



# Hopefully Optimistic

AAOI Newsletter | Spring 2021 Edition



Featured Story  
**Celebrating  
Black History  
Month  
In A  
Pandemic!**

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Upcoming  
Event:  
**Black  
Graduation**

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# Black Lives Matter in racial inequity

BY BREANNA FIERRO, STUDENT WRITER

The fight for racial equity continues as students of color are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Los Angeles Community College District Vice Chancellor of Educational Programs and Institutional Effectiveness Dr. Ryan Corner, commended the African American Outreach Initiative (AAOI) for making it their goal to provide resources to African American students and their communities.



(PICTURED: GUEST SPEAKER DR. EDWARD BUSH)

Dr. Corner stated people need to go beyond supporting the communities during times of crisis, at AAOI's 2021 Black History Month Celebration. He said to set a goal to begin dismantling systems that have generated the inequities in times of crisis and in times of normalcy.

"The current struggles remain clear. The systemic and structural barriers that are in place have prevented us from being able to effectively serve our communities and achieve our equity goals," Dr. Corner said. Los Angeles City College (LACC) student Da'Quinn Shepherd led the student dialogue on deconstructing the black monolithic. He said he feels like those around him ignore getting to know him first. Instead, they judge him by his ethnic background, when those judging tend to culturally appropriate their culture. Shepherd also said students should do their research before making any decisions, especially politics, not jumping to conclusions to conduct research to change the world.

The speech was followed with a poetry reading by Los Angeles Southwest (LASC) student Sherry Bradford on her life and journey as a young African American girl to the present day and a deconstruction of the black monologue by LACC student Aigner Ellis. "Black people have to work twice as hard to get ahead or to be successful, and as a Black gay man, I felt that way, even within," Ellis said.

The AAOI program coordinator Dr. Nyree Berry introduced Dr. Edward Bush as co-author of the African-American Male Theory and Co-Founder of A2Mend before he took over to discuss the critical juncture in the African American community. With the LACCD being the largest Community College district in the nation, Dr. Bush said he doesn't take lightly the position of influence those of African descent and those of color have right now, nor should anyone else, to view it as an immense responsibility, and due to the complexities associated with the district if they are able to figure it out.

(continued on page 4)



(PICTURED: LACC STUDENT DA'QUINN SHEPHERD)



# WorkForce Committee

BY DR. LAURA MANYWEATHER

The AAOI Community and Workforce Partnership hosted the 1st Annual Career Mentoring Session on February 26, 2021 With nearly 500 people registered.

The AAOI Workforce & Community Committee coordinated a great event to allow African American students to explore various careers. The virtual event had guest speakers from Energy Efficiency, Building Construction and Mental Health.

Speakers and professional participants included

- SCE Edison
- Patt Watts – Energy Sector
- Dr. Rueben Smith – LACCD Vice Chancellor/Chief Facilities Executive
- Mental Health Provider
- And more!

The next Career mentoring event will take place May 7th for more information please contact Dr. Laura Manyweather @manywelh@wlac.edu



# Black Lives Matter in racial inequity (continued from page 2)

“One thing that drives me to do this work is not out of my own intrinsic idea, it’s because I recognize first and foremost that I have a debt that must be repaid. That when our ancestors died, they knew directly that they would not benefit from the struggle and sacrifice,” Dr. Bush said. “But they wanted to do the work because they knew at some point you were going to come along and wanted to make sure you were in the position you are now in order to make a difference.” Dr. Bush said to challenge the policies, and that the African American community knows to be deleterious, to understand that no matter what African-Americans, are operating at a point of righteousness and that they are going to be okay.



Activists  
Creators  
and Change Agents,

# We Need You!



The African American Outreach Initiative is Looking For Student Ambassadors From All LACCD Campuses For Our Leadership Council to Identify and Address Opportunities and Inequities for African-American students in the district.

For More Information Contact: Aigner Ellis at [aaoistudentsubmissions@gmail.com](mailto:aaoistudentsubmissions@gmail.com)



# AAOI Event Recap: HBCU PANEL

BY BREANNA FIERRO, STUDENT WRITER

The African American Outreach Initiative (AAOI) program, Historically Black College and University (HBCU) committee, hosted a HBCU speaker panel event in an effort to encourage and support Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) students with their desires to gain interest about the possibility of transfer to HBCU institutions.

Dr. Nyree Berry, AAOI Coordinator, opened the event by welcoming all in attendance, providing detailed information about the AAOI program. AAOI, a district led African American Outreach Initiative program is designed to seek and assist African American students within LACCD. “Students who seek assistance with access, navigating the school system, assistance and support through school or have challenges accessing resources will have supportive LACCD members assist them with them AAOI program,” said Dr. Berry.



Dr. Danielle Lendor, Assistant Coordinator and HBCU Committee Co-Chair, followed by addressing the importance of ensuring that prospective HBCU students are aware of the positive experiences and understand the significance of attending a HBCU. "AAOI provides direct experiences from current HBCU students and alumni about the positive aspects of attending a HBCU," said Dr. Lendor.

HBCU Committee Co-Chair and MC for the event, Dr. Erika Miller, was proud to acknowledge her alma mater, Howard University, and the legacy of HBCU institutions, "When people try to convince us to go other places, we have to tell them 'I don't think so' because our HBCU blood runs deep. We are who we are, we don't come out the same individual we started out as, we come out 100 times better," said Dr. Miller. Dr. Miller continued by presenting the panelist who were either current students or alumni from the following HBCU institutions: Wilberforce University, Howard University, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), Spelman College, Tuskegee University, and Kentucky State University.



(PICTURED: EVENT HOST DR. NIKOLE MILLER)



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The panelist responded to questions regarding their overall experience while attending a HBCU. The questions included topics regarding how they became interested in attending an HBCU, the challenges they had to overcome, how they financed their education, and their personal campus environment experiences.

Kentucky State University student, Erica Jones, expressed that the environment at a HBCU differed from those colleges elsewhere because it felt family oriented. The students at Kentucky State University welcomed Erica with open arms and assuring her that she could count on them and call on them when needed. Ms. Jones believes that she may not have had the same experience at a non-HBCU institution. (continued on page 7)







THE LOS ANGELES COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT'S  
AFRICAN AMERICAN OUTREACH INITIATIVE PROGRAM  
PRESENTS



# 2021 Virtual Black Graduation Celebration

## A Cultural Ceremony Honoring Students

CITY - EAST - HARBOR - MISSION - PIERCE - SOUTHWEST - TRADE TECH - VALLEY - WEST



**SAVE  
THE  
DATE**

**TUESDAY  
MAY 25,  
2021**

**3:00 PM -  
5:00 PM**

**For more info, contact 2021 Black Graduation Celebration Co-Chairs:**

**Dr. Elliott Coney**

AAOI Co-Chair; Signature Events Committee Los Angeles Valley College | [Coneye@laccd.edu](mailto:Coneye@laccd.edu)

**Ms. Nicole Flores**

AAOI Co-Chair; Signature Events Committee Los Angeles Trade Technical College | [Floresn3@laccd.edu](mailto:Floresn3@laccd.edu)

**Graduating LACCD Students are encouraged to pre-register for the celebration**

**Pre-Register today for the Virtual Black Graduation Ceremony**

**LACCD faculty, staff, and administrators are all invited to celebrate student achievement**

LACC encourages persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate needing any kind of accommodation or have questions about the physical access provided, please contact Betina Vallin at [vallinb@laccd.edu](mailto:vallinb@laccd.edu) as soon as possible but no later than seven (7) business days prior to the event.

## AAOI Event Recap: HBCU PANEL (continued from page 5)

Howard University graduate, Nichole Bates, grew up in Long Beach, California where she experienced racism and prejudice at a young age. Nichole expresses that these experiences encouraged her to escape the homogenous bubble in Long Beach and attend a HBCU. "Undergoing the many indifferent types of Black people and cultures through the HBCU from other states and continents was amazing to witness," Ms. Bates stated. Seeing the pure intelligence, routine and hustle from the students encouraged her to remain positive throughout her experience at HBCU.

"There is a strong protest spirit at HBCU's that is in this current climate, having a huge impact on change in the world," said Wilberforce University graduate, Amanda Pratt. She noted that one of the greatest benefits she received by attending an HBCU was its ability to prepare her for the many opportunities faced when graduating coupled with the exposure to strong individuals like Dr. Floyd Flake. "From clubs, art, music, and academics, HBCUs are designed to exceed the limitations and prejudices placed on those within the Black community. HBCUs guide students to debunk the misconceptions that figuring it out all alone is a part of growing. Students are encouraged to ask for assistance and support and continue to walk the steps of our ancestors," expressed Ms. Pratt.

LA Trade Tech student Ellis Bivens and AAOI District Chief Student Ambassador Aigner Ellis interviewed U.S. Congresswoman Karen Bass from the great state of California. In the brief exchange students asked Rep. Bass about criminal justice reform and how students can make a bigger impact nationally and in their local communities.

The interview occurred during Chancellor Rodriguez's advisory committee on Black/African-American Student Affairs. In a conversation with Chancellor Rodriguez following the student led interview, Representative Bass reflected her time in community college stating that she attended more than one before transferring to university and cited it as one of the reasons for her strong support of LACCD.



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## From Community College To The U.S. Congress







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#### African American Outreach Initiative Leaders:

Ryan M. Cornner, Ed.D., Vice Chancellor of Educational Programs and Institutional Effectiveness  
Nyree Berry, Ed.D., Faculty Coordinator of African American Outreach Initiative  
Danielle Lendor, Ed.D., Faculty Assistant Coordinator of African American Outreach Initiative  
C. Aigner Ellis, District Chief Student Ambassador  
Breanna Fierro, Newsletter Editor

#### African American Outreach Initiative Committee Chairs:

1. Advocacy, Policy Development and Funding Committee- Dr. Lance Robert (LASC)
2. Access- Brittany Gray (LAHC) & Brandy Robinson (LASC)
3. Student Support Programs- Michael Hopper (LATT) & Damien Danielly (LASC)
4. Community and Workforce Partnerships- Dr. Laura Manyweather (WLAC)
5. HBCU Transfer and Awareness- Dr. Erika Miller (LASC) & Dr. Danielle Lendor (LAPC)
6. College Signature Events- Dr. Elliott Coney (LAVC) & Nicole Flores (LATT)
7. Marketing & Promotions- C. Aigner Ellis

