

UB takes steps toward progress

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Students speak on diversity and inclusion as part of community chat

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With racial tensions high on college campuses throughout the nation, some UB students and administrators gathered Wednesday night to propose solutions.

Teresa Miller, vice provost of Equity and Inclusion, met with students to discuss the issue of race and diversity on campus. The “community chat” was held in the South Lake Village Community Center and students were given a chance to not only share their feelings on race on campus, but also propose solutions.

“At first, I felt that UB was just trying to appease students, but after this meeting I feel it’s really genuine,” said Sonya Tareke, a junior business major.

Miller is UB’s first vice provost of Equity and Inclusion, as she took the position in 2014. Since her appointment, Miller has been working to create a more inclusive UB, not only on the student level, but also in faculty and staff.

The community chat was a joint effort between Miller and Meegan Hunt, the associate director of Campus Living and Wellness Education at UB. The team began brainstorming ideas on how to achieve a more inclusive campus and its focus on faculty and a general education course on diversity.

The meeting was held through the Residential Housing Association.

“We wanted to be able to meet with students, so we coordinated with the RHA to be able to meet with students in campus living complexes,” Hunt said.

The discussion started with issues of racial tensions at universities across the country.

Students, including those at the University of Missouri, have protested for further university responses to issues of racism and lack of inclusion on their campuses.

The tension has left some students feeling uneasy. Some students said the tension makes them feel unsafe because it could initiate retaliation against black students. Another student said that while they do not feel unsafe at UB, there is a feeling that if incidents can happen elsewhere they could happen at UB.

Students also discussed Yik Yak, the social media forum where people post anonymously. Students said that when Black Student Union (BSU) held its annual Black Solidarity Day, some students took to Yik Yak to use racial slurs to deprecate BSU, along with other minority students.

Students said international students were also targets and victims of racial slurs.

The sense of a UB community on campus compared to other schools is another issue students brought up. Safiyeh Kayembe, a junior political science major, spoke about her previous school and the sense of community there.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

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KAINAN GUO, THE SPECTRUM

Teresa Miller (right), vice provost of Equity and Inclusion, speaks at the Black Student Union's open forum in September. Miller also spoke at the "community chat" in South Lake Village Wednesday night to discuss race and diversity on campus.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"I went to an HBCU [historically black colleges and universities] before this and the school was built on community," Kayembe said. "The college was small but there were two other colleges right next door, so we really had a close community."

A graduate student at the meeting said she is one of four students of color in one of her classes. The idea of having students of color mentor others did come up, but Miller was cautious about the idea. While she thinks it's a good idea she doesn't want to "overwhelm" students.

"It's not easy to ask someone to lift as they climb," Miller said.

A meeting at Goodyear Hall on South Campus preceded the meeting at South Lake.

"One thing that I got from Goodyear was that there's not enough contact with the faculty," Miller said.

Many students at that meeting said they've never been to a faculty member's home. Miller said UB's large student population would make this difficult, but the idea of getting faculty to eat in dining halls with students on

occasion was brought up at the meeting.

However, students feel progress is being made.

The Dear World event that took place on campus Tuesday was one way for students to be heard on campus. The event allowed students to write messages on themselves and be photographed.

One student said a University Police officer took part in the event, which she said was a step in the right direction to creating inclusivity. Making UPD more familiar to students was emphasized in the meeting. Students discussed the creation of the UPD student task force, which allows students to have regular discussions with UPD.

Didi Okorodo, a junior biomedical science major, also felt the meeting gave students a place to speak out. UB will have a diversity course for the first time next fall as a part of the new general education requirements.

"Diversity is a part of the college experience, so UB needs to have a class or seminar about it," she said.

There will be another community chat in Governors Complex on Dec. 3.