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SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

BU President Robert Brown at City Hall Friday.

By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT DECEMBER 19, 2014

Despite a contentious run-up to their meeting, Boston University president Robert A. Brown and Boston city councilors were cordial as they debated the diversity of BU's student body and workforce at a City Council hearing on Friday afternoon.

Brown and Councilor Tito Jackson, who led the Education Committee hearing, disagreed at times on how to interpret statistics about the demographic makeup of BU's student population, faculty, administration, and board of trustees. But the two men agreed on the importance of diversity.

Brown's appearance came after the council issued a subpoena last month demanding that he appear or face possible arrest. The subpoena set off an unusual public spat.

Just before the hearing Brown and Jackson shook hands. Brown thanked councilors for inviting him and said improving diversity at BU is a key focus for him and other university leaders.

Dozens of people, including BU students and local residents, watched the proceedings.

"The university has implemented a large set of initiatives to promote diversity on every level of our campus," Brown said. "We work very hard at enrolling minority students from all around the United States and specifically from Boston and Boston public schools."

Jackson thanked Brown and other BU representatives several times for attending.

"This matters. It matters now more than ever," Jackson said, citing the recent wave of protests in Boston and other cities across the country about race and related issues.

Jackson had researched figures about diversity at BU, the largest university and third-largest employer in Boston, and presented some of his findings to Brown.

Jackson cited a report by BU faculty saying that as of 2011, the university had "an extremely low" percentage of black faculty — about 2 percent — and of Hispanic or Latino faculty — about 3 percent — when compared with peer institutions.

"While there are aspects of the city of Boston that make this particularly challenging, no other Boston-area



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university has ratios as low as ours,” the report said.

Brown responded that the university is taking steps to increase diversity among faculty, but he said that faculty turnover at BU is less than at other organizations, meaning the change is progressing somewhat slowly.

“But that doesn’t mean we don’t want to change that,” he said.

Jackson, citing Forbes magazine, presented figures showing that BU, when compared with 14 peer institutions, fares well in terms of Latino and Asian student enrollment but lags in enrolling black students.

Brown said BU is working to increase its black student population. He noted that while the percentage of incoming black students at BU is below a high point reached in the 1970s before a drop later that decade, it has been slowly increasing in the years since.

At one point, after Brown said that he didn’t know where the Forbes data came from, Jackson cut him off, saying: “I do consider Forbes to be a pretty decent source.”

Jackson was joined by Councilors Salvatore LaMattina, Ayanna Pressley, Timothy McCarthy, Josh Zakim, and Charles Yancey. All said they want to work with BU and called on the institution to lead on diversity the same way it leads in other areas.

“We are not here just to point a finger,” Jackson said. “We are here to be of help and assistance.”

Some students also spoke, urging BU to do more to increase diversity.

Jackson, chairman of the council’s Education Committee, called for the hearing and led the effort to subpoena Brown to appear — a rare move by the council — after BU did not send any representatives to an initial hearing scheduled for Oct. 24.

BU lawyers filed paperwork in Suffolk Superior Court challenging the subpoena, but earlier this month, before the matter was taken up by a judge, the two sides agreed to meet Friday.

The council plans to hold a series of hearings about hiring and enrollment diversity in higher education, and eventually plans to invite leaders from all the local colleges and universities to testify.

At Friday’s hearing, Jackson, who represents Roxbury and parts of the South End, Dorchester, and the Fenway, said many people have expressed discomfort with him for seeking the hearings. But he said he remains committed to discussing the issue.

“It is my desire to put these important questions on the table,” he said, before quoting BU alumnus Martin Luther King Jr. “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

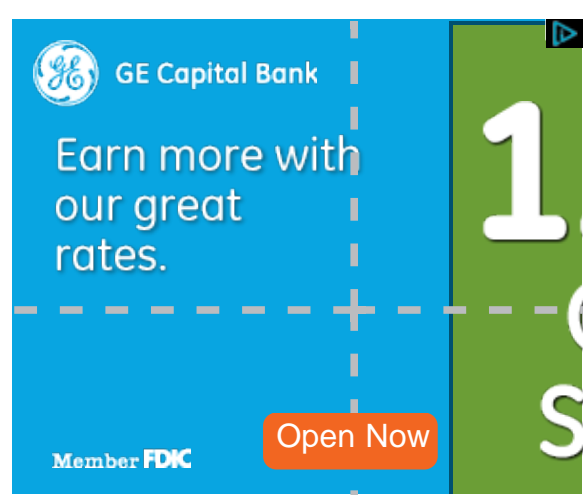
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