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White Supremacy at Georgia Southern

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Senate Executive Committee Request Form

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SHORT TITLE

(Please provide a short descriptive title that would be suitable for inclusion in the Senate Agenda.)

White Supremacy at Georgia Southern

SUBJECT OF DISCUSSION:

(Please state the nature of your request as concisely as possible.)

The Inclusive Excellence initiatives at GSU began after a few specific incidents: the use of the word "n****r" by professors in and outside of classrooms in a manner which offended some students, the "triggerish" incident which was picked up by national news, and the discovery of racist and sexist threats of violence in one of our public restrooms. Last semester, students burned copies of a book about the experiences of minority students at historically white institutions. Since the book burning, students and faculty have reported escalating incidents of anti-diversity backlash and discriminatory behavior. Faculty have reported the appearance of "It's Okay to Be White" leaflets on the Statesboro campus; that slogan has been used by white-supremacist organizations, including the Ku Klux Klan, in recruiting materials. In October, a student filmed a class presentation in which he promoted the "great replacement" or "white genocide" conspiracy theory, then published the video online. The student claims to be part of the "long march," a movement to normalize white nationalist ideas in academia, and has received positive feedback from white nationalist organizations like the American Identity Movement. All of these incidents reflect the history of white supremacy in the United States. White supremacy is a well-researched phenomenon known to affect the climate of college campuses. White supremacy has historically motivated individuals and groups to escalate from expressing grievances, to offensive, harassing or threatening language, and finally to violent, terrorist acts. All of these behaviors discriminate against members of our community by making them feel excluded and threatened on our campus. This violates our students' right to equal access to education. Furthermore, discriminatory and white supremacist discourses run contrary to a healthy, productive culture of learning which faculty work to foster. Finally, all of these incidents reflect our failure as an organization to respond to white supremacy, an ideology incongruous with the democratic values of the United States and its public institutions. Faculty, staff, and students need guidance on recognizing, reporting, and responding to white supremacy and its associated threats. The following questions are intended to foster a productive conversation and lead to a Faculty Senate resolution on white supremacy: What should GSU do about white supremacy? How should the university respond to the potential for white supremacist organizing on our campuses? What is the relationship between our Inclusive Excellence initiatives and the anti-diversity backlash? In general, how should faculty respond when students express white supremacist ideas in class or on campus?

RATIONALE(s):

(Please explain why this issue is one of general concern for the Faculty Senate or for the University and not a matter concerning only an individual college or administrative area.)

GSU's Inclusive Excellence initiatives were instigated by multiple instances of anti-black language, one which included a call to violence. FBI data and testimony indicate the real threat of white supremacy as a motivator of terrorist behavior and hate crimes. As a formerly segregated, historically white institution in the Southeast, GSU has a historical relationship with white supremacy. In the past, campus leaders like GS President Marvin Pittman have risen to the challenge of racism on campus, and we should do so now.

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Approval

Response:

Approved

1/24/2020

SEC Response:

SEC approved the addition of this Discussion Item to the Feb. 5, 2020 agenda of the Faculty Senate.

2/5/2020

Senate Response:

Discussion: Chris Cartright (CAH) has previously submitted an RFI on this issue. He wanted information on where administration stands concerning this issue. His understanding is that our administration is unable to address white supremacy directly itself. However, white supremacy is particularly salient in our region and at this time in the history in our country. He wants to talk through with faculty what would be an appropriate response. Senate feedback will be used to craft, and then submit, a resolution to the Senate at our next meeting. The History department's statement could be used as a template for this resolution. Trish Holt (COE) noted that we have a new VP for Inclusive Excellence who is coming in. She asked if Chris Cartright has talked to him. He replied that this would be a good next step. Chris Cartright explained that he would like to see more action from administration, and this VP fill that role. He further explained that he sees a distinction between what faculty and administrators can do. Andrew Hansen (JPHCOPH) noted that for his college, discussions on this issue are second nature, and it is part of their mission to include cultural competency elements in courses and training. He recommended cultural competency as SOAR sessions for students, and also for both incoming and current faculty. Helen Bland (JPHCOPH) remarked that we have diversity fellows whom she has met. She asked if Chris Cartright has reached out to these fellows in crafting his resolution, as they have expertise. They could give perspective on the language of this resolution. Chris Cartright replied that he has spoken to them and can get more feedback from them. Dustin Anderson (CAH) noted that this is a long-term issue. He asked that we consider this issue at

every level, such as hiring. Are we having conversations about the role of diversity and inclusion? Looking at the microscopic level, we could express and engage with this issue more intensively. Chris Cartright (CAH) noted that feedback indicates there is readiness and confidence to address systemic inequalities. He sees a lot of support in moving forward on these issues. White supremacy as an ideology and white nationalism are different issues that require different responses. We need to pursue both of these issues. He is looking for advice on how we can address both of these things: hiring practices, and also systemic racism and white supremacists who may be recruiting on our campus. Kristi Smith (LIB), who serves on the Faculty Welfare Committee, told the Senate that this committee has discussed the recent Chronicle of Higher Education article on the book burning incident. Maybe the new VP of Inclusive Excellence could work with FYE faculty. Also, we are required to do online training such as cybersecurity. Why not require online diversity training? Michelle Haberland (CAH) asked that we consider, as a faculty, the history department's resolution. We need a cultural change. There are faculty members who are addressing these issues, panels are being held about the first 500 African-Americans who came to our campus, and there is another initiative with SGA that would help us create some measure to gauge how effectively we are hiring. The new VP can pull these together under one umbrella to lead us in a direction of making white supremacy less acceptable on this campus. Carl Reiber (Provost) noted that this body (the Senate) has the power to recommend that all faculty have some diversity training. Heidi Altman (CBSS) said that the idea that white supremacy can be normalized through first amendment protection is bothersome. We should perhaps have training on how to recognize and counter white supremacist ideology. Helen Bland (JPHCOPH) asked that legal might help us distinguish terminology such as white nationalism and supremacy. Trish Holt (COE) agreed that faculty are at the forefront, but should it be only faculty who take training, or everyone who works on campus? Wayne Johnson (CEC) wondered what would happen if students wanted to form a white supremacist group. How would we handle it? Laura Copeland (Legal Affairs) explained that white supremacy is not a legal term. Dustin Anderson (CAH) noted that the student code of conduct would prevent that from happening. Every student organization has to adhere to a code of conduct that they abide by the university's anti-discrimination policy. This body can do something very similar by creating our own policy. John Lester (VP Comm. and Marketing) noted that we have a Diversity and Inclusive Excellence website to announce our efforts. Wayne Johnson (COC) asked if the white supremacist group stipulated that anyone could join, could they then get around our policy? Melanie Miller (Interim VP Student Affairs) noted that this is possible. Laura Copeland (Legal Affairs) clarified that there is a Supreme Court case which states that we are required to make organizations abide by our non-discrimination policy. However, it is possible that if an organization is not discriminating in membership, we cannot discriminate against their ideology. Chris Cartright (CAH) noted that we need to make sure our distinctions in terminology are made more clear. White nationalism is his biggest concern. He would like to find a way to create a shared culture of anti-racist pedagogy. He does not want to censure students or punish them for expressing their ideas. However, we live in a social reality that extends beyond the university. White nationalism is spreading, and we need to address it so as not to become a white supremacy campus. Dustin Anderson (CAH) explained that if we have a student organization that is espousing white supremacy ideology, then we have an employee who signed off on it because a student organization needs to have a faculty sponsor. We need to ensure that the faculty we have working on our campuses do not espouse those ideas. We are a gatekeeper for these kinds of ideas. Melissa Gayan (CAH) wanted to go on the record to say that it was hard for her to face her students when they asked if the university approved of these ideas. We were left to our own devices in how to deal with these problems. Quick responses such as making a statement are essential. Amanda Glaze (COE) noted that this kind of organization is an undercurrent. They aren't official student organizations. How can we support our students if administration has its hands tied and the situation doesn't fall under by-laws of student organizations? Chris Cartright (CAH) explained that these movements can grow in the dark, while universities wring our hands on these more difficult issues. He then thanked the Senators for their feedback. He will talk to a number of stakeholders before submitting a resolution.



President's Response:

