

Committee on Elon History and Memory
Meeting Minutes, May 14, 2019 (8:30-10:00 a.m., Alamance 101)

- I. Approval of Minutes
- II. Updates
- III. Agenda and Division of Labor for 2019-20
- IV. Processing May 3 Campus Conversation

I. Approval of Minutes from April 9

We did not approve the minutes, as we did not have adequate time to review them.

II. Updates

A. Relevant new initiatives among regional schools

- 1. UNC's "[Reckoning: Race, Memory, and Reimagining the Public University](#)" – "A shared learning initiative for fall 2019."
- 2. William and Mary, already well known for the Lemon Project, has produced a [report comparable in scope](#) to that of Furman and others. Our colleagues in Williamsburg have also announced the winning design for a [Memorial to African Americans Enslaved by William and Mary](#).

B. Student initiative at Elon and elsewhere has pushed forward the conversation

- 1. At Georgetown, students voted to tax themselves the symbolic amount of \$27.20 per semester to create a fund for reparations.
- 2. At University of Richmond, students are demanding name changes for two buildings.
- 3. At Elon, students in two classes are brainstorming possible paths forward.

C. Brandon Bell and Charles Irons received a Diversity Infusion Grant to inventory curricular and co-curricular work.

D. Glenda Phillips Hightower spoke at the Black Excellence Awards

III. Agenda and Division of Labor for 2019-20

A. Conceptual challenges.

- 1. At our April meeting, we explored three scenarios that collectively highlighted the difficulty of simultaneously engaging in current debates and doing the research and work necessary to produce a substantial report by May 2020.
- 2. In a parallel development, the Universities Studying Slavery subcommittee asked questions about how to situate its own work in light of the main group's emphasis on race as the first issue to tackle.
- 3. In light of the many competing directions, the chair proposed for the consideration of the full committee a course of action that would produce a product by May 2020 of which we could be proud—and which would set the stage for fruitful, ongoing work.

B. The proposal

- 1. The Committee on Elon History and Memory will concentrate on race/anti-black racism in its report and will make the work a model for how to explore other

identities in our shared history. We will be attentive to new processes/procedures (regarding [re]naming of spaces, academic programming, etc.) through the “test case” of race.

- a. The test case would include both black experiences and accounts of anti-black racism
 - b. The process would invite people to think of the present-day implications of our history
2. The Committee on Elon History and Memory will generate a robust report, akin to those produced by peer and aspirant institutions such as Furman. It will contain:
 - a. Procedural notes regarding our work, to include our statement of values/best practices and a catalog of current history/memory work
 - b. A carefully researched section discussing key episodes in the institution’s history that illustrate the complexity of the black experience and the persistence of anti-black racism, not comprehensive but substantial enough to provide a solid warrant for future work.
 - c. Recommendations for how to tell a more inclusive history, specifically regarding race but with an eye to creating policies and procedures capable of responding to more generalized concerns.
 3. Throughout the academic year, subcommittees will remain intact, but primarily to inform the final recommendations.
 - a. Inventory
 - b. Infrastructure and Advising
 - c. Engagement
 - d. Dissemination
 - e. Curriculum
 4. The group will sponsor campus-wide events both to solicit additional feedback and to generate momentum behind the initiatives to be proposed in May 2020.
 - a. We should try to facilitate opportunities for dialogue, not performance of certain political views.
 - b. We need to anticipate pushback.
 5. The USS Subcommittee will not seek to reproduce the work of the full group but will spend its energy fleshing out what an ongoing institutional presence (tentatively entitled “The Black Oaks Restoration Project”) committed to historical justice vis-à-vis race would look like. *This does assume that the full committee will endorse in May 2020 continued, academically grounded investigation into race and racism at Elon.*

IV. Processing May 3 Campus Conversation

- A. The event was a tremendous success, with over 170 participants overflowing the meeting space and sharing tremendous insights in their working groups.
- B. Participants worked through four questions:
 1. Are there events or time periods in Elon’s history you feel it is especially important for us to revisit as a community? Which ones, and why?
 2. You have heard about some of the range of remedies that institutions across the country are pursuing in search of restorative justice. What sorts of initiatives would you most like to see at Elon?
 3. Surveys and anecdotal evidence show that Whites at PWIs are often resistant to discussing historical racism, arguing that it needlessly aggravates old wounds.

What strategies do you suggest to engage the broadest possible sector of the community (including local residents and alumni) in this conversation?

4. Every single national effort to engage institutional history and memory has concentrated exclusively on race and racism, and Elon is also focusing its first efforts on this urgent topic. What should it look like when we address other erasures or acts of historical violence?

C. The volume of data was simply too vast to discuss the data from the campus conversation effectively. Buffie Longmire-Avital and Denise Hill volunteered to code it for major themes over the summer.