

Sul Ross Group (SRG) Bulletin Nineteen

8 December 2020

Texas A&M Commission on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) [and Representations such as Monuments and Statues] Submitted Their Report to TAMU President Young

In early July, President Young chartered a 45-person commission consisting of two Commissioners (Williams and Hurtado) and four subordinate committees. Their tasks were to look into racial intolerance and historical representations, such as statues, along with policies and practices. The report was submitted, as reported by The Eagle, to the office of the TAMU President on 2 December.

The President and Provost will review the report and provide comments and corrections back to the Commissioners which they expect should be made incorporated. Once accomplished, the report will be forwarded to the TAMUS Chancellor's Office where an Action Plan will be developed.

It is expected that the report will be made public in mid to late January 2021. By charter, it contains findings but no recommendations. Until then, according to Commissioner Jimmy Williams in an interview, he "cannot delve into what is in the document."

Some Enlightenment About the Campus Reform Article

On Monday 7 December, Dr. Danny Pugh, the VP of Student Affairs, TAMU, reached out to us, the SRG, and asked if we could assist with subject article and what it's caused in social media. We assured him we would help, so the following is the information he provided to us which is topical and time sensitive. It starts with his entrée to us, followed by a Student Conduct Office Statement, and some more detailed information he provided to a UCLA faculty member. We believe this will set the circumstances straight for all of you.

The Sul Ross Group Board

Good afternoon, gentlemen,

*By now I assume you all have seen or will be sent a link to the Campus Reform article entitled, ["Exclusive: Texas A&M Students for Trump president 'required' to meet with 'conduct' office after placing Trump signs on 'public property'."](#) **Note: We recommend that you copy and paste this in your browser and read the 4 December 2020 article in Campus Reform by Mckenna Dallmeyer and read about what happened with Aggie student Dion Okeke, the President of "Students for Trump at TAMU).** Despite Friday afternoon conversations with the student leader and email with the article writer, they have determined to move forward with the narrative that they are being summoned/threatened to the conduct office for placing signs. That is NOT the case. The student leader in question was being summoned to the office to provide witness/victim testimony as part of our investigating the people who stole his signs. As they*

explained to him on Friday, the use of generic “summons” template language should not have been used and at no time was he in jeopardy. EVER! In short, the only thing the conduct office wanted was his details so we could hold the thieves accountable.

This has had some legs on social media, and we intend on being as open and transparent as possible. A statement was just released by the Department of Student Life and Office of Student Conduct that reads as follows:

Statement on Stolen Signage Investigation

A standard letter template used by the Student Conduct Office (SCO) to contact the President of the Students for Trump at TAMU (@sft_tamu) to ask for a meeting for information about signs stolen from them failed to state that neither the student leader nor the student organization - the victims - were under investigation. There was no issue with the signs being posted, only with the inappropriate removal by others.

According to a University Police Department (UPD) report received by the Student Conduct Office, Students for Trump at TAMU was the victim of having signs removed before the election. When UPD recovered the signs, the report stated that the organization chose not to press charges. The Student Conduct Office investigated possible student code of conduct violations by those alleged to have stolen the signs, NOT those who were victims.

The Student Conduct Office was in direct contact on Friday, Dec 4, with the student leader to sincerely apologize. Templates will be updated to avoid any future mistake in this regard.

*Student Conduct Office
Texas A&M University*

I supposed the explanation and apologies were not sufficient and, somehow, this is being used as fuel to further flame a false narrative that conservative voices are being silenced on campus. To that extent, I also wanted to share with you some language I shared with UCLA law professor, Eugene Volokh, who contacted us this morning in regard to the Campus Reform article.

*DJP
VPSA*

Professor Volokh,

Howdy and thanks for writing. I was asked to share some additional details with you, but first attempted a call to your UCLA listed office number of (xxx).

Unfortunately, the article to which you reference is not complete with details regarding the situation. The TAMU Students for Trump did place their signs on November 2, 2020 and they were subsequently stolen by the same person who purportedly reported them for placing them outside of the on-campus US Post Office building. UPD had determined that the grounds were state-owned and the building federal, therefore the signs were allowable under our campus policy. However, the complaining party was later witnessed and contacted by UPD while in alleged possession of those signs. UPD then contacted the student leader for TAMU Students

for Trump and he determined not to press charges against those who took the signs on November 2.

UPD filed this report with student conduct and that office opened a case against the alleged thieves, not against TAMU Students for Trump. However, the letter asking the TAMU Students for Trump to visit with the conduct staff used template language that did not clarify that the student organization was not under investigation and also included a template statement about failure to meet with the staff. Our staff communicated this error and apologized to the student leader on Friday afternoon and provided details to the article writer. However, the focus appears to be on what you shared rather than TAMU's intention to hold accountable the students who stole the TAMU Students for Trump signage that was appropriately placed pre-election.

I am unaware if those stolen signs were ever replaced that night or later, but I would not have expected UPD to place those signs. Rest assured, TAMU Students for Trump are more than welcome to locate their signage as any other student organization or group in accordance with the [campus signage policy](#). These signs are considered "wire wicket signs" and allowable as "temporary signage" designed for "not more than fourteen calendar days." The policy is pretty open to allow student groups to promote events and activities on campus, not as permanent signage that would obviously accumulate over the course of a traditional academic year. While the article stops short of alleging the university selectively removing these signs, that is not our practice nor would we remove a sign unless it non-compliant with the linked policy. Again, wicket signage is for temporary purposes and not meant to remain for perpetuity (or more than two weeks). If any member of our community feels signage is non-compliant or out of date, they can complete the Campus Complaint Report form via the Offices of the Dean of Student Life.

Just to reiterate, UPD identified the students who were alleged to have stolen the signs and a determination was made by the student leader NOT to press charges. The university has endeavored to hold these students accountable with the assistance of the student leader. If this was an act to censor conservative students at A&M, then the offended party had the opportunity to prosecute and assist us with our conduct case. While no action was taken criminally, the university will investigate and respond as we do in all referrals to the conduct office. Any allegation otherwise only serves the tremendously false narrative that A&M would not do so and dangerously encourages others to do so in the future.

Texas A&M University prides itself on its content-neutral policies and practices supporting our students' expressive activities. The Student Conduct Office will hold accountable those students who interfere with students exercising expressive activity rights articulate in our policies and protected by the First Amendment. No student or student organization at TAMU should ever feel these rights are diminished nor should persons or external agencies attempt to misconstrue a communicator error to support their own false narrative against our campus. As a matter of fact, this fall we just rolled out a new [First Amendment at Texas A&M University](#) website (although a COVID-year roll out has been less than a splash) and were recently recognized by The FIRE in their [2020 College Free Speech Rankings](#).

Please let me know if you have additional questions. I've taken the liberty of copying our SVP for Marketing & Communications and Dean of Student Life.

Yours,

Daniel J. Pugh, Sr., Ph.D. | Vice President for Student Affairs, TAMU

We had the opportunity to be put in contact with Dion Okeke '22 and afford him the courtesy to add his comments. He did so and here you can read what he had to say.

The SRG

8 November 2020

On November 2nd, members of Students for Trump at Texas A&M and myself, the president of the organization, placed "Trump 2020" signs within different areas on campus. Before finishing, officers from the University Police Department (UPD) asked us to pick back up the signs due to the risk of ground damage. After clarifying with their supervisor, they concluded that we are within our jurisdiction and our rights to place these signs. This conversation was followed by them asking if we would like to press charges on individuals who were found removing our signs. We decided to not press charges on those individuals.

One month later, on December 3rd, the Texas A&M administration emailed me regarding "placing signs on public property." The rhetoric used in the email was quite indicative of disciplinary action being taken due to the placement of the Trump signs. Rhetoric includes "failure to contact the student conduct office by Friday, January 22, 2021, may result in an administrative hold being placed on your registration." The letter further states "failure to comply with the direction of a University official and failure to appear resulting in the possibility of Student Conduct Code charges being brought against you." This story, to which it stands would be a clear obstruction of my first amendment rights at the university. On December 3rd at 3:29 pm Jaclyn Upshaw-Brown, an administrator for the Student Conduct Office called me. Upshaw-Brown communicated to me that the reason I received that letter was due to the police report that officers made one month prior. She also mentioned the letter was simply an invitation to come in and discuss the events on November 2nd.

For clarification, an apology from Texas A&M was not made on this call and there was no mention that an incorrect template was used in the initial letter. A formal sincere apology was not made until Monday, December 7th. This, however, is not my concern.

My main concern is the lack of trust that is held between students and the current administration. Traditional Aggie core valued students, like me, are unfortunately not represented by the current Texas A&M administration. The Texas A&M administration claims to present content-neutral policies, recognition of the constitution of the United States of America, and acceptance of all political ideologies. However, as a current student, my perspective of Texas A&M policy and action says otherwise. The idea of silencing and lack of representation for Aggie core valued students, under today's Texas A&M administration, is no secret. The clear and obvious biases that exist within our administration are evident and have been felt by students that stand by the core values of the university.

Therefore, due to the lack of trust and accountability being held within the administration, after receiving the call from Jaclyn Upshaw-Brown, I was not receptive to her reasoning. Thus, I questioned the authenticity of her findings and I believed it to be a suspicious explanation to a threatening letter that I had just received. Her reasoning communicated that this administration was seemingly backing down from their initial intention. I believe their initial intentions were to intimidate and discourage students, specifically myself, from expressing our political ideologies.

Later claims were made that the university utilized the incorrect email template for the initial letter. How often does that happen? If this was just a means of wanting to talk or gather additional information, I question why the university didn't contact me with the "Student Life"

department, or the “Student Organization and Development Association,” or the “University Police Department.” Respectfully, this unfortunate string of events was due to a lack of communication on behalf of the University and a lack of trust students like myself have with the standing administration.

I also ponder the idea that what if I never took any action? What if I accepted the initial letter face value? Could Texas A&M have quietly slipped me under the rug when it was too late for me to act? This idea may be irrational or unfounded however, this is the reality and impression Texas A&M has indirectly or directly imposed on core valued students. Bear in mind, I want to give Texas A&M the benefit of the doubt however, that idea contrasts with my perception of the university’s clear political biases. Overall, despite my frustrations, I accept the apology made on behalf of the Texas A&M administration, and I look forward to my time in Aggieland. May this incident help us to facilitate a positive change for both students and Texas A&M University.

Respectfully, Dion Okeke ‘22

In the bigger picture, the unfortunate circumstance of this episode is a damaging social media narrative about our beloved University. We, the SRG, have written before about the Professor Ellis’ “one party campus” being a threat to our freedoms and National interests. So, we shall stay on this, while depending on the membership we serve to consider the information and decide for themselves what we can and should do about this in support of a new TAMU President next year.

The Fightin’ Texas Aggies Got it Done!



The Fightin’ Texas Aggie football team showed their grit on “the plains” in Alabama against auburn, 31-20! In the bigger picture, they are climbing the SEC-West ladder as coach Fisher promised. To do so, they had to break the “ceiling” and pass Isu and auburn. They have done it this year and we hope to get another crack this season at bama in the CFP’s. One Ag blogger posted this: “For me, it’s seeing how the talent level has passed auburn. The only SEC (and national) team with clearly more talent is bama. We are now in the next talent level with Isu, the GA dogs and gators. Thanks Coach Jimbo!” Just keep teeing it up, boys, win out and we shall see! It’s going to make many of us sick to have to support ND to beat Clemson in their conference championship game (again). Otherwise, the ACC will likely get two teams in - leaving the Ags out at #5.

Billy Liucci of TexAgs, re the Ags making the CFPs said: “Remember when the same people trying to shoot holes in A&M’s resume tried to tell us OK State, Wisconsin, and BYU were play-off worthy teams?” Dalton Hughes added: I’ve read it said “If Oklahoma wins out, they should receive playoff consideration” making the round today on social media. “They lost to Kansas State - who gave up 69 (SIXTY-NINE) today to Herman’s [sip] Hermits!” Stand by! As a reminder, early national football signing day for FBS is December 16th. Signing day follows on the first Wednesday, the 3rd of February 2021. It’s looking good for adding another loaded class if you have been following it!

Ag Football Schedule Officially Changed by SEC

The SEC officially announced the latest changes throughout the conference Friday, 4 December. They will permit all 14 teams to play 10 games this season. However, the revised schedule is contingent on the absence of additional postponements prior to December 12th.

As expected, the shuffle for the Texas Aggies was: ole miss at Kyle Field on the 12th, and then away at Knoxville, Tennessee on the 19th. There was a glitch in the works, however. Ole miss announced on Friday the 4th that they had “paused” football team activities until the next Wednesday due to positive COVID-19 cases within the program. Ole miss officials said the school will remain in talks with the SEC on its remaining schedule.

And the bad news did come on Monday evening, December the 7th. The Texas A&M-ole miss football game has been postponed due to a combination of positive tests, contact tracing and subsequent quarantining of individuals within the ole miss football program, consistent with Southeastern Conference COVID-19 management requirements.

The opportunity to reschedule the game will be contingent on any cancellation of games currently scheduled for Dec. 19 due to COVID-19, otherwise the game will not be played and would be declared a no-contest. In fact, AD Ross Bjork came right out and said on his 8 December TexAgs interview that we were going to “play nine games this year instead of ten.” This is unfortunate for sure. BTHO Tennessee!!

Aggie Basketball Women Beat the sips in Austin



Vic Schaefer named Women's Basketball head coach on Apr 5, 2020 (hired from Miss state). So old buddies, he and Gary Blair went at each other with the 12th nationally ranked Aggies winning the SEC-Big 12 Challenge game on Sunday afternoon, 6 December.

The Aggies improve to 4-0, while #25 ranked Longhorns fall to 3-1 on the year. A&M collects its 24th victory in the all-time series and is 14-5 in the last 19 meetings. The Aggies are 8-1 all-time versus the Associated Press No. 25 ranked team. This is the first victory in Austin since Feb. 27, 2011. First win against Texas since March 9, 2011 in the Big 12 Tournament quarterfinals. The Aggies collected their second ranked-road victory of the season, after earlier downing then #19 DePaul.

An all-around great effort by senior guard Aaliyah Wilson and a string defensive game inside lifted the Texas Aggies to their 66-61 victory in the Frank Erwin Center.

KeShun Brown “Opts Back In”

As reported in The Eagle on 8 December, Coach Fisher stated that Brown (redshirt freshman linebacker on the Aggie football team) had been reinstated. *“After opting out before the season started, like I said, the door’s always been open. They’ve always been a part of the family; we want to help them.”*

“Listen, there was a lot of turmoil and confusion going on at that time in America [when they made their decisions to opt out]. We had a lot of unknowns; you had a lot of young people making decisions, and now they [are making] decisions based off the information they have now.”



However, in Bulletin 12 on 15 October we said - In Bulletin Ten (29 September 20) we commented on the 26 July protest at the Sully statue and here it is again:

“At the protest at the Sully Statue on 26 July, there was a confrontation between six former student “ole Ags” and some football players. Out of courtesy we are omitting names here although we have them all for sure. There was a threat made by one of the players and we have verified it by talking to the former student Ags who were there. We also confirmed that they, the former students, wrote a letter to both Chancellor Sharp and President Young describing the details of what happened, and the threats that were made by the individual to three of the ole Ags. To date, no answer has been received regarding corrective action and resolution. They are considering giving us a copy of the correspondence they sent the leadership. And they told us that if their inquiry goes unanswered much longer, they very well may pursue it via legal action. We shall stay on this and provide updates.”

As an update, we now have a copy of the letter that the former students, who were there in front of the statue that day, sent to the TAMUS Chancellor. It states that rather than proffering charges, that the Chancellor deal with the young man’s threatening actions within the TAMU student codes. The letter also asks that he be considered for removal from the football team, cancellation of his scholarship, expulsion from TAMU, reported to the SEC, and issued a criminal trespass warning for life should he attempt to return to campus. To date, no response has been received, and the individual remains listed on the team’s roster.

We are still checking on the status of the grievance which was filed by the threatened Aggies and still waiting for a reply. We hope there has been some sort of resolution and apology! More left to come.

You can reach us at: SRGpresident@aggienetwork.com

Reminder: Anyone (Ags and non Ags, SRG Ags and all other Ags too) can “opt in” by going to <https://www.aggienetwork.com/theassociation/sulrossgroup.aspx> and simply putting in your name and email address, and then clicking on “submit.” You will then automatically receive all the SRG Bulletins.

If you wish comment to Those who decide:

Chancellor Sharp: chancellor@tamus.edu

The Board of Regents: vickie@tamus.edu or jbelle@tamus.edu

Interim President Junkins: junkins@tamu.edu

Interim Provost Weichold: m-weichold@tamu.edu

Athletic Director Bjork: rrabun@athletics.tamu.edu

VP for Student Affairs (VPSA) Pugh: djpughsr@vpsa.tamu.edu