Audit and Action Council Meeting
February 23rd, 2021

1. Introductions and in Attendance

Saphire Ruiz (they/them) - Student Assembly President
Kavya Crasta (she/her) - Student Assembly Vice President
Eric Stenzel (he/him) - Student Assembly Vice President-Elect
Khulsen “T” Tulga (she/her) - International Cultural Association
Luis Lopez (he/him) - La Vanguardia Treasurer
Emily “Mil” Fienco (she/they) - Student Assembly Justice & Equity Committee Chair
Sacharja Cunningham (he/him) - Class of 2019, LITS Instructional Designer
Julio Demb (he/him) - Black and Latinx Student Union Social Activist Chair
Professor Nigel Westmaas (he/him) - Africana Studies Department
Felix Tager (he/him)

2. Approval of Minutes

The Chair decided to put the vote to email to afford those not in attendance an opportunity to vote.
Luis Lopez noted that his position is actually Treasurer for LV.
Khulsen “T” Tulga corrected the spelling of her last name.

3. Review of intentions

Saphire Ruiz reviewed the community norms and intentions set last meeting. They noted that there is still space to add/edit the agreements as we move forward (see Feb. 11th notes).

Saphire reviewed last meeting’s thoughts on why we are all participating in this process (see Feb. 11th notes). They made space for any additions.

Saphire reviewed our shared principles of accessibility and transparency, including: sharing our meeting notes, holding ourselves accountable, being transparent within the Council, clarifying what we mean by these words like “DEI” and transparency, ensuring we are all on the same page, an editing process influenced by those not currently on the A&A Council. They asked for any additions.
4. Initial Feedback Process

**Kavya Crasta** discussed our previous interests on increasing student engagement with the A&A Council and our work.

*Sapphire* asked that people consider the ways the Advisory Council engaged with students/the community that they did not agree with.

*Mil Fienco* said that we should work to not be superficial like the Advisory Council. They added that we do not want to tire people out.

**Felix Tager** suggested we do a town hall, though noting that we shouldn’t make it superficial.

**Julio Demb** likes this idea, adding that we need something to talk about

**Kavya Crasta** asked what we can do to make sure this town hall would be different from other ones.

*Mil* suggested we keep the panel for the town hall be only for the A&A Council, and noted accessibility for those who don’t want to speak in front of others.

**Julio** added that we could use anonymous Q&A.

**Luis Lopez** noted that we could send out a survey in advance. They also noted that a town hall setting engenders a debate-type atmosphere.

**Eric Stenzel** suggested that we frame the town hall as being us asking students questions rather than vice versa.

**Julio** supported this, noting admin’s hesitancy. He also supported that we do a survey.

**Kavya** asked what we could include in this survey.

**Sapphire** added that we should discuss parameters. What kind of specific feedback are we interested in? What type of questions do we want? If we had to think about data, what data points do we want?

**Kavya** likes these parameters and suggested we ask ourselves what data points we’d like in relation to the advisory council.
Felix added “Who is the survey targeted for? I was thinking we might want to send it to some alumni we are close to as it would provide data proving that this is an ongoing issue that has impacted many more than just the students. From an alumni relations standpoint, the best ally we have are alumni as they provide the support needed to convince the administration that we are in the right.”

Mil added the more input the better, and agreed with Felix.

Luis agreed and added that it would be beneficial to our cause.

Felix mentioned that he could ask for permission to contact alumni for their perspectives based on different identities and affiliations.

Kavya liked this idea.

Eric added that we should give the Alumni Office the opportunity to say “no” to legitimate requests.

Julio agreed and added that he was a first-year student when the Advisory Council was announced, and he was initially confused about the opposition. He tried to participate in listening sessions and said now he gets it, words in one ear and out the other.

Kavya asked what ways are that we can bring out those specific experiences, of gaining a dissonance between what they thought and what was experienced from the Advisory Council.

Julio suggested that we include questions in the survey about whether individuals personally felt supported by the AC.

Felix said he agrees but was uncertain people would be open for that because of the College’s use of personal experiences to tokenize students in marketing. Personal experiences may be better for the town hall whereas statistical data on broad themes would be better for form.

Saphire said they made the mental health survey anonymous and could do same for AC form.

T suggested we ask what people’s needs are/have been to aid us in our decisions

Kavya agreed.

Kavya asked for other parameters.
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T added that International students don’t often get targeted support in the ways they’d like. She suggested that we specifically cater to the needs of this group. So far it has only been one Dean and we should consider expanding.

Sapphire added considerations of how we can avoid making the same mistakes as the Advisory Council. What are the things students would want to be different from their own interactions?

Felix said he doesn’t have faith with them in supporting students against threats. The College says “what do we see in the news that can make us look good”. The question we need to ask is: does the community feel supported? The answer seems to be no, and they’re not changing.

Sacharja Cunningham added that we both want feedback on the Advisory Council and what our next steps are. Will the survey address both areas? How long will the survey be? Concerned that length could be an issue. He further adds that the issues are so big that surveys are difficult to adequately capture what’s going on. When asking about experiences, we get into larger conversations; we need to narrow down into recommendations/steps forward. We should anticipate that faculty/staff have a lot of different experiences, and we need to zero-in on what’s needed.

Sacharja clarified that we may want to divide the “Audit” and the “Action” a little bit more. We also don’t want to force people to relive trauma. How do we avoid that?

Luis said that we should create a timeline of marginalization over Hamilton’s history—it could become a monthly/bi-monthly newsletter on these issues. A common theme is that all of this knowledge is not accessible; stories and experiences aren’t known.

Felix added that Pride flags were taken from the bridge during the National Coming Out Day display a while back and that, while some efforts have been made to support queer students against specific incidences of homophobia, writ-large the hate that has impacted students has not been adequately addressed.

Professor Nigel Westmaas added that those who have been struggling on campus for a long time need to chronicle the past so we can build on it. It is good to have a comprehensive thing. These issues have had ups and downs since he started on campus, the whole gamut. It isn’t found in any one document. Hamilton students were at one point almost expelled for opposing slavery. Long history should be covered for new generations of students.
Kavya noted time and requested specific questions.

Sapphire asked that we consider survey length given the burdens on the community. Proposed splitting the survey in two: one on the Advisory Council, and one on action steps. The AC could be now and then the actions could be later.

Kavya supports.

Temperature check shows support for dividing.

5. Working Groups

Sapphire described the role Working Groups will be taking. They emphasized that we are much more about the “Action” than the “Audit”. To do this, we need to establish separate working groups for distinct subjects. They emphasized that it appears the Advisory Council had shortcomings in actually accomplishing tangible work, that some of their final recommendations should have been their work to begin with. So, to do that, we need subcommittees. Chairs of these working groups would be responsible for setting their own agendas and meeting times. We’ll talk more in depth next week, but as a starter, is anyone interested in getting involved in establishing working groups?

Mil is interested in Curriculum, Enrollment, and Indigenous Rights.

Luis suggested a History and Continuity working group to research and share Hamilton history.

Felix expressed interest.

T asked if she could get back later.

Sapphire said yes.

Julio asked if we have finite or if we are still adjusting.

Sapphire said goal is 10, but can adjust.

Julio suggested an inclusion committee to focus on adequately addressing inclusion of different demographics in the A&A Council.

NEXT STEPS

- Saphire and Kavya think through initial feedback process
- Setting an official time
Setting up working groups