

# ELON Black Alumni Network

June 25, 2020

President Book, Provost Volety, and Senior Staff Administrators of Elon University:

Over the last month, the Elon Black Alumni Network (EBAN) had several conversations through virtual town halls with over 100 black alumni and students not only to speak about their past Elon experiences but to speak on their ideas of how Elon can become a safe learning environment for current and future black undergraduate and graduate students. As a result of these numerous conversations and ideas, EBAN hereby presents a formal series of recommendations on behalf of the black alumni and students. We must admit, most of these ideas are not new, and the black community is skeptical about re-presenting recommendations to Elon. While Elon has made strides via multiculturalism and global education, regrettably, black students and initiatives have been lost under this expansive umbrella. At this critical time in history, it is imperative for the administration to listen and, more importantly, to take actionable steps to ensure black students, faculty, and staff thrive in an environment devoid of isolation, racism and microaggressions. We are confident that by clearly outlining the recommendations from the Black community, Elon will become an institution that fosters diversity, equality and inclusion to support Black Life at Elon.

The #blackatelon social media campaign started by a small group of black alumni revealed that today, we have similar stories of injustice since the day Glenda Phillips-Hightower stepped foot on this campus. We are still being treated as insignificant on campus and in classrooms by administrators, faculty and staff who were supposed to protect us and by our fellow student peers. Elon, now is your time to not only work in partnership with your black faculty, staff, students, and alumni to support us but to name the standard you want moving forward and to challenge white faculty, staff, students and alumni to do their part. This is not the time to look at peer and aspirant institutions but to truly chart a new course.

With the recent murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, the society's bar has been raised for action, training, safety and support for the black community. This is evidenced by the current global protests and newly released statements that Black Lives Matter from various Fortune 500 companies and higher education institutions. While relieved that others are now embracing this concept, the black community has been advocating for these same places to do this for years, decades, and centuries. We find it disheartening that Elon prides itself on promoting global citizenship and engagement, while black students at Elon continue to suffer racism in the classroom, perpetuated by peers, professors, administrators and staff.

Elon has cultivated an environment where majority students, faculty, and staff continue to commit acts or remain complicit in the daily racism and harm experienced by the black community. Elon has been known to be strategic but, this continues to be an area where strategy is not met outside of surface-level checkbox initiatives. A review of Elon's history will show that everything on Elon's campus to support black life at Elon has been fought for by black students, faculty, and staff, only to be stripped from us in the name of multicultural efforts. We are tired and the time is now for the university to put its commitment into action. Elon has been given blueprints to do this work through the President's Task Force on Black Life, the History and Memory committee, and the most recent Black Lumen Project: An Equity Initiative proposal. We support these efforts to advance Black Life at Elon and make systematic change. Where Elon has fallen short is being

accountable for this commitment and publicly showcasing how it will challenge and dismantle every aspect of white supremacy and perfectionist culture to ensure the safety and security of black students, faculty, and staff.

We have identified the following major issues, recommendations and a suggested timeline for implementation. These recommendations have come from the voices of hundreds of black alumni and students who want Elon to be a safe learning environment for black students, faculty and staff. Many of these ideas below are not new and some were previously asked by black alumni in various capacities over the last 25+ years. We believe now is the time to act. Let your “yes” be “yes” and your “no” be known because had the university’s previous and current administrators listened to many of these suggestions over EBAN’s 25 years history, imagine how far Elon would be toward furthering its “unprecedented commitment to diversity.” Every step of this change should include the voice of your current black students, faculty and staff; however, due to the unequal power dynamic and institutional barriers within the university, we recommend the university utilize external companies or black alumni who have expertise in many of these areas to assist in oversight, assessment, evaluation, examination and implementation.

### **Major Issue 1- Structures and Initiatives to advance and support Black Life at Elon**

**Recommendation 1-** Structural changes at Elon need to be made immediately to better support Equity, Diversity and Inclusion initiatives. Thus, we recommend the Associate Vice President for Inclusive Excellence and Civic Engagement immediately transition to a Vice President for Inclusive Excellence and Civic Engagement role with the support of adequate staffing and funding to advance current and future initiatives. If this role is not transitioned, then we recommend the creation of this position and a national search conducted. This position should report directly to the President and work in partnership with the Provost and all other senior staff members to challenge all units to make systematic change.

**Recommendation 2-** In support of the Black Lumen Project: An Equity Initiative Proposal, EBAN fully supports the implementation of a staffing role that focuses on coordinating efforts connected to staffing, policies, advocacy, curricular and co-curricular efforts regarding Black Life at Elon. This role will be paramount in Elon’s long term success to advance structural changes. This staff member must have: (i) a rapport with black students, (ii) a demonstrable passion for the Black Lumen Project and (iii) prior work experience in equity, diversity and inclusion.

**Recommendation 3-** Increase representation of black faculty, staff, and senior administrators, and provide mandatory transparent reporting of the current diverse representation on all leadership teams in departments, divisions, senior administration and volunteer boards/committees.

- Benchmark 1- Transparent reporting must be immediately made available, but no later than August 3, 2020.
- Benchmark 2- Create a strategic plan to rapidly increase diverse representation to exceed 40% of the leadership team. While this plan includes representation in all forms (gender, race, ethnicity, LGBTQIA, etc.), there must be a targeted focus on increasing black representation to ensure at least 15% of the total leadership team is black. We expect the President to empower university leaders to prioritize this initiative and to hold university leaders accountable when efforts are not made toward this goal.

- Benchmark 3- In consultation with Black faculty and staff, determine what support mechanisms are necessary to prepare for the increase in diverse representation.

**Recommendation 4-** Increase the number of black parents, alumni and prospects in all major giving portfolios and set a metric of tracking philanthropy solicited and gifted to Elon University that supports black initiatives and all equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives. This should be at least 10% of the portfolio and 10% of gift acquisition with a plan to increase to 15% in the next three to five years (2023 - 2025).

- Benchmark 1- Consult with Bryn Mawr College by December 31, 2020. This institution currently has best practices in this area for Elon to learn from.

**Recommendation 5-** Create an admission goal towards the recruitment of black students and allotment of financial support to ensure the enrollment of black students. Recommendation of 10% black enrollment for the incoming class of 2025.

- Benchmark 1- Implementation by the start of Fall 2020 - Admissions action plan for black student enrollment shared with black alumni via a virtual town hall in September.
- Benchmark 2- Implementation by Spring 2021 - Rollout of a black legacy initiative.
- Benchmark 3- Implementation by Summer 2021- Virtual town hall with black alumni, students and parents to discuss successes and challenges from this academic year's recruitment efforts.

**Recommendation 6-** Create structures that minimize silos within the black community and allow Black Life constituent groups to advise the president and senior staff. All black initiatives, programs and councils will be presented with quarterly updates regarding Elon's annual goals, action plans, funding/financial resources, and progress on Elon's annual strategies, to include efforts and initiatives promoting and supporting black life and anti-racist work at Elon. Recommendations made to Elon leadership will be tracked and saved as historical documents that are to be revisited annually to measure accountability. This includes, but is not limited to, the following initiatives: (i) recruitment initiatives of black students, (ii) black representation on committees, leadership, councils and portfolios, (iii) anti-racist training, (iv) results from these initiatives within various departments and (v) the efforts of the President's Inclusive Task Force and Academic Council.

- Benchmark 1- Revise the Black Life Advisory Council's mission and scope to include black faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents, and black Alamance county community representatives. This group, along with others, will be presented with yearly goals, action plans, and progress on the university's strategies promoting black life and anti-racist work at Elon.
- Benchmark 2- Create a staff position to oversee and provide support to the Black Life Advisory Council.
- Benchmark 3- Create a bridge for connecting the black Elon Law students to the community on main campus, to ensure the black law students are not cut-off from the resources available to undergraduate black students on main campus.

**Recommendation 7-** Examine budgets for programs that support Black-identified initiatives to ensure programs and initiatives are adequately funded.

- Benchmark 1- Conduct a budget analysis for the CREDE, African & African American Studies minor and all black-identified student groups. Identify gaps, challenges and needs to be addressed.
- Benchmark 2- Submit a budget proposal to advance anti-racism work at Elon to be included in the FY 2021 proposal process.

**Recommendation 8-** Serve as the host for an annual or bi-annual black coalition convention inviting all black alumni councils/networks in North Carolina to convene, to learn and to strategize about the advancement of black life on North Carolina's higher education campuses and communities. This convention should be hosted and coordinated by a council that represents all the black initiatives, programs, councils and black Alamance county community representatives led by member(s) of the President's senior staff administration in close coordination with the Vice President for Inclusive Excellence and Civic Engagement.

- Benchmark 1- Implementation by Fall 2021.

### **Major Issue 2 - Campus Climate and Anti-Racist Initiatives impacting White faculty, staff and students**

**Recommendation 9-** Immediately evaluate and publicize a public statement that is true to Elon University's philosophy, expectations and requirements around diversity, equity and inclusion. This should be included in all Elon University strategic plans, goals and principles. We must examine all current communications and public statements to ensure this new statement is consistent with the work, actions and hearts of Elon University's quest to eradicate racism in all its forms.

**Recommendation 10-** Require on-going cultural competency and identity training for all current and new faculty and staff. It is important to understand diversity within our discipline but faculty and staff must also take the time to do the self-work. We recommend not only providing this training during onboarding, but to provide ongoing training opportunities and expectations throughout employment. The value of this development should be integrated into performance appraisals, promotion and tenure, and yearly professional development goal setting.

- Benchmark 1- The University Campus Police should engage in training in the following areas: unconscious & conscious bias, conflict resolution, and de-escalation techniques to be implemented by the Fall 2020 semester.
- Benchmark 2- Community policing policies established and shared for review.
- Benchmark 3- By Spring 2021, retain an outside firm or institution to train current faculty, staff, and students to be facilitators on topics related to race and identity, to support the CREDE and the Center for Inclusive Excellence.

**Recommendation 11-** Require academic courses, particularly within the 100 and 200 level, within Elon's curriculum that focus on race and privilege in America. Every Elon student, including graduate students, should learn about structural racism and oppression and how that impacts their personal and professional journeys moving forward.

- Benchmark 1- Work in partnership with the African & African American Studies minor to create a plan to support the creation of 100 and 200 level courses that allow a student to incorporate such classes into their major as an requirement or elective. This can also be

done in partnership with the other interdisciplinary minors that focus on race, equity and social justice to introduce students to this topic.

- Benchmark 2- Utilize or create a pre/post-doctoral minority fellowship program to assist in creating, teaching, and sustaining these courses within the African & African American Studies minor.
- Benchmark 3- Incorporate mandatory development opportunities regarding race within each of the Elon Experience Learning Requirements.

**Recommendation 12-** To promote equitable hiring practices, we recommend for Elon to hire an Equity Officer within the Human Resources department that ensures hiring practices for both faculty and staff align with the university's values and utilize nationally recognized best practices. This role should evaluate equitable hiring practices, the inclusion of DEI language in job postings and recruitment marketing materials, and to ensure fair and equitable compensation. This is in support of the recommendation made by the Strategic Planning Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Taskforce.

- Benchmark 1- Immediately incorporate the following question on each university employment application, "How do you see yourself contributing to the university's diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts?" This question will serve as a tool in assessing how current applicants align with the university's values.
- Benchmark 2- Create or appoint an Equity Officer within the Human Resources department.
- Benchmark 3- Explore how the university ombudsman is perceived and utilized by black faculty and staff. Required this position to receive training around race and diversity.

### **Major Issue 3 - Bias Reporting and Accountability**

**Recommendation 13** - Immediately examine, amend and execute a new Elon bias reporting system and create policies that address the limitations of the current Elon bias reporting system and policies with regards to black students, faculty, staff and alumni. This restructuring should be completed in conjunction with the Office of Student Conduct and an external consultant. The Office of Student Conduct and the external consultant must identify gaps and opportunities for improvement in the bias reporting structure and include accountability measures.

- Benchmark 1 – By Fall 2020, Elon needs to implement a Zero Tolerance policy for any acts or intended acts that are rooted in racism.
- Benchmark 2- By Fall 2020, include anti-racism language in the University Honor Code. (For example: affirming our commitment to recognizing, addressing and eradicating all forms of racism and ethnic oppression).
- Benchmark 3– By Fall 2020, include the number of incidents, type and impacted parties/organizations, on Elon's current bias incident reporting [webpage](#). While we recognize that FERPA protects a student's privacy, to include prohibiting the release of individual names, we are asking for Elon to release information not protected by FERPA, such as the number of incidents, the types of incidents and the outcome of each incident, to bolster the community's confidence in Elon with regards to accountability and transparency.

## **Major Issue 4 - University Accountability and Transparency**

**Recommendation 14** - To promote transparency and a partnership within and among the various administrators in Admissions, Academic Council, student support, bias reporting, and career services, we recommend quarterly town hall meetings with select senior administrators, faculty and staff. The purpose of the quarterly town hall meeting is: (i) to influence the areas impacting Black life at Elon, (ii) to discuss the yearly and long term goals and (iii) to create concrete strategies in their action plans, successes and challenges.

- Benchmark 1- Implementation by Fall 2020 - We want to see the following Town Halls occur:
  - a. Discussion regarding the Black recruitment efforts with Admissions, to include participation by key administrators, such as: Greg Ziaser and Courtney Vaughn.
  - b. Discussion regarding the progress on current anti-racist initiatives, to include participation by key administrators, such as: Academic Council Representative, Dr. Randy Williams, Director of the Elon CORE Curriculum, Designee from the Elon First-Year Experience.
- Benchmark 2- Implementation by the end of Fall 2020, develop a calendar for remaining town hall topics.

**Recommendation 15** - Every department and division must commit to critically examine their role in supporting or not supporting Black life at Elon through their policies, staffing and practices. Similar to the Division of Student Life, which is currently conducting program reviews based on the CAS Standards, we recommend that Elon work with a DEI consultant firm or qualified alumni with expertise in these various areas to complete an internal and external race equity audit with a subsequent action plan that will be publicly shared.

- Benchmark 1- 50% of Elon's divisions will complete this study by Fall 2021.
- Benchmark 2- 100% of Elon divisions will complete this study by Fall 2022.

**Recommendation 16** - The formation of an oversight committee that will work with the University Communications and the Vice President for Inclusive Excellence and Civic Engagement, in collaboration with the Elon Black Alumni Network, the CREDE, the Black Student Union, the Black Employee Resource Group, and the African-African American Studies Program Coordinator, to create a yearly publication that highlights the state of the black community and efforts at Elon. This web and print publication will share progress on yearly priorities, goals, strategies, admissions targets, bias reporting incidents, financial support, highlights and challenges of curricular and co-curricular initiatives advancing Black life at Elon. We recommend this be in the format of a printed document supported by an online webpage.

- Benchmark 1- Implementation of oversight committee by start of Fall 2020.
- Benchmark 2- First yearly publication will be released by the end of Spring 2021/start of Summer 2021.
- Benchmark 3- By Spring 2021, creation of a Black Life at Elon web page that highlights all aspects of Black life at Elon, virtual town halls, etc.

Dr. Book, many of the black alumni loved their Elon experience, met best friends, future partners and mentors. We survived our Elon experience because of the community WE built, but many black alumni say they will never step foot back on the campus or donate due to their traumatic

experience. We deserve better and now is the time to act. You are the Head Phoenix. We believe YOU are the leader for this time in our collective history. As an ally, the Head Phoenix position has the authority to implement the changes and set Elon on a progressive unchartered course. The actions taken or not taken will leave an indelible mark on the history of Elon University for all generations to come. Making strides towards equity for one marginalized group, benefits all marginalized groups. It calls out the fundamental cracks in a system that disproportionately disenfranchises marginalized groups. The black alumni network will make itself available to assist and to present any additional content or context to the senior staff of the university regarding these recommendations and rationale.

With the academic year quickly approaching, we respectfully request a comprehensive response as soon as possible, but no later than August 7, 2020 that incorporates Elon University's plan to take action and on our aforementioned recommendations. This response should include a timeline along with proactive measures of accountability for implementations of these recommendations. In designing this response, we ask you to consider the following- Who does Elon want to be as it boldly looks to the future, and what do we want our students and alumni to stand for as they become future leaders?

By implementing these recommendations, Elon will be set apart as a leader in higher education that ensures that Black Students Matter, but more importantly, that Black Lives Matter.

### **The Elon Black Alumni Network**

Past & Current EBAN Presidents – Priscilla Awkard '95, Steve Walker '93, Dr. Tracey Helton Lewis '93, P'10, Dr. Renita Webb '04, Cameron Davis '06, Aliana Harrison '08

Current EBAN Leadership Team - Talia Scott '06, LaToya Smalls Delgado'07, Ron Dargon II '05, Kaye Hayes '98, Ruby Thornton Bracy '99, Terri Fletcher '95, Janean Dunn L'15, Ursula Warren G'15, Antonio White '98, Dwayne Ijames '06, Deborah Blackwell '87

**and your 2000+ black-identifying Elon Alumni**