

# STRONGER TOGETHER



TEXAS A&M  
UNIVERSITY

A Report by the Commission on  
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

January 2021

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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**O**n July 13, 2020, Texas A&M University President Michael K. Young announced the membership and charge of a comprehensive Commission on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

This 45-person commission of students, faculty, staff and former students was charged to provide findings — not recommendations, opinions or conclusions — related to diversity, equity and inclusion at Texas A&M through research and discourse across topics of racial intolerance, university policies and practices, and historical representations such as statues.

## THE COMMISSION'S SPECIFIC CHARGES INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING:

- **Engage the university community** through public forums to solicit input and information from the broader university community, including students, faculty, staff and former students.
- **Assess relevant data and literature** (reports, policies and practices) related to diversity, equity and inclusion at Texas A&M and the Bryan and College Station communities.
- **Explore institutional alignment of policies and procedures** with the land-grant mission, goals and Core Values of Texas A&M.
- **Review information** across academic and non-academic units affecting the culture, climate and well-being of impacted campus communities.
- **Provide a final report with findings** to Texas A&M System's Board of Regents and President Young no later than Oct. 30, 2020.<sup>1</sup>

*"You can pick up your marbles and leave and throw in with some other school. Or you can suck up your guts and work to make A&M great. Those that choose to defect should know they leave A&M in the hour of her greatest need."*

J.E. Rudder

Commission members undertook this charge with an awareness of the complex history of diversity and inclusion at the university.

Texas A&M has made many strides toward addressing diversity, equity and inclusion over its history. Examining our past teaches us of exclusion and discrimination, but also showcases an evolution and improvement toward inclusion and diversity bound by dedication to the Aggie spirit.

There is perhaps no better example than Texas A&M President James Earl Rudder's leadership in diversifying Texas A&M by opening its doors to Blacks and African Americans and by formally admitting women. Since that time, Texas A&M has flourished to become one of the nation's premier research universities, with campuses across Texas and around the world.

1. The original timeline was amended.



Still today, some students, faculty and staff from marginalized groups encounter negative experiences from intolerance, racism and other prejudices. These impede their ability to thrive in Texas A&M's learning and working environment. Even one incident of prejudice, discrimination or antagonism in Aggieland based on an individual's race, gender, religion, ability or sexual identity is too many.

There is a deep affection and pride for Texas A&M among students, faculty, staff, former students and other stakeholders. All want to see the university continue to grow in stature. This sentiment typically bookended all discussions, conversations and listening sessions hosted by commission members, even from those who had significant criticisms. Members of the Aggie family indicated a readiness to help bridge the gap between the university's aspirations for more diversity, equity and inclusion, and the sometimes difficult daily reality of incivility, racism, intolerance and disrespect.

*"Throughout our evolution, our success and contemporary significance have been underpinned by strategically planning our direction and focus to always position Texas A&M ahead of the curve."*

Texas A&M University 2020-2025 Strategic Plan

The data and discussions of the commission show that Texas A&M has reached an inflection point, and it is time for Aggies to do what Aggies do best: lead and serve. Deep discussions and empathetic conversations can refresh the current Aggie experience while holding true to the best traditions of the past. As one former student noted, "History should inform, but not determine, our destiny."

Our work as a commission revealed that there remains within the Aggie community a strong desire to show bold leadership in support of diversity, equity and inclusion; to commit to improving our campus climate; to trust one another; to have difficult conversations; and to ensure that ALL Aggies are welcome and respected at the school we think so grand.

**We are the Aggies, the Aggies are we.**

# KEY COMMISSION FINDINGS

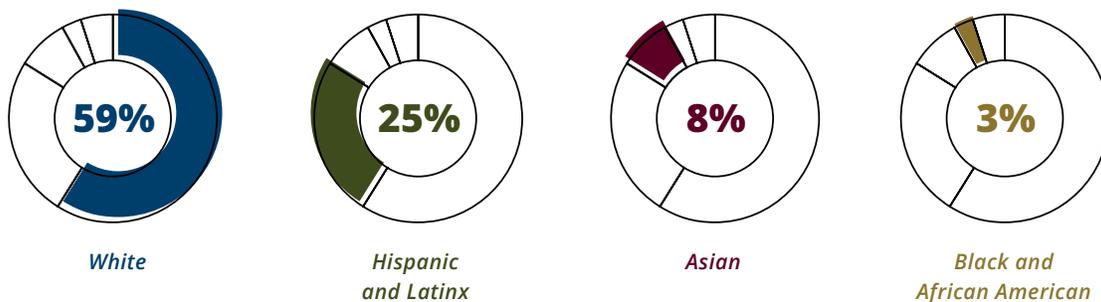
## DEMOGRAPHICS

Texas A&M began admitting women and African American students nearly 60 years ago. Since then, the university has strived toward a more diverse and inclusive campus, while also rising in prominence as an academic university. Nevertheless, like other land-grant universities, it is not meeting its goal to have a student body that reflects its state's demographics.

To gain an initial understanding of the student demographics at Texas A&M, the commission benchmarked undergraduate student enrollment against 59 comparable land-grant universities. As a first exercise, data were gathered to contrast the makeup of the overall undergraduate student populations.

When compared in this way, Texas A&M largely appears average. For example, Texas A&M has a slightly lower White undergraduate student enrollment percentage than the average (Texas A&M stands at 59% while the average is 61%). Also, Texas A&M has a slightly lower Black and African American undergraduate student enrollment percentage than the average (Texas A&M stands at 3% while the average is 4.3%).

### TEXAS A&M UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT



One exception to this average performance, however, is the enrollment of Hispanic and Latinx undergraduate students. Here, Texas A&M is an outlier in the positive sense. Texas A&M ranks third highest of the 59 universities, with 25% enrollment. The two schools higher than Texas A&M have percentages of 26% and 27%.

A notable goal of land-grant universities is to have a student body that reflects the demographics of the states they serve. It is therefore useful to look at undergraduate student enrollment as compared to state demographics. When benchmarked against the 59 land-grant universities in this manner, Texas A&M performs below its land-grant peers. Texas A&M enrolls a larger percentage of non-marginalized students than its state's population, to the point that the university is second highest in this regard; and Texas A&M enrolls a smaller percentage of Black and African American and Hispanic and Latinx undergraduate students than its state's population, to the point that it is one of the worst-performing schools in this regard.<sup>2</sup>

2. Demographic data for each of the universities are from the fall 2019 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) gathered by the National Center for Education Statistics, and the 2021 *U.S. News & World Report* on Campus Ethnic Diversity. Demographic data for each state are from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Data analysis should always be done in context. When contrasting the undergraduate student enrollment percentages of land-grant universities with their respective states' demographics, it is important to note that states with highly homogeneous populations can fare better than states with more diverse populations even if the true numbers are low. For example, land-grant universities in states with small Black and African American populations (e.g., Montana at 0.6%) can be more representative of their state's demographics even if they admitted no minorities. In comparison, Texas A&M is in a diverse state, so even if Texas A&M admits large numbers of minorities in those groups, its percentage may still be lower.

Notably, in terms of real numbers, Texas A&M admits more minority students than many of the comparison universities. Despite what the real numbers or percentages indicate, Texas A&M embraces its land-grant mission and can do better.

***Aggies do not just aim to be average, or even above average — they aim for Excellence.***

By further increasing minority enrollment, the university will have greater competitive advantage by preparing its students for a diverse and global workforce. Additionally, studies show that diverse organizations are more profitable and successful over time.

## BENCHMARKING

Texas A&M has grown in stature over the past 60 years, as evidenced by the university's admission into the Association of American Universities (AAU) in 2001. The AAU is composed of America's leading research universities and is an important group to benchmark against, particularly as Texas A&M has additional duties as a land-grant university.

When benchmarked against the 63 AAU members in the United States, Texas A&M tends to perform below its peers. The percentage of White undergraduate students (59%) at Texas A&M ranks 12th highest of the 63 universities. Texas A&M does score comparatively well in its percentage of Hispanic and Latinx undergraduate students (25%), placing the university considerably above average.

Unfortunately, the percentage of Asian and Black and African American undergraduate students is about half of the average of AAU members. The percentage of Asian undergraduate students at Texas A&M is 8%, whereas the AAU member average is 17.1%; and

the percentage of Black and African American undergraduate students at Texas A&M is 3%, whereas the AAU member average is 5.4%.

Ethnically diverse college campuses offer students the ability to study and learn with undergraduates from racial and ethnic groups that are different from their own. Thus, another useful indicator of school diversity is the diversity index used by *U.S. News & World Report (USNWR)*.

The USNWR index is a probability measure that any two people chosen at random from a given school are different due to race and national origin. Based on this index, Texas A&M ranks higher than average when benchmarked to a pool of 111 comparable universities. Using this same index, Texas A&M scores third among schools in the Southeastern Conference and third among schools in the Big 12 Conference.

## RACE AS A CONSIDERATION IN ENROLLMENT

With all these data in mind, it is useful to consider enrollment at Texas A&M. Texas A&M embraces Texas's top ten percent plan, which provides students in the top ten percent of their high-school classes with automatic admission to any public university in the state. Texas House Bill 588, which instituted this rule, was created as an answer to the restrictions of the *Hopwood v. Texas* appeals court case banning the use of race as a factor in deciding which applicants to admit in order to achieve a diverse student body.

Throughout history, racial classifications, specifically for Black and African American people, were directly used to hinder access and establish barriers to higher education. Acknowledging this truth, Texas A&M potentially may use race as a consideration in student admission as a narrowly tailored means of pursuing greater diversity if it can meet the fact-specific standards articulated in the 2013 *Fisher v. University of Texas* case. However, as evidenced by continuous federal litigation, it can be difficult to support and defend this type of admission policy under the rigorous standards of Equal Protection.

## ENROLLMENT AND RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

A notable positive enrollment trend pertains to Hispanic and Latinx undergraduate students. At Texas A&M, this group has increased by 292.9% since 1999, bringing the university to the cusp of designation as a Hispanic and Latinx Serving Institution. (The designation requires 25% sustained enrollment percentage of Hispanic and Latinx students, whereas the university's current enrollment percentage stands at 24.9%.)

Data show that recruitment of the Black and African American population has been a persistent issue. For example, data on undergraduate student enrollment show that while total student numbers have increased, the percentage of Black and African American students enrolled at Texas A&M has remained mostly unchanged since at least 1999. Black and African American students accounted for 2.66% of the undergraduate student population in 1999 and 3.15% in 2019.

The Regents' Scholars Program has been a positive step toward bringing socio-economic diversity to Texas A&M. This four-year scholarship program, established in fall 2004, is designed to help first-generation college students achieve their educational goals at Texas A&M. This program provides assistance to approximately 850 students each year, and racial and ethnic minority students represent 89% of the 2019 academic year freshman cohort.

In the summer of 2020, the Texas A&M University System board of regents voted unanimously to boost the effort by creating a \$100 million scholarship fund to address diversity issues on the system's 11 campuses. The program is aligned with the board's strategic plan that articulates clearly the system's commitment to ensuring its institutions serve a diverse student body and better represent the population of the state.



## THE REGENTS' SCHOLARS PROGRAM

**850**  
Students Served Annually

Founded in  
**2004**

**Up to \$24,000**  
in Scholarships per Student

The program provides \$10 million annually over 10 years for scholarships to students from all socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly to low income, first-generation students and students from geographically underrepresented regions of the state.

## RETENTION AND STUDENT SUCCESS

While enrollment is a critical component for student diversity, so too are retention and student success. Texas A&M's retention rates for American Indian and Alaskan, Black and African American, Hispanic and Latinx, and Asian students are at or below the first quartile when compared to other AAU institutions.

Furthermore, Texas A&M significantly lags behind peer institutions (i.e., University of Texas at Austin, University of Florida, University of Michigan and University of California, Los Angeles) in its six-year graduation rate of Black and African American undergraduate students.

As an example, a recent cohort study of Texas A&M had a 61% graduation rate for its Black and African American population, whereas the peer institutions had graduation rates ranging from 74% to 81%. When compared to land-grant universities, however, Texas A&M has an equal or higher retention rate of undergraduate students in all ethnic categories than the average of those universities.

## FACULTY AND STAFF

Another significant factor for achieving a diverse student population is having diverse faculty and staff. Data indicate that the percentage of faculty and staff of color remained relatively flat from 2015 to 2019 despite policies and training (e.g., STRIDE) to help faculty search committees be more conscious of implicit bias regarding race, ethnicity and other forms of diversity.

Some explanations for the shortcomings include a lack of accountability to ensure policies for recruiting and hiring diverse faculty and staff are successful, as well as a need for additional resources related to increasing diversity.

### ACES FELLOWS PROGRAM

Texas A&M is exploring several programs to address this shortfall, including the Accountability, Climate, Equity and Scholarship (ACES) Fellows Program. This faculty pipeline initiative promotes the research, teaching and scholarship of early career scholars who embrace the belief that diversity is an indispensable component of academic excellence.

In 2019, the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Education and Human Development participated in the program, and four faculty were hired. In 2020, seven faculty were hired through the program. “As of December 2019, 435 applications had been submitted to the ACES program, proving that Texas A&M can attract promising, diverse early career faculty.”<sup>3</sup> In 2020, two additional colleges are scheduled to join the program. Pipelines like these may need to be expanded to be truly impactful.

*A more welcoming and inclusive campus climate that reflects and represents the various populations at Texas A&M is strongly desired by members of traditionally marginalized groups, as well as by many others.*

3. <https://diversity.tamu.edu/Diversity/media/diversity/PDF/State-of-Diversity-06-23-20-final2.pdf>

## CAMPUS CLIMATE, SYMBOLS AND ATTITUDES

Evidence collected from individual accounts, surveys and reporting mechanisms (such as StopHate and TellSomebody) indicate that some students, faculty and staff from marginalized groups are the recipients of speech and behaviors from some members of the Aggie community that make them feel isolated and excluded.

Many students, faculty, staff and former students possess a posture of listening to, or exhibiting empathy toward, marginalized groups, and support initiatives toward diversity, equity and inclusion. Unfortunately, there are vocal groups that believe diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives are neither beneficial or needed, and this contributes to both a perception and reality that the university is not doing enough to welcome marginalized groups. The struggle is that some in the Aggie community view inclusion to mean joining the existing Aggie culture, whereas others view inclusion to mean expanding attitudes and activities as part of the Aggie experience.

Commission conversations and listening sessions revealed that each person has their own unique definition of what it means to be an Aggie, and each definition is likely shaped by one's experience with the university. The characteristics defining an Aggie were generally positive, and centered around the Aggie family and being part of something larger than themselves.

The conversations and listening sessions also revealed, however, the existence of rigid stereotypes surrounding the Aggie definition, leading some individuals on today's campus (especially those from marginalized groups) to find the historical identity of "Who is an Aggie" to be limiting and not reflective of their experience.

The six Core Values of Respect, Excellence, Leadership, Loyalty, Integrity and Selfless Service are well-known. At the same time, they are not defined, understood, adopted or uniformly lived by university stakeholders.

This is especially true of Respect. The commission found that there is an opportunity to revisit and fully define these Core Values to ensure their integration into the Aggie identity and their practice by all members of the Aggie family.

***"Factors that would positively impact the campus climate would be one in which all forms of hate, racism, bigotry, etc. are not tolerated whatsoever. One in which Aggies can call each other out on such acts and are willing to stand up against such actions as they are not representative of who we are — really holding each other accountable and up to high standards."***

**Listening session participant**

The Lawrence Sullivan Ross statue is a source of deep emotions and strongly polarized views, with proponents and detractors divided mainly along racial and age demographic lines. The commission's study of 19 other universities found that not addressing the attention or controversy surrounding symbols, names and iconography will likely result in additional reputational damage, and continue strife indefinitely.

While it is beneficial for leadership to fully address this two-sided issue, it is important to understand that legislative approval may be required to alter, move or remove the monument.

## PERCEPTIONS, SUCCESSES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The university has made efforts to achieve an equitable, diverse and inclusive campus climate for Texas A&M's students, faculty and staff.

### **PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON CLIMATE AND DIVERSITY**

Of note is the work of the President's Council on Climate and Diversity, whose purpose is to provide counsel to the President, Provost and Executive Vice President on methods to attract and retain culturally diverse students, faculty and staff to Texas A&M, as well as to strengthen, sustain and promote the diversity efforts in support of Vision 2020 goals.

### **DEANS CARE**

Another more recent effort, originating from the Council of Deans, is the Deans Committed to Anti-Racism Efforts (Deans CARE). The Deans CARE initiative aims to engage in sustained, systemic, collective action for anti-racism efforts at Texas A&M and beyond, and to assist Texas A&M in making steady progress on its goals, as outlined by university leaders and as articulated by documented metrics.

### **LOUIS STOKES ALLIANCE FOR MINORITY PARTICIPATION**

Schools in the Texas A&M System have had a direct impact on increasing the number of underrepresented minority students who complete baccalaureate and doctoral degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields through the Texas A&M University System Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (TAMUS LSAMP) program.

The TAMUS LSAMP program is a partnership composed of four system schools committed to increasing the number of underrepresented students participating in STEM fields, and it is part of the larger LSAMP program of the National Science Foundation founded in 1990. In its first eight years, it helped increase the number of degrees awarded to minority students by a factor of five (to more than 20,000).



## HIGHER EDUCATION CENTER AT MCALLEN

The Higher Education Center at McAllen is part of Texas A&M University and was established to provide higher education opportunities for residents of the Rio Grande Valley in Texas. The center sits in Hidalgo County, where only 18% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.

The center received its first students in fall 2018 and is committed to supporting the educational needs of its students by providing top-tier programs to fulfill student career goals, enhancing economic development of the region and producing a skilled workforce.

## PERCEPTIONS, THEMES AND ACTION ITEMS

In spring of 2020, in response to reports about racism at Texas A&M, leadership accepted and triaged a collection of proposals from students, faculty and staff containing remedies to concerns stemming from local, regional and national events that have negatively impacted our communities.

Leadership identified common action items and organized proposed remedies by themes. Five key themes were identified comprising a total of 16 action items, such as providing funding and erecting the Matthew Gaines statue by the spring of 2021, revising the script used during student tours, funding identity-specific cultural resource centers on campus, and developing and enforcing a systemwide anti-racism policy for students, faculty and staff.

Each action item was given attention. Some items were completed, while others are in progress. A full list of the themes, action items and assessments, an outline of the actions taken to date, and contact information can be found in the appendix.

Despite Texas A&M's efforts to improve, a perception commonly expressed to the commission is that leadership has not taken any significant actions or made any meaningful changes to support diversity, equity and inclusion. This is despite having received a number of reports, recommendations and suggestions (sometimes supported by the data found in this report) from past committees and commissions that were tasked with a similar charge as this commission. It is viewed that these types of activities, initiatives, commissions and reports lead to inadequate action or follow-up.

When individuals were asked what they wanted to see from Texas A&M right now, there was an overwhelming response for more swift, frequent and effective communication and action about diversity, equity and inclusion.

## THREE THEMES COMPRISING THE LISTENING SESSIONS' FINDINGS EMERGED

### THEME 1: CAMPUS CAMPAIGN

First, there is a strong desire for an authentic priority campaign centered on the university's actions, commitment and responsibility in creating an inclusive campus climate where all Aggies can thrive. The university has been successful in these types of campaigns before, like Texas A&M's COVID-19 safety awareness campaign called "Don't Pass it Back" or the "Step In. Stand Up." sexual harassment and sexual violence campaign.

Texas A&M has an opportunity to lead university institutions by example through its sustained and demonstrated commitment to achieving diversity, equity and inclusion.

### THEME 2: ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF ISSUES

Second, there is a strong desire for Texas A&M leaders to actively and authentically acknowledge issues around racism and talk directly about broader diversity, equity and inclusion issues. As one student noted, "I'm so sick of bland statements!"

### THEME 3: COMMUNICATING SUCCESS STORIES

Third, there is a strong desire for a central and comprehensive communications and marketing strategy to highlight the many diversity, equity and inclusion success stories at Texas A&M. These include the recent Texas A&M Athletics "Aggie Commitment" initiative that was created in conjunction with student athletes and coaches, and the creation of the \$100 million scholarship fund to address diversity issues and assist first-generation students.





## IN CONCLUSION

The commission deviates from the charge to provide findings with a singular recommendation: That this report be only the beginning of the Aggie community's shared responsibility and commitment to continued conversations, forward progress, and renewed commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion for all Aggies.

# COMMISSION APPROACH AND PROCESS

The commission utilized a framework of empathy and problem definition. Commission members were asked to set aside their personal assumptions in order to gain insight into others and their needs, using an empathetic, listening posture. Secondly, each group was challenged to rigorously define the problem we are trying to solve through a series of steps.

The commission convened for their first meeting on July 27, 2020, and met regularly through August, September and October. At the outset, four subcommittee groups were formed to conduct the commission's work in the principal areas of mission and values, campus culture and climate, data and policies, and community engagement. The commission conducted its research through a review and study of literature, media and data, including climate surveys and university reporting mechanisms like StopHate and TellSomebody.

Additionally, the commission solicited and received input from more than 450 individual participants through hundreds of hours of discourse, including small-group and one-on-one conversations, as well as open community listening sessions. Input was also received through a commission email, an online form, letters and phone calls.

The commission completed its research on November 6, 2020, completed a draft report on November 30, 2020, and submitted a final report in January 2021.

# MEMBERSHIP

The commission was co-chaired by John E. Hurtado '91 and Jimmy Williams '83, and the full list of commission members is shown below.

## BOARD OF REGENTS AND DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

<b>Elaine Mendoza</b>	'87, Chair, Board of Regents, The Texas A&M University System
<b>Bill Mahomes</b>	'69, Member, Board of Regents, The Texas A&M University System
<b>Ruth Simmons</b>	President, Prairie View A&M University

## CURRENT STUDENTS

<b>Chante Anderson</b>	'21, Black Graduate Student Association
<b>Iman Ahmed</b>	'22, Student Senate
<b>Corniyah Bradley</b>	'21, Black Student Alliance Council
<b>Alexandra Campbell</b>	'21, Texas A&M Panhellenic
<b>Tanner Cedrone</b>	'21, Corps of Cadets
<b>Matthew B. Francis Jr.</b>	'22, TAMU NAACP
<b>Ritika Gangarapu</b>	'21, Asian Presidents' Council
<b>Maximiliano "Max" Lopez</b>	'21, Hispanic Presidents' Council
<b>Eric Mendoza</b>	'21, Student Body President
<b>Kellen Mond</b>	'20, Student Athlete, Football
<b>Fawaz Syed</b>	'23, Class Councils, Sophomore Class
<b>Jack Tucker</b>	'21, Texas A&M Foundation Maroon Coats
<b>Uthej Vatipalli</b>	'21, Graduate & Professional Student Government
<b>Sean Waters</b>	'22, International Student Association

## FORMER STUDENTS

<b>Randall Cain</b>	'82, Former Chair, 12th Man Foundation, Texas A&M Foundation
<b>Adrian Cornelius</b>	'93, TAMU Black Former Student Network
<b>Erica Davis-Rouse</b>	'95, Intervene
<b>John F. Dickerson</b>	'87, Association of Former Students Board of Directors
<b>David Dunlap</b>	'83, 12th Man Foundation Board of Trustees
<b>Willie T. Langston</b>	'81, Avalon Advisors, LLC

## FORMER STUDENTS (CONT.)

<b>Monica Menzel</b>	'93, TAMU Hispanic Network
<b>Stephen Ruth</b>	'92, U.S. Army
<b>Tiana J. Sanford</b>	'04, Attorney and Association of Former Students Class Agent
<b>The Honorable Ingrid M. Warren</b>	'93, Dallas County Judge
<b>Jimmy Williams</b>	'83, Carnegie Mellon University
<b>Shariq Yosufzai</b>	'74, Accordant Advisors

## FACULTY AND STAFF

<b>Francis Achike</b>	College of Medicine
<b>Kristina Ballard</b>	College of Engineering
<b>Vernon Camus</b>	'18, University Staff Council Galveston
<b>David Chapman</b>	'67, University Libraries (Retired)
<b>Mary Ann Covey</b>	'92, Counseling & Psychological Services
<b>Leroy Dorsey</b>	College of Liberal Arts
<b>Julie Harlin</b>	'93, Faculty Senate
<b>Cynthia Hernandez</b>	'94, Division of Student Affairs
<b>John Hurtado</b>	'91, College of Engineering
<b>Ben Kalscheur</b>	'13, Office of Sustainability
<b>Serge Razafindrakoto</b>	Division of Information Technology
<b>Dorothy Shippen</b>	College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
<b>R.C. Slocum</b>	Office of the President, Former Texas A&M Football Coach
<b>Christine Stanley</b>	'85, College of Education and Human Development
<b>Arthur Watson</b>	'15, Transition Academic Programs
<b>Karen Wooley</b>	College of Science

Other team members included Cady Auckerman '00, who served as the commission project manager, and Grace Tsai '19 and Kevin Johnson '84, who served as graduate student assistants.