

'That's how we get a more equitable university'

January 20, 2016 12:15 PM Carol J. Schlueter
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Tulane University President Mike Fitts, at right on the stage, answers a student's question at Tuesday's (Jan. 19) town hall meeting on racial issues at Tulane. Joining Fitts on the platform were, from left, undergraduate student leader Alexandria Williams; professor Michael Cunningham; and Tania Tetlow, vice president and chief of staff. (Photo by Ryan Rivet)

Members of the Tulane University community filled the Kendall Cram Lecture Hall on Tuesday night (Jan. 19) for a town hall meeting to express concerns about the racial climate on campus and lay the groundwork for a new commission appointed by Tulane President Mike Fitts.

He has appointed 52 members to the campuswide [Commission on Race and Tulane Values](#), a group that Fitts said will be looking at "ways in which we can all bring

about an institution we are proud of and is a symbol nationally for what a diverse university should be about.”

Commission members listened to concerns raised by students who lined up at the microphone and submitted written questions. Answering the questions from the stage were Fitts, student leader Alexandria Williams and the co-chairs of the commission, psychology professor [Michael Cunningham](#) and [Tania Tetlow](#), vice president and chief of staff.

The student speakers brought up a wide range of concerns, from the need for better recruitment of diverse students, especially African-Americans, and appeals for more faculty members of color and more work to support and keep them at Tulane.

Fitts answered, “I don’t think anybody is satisfied with the student diversity on this campus. We have to do better.”

Students also asked for expanded services and more space for the [Office of Multicultural Affairs](#), and encouraged everyone in the Tulane community to speak up to correct conversations that are racially insensitive.

“From the student perspective, it’s really important that we take this conversation out of this room,” said Williams, an undergraduate who represents the Tulane Black Student Union and Students Organizing Against Racism at Tulane. “You take it everywhere you can, because the worst thing that can happen is that the university stays where it is now; the best thing that can happen is that we change people’s minds. It’s hard to call out your friends if they make a racist joke but we have to be willing to have those uncomfortable conversations with people. That’s how we get a more equitable university.”

Fitts added, “This is not an obligation of minority members. It’s an obligation of everybody in the community to speak out.”

The town hall meeting was a continuation of discussions that took place in November at [A Call for Unity rally](#).

“Your presence here speaks volumes about your commitment to making this a more just university that creates an atmosphere of mutual respect.”

TU President Mike Fitts