

Udall Alumni Association and Udall Foundation Listening Session on Race, Inclusion, and Justice *September 9, 2020*

Discussion Summary

On September 9, 2020, the Udall Alumni Association (UAA) and the Udall Foundation (UF) convened a listening session for UAA members on race, inclusion, and justice. Dana Goodson, a Senior Program Manager from the UF's National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution, facilitated the session.

Nora Cata, President of the UAA Board, and Bret Muter, Acting Director of the UF Education Programs, delivered opening remarks and thanked participants for joining. Nora emphasized the Board's commitment to race, justice, and equity, and sharing the Board's goal of creating a space to hear the voices of members who identify as black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). She noted that the UAA is uniquely positioned to make an impact related to race, inclusion, and justice given the diverse geographies and fields that alumni represent.

Bret shared that the UF Education Program is in a period of evaluation, reflection, and change and that staff will be working with the new Education Director, Alicia Harris, in the coming months to initiate a new strategic planning process. The goal of the process will be to make UF Education programs more relevant and inclusive. Bret commented that this session is the first of several and that there will be additional opportunities for alumni to share feedback with the UAA Board and the UF.

Next, Dana facilitated a round of introductions using the chat and polls. More than 40 alumni participated in the session, the majority (96%) of whom were affiliated with the UF through the Undergraduate Scholarship program. One half of the participants were affiliated with UF programs between 2016-2020, while the other half were split between classes ranging from 2001-2005, 2006-2010, and 2011-2015. Additionally, Dana asked participants to share their racial and ethnic identities by participating in an AnswerGarden poll. Participants' responses were displayed in a word cloud (Figure 1), where word size represents the frequency of each response.¹



Figure 1. Listening Session participants' racial and ethnic identities.

Following the introductions, Dana reviewed the session objectives and agenda (see [Appendix A](#)), which were developed by a planning team of UF and UAA leadership and

¹ Participants who joined the call after the introductory session did not have a chance to respond to these questions about their identity and affiliation.

volunteers. She also shared listening guidelines to help participants create a safe and welcoming space (see [Appendix B](#)). Key themes and takeaways from the subsequent discussion are summarized below.

Themes and Key Takeaways

1. Participants joined the listening session to listen, connect, understand, support, and learn.

Participants indicated a clear desire to engage in the conversation about race, justice, and inclusion, noting its timeliness and importance given the national momentum around the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Many participants expressed their intention to be in “listening mode” and to expand their knowledge of how racism, colonialism, and white supremacy is perpetuated in the Udall community. Several participants commented that BIPOC alumni are likely having conversations about their experiences in many different arenas and that participants should be cognizant of the fact that the process of continuous sharing and teaching can be emotionally draining and burdensome for BIPOC alumni. Several participants emphasized the importance of white alumni “showing up” for conversations on race, inclusion, and justice and the importance of committing to being strong allies to BIPOC alumni.

Sample Statements and Observations:

- I’m here because I want to hear everyone’s perspectives and be supportive of what everyone’s saying.
- I think it’s a good sign when organizations are really paying attention to the fact that there’s a national awakening to ongoing racism in the U.S.
- I’m here because I’ve seen descriptions and observations of the Udall community and in the environmental field that have been new to me and have me questioning how we bring environmentalism forward in the world. I need to expand my knowledge and understanding of that.
- I love the Udall community and I think we can do better.
- I appreciate the opportunity for introspection and connection.

2. There is a strong desire to create a more inclusive alumni community and foster meaningful change for future generations of UF scholars, interns, and fellows.

Many participants voiced their hope that this listening session and future sessions would catalyze real change within the Udall community, to the benefit of future UF scholars, interns, and fellows. One participant highlighted the need for the sessions to center on growth, introspection, and actionable change, expressing a desire for the sessions to be more than leadership talking points. A few participants expressed feeling disconnected from fellow alumni and emphasized the need for the Udall community to “create a bigger tent” and be more inclusive and welcoming to alumni from diverse geographies, fields, and backgrounds.

Sample Statements and Observations:

- There’s a real opportunity to create meaningful change and impact so that the next generation of BIPOC fellows and scholars can benefit.
- I would like to see real change in the processes that are furthering the inequities in our community.

- I want to participate in conversations about how the UF can improve with respect to serving the community within the foundation and for the future interns and fellows.

3. The UF and Udall community have been important allies to BIPOC alumni in some ways and have made improvements. However, further introspection, learning, and growth are needed.

Several participants commented that the UF has been an important ally to BIPOC alumni and has made recent improvements with respect to equity and inclusion. For instance, a current scholar felt that there was a marked improvement in the inclusivity of the 2020 Scholar Orientation as compared to the 2019 orientation. Many participants underscored the need, however, for the Udall community to acknowledge that it has not done enough with respect to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Participants felt that the Udall community needs to continue to raise questions about how systemic racism is embedded in the community and examine its own ties to colonialism and the white colonial perspective of the environmental movement. Several participants discussed the need for the community to engage in ongoing learning, introspection, and growth, and one participant encouraged the UF and UAA to consider how to advance beyond allyship to advocacy.

Sample Statements and Observations:

- The Udall community can do better to create a more diverse community, to ensure that everyone feels comfortable in our spaces, and to center racial equity in our environmental work.
- I would like to see acknowledgment that there's a lot more to do and humility that there hasn't been enough done yet.
- Though the system is larger than us, we need to take responsibility for the role we play.
- We're entangled with the traditional environmental space, which is largely white, has colonialist roots, and focuses on preservation of land and wilderness rather than looking at environmental and racial justice.
- The improvement in the scholar orientation from 2019 to 2020 is marked – huge improvement and very pleasant experience. UF could go further in 2021 and needs to question everything it is doing at each step.
- I'd like to see a continuous process of introspection and improvement.

4. Authenticity, transparency, and accountability must be central components of the Udall community's strategy to address racial inequities.

Noting the value of learning from other organizations' responses to institutional racism, several participants emphasized that authenticity, transparency, and accountability must be foundational components of any response to racial inequity. Participants cautioned against tokenism and box-checking, highlighting the importance of authentic representation and creating an authentic space for BIPOC.

Sample Statements and Observations:

- I'd like to avoid the tokenization of BIPOC and oversimplification of racism seen in many organizations' responses to BLM.

- We need authentic representation and authentic space for BIPOC – we don’t want to check a box. We need accountability and transparency.
- I’d like to see a commitment to transparency and accountability.

5. Participants would like to see a greater emphasis on learning, intellectual curiosity, and relationship-building within the Udall community.

A few participants shared their view that the UF and larger Udall community tend to focus more on leadership and environmental “buzzwords” than fostering and promoting curiosity and learning. These participants stressed the importance of learning from people with different backgrounds, lived experiences, and viewpoints, noting the need to integrate these lessons into their own work and everyday lives. Participants hoped that the Udall community could cultivate a learning environment and encourage its members to build meaningful relationships with people with different interests and backgrounds.

Sample Statements and Observations:

- It’s useful to push the question of how you’re learning from people different from yourself and how you’re integrating what you’re learning from others into your own work. I was struck by how fellow white environmental scholars compartmentalized scholar orientation sessions into what is “relevant” to their work. The intent should be to take tribal public policy and health care and integrate it into your own work.

Suggestions for Improvement

Participants shared several strategies and suggestions for addressing institutional racism and building a more diverse, authentic, and inclusive community. Suggestions fell within several categories, largely focusing on ways to improve scholar and fellow recruitment processes, applications and application requirements, and orientations.

Recruitment Process

- Identify how and where alumni are recruiting new applicants and consider which groups are currently excluded from recruitment efforts. Use this information to recruit more diverse groups and communities. One participant noted that they had learned about the scholarship in an honors program – a place of privilege. Another pointed out that the Udall community needs to take responsibility for the ways in which they might be recruiting new applicants similar to themselves.
- Explore opportunities to build relationships with institutions and organizations not traditionally included in recruitment efforts.
- Evaluate application requirements and consider how requirements (e.g., full-time enrollment status, documentation status) may exclude groups of potential applicants.

Application Process

- Identify and provide resources to assist non-traditional students with preparing applications.
- Consider alternative submission options (e.g., videos, art) to enable applicants to share their stories and express themselves in creative ways.

- Add a question asking how applicants have learned from people different from themselves.
- Consider how environmental activism may be different in indigenous communities and communities of color than in a white environmental setting and create opportunities for BIPOC applicants to speak to their experiences in the application.
- Create a working group to review application requirements and questions.

Scholar Orientation

- Emphasize the importance of learning, growing, and building relationships.
- Include more diverse backgrounds and narratives (e.g., in the case study).
- Share reading materials in advance to expose scholars to a range of lived experiences that the mainstream environmental movement excludes.

Beyond Udall Programs

- Share information about how other organizations have approached dismantling institutional racism and learn from their experiences (both good and bad).
- Explore opportunities for alumni to leverage their connection to the Udalls to promote policies that support BIPOC.

Closing

Jason Curley, Education Manager at the UF, and Nora provided closing remarks and discussed next steps. Jason thanked participants for sharing their experiences and insights and for their commitment to the alumni community. He noted that the UF will be reflecting on everything discussed in the session and will follow up with details about additional sessions in the coming weeks. Nora echoed Jason's thanks and expressed her appreciation for participants bringing their voices to the discussion.

Appendix A: Listening Session Agenda

Listening Session on Race, Inclusion, and Justice (#1 of 2)

with the Udall Alumni Association and Udall Foundation

Wednesday, September 9, 2020

5:30 – 7:00 pm Pacific / 8:30 – 10:00 pm Eastern

Session #1 Agenda

Session #1 Objectives:

- Begin creating a space to hear and amplify the voices of Black, Indigenous, and people of color in the Udall community
- Explore those aspects of institutional racism that manifest within the fields of environment, health, and academia and that are also reflected in Udall programs
- Start a conversation on how Udall alumni can support each other in promoting the increase in the presence, access, and involvement of participants who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color in Udall programs

<i>Time</i>	<i>Lead(s)</i>	<i>Topic</i>
5:30 pm PST	Dana G.	Welcome, Introductions, and Session Overview ● Welcome – <i>Nora Cata, UAA President and Bret Muter, Acting Director, Udall Foundation Education Programs</i> ● Round of introductions - <i>Dana Goodson, facilitator, National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution, Udall Foundation</i> ● Session overview and guidelines – <i>Dana</i> <u>Materials:</u> <i>How to Use Zoom Features; Listening Session Guidelines;</i> <u>AnswerGarden link:</u> https://answergarden.ch/1385367 (for use in session)
5:50	Dana G.	Listening Session with the Udall Foundation <u>Objective:</u> <i>Alumni have the opportunity to share experiences of institutional racism, raise concerns, and express desired goals for changes at UAA and UF, with UAA and UF representatives present and listening.</i> Questions for discussion include: ● Sharing experiences/seeking understanding: ○ <i>What brings you to this conversation?</i> ○ <i>In what ways have you seen institutional racism manifested within the fields of environment, health, or academia?</i> ○ <i>In what ways have you seen institutional racism manifested within Udall Foundation or UAA programs?</i> ○ <i>As a Black or Indigenous person or person of color, what do you</i>

		<i>wish for white people to understand?</i> ● Focusing on what to do next/possible actions to take: ○ <i>How can the identified aspects of institutional racism be addressed?</i> ○ <i>What would you like the Udall Foundation and UAA to be aware of/attentive to in future programming?</i> ○ <i>What kind of outreach can be done to reach communities who are underrepresented?</i> ○ <i>What other questions/ideas are you seeing raised in other spaces like this?</i>
6:55	UAA & UF	Appreciation and Next Steps ● Closing remarks – <i>Nora Cata and Jason Curley, Program Manager, Udall Foundation Education Programs</i>
7:00		Adjourn

Appendix B: Listening Guidelines

The following guidelines are intended to create space for participants to engage in productive conversation that leads to shared learning, improved understanding, and group creativity:

- **Black, Indigenous, and people of color will be invited to speak first.** Actively contribute to creating a safe space for Black, Indigenous, and people of color to participate.
- **Listen** carefully, whole-heartedly, and with respect. Listen to understand. Be present in this conversation.
- **One person talks at a time.** Everyone listens to the person talking, without interrupting. Make space for others to speak.
- **Know your intent, own your impact.** You may think your intent was harmless, but the impact of your words may be hurtful. Be open to hearing that impact from others.
- **No one knows everything, together we know a lot.** Enter this space with humility, and a belief that you can learn from everyone in the room, regardless of your own experience.
- **Assume nothing.** If you think you misunderstand, ask questions respectfully. Make room for the possibility you don't know the full picture.
- **Questions are encouraged, but participants have the right to not answer your questions.** Recognize the burden people with marginalized identities endure. Questions and curiosity are important, but recognize those with marginalized identities often, in addition to processing oppression, are forced to take on a teaching role, providing both explanation and context.