**BLACK HISTORY MONTH EVENTS**

**NPHC PANEL**
6 p.m. | Moseley 215

Are you interested in learning more about The Divine Nine and Multicultural organizations on campus? Join the NPHC panel featuring Elon faculty and staff, with representation across The Divine Nine.

**FILM SCREENING: “TWO GODS”**
5:30 p.m. | Turner Theatre, 123 Williamson Ave

Two Gods is a feature documentary film about a Muslim casket maker and ritual body washer in Newark, NJ who takes two young men under his wing to teach them how to live better lives.

**WOMANIST WISDOMS ON BLACK JOY**
6 p.m. | Zoom

This 4-course series will engage the definition of womanism and womanist theory to provide wisdom for the Elon community to immerse in and practice Black Joy as a praxis. This event is hosted by the CREDE.

**SUBCINEMA: QUEEN & SLIM**
8 p.m. | Turner Theatre, 123 Williamson Ave

SUBCinema is playing movies that are relevant to Black History Month. Queen & Slim is about a couple’s first date that takes an unexpected turn when a police officer pulls them over.

**BLACK HISTORY MONTH DANCE CONCERT**
7 p.m. | Turner Theatre, 123 Williamson Ave

Elon’s Department of Performing Arts will do a screening of their Black History Month performance.

**BLACK TABLE TALK: BLACK JOY**
12-2 p.m. | Moseley 217

This is an opportunity for the Black student population to enter into a space and embrace the love for themselves and their community. This will serve as a moment to reflect in a safe space, express a sense of joy and fulfill one’s cup and passion.

**SUBCINEMA: “JUST MERCY”**
8 p.m. | Turner Theatre, 123 Williamson Ave

SUBCinema will be playing movies that are relevant to Black History Month. Just Mercy is about Bryan Stevenson who heads to Alabama to defend those wrongly condemned or not afforded proper representation.

**BLACK ALAMANCE COUNTY AWARDS**
7:30 p.m. | Mebane Arts Center

The first Black Alamance County Awards mission is to celebrate Black owned and operated businesses, serving as a recognition platform for nominees while encouraging the community’s next generation of Black business leaders.

**BLACK SOLIDARITY DAY: A BLACK JOY LOVE LETTER**
12-8 p.m. | Moseley

The Elon University Black Solidarity Conference aims to unite Black-identifying students, faculty, and staff by providing an avenue through which Black identity, Black intersectionality, and building solidarity are explored. This year will offer an allyship, anti-racism, anti-black racism track designed specifically for non-black identified participants who want to learn more about anti-Blackness, oppression, power, privilege, and ways in which they can be better allies with Black communities.

**MOVIE SCREENING & FELLOWSHIP**
6 p.m. | Pleasant Grove Recreation Center

Join the Down Home Alamance chapter for a family-friendly event. There will be a screening of “Swing State,” a new film directed by Nathaniel Frum and starring, for better or for worse, Alamance County. Food, drinks and crafts will be provided.

**VIGIL FOR WYATT OUTLAW**
6 p.m. | South Side of the Historic Courthouse, Graham

A service of prayer and hope that will honor and recognize Wyatt Outlaw, who was the first African American to serve as Town Commissioner and Constable of the town of Graham, North Carolina. He was lynched by the White Brotherhood. Candles available, flashlights welcome.
This Black History Month, I am celebrating with reflection. I am taking the month to think about the rooms that I sit in, the opportunities I am given and the trials and tribulations I have faced. I am celebrating Black history by challenging the status quo, practicing resistance and being unapologetically myself.

I am celebrating Black history by learning and expanding my mind. I am celebrating Black history by supporting my fellow peers of color, faculty, staff and the other figures in my life. I am taking the month to give back and to pour into others.

I am celebrating this year as the president of the Black Student Union by inviting you to join me in not just celebrating throughout this month, but every day. I want to invite you to take this time to be introspective in your own life and to examine the classrooms you sit in, the places you live and challenge the perspectives. To take time to be engulfed and inspired by the words of revolutionaries from our past and today.

I hope that students at Elon take this as an opportunity to get out of their comfort zone. Take a trip to the CREDE, stop by the BSU office, engage in new spaces on campus and with your peers. Take a look at what’s happening in the surrounding area and get more involved. Be inspired to reflect, learn, challenge, embrace and spread joy this Black History Month.

Letter from Christina Carr, President of Elon University’s Black Student Union

Christina Carr
Teaching African American studies and critical race theory proves challenging for some Elon professors

Caroline Mitchell
Design Chief

A professor, a woman and an immigrant.

Those three intersecting identities allow English professor Prudence Layne to tell her life story and teach African American studies at Elon University. Layne's 22 years teaching at Elon have taught her many things, but if there is anything that has stood out, it's that education surrounding African American and Black history is overlooked.

"There is a kind of fairytale construction of the story of Black history," Layne said. "It's a story and a narrative that a lot of people don't know."

Layne said she is often asked the question, "Why is it African and African American?" when students are referring to different types of studies. Questions like these can sometimes lead to discrepancies in the U.S. education system. Throughout her time at Elon, Layne said she has seen firsthand how the education system has disregarded the importance of African American literature and history.

Layne's background — originally from the Caribbean but grew up living between the United States, Faroe Islands of Denmark and Barbados — allowed her to have a diverse education during her secondary and higher education years. Her experiences of living in different communities allow her to have a greater understanding of diversity — something she brings to Elon.

"I felt empowered to talk about race," Layne said. "We make sure that we don't talk about these as difficult conversations, it's like riding a bike — it's only hard when you aren't practicing."

Layne often encounters students at the university who have little-to-no background in either African American studies or history, primarily because many of their K-12 education systems relegated the study of those histories. A major example of this is when a North Carolina school district banned critical race theory from their classrooms back in 2021.

Unlike Layne, associate professor of education at Elon's School of Education Lisa Buchanan did not experience diversity in her education.

"Prior to graduate school, I had a largely incomplete knowledge of African American history," Buchanan wrote in an email to Elon News Network. "What I did know was things about Black history, rather than learning about the world around me through Black history."

Buchanan wrote that African American history is often taught about rather than taught through. She has seen elements of history censored in the general education system, which is why many students at Elon and other institutions have a lack of prior knowledge about America's history.

Both Layne and Buchanan believe that the collegiate and K-12 education systems fail to teach important details about American history that have a connection to African American history or culture. According to Layne, there are differences between each of the African American cultures, and there are different fields of study for each culture. She said subjects should be taught individually, but instead they have been intertwined with each other.

An observation Layne quickly made when she started teaching was that learning about new perspectives is important early in her career. Layne said she could feel she was "pushing against the tide" when teaching some students. She felt like she didn't have a universal set of open minds to teach to Layne asks her students to look at their own privileges and experiences as a source of empowerment to make a difference.

"I feel empowered to talk about race. We make sure that we don’t talk about these as difficult conversations, it's like riding a bike — it’s only hard when you aren’t practicing."

Prudence Layne
English Professor

"Teaching and learning about African American history has expanded my worldview and developed my understanding of the experiences of other groups and individuals," Buchanan wrote. "African American history is incredibly multifaceted; it includes Black perseverance and agency, Black joy and legacy."

Bringing in critical race theory

Critical race theory and African American studies have made headlines in recent years about placing regulations on teaching Black history in some states. Critical race theory is a cross-disciplinary examination of race and law in the United States. It's a way of understanding how American racism has shaped public policy. In North Carolina, the teaching of critical race theory has led to a debate on what racial concepts can be discussed in the classroom.

North Carolina House Bill 324 — which was designed to ban any teaching of critical race theory — was passed in September 2021 but has since been vetoed, was one recent reason why some teachers struggled to teach African American studies due to limitations in education.

Layne said that although Elon University is a private institution and has different teaching regulations than public universities, professors can still face challenges in teaching a diverse curriculum.

“There are lots of teachers who feel like their hands are tied," Layne said. "They don’t teach critical race theory, but they want to be able to talk about the experiences of all of their students, not just any in particular. And so they feel censored … There are real effects about how and what they teach."

The shift in the approach to diversity education might be the solution for censorship issues such as building into the educational process to foster an inclusive environment, according to Layne. By aiming for inclusivity and representation, students can still reach a clearer understanding of African American and Black history.

"We need to expose our students to diverse perspectives from really early and young," Layne said. "That’s how empathy, inclusion and acceptance happens."
Junior Kennedy Boston knew her race was a big part of her identity when she was applying to colleges. At Elon University and other predominantly white institutions, Boston said a score on her application that would appear on her applications.

“I knew that they would look at my application and be like, ‘Oh, she’s Black,’” Boston said. “That would be a standout piece of my own application. And inherently, that would change views, or maybe not, but it would at least play some level of consideration in how I was viewed in the admissions process.”

Race-conscious admissions have long been used in higher education as a form of affirmative action — policies or practices used to include minority groups in areas where they have been historically underrepresented. But it is not without controversy. Race-conscious admissions have been challenged many times over the years, going all the way to the Supreme Court on multiple occasions. Now, Student for Fair Admissions, a conservative advocacy group, is taking two universities to the country’s highest court in an attempt to end race-conscious admissions altogether.

Elon Law professor and alumna Tiffany Atkins, a liberal law professor and third year law student, said past challenges — such as University of California Regents v. Bakke and Grutter v. Bollinger and Fisher v. University of Texas — have resulted in Supreme Court precedents that tell higher education institutions in what capacity they can consider race in admissions.

“We know that you can’t just use race to fill a quota. You can’t say, ‘We need 20 Black students, go find me any 20,’” Atkins said. “The court said that’s inefficient, that’s unconstitutional. But the use of race as a factor in admissions and schools, depending on their history, their own history with racial exclusion — can modify that to an extent.”

SFSA filed two similar suits against Harvard College and the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill in 2014. Both cases came up through the court appeals system until 2021, when the Supreme Court agreed to hear them in their next term.

Part of SFSA’s argument relies on the precedent from the 2003 case Grutter v. Bollinger. In Grutter, the court held that the University of Michigan Law School could use race as a “plus” factor in their admissions process — setting the precedent that race-conscious admissions are constitutional when race is just one factor in a process that gives individualized consideration to each applicant.

The two current cases are arguing that the Supreme Court should overturn Grutter and rule that higher education institutions cannot consider an applicant’s race at all in their admissions processes.

Grutter established what Atkins termed a “race plus” admissions model, a university can say race is a soft positive, or a “plus,” on an application, but race cannot be the reason the applicant gets in.

Atkins said she thinks when schools acknowledge a lack of representation in themselves, the “race plus” model is the best way to conduct race-conscious admissions.

“If a school knows that it has a history of excluding black students, other students of color, so they prioritize inclusion of those groups, I think that that’s fair,” Atkins said. “And the Supreme Court tells us that you can do that.”

But SFSA is arguing that not even a “race plus” model should be used.

The group’s case against Harvard College hinges on a Kimberly Romero model that Harvard’s admissions uses. When reviewing applications, Harvard gave positive or negative weight to subjective personality factors. Looking at individual applications, SFSA said Harvard’s admissions officers gave Asian American applicants negative personality factors that offset their academic records.

SFSA alleged that doing so allowed them to impose a soft racial quota to limit the amount of Asian Americans they admit. From this, SFSA is arguing that a race blind admissions process would be more fair.

WE KNOW THAT YOU CAN’T JUST USE RACE TO FILL A QUOTA. YOU CAN’T SAY, “WE NEED 20 BLACK STUDENTS, GO FIND ME ANY 20.” THE COURT SAID THAT’S INEFFECTIVE, THAT’S UNCONSTITUTIONAL. BUT THE USE OF RACE AS A FACTOR IN ADMISSIONS AND SCHOOLS DEPENDS ON THEIR HISTORY — THEIR OWN HISTORY WITH RACIAL EXCLUSION — CAN MODIFY THAT TO AN EXTENT.

Tiffany Atkins
Elon Law professor and alumna.

At Elon, race is one of a variety of factors considered in an applicant’s profile, according to Greg Zaiser, vice president of enrollment and assistant director of admissions for diversity and access. They said the Elon admissions office is intentional with its diversity recruitment efforts.

“For our undergraduate students and the Boldly Elon strategic plan, we seek to build a class of students from different backgrounds, perspectives and areas of the world,” Zaiser and Romero wrote to Elon News Network. “The politicking, as we would say here, is a demonstrated ability to be successful in the Elon classroom as evidenced by the high school record.”

Boston said she’s not sure how much race is being considered because the population of students of color at Elon is so small.

“There’s so few of us here already that I’m like, ‘Is it even playing a role at all?’” Boston said.

To Boston, the “race plus” system is flawed. The system subjectively attaches a numerical value to an identity, she said.

“I think assigning a value to race and its experiences is just not going to work,” Boston said. “To add a value of how much of a plus that is, I think, doesn’t work because it negates so many experiences based on people’s individualized experiences and races.”

What makes one of these cases seemingly unique from previous challenges is that this is the first time the court has considered a challenge to a private institution.

“Traditionally, the court does not hear civil rights cases involving private entities, raising two questions. First, whether the Supreme Court has jurisdiction over Harvard, and second, if the precedent set will apply to all private colleges and universities, such as Elon.”

The answers go together. The second part of SFSA’s argument is that UNC Chapel Hill and Harvard are violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination in educational institutions. According to Atkins, private institutions that receive any federal funding are subject to the act. Since Harvard receives federal funding, the Supreme Court does have jurisdiction over the school. This means that not only can it be subject to lawsuits, but it also is held to the court’s previous precedents.

Elon, which does receive public funding, is also held to the same standard.

“What the Civil Rights Act of ’64 said is the measure of how long it is to the states to decide which rules they follow and which they don’t, how they treat people based on race, gender and other identifying demographics or identifying characteristics,” Atkins said.

If the Supreme Court overturns Grutter, it will set a new precedent that race cannot be considered in higher education admissions at all. But Zaiser and Romero don’t believe that will translate into the case will have as great of an impact on Elon as it would on more competitive private institutions like Harvard.

“Much of the attention on Harvard and other schools is a function of their extremely high rate of selectivity. In a sense, selectivity is juxtaposed to inclusion,” Zaiser and Romero wrote. “We’re searching for students who will be successful at Elon and our acceptance rate reflects that.”

The last time the Supreme Court heard a race-conscious admissions case was six years ago, in the 2016 case Fisher v. University of Texas. But Atkins said the court didn’t decide to hear these challenges so soon after because they present a unique or different problem from previous cases. Instead, it has to do with the recent changes in the ideological composition of the justices themselves. The sitting justices today may make a different decision from courts of the past.

“The politicking, as we would say here, is that we now have this super conservative court,” Atkins said. “The balance of power has shifted.”

SFSA took advantage of this, appealing to the ideals of a court that now more widely represents its own.

Atkins recalled a 2003 statement from Justice Sandra Day O’Connor after Grutter, where she had said she believed that in 25 years, higher education institutions would no longer need to use affirmative action.

“Twenty-five years from then will be 2028. So we’re coming up on this date that Justice O’Connor said we shouldn’t need to use this anymore,” Atkins said. “I think she was wrong to put a date on it, because you can’t eradicate centuries upon centuries of explicit discrimination against Black people, and other people of color, with just 25 years of race-conscious remedy.”

No matter what happens to race-conscious admissions in the next term of the Supreme Court, Boston said she thinks the system needs an update nationally.

“I truly believe those intentions were good. And what it was initially doing was positive,” Boston said. “But it has morphed into something that’s a little less positive… So I think it is another thing that we tried and it didn’t work as intended, so we either rework it or get rid of it as a whole.”
Burlington residents who are part of the Black community look for spaces for civic engagement, learning areas

Nyah Phengsitthy
Managing Editor | @nyahphengsitthy

Driving down North Graham Hopedale Road in Burlington, Seneca Rogers passes by the former Western Electric Company-Tarheel Army Missile Plant. Rogers, who is currently running for Alamance Board of Education, hopes that the area can one day turn into something else — a Black community space. The lifelong Burlington resident observed community hubs, such as the Mayo Bigelow Community Center at North Park and the CityGate Dream Center, serving as a meeting place for the many Black community members as he grew up and still does today.

But those spaces aren’t enough.

According to Rogers, the need for more meeting spaces throughout Burlington has been a goal for many members of the Black community. These spaces can be used for civic engagement, meetings with personal agendas and, most importantly, a place to express voices. During the start of his Board of Education campaign, Rogers said local parents and other Black community members expressed concerns over not having a voice in the community. These future spaces can hopefully combat that issue.

“There isn’t a pipeline of Black candidates to reach out to have experience to talk about,” Caldwell said. “One of the things I try to do now is when I hear that Black candidates are going to run, I have conversations and say, ‘OK, these are some things you need to consider.’”

As the executive co-director of Down Home North Carolina, a nonprofit organization created to build multi-racial power for working people in the state’s small towns and rural regions, Caldwell hopes to use the organization’s space to bring more Black leaders together in the meantime. Informing community members beyond politics is also a goal for these spaces, especially about Black history, according to Donna Vanhook — the first Black woman to run for mayor of Burlington in 2021. In a study published in February 2022 by the Pew Research Center on Black Americans, 42% said they are somewhat informed about Black History — 51% say they are very or extremely informed. 37% said they are somewhat informed and 15% said they are a little or not informed at all. Vanhook said these Black spaces will educate others more about Black history.

“There are more about Black history. “Historically, Black spaces have been limited,” Vanhook said. “It’s not a feeling we have a lot — having that Black space feeling safe.”

Rogers said the next steps to creating these safe spaces is to push future candidates running in races in Burlington and surrounding counties to go into neighborhoods more, especially east Burlington. The idea of turning the former Western Electric property into a community center with classrooms, computer labs, recreation areas, meeting spaces and more, is one area that can bring more Black voices to the table, according to Rogers.

“Some people might not feel comfortable showing up to central office for a board meeting, but if there’s a community center, or somewhere right there in their neighborhood, they might be comfortable there because they’re around everybody who they live around, and they’re fine with talking about the issues that they have,” Rogers said.

And while more areas are needed for more civic engagement, they’re also needed to simply split the Alamance County Black community. “Black safe spaces are very important,” Caldwell said. “It’s so heavy in Alamance, you need a space for Black joy because there’s so much going on, so much trauma circulating, and there has to be a space where you can have some Black joy.”

As the Black community continues to engage with each other about future meeting spaces, 2022 will also be a year that will seek voter engagement, racial justice and promote Black and minority businesses. Many of these events begin with finding things that bring the community together.

“The goal is to continually find things to hold this community together to do things,” Caldwell said. “We want to be a space that can continue to grow. And as we listen to the community, this is a space of shared power.”
Bryant Colson served as the first Black editor-in-chief of The Pendulum and first Black SGA president

Naomi Washington

You were the first Black editor-in-chief of The Pendulum and the first Black SGA president; what were some obstacles you faced by making those accomplishments?

What went through my mind at that time was being able to garner enough votes to get me over the hump. I knew I had the communities in which I hung in… I figured it was about 150 [Black students], so I can count on many of those votes. But at that time, I guess my senior year, 1980, there were about 2,577 students on campus and there were 214 [Black students]. So now I know those numbers. I didn't know them then. But I sure was counting on those 150 that I thought I had back then. And in my community of athletes, they let me hang with them, though I wasn't an athlete.

I played a decent game of baseball back in the day, as my dad played in the Negro Leagues in Greensboro. But I figured I could count on them… So ironically, or not ironically, good that I had those votes, because it did get me over the hump… I wasn’t too naive to know that, we had apathy in the student body or disinterested — who cares about student government unless you’re putting on a concert — but those communities got me over the hump and thankfully, I won and it was fun.

Can you talk more about the communities you had? Especially because here at Elon, we really value those cohort experiences?

I had probably about three or so communities that let me hang with them. The Black community of course, the 234 of us. We were a close knit family because we were, as we used to say back then, ‘we were all we had.’ So we were tight. I remember the snowstorm of 1979. The school was telling us ‘if you can go home because we can’t assure you that cafeteria workers, professors, administrators would be here and classes are certainly canceled.’ But crazy us, a few of us, especially my athletics circle, we stayed and boy, were we crazy. We thought we were getting warm by going down to Belk Gym and getting in the pool without realizing that we had to get out of the warm pool and walk back to the dorm in the cold.

How — specifically in the roles that you were in SGA president and editor-in-chief of The Pendulum — did you take everything that you learned from those roles into your professional life?

“...I decided to apply for The Pendulum position. I was prompted by the previous editor, Kemp Liles, and the adviser, Dr. Mary Ellen Priestley, she was a sweetheart. But she was always on me, telling me that it was something that I can do. I didn’t have all of the confidence that I probably should have. But I ended up with a ton, and I can’t be more grateful for Dr. Priestley, Kemp and then coordinator of student activities, Bill Sharp. He was a humongous supporter back in the day for me. Those three talked me into The Pendulum opportunity. That actually all started with my freshman English teacher, who used to always tell me I should consider writing for The Pendulum, because when we had papers to write, mine tended to be about sports. And she asked me, ‘You oughtta consider doing that, Bryant.’ I took that under advisement and, of course, as you can see, I did do it.

I was student body president of my school when I was in elementary school, sixth grade. I was into student government in back then junior high school — Paige High School. I was into student government all my years there, so it was just ingrained in me. I don’t know how much of a leader I was but it certainly helped me, gave me the confidence even to want to do it here along with being pushed with my SGA community and advisers. So that got me going, especially the writing part. That was so important: the ability to write. Whether you are managing people, you have employee reviews to write. We didn’t have it back then, but emails. And you want to make sure what you are doing is making sense to the people that it needs to make sense to. Those were important things to me. Another thing that was really, really good and it was a blessing and not so much a disguise was, after I got in this position, I was not aware that the Pendulum position paid a stipend. I mean they’re paying me to do something I like. As I was telling the young lady earlier, find something that you love and call it work and put a little money in the plate at work. I would send, I would send half home to my mother and I’d put half in my checking account here. SGA the same thing — a stipend. I couldn’t believe that. So I split it right down the middle, sent half home to my mother and I put the other half in my account here on campus. That was gravy, you know, icing on the cake.”

How do you go about celebrating Black History Month each year? And how should we as a campus go about celebrating?

“Well, I actually don’t mean this to sound too cheesy, but Black history to me, I celebrate every day. There’s something on TV, some person that you meet, somebody that you talk to, that makes you proud to be Black. Abby Phillip, CNN news analyst — smart lady; old school Donna Brazile, chaired the Gore campaign and chaired the Democratic National Committee — smart lady; Laura Coates; I mean, these are smart people I see on TV every day and what’s not to be proud about to be Black? I remember having to tell friends, and my girls when they were younger, I would hear at times, and hopefully they were being facetious, that why in the world did they pick the shortest month to let us celebrate our people? 29 whole days, 28 whole days. Well, you know what? That wasn’t the choice, as I tried to explain to them. Ironically, a gentleman by the name of Carter Woodson, the second Black person to get a PhD at Harvard, started a Negro History Week in February back in 1926, where he would tout the accomplishments of Black people and negroes back then. It wasn’t given to him. He chose that month because it had the birthdays of iconic people at that time. Abraham Lincoln — February 12. Frederick Douglass — February 14. That’s why he chose that month. And fast forward to Gerald Ford in 1976, where he made it a month-long annual celebration.”

You mentioned specifically about Black History Month? What do you think of Black History Month?
Elon University junior Hunter McIntosh is not only a leader on the men's basketball team at Elon, but in the community as well as he serves on the Black Student Union board and analyzes the culture surrounding race at Elon.

How one Elon athlete fights back against racism, calling for more unity across campus

Caitlin Rundle
Elon News Network | @caitlinr_21

Junior Hunter McIntosh is an African American athlete and leader. He’s broken records, won over a dozen awards and honors in just two and half years and has become known as a leader on the court. However, his leadership goes beyond basketball. Serving on the Black Student Union Board, McIntosh has been able to serve as an athlete liaison, seeing firsthand the culture surrounding race at Elon.

Over my last four years here, I’ve seen policies and changes to the curriculum take place to encourage D.E.I. trainings and just improve the culture on campus in general, but obviously, as a white person, I don’t really see those impacts on campus. Have you over your past three years, seeing these policies, seeing these changes, impact the culture on campus in any way, shape or form?

“I would say at least policy wise, especially last summer, there was a lot of events that within America kind of opened some eyes. So, I felt like, personally, Elon’s response to it, I felt like they got ahead of it … Actions wise, day to day, I would say maybe not much has changed but at least at Elon I feel comfortable being able to express my feelings, my thoughts.”

Is there anything that you would like to see changed specifically at Elon?

“There’s tons of different groups, tons of different communities, whether it’s fraternities, sororities or on campus groups or clubs, I’d probably like to see a lot more mixing of those. I feel like every group or something has something to offer … I feel like just as people, we have a lot more similarities than differences. Sometimes it happens naturally, but sometimes you need to have spaces and stuff where different types of groups and communities can come together.”

Do you know how we as a community start that process?

“I think you want to do it more naturally, more organic, so it’s not forced upon each other. I think initially, maybe just kind of informal things like a food gathering or a picnic or something where it’s kind of a little less [formal], it doesn’t feel as forced upon people to connect with others. I think that’s where the best kind of genuine relationships are formed.”

Can you talk about the team, and your message as a team?

“As a team we feel like we have a voice. People kind of gravitate toward our team and want to watch us and watch us compete, but we also know it’s bigger than basketball. Life is bigger than basketball. So any point where we feel like we could take a stance against injustice, take a stance against racism, stuff like that, we want to be able to do that.”

Has anything similar to [the meeting with all of athletics about racism] happened since last year? Or has it been on you guys to continue that message of last summer through into this year as well?

“I think the onus is on us as players and students to continue that message … The responsibility weighs on us a little more, but I kind of don’t see that as a problem. I think that we are the ones who are pushing the narrative forward, and I feel like it’s important that the ball should be in our court. If you want to take responsibility of pushing this university forward, it’s gonna start with the students.”

I do want to ask if you feel any pressure, not only as a Black man, but also as a student athlete, do you ever feel that you’re kind of getting double stereotyped from both of those identities?

“You can get a sense where other students might have other preconceived notions as an athlete about what type of person you are. I feel like that’s just unfair sometimes. We love basketball, but we all have different interests outside of sports … kind of being an African American male on campus, there is society’s pressure on yourself not just to be able to come here and perform on the court, but off the court, how you carry yourself. There’s obviously moments, you’re already a minority on campus, you already stick out a little bit whether it’s in classrooms, or just walking around campus … I don’t want to say that it’s a pressure that is harmful in a sense, but I feel like it can be overwhelming at some points.”

As a campus, what can we do to start to improve relationships with each other, relationships with the outside community, how do we start to make those connections?

“Any genuine connection, it comes down to just trust and belief. When you want to start new relationships, it’s going to be uncomfortable at first, it’s going to be something challenging, but I think a little effort could go a long way … Just keep showing up, I think that’s just really the biggest thing. If you’re uncomfortable in another group’s space, obviously you’re welcome, just keeps showing up. It’s not going to be the most fun sometimes, but over time when you’re growing in a relationship, that’s where the real, genuine stuff happens … Put your pride to the side. I think sometimes, it can be like, ‘alright, this is my way or my way of thinking,’ but I think if you accept that’s how this person thinks or this is how they feel and you genuinely try to understand that and just be open to it. It’s tough sometimes, but I think if you really put the extra effort in there, it will go a long way.”