



For more than two hours this morning, I met with about 100 of our students. I heard their brutally heartfelt and painfully honest stories about the challenges of being a student of color or need at our University.

It was, as I told them, the toughest day I have had as a member of our community. My mind was further opened to their challenges and, frankly, to some of the shortcomings we have as an institution that aspires to be a community of belonging for everyone.

They shared what it means to be a black student, someone who is hungry, or someone who fears losing housing. I have an obligation to meet them where they are and to do everything I can to help them to feel that this University is their University.

I thanked them for their passion and their courage. I know that this is not the first conversation that we have had, and I know it will not be the last.

We will continue our dialogue. Further, I know many of the students I met with are disappointed about the amount of progress we've made. I told them that I am disappointed, too, and I am sorry.

We need to make better progress at a faster pace. We have certain things we are proud of that we can point to, and we have certain things that require more work.

We are committed to doing that work, together with all of them and all of you.

Their concerns are real. They are fair. They deserve our attention.

I committed to them that they would have it – now, and as importantly, for the long term, as sustainable progress requires a deep and lasting commitment.

They rightfully rely on me – and look to me – as their University President. My obligation, and that of my administration, is to hear them and to work with them to create the institution they want us to be.

This morning, then, our conversation revolved around how we can turn shared goals into common ground.

Our first steps will revolve around eight commitments we are making as a University, based on issues put forward by the Black Student Advisory Council and the Basic Needs Campaign. In summary, the challenges center on ensuring that basic needs, such as housing and food security, are met and that we are doing everything we can to

create a community of belonging for everyone.

We expressed concerns to the Black Student Advisory Council about safety in the Main Building going forward. Based on that, and the commitments we have made below, they left the building this evening. The students associated with the Basic Needs Campaign also agreed to leave the building and end their hunger strike.

A summary of the commitments includes:

A permanent seat for black students on search committees for administrative officials: UK will include a representative from the Black Student Advisory Council on all senior-level search committees (deans and high-level administrators). UK will work with the Black Student Advisory Council on the best process to ensure how that representation happens.

Revising the William C. Parker Scholarship: The Parker Scholarship – which historically has targeted underrepresented students and students with financial need – requires reform. UK will meet with the Black Student Advisory Council to review the available data relative to the Parker scholarship, with the goal of strengthening and continuing to grow the program for black students, without diminishing our commitment to diverse students across the campus. Our review will also include the Lyman T. Johnson Awards, which are awarded to graduate students.

Standardizing the role of Diversity and Inclusion Officers: UK will immediately move to ensure that Diversity Officers have the duties, training, time, and resources they need to mirror best practices in the country, and to confirm that we are meeting the University's Strategic Plan goals relative to diversity and inclusivity. UK will develop a standardized process for evaluating Diversity Officers and measuring their effectiveness.

Releasing the findings from the 2016 Cook Ross Survey: UK will post the Cook Ross Survey online along with wellness and other campus climate surveys for public review. That survey and others have helped guide much of the progress we have made in recent years in improving our campus climate and making us an even better place to work.

Taking down the mural in Memorial Hall: UK will immediately cover the mural and re-engage with a new committee to determine a long-term plan. Although efforts over the past two years to create a more complete context for the mural have been earnest and thoughtful, the artwork in Memorial Hall remains a touchstone of pain and hurt for many students of color.

Staffing for a Basic Needs Center: As a first step, a full-time, professional staff member will be hired and trained to coordinate and plan UK's approach to basic needs, including food and housing insecurity. Additional resources for staffing and physical space will be added, if needed.

Establish a Basic Needs Fund: UK will consolidate its two emergency and assistance funds into a one-stop shop to better handle requests related to food and housing insecurity and questions around basic needs. The consolidated funds will be continually assessed and replenished to ensure needs are met. Donors will be able to contribute.

This morning, I pledged to the students – and those they represent – that we must do more. Indeed, we will do more. The actions above, created in good faith with the students and informed by their thoughtfulness and passion, are one step in the journey we are taking. It will be hard work. But all work worth doing is. I know you will join me in the journey and the work ahead.

Eli Capilouto
President

