



# SIUE Black Faculty And Staff Association Hosts Second Annual State Of The Black Union

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EDWARDSVILLE - Blacks account for 43 of 677 faculty members, 323 of 2,431 staff members, and 317 of 3,433 undergraduate and graduate degrees at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

Statistics and analytics, panelists' experiences and viewpoints, previously conducted and live interactive surveys, and strategies and recommendations were shared during SIUE's second annual [State of the Black Union](#), sponsored by the Black Faculty and Staff

Association (BFSA) and moderated by BFSA member Tarsha Moore, Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion (CSDI) assistant director. The webinar was held virtually on Thursday, Feb. 4 with approximately 100 people attending.

“This event is an opportunity for our campus to report and reflect upon the current conditions and experiences of Black faculty, staff and students at SIUE that fall well below the aspirational statements of administration,” said BFSA President J.T. Snipes, PhD, assistant professor in the School of Education, Health and Human Behavior’s (SEHHB) Department of Educational Leadership. “Furthermore, we will use this event as an emergency call to action for our campus to reconcile with the truth, and reimagine ways we engage and support our Black community.”

“Thank you for the call to action,” said SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke in his welcoming remarks. “It is such an important part of this event. There are areas where I have concern, and there are areas where we can celebrate.

“The retention and graduation of Black students at SIUE is not where we want it to be, and it is something I think about every day. The Black graduation rate is between 25-30%, compared to 50% for the campus as a whole. The retention rate is about 10-12 points behind the campus as a whole,” noted Pembroke. “There are also areas where our hiring and employment numbers are not where we want them to be. The percentage of Black faculty is between 5-6%, which is dramatically lower than desired. We were encouraged that the incoming Black faculty class of 2021 is much larger than it has been. We hope that is a result of our strategic hiring efforts. On the staff side, particularly in the trades where we have 0%, we have to address ways to increase numbers.”

In the opening address, BFSA board member Dominic Dorsey, director of the Office of Accessible Campus Community and Equitable Student Support (ACCESS), began with a historical and reflective approach in using one of James Baldwin’s famous quotes, “To be Black and conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage.”

“Baldwin went on to qualify that statement by discussing the heart of America and a privileged population that had deluded themselves for so long into the belief that he was not a human,” rebuffed Dorsey. “He described it as moral apathy. A profound lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern for the welfare of Black Americans in this country. Although Baldwin would engage in this conversation about being Black in America in 1960, surely the notion of moral apathy would have largely dissipated some 60 years later.

“In over three decades since Baldwin prolifically encapsulated the experience of Black social awareness, we still endure a consistent rage. One that has apparently now become

popular to acknowledge by a majority population no longer afforded the luxury of preoccupation or ignorance due to being held captive by a pandemic. ... Our response to the pandemic is the realization that we must willingly participate in a theater of pain or endure injustice and provide proof to receive a fair and equitable existence among our peers. Slavery was ‘abolished’ in 1865, and the labor of emancipation is still heaped upon Black folks. It’s no wonder that the state of the union is not only a state of emergency, but an ever-present state of rage.”

Also part of the opening address was BFSA board member Gina Jeffries, EdD, director of the SIUE East St. Louis Charter High School. “In the past year, many performative actions have been implemented but there is questionable progress ... Being hopeful that progress will happen is a complacent position for the inactive to appease their own self-aspirations of racial equity – deeming themselves as allies, while never being bestowed such a title from the Black community!

“SIUE has existed for more than 60 years, yet there are departments that have never granted a Black person tenure. As a matter of fact, there are departments and units with no Black people in the department ... SIUE refuses to implement mandatory racism and multicultural competency training for all administrators, faculty, staff, and students, when by its own words in the 2013-2016 Diversity Plan admitted that in order to create a ‘climate within the unit that is welcoming to ... individuals from diverse background necessitate formal diversity training.’ ... SIUE should re-examine reasons why Black faculty, staff and students leave this institution ... We hope the annual State of the Black Union event will help to hold our institution accountable for the collective responsibility it has to create and sustain an equitable and safe campus for Black people.”

A close look at the numbers from the SIUE Fact Books from 2015-18 was presented by BFSA members Michael Hankins, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Chemistry, and Regiere Lovett, coordinator for New Student Programs and team leader for Springboard to Success Freshman Orientation in the Office of Admissions.

An analysis on the results gathered from the SIUE Black Climate Survey, adapted from Dr. Tonisha Hamilton’s 2009 dissertation research at Seton Hall University, and given to faculty, staff and students was explained by Timothy Lewis, PhD, assistant professor in the College of Arts and Sciences’ Department of Political Science. Some of the statements that respondents were asked to rate from strongly agree to strongly disagree included:

- As a Black faculty/staff person, I have been treated fairly on this campus
- In general, I have experienced racial bias from other faculty/staff persons and or students
- The interracial climate on this campus is tense

- As a Black student, I feel out of place in the classroom

A discussion on the numbers, survey results and more were led by the following panel members:

- Kathryn Bentley, associate professor in the CAS Department of Theater and Dance, and Black studies program director
- Stephanie Simpson, assistant director in the Office of Online Student Services
- Fannie Acoff, program coordinator for SIUE CORE T.E.A.M.
- Capri Wroten, graduate student in the College Student Personnel Administration program

“There are some things I’m excited about,” Pembroke said in his earlier remarks. “We’re getting ready to begin the three-year period for our Quality Initiative, which is required for our accreditation. The QI topic we’ve selected is to put \$500,000 in Anti-Racism at SIUE ... Also, within a month or two we will be able to announce additional diversity within our leadership with both the Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (VCEDI) at SIUE and first SIU System Vice President for Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and Chief Diversity Officer.”

In closing and after celebrating achievements of various Black faculty and staff, Bentley counseled, “Remember, we forget to celebrate ourselves as part of our self-care. We have to stop, take a minute and breathe, and celebrate!”

A formal report of the BFSA’s second annual State of the Black Union will be submitted to Pembroke and will be uploaded to the [BFSA website](#) at a later date.