11-9-2018

Black Student Union 50th Anniversary Closing Remarks

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BSU 50th Anniversary Kick-off

Closing Remarks – Taylor Terry

On behalf of the organizers and sponsors of this event, it is indeed my pleasure to make a few closing remarks and express my immense gratitude to all those who made the BSU 50th Anniversary Celebration a reality.

The planning of an event of this magnitude is always paved with difficulties. This is especially the case when the bulk of the work is done by staff, administrators, faculty, and students from different areas of campus who wear multiple hats and are stretched thin by the responsibility of uplifting our community on campus. Despite its challenges, it was absolutely worth it to come together and be surrounded by members and pillars of our community in the spirit of celebrating past accomplishments of Black student activism, and looking forward to our collectively bright futures. I would like to introduce this event as only the first, a kick off to several events that fall under the theme of the BSU 50th Anniversary Year including but not limited to a night of Expressions as well as our annual Black Cultural Dinner to come in the Spring semester.

I want to express our gratitude to Fr. Paul Fitzgerald, USF President, and his staff, for agreeing to host this event and for being active allies in the upliftment and celebration of the Black USF community.

A significant part of planning this series of events was carried out in the development office under the support and guidance of its Senior Associate Vice President, Preston Walton. Further, the Director of development, Jennifer Ratliff, and the Assistant Director of Marketing and Communications, Monica Njoku, made significant contributions to connecting us and communicating with alumni. We express our deepest thanks to them.

Additionally, I would like to thank Professor Stephanie Sears, Associate Dean Sean Calhoun, and Michael Tadesse-Bell, and for their service on the BSU 50th Planning committee and beyond. Many others helped out, including Dan Erwin who supported us with communications and Elonte Porter who assisted with marketing and set up.

It is with great humility, and the utmost respect that I thank Professor Candice Harrison for all of her many hours of labor in bringing this vision of a BSU 50th Anniversary Celebration to life. I would like to thank her for her unfaltering commitment to Black Student success on this campus and for her dedication to facilitating Black Student growth, both interpersonally and systemically,
with the implementation of the revolutionary Black Achievement Success and Engagement Program. Through mentorship, she among other Black Faculty, staff, and administrators have for years provided and continue to offer Black Students and Black Student leaders, such as myself, opportunities for growth and valued wisdom applicable far outside our academic context.

I would like to thank the panelists for their time and testimonies of activism, gifted to us for the purpose of inspiration in a much trying social political time.

An event becomes a success only if people are in attendance! Thus, we express our sincere thanks to all of you who have gathered, and traveled to be with us today. We thank you for your continued support of BSU, and for your past, present, and future activism within our community!

The Black Student Union works diligently today to foster community and relationship building spaces and to uphold our mission "to examine and collaborate through valuable interaction to increase historical and cultural awareness of the African Diaspora. Recognizing that pluralism and diversity add value to the university experience and society as a whole, BSU seeks to educate and involve the university community in the diversity of the African American experience."

One way in which we have carried this out is through the founding of a BSU supported subgroup, The Black Rainbow Party, which serves as a space of support for Black LGBTQ+ identified folks and allies to combat homophobia and social erasure, further integrate Black LGBTQ+ students and allies into the larger Black USF community, and provides community specific resources, history, and imperative intra-community building dialogue. We are proud to have made this addition to our organization and do so in the hope of systemic intra-community change.

On a personal note, when I first came to USF I came here utterly lost, desperately searching for a connection to a culture that I had been almost completely isolated from. I came here loud and absolutely wrong, expressing years of socialization of internalized hatred for who I was. Black students, faculty, staff and administrators were here waiting for me though. I can imagine them in the back like whew chile, lets help this one; she don't know.

As I stand before you today I still do not know everything, I am not perfect, and there are still learning experiences that I have yet to enjoy, but what was perfect was the amount of love I was received with. The amount of care and energy that was poured into my development and into the creation of my success. It was perfect in the ways in which I was folded into this community,
as though this home had always been built for me, ready for me to find it. I am immensely grateful to every person in this room who has dedicated their life's work to the upliftment of students such as myself.

This community changed the direction of my life and I will continue to be in service of it and support to it beyond graduation and into my life as an alum. I would like to challenge folks in this room to search their hearts for the ways in which this community has impacted you, and to search your minds and will power for the ways in which you can give back to it now.

Thank you.