diversity and inclusion in mind (*First-Year Experience*).
- d. Encourage diversity in Greek life; encourage these organizations to involve students from all underrepresented groups (*Campus Symbols, Structure and Greek Life*).

## ALUMNI RELATIONS

### 12. **Further explore how we engage diverse alumni** (*Diverse Alumni Relations*).

Specific actions that would support this recommendation include the following:

- a. Provide funding for a consultant to visit and provide direction related to our engagement of diverse alumni; a consultant should evaluate the staffing model and engagement and donation practices.
- b. Develop a semester-based, alumni-oriented report that highlights diverse alumni giving and the activities of our multicultural student organizations' activities (*Diverse Alumni Relations*).
- c. Work intentionally with the Black Alumni Advisory Board on ways in which diverse alumni would be willing to give their time and talents to our university (*Diverse Alumni Relations*).

## Chancellor's Response to the Expanded Sensitivity and Respect Committee Report

On behalf of The University community, including the students, faculty, staff and alumni, I express gratitude to each and every participant in the Expanded Sensitivity and Respect Committee for the production of this report and the related recommendations. It was my hope when the committee was appointed that you would stretch us as a university community in the area of race relations, and I believe you have been successful at doing that.

Likely, the most immediate impact of your work will be a significant increase in focus on educational opportunities for members of our community, particularly students as they arrive on our campus and into our community. I'm grateful that some of that work has begun with the academic year we are in now.

Implementation of some of your recommendations will be easy and others will be much more difficult. It is not surprising that on some of the more difficult issues your committee had difficulty gaining consensus or unanimity. These issues of conflict, hate language and being disrespectful of those who are different from us have existed for the entire span of humanity. Exemplary leaders like Gandhi and King have literally given their lives to dealing with these issues and yet there's still work for us to do.

My goal as Chancellor in assisting the university community in implementing the recommendations will be to do what is best for African American students and other non-majority groups that are a part of our university community during this year and the years that follow. When decisions have to be made about what is in the best interest of the reputation of the institution or is in the best interest of our students, I will lean to doing what is best for our students. The goal and implementation will be not to satisfy everyone in any of our constituency groups including our alumni, our faculty, and staff nor the press but to do what is right and in the best interest of students.

I respond below to each of the recommendations and outline a plan for consideration of implementation. As we move into the implementation phase, I will continue to seek advice from multiple sources, including members of this committee. Decisions that lay in my sphere of authority I will make to the best of my ability. For those that reside in other spheres of authority, for example, our Board and our Faculty, I will do my best to encourage good implementation.

Finally, as we deal with divided opinions about how to move forward as a university community on some of these difficult issues, I will do my best to carry the burden of criticism from those who are disappointed.

Implementation plans for each recommendation:

**1. Develop and plainly display a clear message that explains our institutional commitment to diversity.**

The Sensitivity and Respect Standing Committee will be asked to make recommendations to be reviewed by the Strategic Planning Council and then by the Senior Leadership Group. The goal will be to be more explicit in our institutional commitment to diversity. It is expected this will be completed within the current academic year.

**2. Evaluate current administrative structure and increase resources to support diversity efforts.**

A consultant will be engaged to work with the Senior Leadership on this recommendation. A multi-cultural center is already in the planning stages through the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. We will proceed with following recommendations of that planning committee. Decisions around changes in administrative structure should be made within this academic year.

**3. Create a culture of research excellence related to race.**

Implementation for this should be done through the faculty with encouragement and support of the Office of the Provost. The portion of this recommendation that can be implemented in the central administration should be accomplished in this academic year.

**4. Enhance our communications and marketing strategies to ensure that race and inclusiveness are a central part of our messages.**

The Chief Communications Officer and the Chief Diversity Officer will be asked to work together on this recommendation and specific plans should be prepared within this academic year.

**5. Better prepare our faculty and staff to respond to and address incidents of bias.**

The Provost, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, and the Chief Diversity Officer with assistance from Human Resources will be asked to develop implementation plans around this recommendation within this academic year.

**6. Conduct a review of all of our divisive symbols.**

A consultant will be engaged to help with this review; this process will be begun in the first half of this academic year with a goal of beginning the review within the academic year.

**7. Adopt a comprehensive, holistic diversity plan with strategies tied to measurable goals.**

The Chief Diversity Officer working with the Senior Leadership Group will prepare implementation of this recommendation within the academic year. The existing diversity plans will be reviewed and integrated during this process.

**8. Incorporate an emphasis on racial climate and diversity into all aspects of university planning and assessment.**

The Strategic Planning Council and Office of the Provost will be asked to plan implementation of this recommendation during this academic year.

**9. Provide an ongoing assessment of campus climate.**

The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs will be asked to take responsibility for this recommendation. It is already underway and it will be continued with some degree of frequency in coming years.



**10. Engage diverse, prospective students earlier (with an emphasis on Mississippians), and aid in their transition to UM.**

Plans are already underway. The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs will be asked to lead implementation of this recommendation.

**11. Initiate a new student program (or enhance our current offerings) to more intentionally educate students about our commitment to inclusion and reinforce our shared values.**

Plans are already being implemented. The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs will be asked to take responsibility for this recommendation.

**12. Further explore how we engage diverse alumni (*Diverse Alumni Relations*).**

The Executive Director of the Alumni Association and the Chief Diversity Officer will be asked to provide an implementation plan for this recommendation during this academic year.