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Pan-African Commons 1-Year Comprehensive Assessment Report

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Pan-African Commons 1-Year Assessment Report

Cultural Resource Centers, Portland State University



Portland State
Pan-African Commons



Portland State University

Pan-African Commons 1-Year Comprehensive Assessment Report
Cultural Resource Centers, Diversity & Multicultural Student Services
Portland State University

Pan-African Commons, 1-Year Comprehensive Assessment Report
Portland State University
2017

Prepared for:

Portland State University students, staff, faculty, stakeholders, and the greater community

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Introduction

The Cultural Resource Centers (CRCs) at Portland State University (PSU) create a student-centered inclusive environment that enriches the university experience. The CRCs value diversity, social justice, cultural traditions, student identities, success and leadership. On November 2, 2016, PSU held a grand opening celebrating the expansion of the CRCs with the addition of two new centers, including the Pan-African Commons (PAC). The growth of the CRCs marks a milestone in PSU's commitment to social justice and equity.

The purpose of the Pan-African Commons 1-Year Assessment was to measure how student experiences and needs within institutional memory related to the experiences of Black students who've attended PSU, and how they may inform Pan-African Commons programing and priorities. Findings will be deemed from the data collection of; the Black Student Climate Survey Data administered by Pan-African Task Force, Portland State University's university Archives special collections, onboarding program, informational meetings, and a SWOT analysis. The Pan-African Commons proves to be on-boarding in an effective and student-centered manner highlighting multiple Black identities, but must priorities needs due to lack of capacity to meet them entirely.

Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) regularly fail to support the multiple barriers of Black students with their cultural development (Bakarai, 1997). Often, negative stereotypes are internalized by Black college students, which reflect ways of knowing around Black culture. With the lack of culturally-relevant curriculum in education, Black students are led to include aspects of negative racial ideas of Black culture within their young adult identities (Adams, 2005). Academic and personal success are inextricably linked to the ways in which Black culture is reflected on campus, and in their lives (Ritchey, 2015). In conclusion, PSU's Pan-African Commons has a commitment to validating the cultural development of

Black students, reflecting positive images and environments, and illuminating the presence of Black culture at Portland State University.

Background

Mission

To embrace past and present student voice and needs in the center of the onboarding process of the new African American, African, and Black Student Resource Center.

Vision

To incorporate the historical context of the student and greater community into the formation of the cultural center

Needs that surface from examining campus climate will be mirrored in core function and student programming of cultural center

Learning Outcomes

- Identify a mission that encompasses the needs of center functions
- Identify campus climate conditions that illuminate potential areas of programming needs
- Identify common issues and positive campus experiences

At a Glance: Year One

Institutional Location & Function

1 of 5 Cultural Resource Centers within the Diversity & Multicultural Student Services department.

*Cultural Resource Centers operate with student-led committees, in conjunction with *Cultural Resource Centers Student Programming Teams*.*

Comprehensive Budget

\$5,960.00

Visits

3000 unique visits

Fall term, 800

Winter term, 1100

Spring term, 1100

Type

- Community, 150
- Staff/faculty, 85
- Students, 2770

Programs

4 Programs, 11 events

Committees

Pan-African Commons Mission Statement Committee

Black History Month

Martin Luther King Jr. Tribute Week

The Irie Project

Methods

The methods used for conducting the PAC assessment include surveys, archive collections, meeting minutes, informational interviews, and a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis. Participant demographics will be collected from the Black Student Climate Survey Data administered by Pan-African Task Force. The Pan-African Task Force was created to identify best practices for faculty and staff to retrain and recruit African, Black, and/or Caribbean students. The Pan-African Task Force is a separate entity at Portland State University whose data may help reveal more information about the interests of Black students the Pan-African Commons serves.

Collections within the Portland State University Library Archives department include Verdell Burdine and Otto G. Rutherford Family Collection, 1900s-1980s and Senator Avel L. Gordly Papers, 1981-2008 will be reviewed for any information directly pertaining to PSU students, which may illuminate pertinent contexts that exist within Pan-African Commons programming. The on-boarding process for the Pan-African Commons included recruitment for the mission statement committee, and sessions to co-create the foundation for the Pan-African Commons. Themes from the foundational documents used to retain or collect student voice will also be included in this assessment. Informational meetings with

students, staff, and community members will also inform data. Lastly, an analysis including the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats will be conducted.

Findings

Participant Demographics from the Black Student Climate Study, 2017

Table 1: Total Black Student Population, Spring 2017

Race/ Ethnicity		
Asian	1,830	7.6%
Black*	772	3.2%
Hispanic/Latino	2,813	11.6%
International Students	1,890	7.8%
Multiple Ethnic/Race	1,333	5.5%
Native American	295	1.2%
Pacific Islander	130	0.5%
White*	14,086	58.2%
Declined to Respond	1,050	4.3%

Table 2: Retention Rate of First Years, 2007-2010

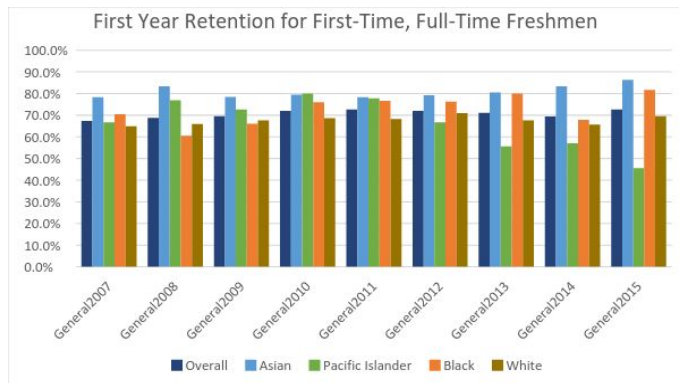


Table 3: 6-Year Graduation Rate, 2007-2010

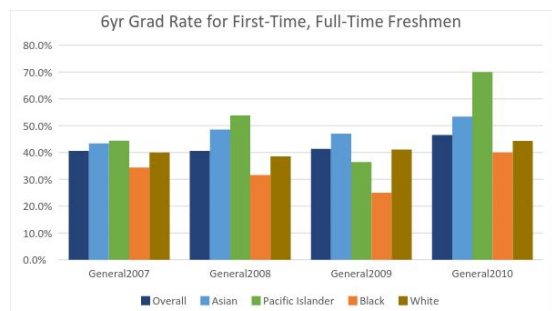


Table 4: GPA of First-Time/Full-Time New Student Cohorts Not Retained, 2013-2015

Fall 15 Cohort			
	Average Credits Earned Upon Departure	Avg. Terms Completed	PSU GPA
Asian	22.5	2.2	2.46
Black	26.7	2.2	2.51
Declined to Respond/Other	22.4	2.4	1.85
Hispanic/Latino	24.6	2.4	2.44
International Students	21.5	2.2	1.38
Multiple Ethnic/Race	22.4	2.3	2.06
Native American	19.7	2.3	1.41
Pacific Islander	29.7	2.8	2.58
White	27.0	2.4	2.61
AVERAGE OVERALL	25.6	2.4	2.43

Fall 14 Cohort			
	Average Credits Earned Upon Departure	Avg. Terms Completed	PSU GPA
Asian	35.8	2.8	2.78
Black	18.4	1.9	2.07
Declined to Respond/Other	23.6	2.2	2.37
Hispanic/Latino	23.8	2.2	2.24
International Students	26.1	2.1	1.40
Multiple Ethnic/Race	27.4	2.4	2.44
Native American	22.5	2.4	2.23
Pacific Islander	23.8	2.0	2.80
White	28.0	2.4	2.63
AVERAGE OVERALL	26.9	2.4	2.46

Fall 13 Cohort			
	Average Credits Earned Upon Departure	Avg. Terms Completed	PSU GPA
Asian	29.0	2.5	2.46
Black	24.8	2.5	1.95
Declined to Respond/Other	24.9	2.5	2.22
Hispanic/Latino	25.3	2.4	2.29
International Students	24.8	2.4	1.23
Multiple Ethnic/Race	27.8	2.4	2.52
Native American	29.7	2.7	2.19
Pacific Islander	26.3	2.5	2.50
White	25.8	2.3	2.42
AVERAGE OVERALL	26.0	2.4	2.31

The data displayed in these findings reflect a steady retention rate, but low graduation rate. One of the functions of the Pan-African Commons is to support retention rates through its programs and services. The Black students who leave PSU without completion do so by their second or third term on campus. The Black students who leave without completing their degrees are at or just below the minimum for good academic standing status. This illuminates there is a high need for programming to focus on Black students who are new to campus, and a steady focus on students who remain past their first year.

History from the University Archives

Portland State University Library's Special Collections is home to over 5500 items deemed unique or rare and historically significant. Holdings include books, journals, manuscripts, documents, photographs, maps, graphic novels, audio-visual material, and realia, spanning the 15th century to the present. This area

was identified as a place to collect institutional and community memory about the racial climate for Black PSU students (Appendix A-B).

Community History

- Community organizing has been present in some form for many years in the greater Portland Black community, including organizations like the NAACP and Black United Front.
- Individuals like Avel Gordly were intrical in the successes they made, and created other initiatives which ended up in the construction of academic institutes and counseling centers.
- A statewide climate mirroring racist values, gentrification in Northeast Portland, and more troubling history have deeply complicated the lives of Black Oregon.
- The history of the Black community shows evidence in a deep investment in the arts.
- Examples include poetry readings, plays, skits, fashion shows, and radio shows.

Black Studies History

- Black Studies faculty showed continuous evidence of requesting a cultural center for students, especially a center connecting with their research priorities.
- In the Spring of 1975, the Black Cultural Affairs Board student organization were joined by the Black Studies faculty in the Park Blocks near campus to address race issues on campus, and demand action be taken to address them.

On-Boarding Processes

The Pan-African Commons created a committee that collectively identified a mission statement for the center of October 2016. To recruit student members, an interest form was emailed to all students who

identified as Black. Responses to the question “How might a resource center provide support to African and Black-American communities?”, were retained.

Gathering Space, Building Community is a Cultural Resource Centers Program aimed at recognizing the depth and breadth of work. The activities extend well beyond creating space for studying or relaxing. We impact all aspects of retention, persistence, and graduation for our students; create meaningful community connections; and foster authentic environments for coalition building. This was facilitated through a series of workshops and online surveys.

Mission Statement Interest Intake Form Summary

“This resource center will give African/Black American students a place where they can feel comfortable in their own skin. The ability to be their authentic selves while identifying with others who share similar views, ideas, experiences, and goals. The resource center will empower communities” (Appendix H).

Gathering Space, Building Community Summary (Appendix C-F)

- Student support and staff;
- Programming to support retention;
- Home away from home;
- Intersectional feminist spaces;
- Outreach to PSU community;
- African art;
- Education materials, i.e. books;
- Access to organizations and community resources.

Informational Meetings

In effort to gather input, informal informational meetings were conducted with students, staff, faculty, and community members.

- (Graduate student): The graduate student shared the frustrated climate of the Black student community after a disruption in the opening process of the Pan-African Commons. Also, they provided a recent history of the work of student organizations on campus. Black Graduation, a ceremony honoring Pan-African PSU graduating students, started for the first year in 2016 with limited support and funding. Concern was raised for the sustainability of the program. The student also provided an extensive list of community organizations that could have a useful relationship or connection with the Pan-African Commons
- (Alumni): “Alumni support is very important and I would say that is one thing that has not been very strong in the past which I hope to be a part of changing. As far as the climate goes for Black students at PSU it is definitely budding yet probably the most vibrant it has ever been in my time at Portland State. I think students will be coming into the year with high hopes for the Center as having both a BSU and Black Cultural Affairs Board. We fought long and hard in my 5 years and even before I came along to finally feel like our opinions matter on campus. There is a lot of momentum for you all to start with which is different because usually it always seemed like we were starting over every year.”
- (Undergraduate Student): An undergraduate student shared that there isn’t a lot of support for Black and African students on campus, and sometimes African students are lost at times within engagement efforts for Black students. He hopes for inclusion of African identities to be as much of a priority as African-American identities in the Pan-African Commons

- (Alumni): An alumni/x shared the intricate parts that members of the Black Cultural Affairs Board (BCAB) had in the onboarding of the Pan-African Commons. Jeanine also shared hopes for the working relationship that could be cultivated between BCAB and the Pan-African Commons. Institutional policies, structures, and support all play a role in the threat of BCAB remaining active and maintaining their funding status.
- (Staff): A long-time staff member spoke of the rapid changes and transitions in Portland- particularly in the northeast and downtown areas. Gentrification played a role in demographic and community culture changes.
- (Faculty): A previous leader in PSU's Black Studies faculty provided a collection of resources to understand the history of Black people in Oregon. He also provided context about former Black Studies faculty advocating for resources, including a resource center. He mentioned that there typically could be priorities that PSU may identify more so than supplemental campus resource for Black students authorized any.
- (CRC Student Staff):
 - Early 1900s-1945
 - Black people worked in shipyards in the military in Vanport, community redlines their residential access
 - Vanport floods, city has inner conflict with federal government to allow Black militia in Vanport
 - Portland was created, Black people redlined to Alberta
 - Black people fled from the south to work in Pacific Northwest
 - Portland becomes an increasingly viable city, Black neighborhoods & businesses surface
 - 1945-1970

- PSU is originally founded for GI Bill recipients, accommodating people of color and women
- Portland officials consume areas with Black businesses to build highways and large lots
- Economic disparities rise and
- 1970-present
 - Alberta neighborhood becomes more consumed by White businesses: events closing down streets that aren't culturally significant or relevant
 - East Portland is consumed by Portland, filters "lower income" residents
 - The Black Studies department initially proposes a need for a Black Cultural Center, 1998

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Analysis

A Strengths, Weaknesses, opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis is an assessment tool. The purpose of this analysis is to self-identify strengths and weaknesses, and identify environmental threats and opportunities (Appendix I).

Strengths:

- Events/Programs:
 - Grand Opening Celebration
 - Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture Poster Exhibit
- Discovering/serving multiple student populations: Visitors, Task Force focus, Ramadan event, family-friendly area
- Collaboration with other departments: (Black Studies, QRC, ASPSU, Student groups)
- Office additions: Child-friendly area, library
- Transitioning leadership of Black History Month

Weaknesses:

- 1-full time staff member, and lack of centralized staffing
- Limited resources allocated from the Student-Fee Committee
- Continued investment from students in current department wide structures: program committees
- Relationship with student engagement at Black Student Success Summit

Opportunities:

- Increased point of contact to other resources from Black students (CARE, Advising, SHAC)
- Centralize resources and support for Black students, (siloed currently)
- Utilizing resource and support cultivated from new Pan-African Student Task Force

Threats:

- Budget crisis or constraints
- University understanding of best practice in Black student retention through the impact of a single program or single position
- PAC in SMSU
- Lack of capacity for all center needs to be simultaneously addressed

Recommendations

Future recommendations were generated from analyzing findings from this report. Recommendations include continued assessment, fundraising, developing a plan for student outreach, centralizing access to resources, and continuing student centered programming. This section will further explain what each of these recommendations could look like.

Long-term Assessment

An extensive assessment with more sophisticated methodology can help support identifying additional needs. In the next phase of assessment, focus groups have been identified as a feasible and helpful tool to

collect rich narrative data. This form of assessment could greatly direct future priorities, and identify whether or not the services the Pan-African Commons actually work for students.

Fundraising

Due to expectations set by the Student Fee Committee and the financial state of Portland State University, diversifying funds would guarantee a consistent stream of resources. Options for acquiring funding could be grant writing or finding donations from community businesses.

Outreach Development

More student input is needed to support the continuous needs of the Pan-African Commons, specifically, supporting the committees that direct how programs operate. Dedicating a student position, or responsibility of a current student position for outreach who connects with classrooms, student organizations, conduct passive programming, and make strategic announcements.

Centralize Access to Resources for Black Students

Students may have a difficult time identifying or accessing resources on campus. Making sure department and programs advertise and promote opportunities within the Pan-African Commons may lower this need. In addition, identifying a list of point people in those areas for working relationships and personal referrals may help with relationship building and create a different impact on the greater community. An increased level of retention rates could be an indirect result of this strategy.

Student-Centered Programming

The Cultural Resource Centers value for student-centered programming. In practice, it is evident that with student voice there is an increased level of participation, buy-in, and investment from student

communities. A prediction of increased student participation and satisfaction is the result of continuing to creatively foster the student-centered mission.

Limitations

Options for collecting data were mostly combined from pre-existing sources, and their is limited to no capacity to collect more in a timely manner, as the current staffing stands. A more improved methodology in a future assessment that includes a diversification of data could vastly impact results. Another limitation, is that the assessment was largely conducted by myself. Periodic Involvement of the Assistant Director of the Cultural Resource Centers or student input may support that need in the future.

Conclusion

The purpose of this assessment was to identify themes within institutional memory related to the experiences of Black students who've attended PSU. Findings will be deemed from the data collection of; the Black Student Climate Survey Data administered by Pan-African Task Force, Portland State University's university Archives special collections, onboarding program, informational meetings, and a SWOT analysis. The Pan-African Commons proves to be on-boarding in an effective and student-centered manner. But we have identified needs such as outreach and centralizing access to resources due to lack of capacity to meet all programming and center needs entirely.

Addenda

[Appendix A](#)

[Appendix B](#)

[Appendix C-I](#)

References

Adams, T. A. (2005). Establishing intellectual space for Black students in predominantly White universities through Black studies. *The Negro Educational Review*, 56, 1–16.

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