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## Grand Launch of the Black Resource Center: Michael Tadesse-Bell's Speech

Michael Tadesse-Bell

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Thank you all for your presence here tonight. This day would not be possible without the tireless efforts and fierce leadership of current and former Black students. Folks like Dr. Joe Marshall, Adrienne Riley, Timothy Simon, and Sarah Toutant as well as so many others have stood tall when uncomfortable and inconvenient. Their sacrifices planted a seed that we are now bearing the fruit from. So, again I say, thank you.

As many of you know we launched the Black Achievement Success and Engagement program (BASE) this past fall semester, and with it, two of its three components. The first component is the Black Scholars Program, which is a rigorous and competitive academic program, grounded in Jesuit values, that seeks to provide high-achieving Black students with the resources, skills, and support necessary to achieve personal and professional excellence. Through the Black Scholars Program, we welcomed 13 students to USF in the fall semester. The second component is the Black Living Learning Community, which offers a fun and engaging learning environment for 20 first year students, including the scholars, and 10 second year students who share an interest in the historical, intellectual, and

political traditions of Black Americans, and want to engage more deeply with the local Bay Area Black community through service-learning coursework.

The final component is what we launch here this evening. The Black Resource Center or the BRC as we affectionately call it, seeks to provide a safe, supportive space for all Black identified students, both undergraduate and graduate to connect with each other and to receive academic, spiritual, mentoring, and emotional support services. Through intentional strategies, we will leverage the capacity of community partners, including faculty, staff, student organizations, department units, local organizations and alumni to bring forth an array of support services, workshops and trainings to support the holistic development of Black identified students ultimately working to help them actualize their personal and academic potential. As stated so eloquently by Dr. Harrison in the previous video, this will require a village effort. A village lending their expertise, time and energy.

Just last week we launched an internal BRC website featuring some of

the scheduled events and workshops that will come out of the BRC this semester. In addition, we uplift many of the existing resources our community partners already engage in. We have already begun working with alumni engagement to create key strategies to help juniors, seniors and graduate students leverage the existing Alumni Mentorship Program and be paired with Black mentors who can help them think critical about their majors, interest and explore what challenges and opportunities lay ahead. For the juniors and seniors in the room who haven't signed up already, please consider this great opportunity. See me later for more information.

We are excited that our first event, this semester, will take place next Thursday, February 28 and will help students tackle exploring and applying for outside scholarships as paying for college continues to be an issue many students struggle with. In march, we will help students think about how they are and can be effective leaders through "the leadership challenge workshop" facilitated by Assistant Vice Provost for Student Engagement, Lester Deanes. Finally, we are exploring mentorship opportunities for first and second year students as according to survey data, mentorship, along with the aforementioned

workshops, were most desired.

As we work closer together to unify existing resources and develop new partnerships, we will systematically march towards our goals of:

- Building a more inclusive, equitable and diverse University by increasing the recruitment, retention and graduation rates of black students;
- Creating an institutional climate in which black students feel valued, included, supported and empowered to reach their full academic and human potential;
- Strengthening the relationships between black students and their peers, faculty, staff, alumni and administrators;
- Strengthening the engagement of black students at the University and in the surrounding Bay Area community; and finally,
- Creating pathways for black students to move successfully through their University careers and into rich and rewarding professional careers.

Reaching these goals will take time but we are committed to them.

Your presence here this evening says that you are as well. This center and the BASE initiative overall signifies that we as an institution can and are committed to doing better.