

An Investigation of Student Use and Perception of the Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center

Laura Davis, Lucy LePeau, Adam Patricoski, and Michael Schmeckeber

This mixed quantitative and qualitative environmental assessment examined students' uses and perceptions of the Neal Marshall Black Culture Center at Indiana University Bloomington. Specifically, 102 student patrons of the center were asked about their perceptions of the center, the mission, and their use of the center. Findings reflected differences between Black and non-Black respondents on these three variables. The study concludes with recommendations to administrators to better serve students through Black Culture Centers.

Introduction

Black Culture Centers (BCC) can provide Black students with a supportive niche, assisting these students' efforts to contribute and integrate their unique perspectives into the larger campus culture (Turner, 1994). In 2001, Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) completed construction of the Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center (NMBCC). During the infant stages of the NMBCC, this supportive niche was exemplified as the main goal in providing "a positive and hospitable environment for Black faculty, students, and staff" (Indiana University Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center, 2003). Today the NMBCC serves as a resource that seeks to support and encourage the Black student population while educating the campus at large about the Black experience. This is reflected in the current NMBCC mission statement that states:

The Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center is committed to: academic excellence through quality educational cultural and social programs that promote public awareness about the Black experience while celebrating the academic and leadership achievements of our students. (Indiana University Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center, 2001)

This research examined the NMBCC's impact on student patrons of the center. Strange and Banning (2001) argued that there is an important connection between physical environment and behaviors in that setting. However, physical structure alone does not influence behavior and perception. Kuh (2000) asserted that mission and philosophy exert more influence on student behavior than any other institutional factor, including physical space.

Operating within the framework of environmental assessment by

Upcraft and Schuh (2000), the researchers aimed to examine the ecology, climate, and culture of the NMBCC. The assessment examined the climatic and cultural interplay between physical space, student perception, and espoused mission. More specifically, the following research questions were explored: (a) How do student patrons use the NMBCC? (b) How do student patrons perceive the NMBCC? and (c) Is the NMBCC facility congruent with its mission? This information may be used to better understand student perceptions of the NMBCC. Additionally, other BCCs across the nation may utilize the methodology and findings.

Literature Review

Campus Environments and Diverse Populations

Upcraft and Schuh (1996) proposed that campus environments are multi-dimensional, including factors such as physical facilities and structures, student, faculty, and staff populations, curricular and co-curricular opportunities, and unique institutional philosophies. Assessment of these environmental characteristics provides an evaluation of how multiple conditions on a college campus impact student learning and growth (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). In light of this, assessment of campus culture is particularly important in order to understand the impact of culture on diverse student populations (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

Black students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) often experience dissonance between their needs and what the institutional environment provides (Astin, 1999). Stronger student connections with the institution's academic and social systems positively impact persistence (Tinto, 1993). Further, higher student satisfaction is created through students' meaningful involvement on campus (Astin, 1999). Given these assertions, dissonance could negatively influence Black student persistence. BCCs provide opportunities for institutions to facilitate inclusion of Black students at PWIs.

History and Purpose of Black Cultural Centers

Black students attending PWIs need to perceive both the academic and social climate as inclusive and affirming (Jones, 2001). Institutions' establishment of BCCs intentionally creates an environment that invites minorities into a nurturing atmosphere for personal and cultural growth (Tomlinson, 1992). Princes (1994) echoed, "The Centers' role and function [are] also to assist with the development and enhancement of the students' racial, ethnic, and cultural pride, preservation and identification" (p. 18-19).

The earliest BCCs date back to the early 1900s as a place where Black students regularly convened to study and converse (Hefner, 2002). The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, followed by the 1968 amendments

to the Higher Education Act of 1965, specifically Title IV, led to increased enrollment of Black students at PWIs (Princes, 1994). As enrollment increased, institutions focused their attention on the persistence of Black students (Princes, 1994). Feelings of alienation, loneliness, and isolation contributed to the aforementioned need for BCC construction.

NMBCC History

At the beginning of the 1900s, Black Greek-lettered organizations served as the early forms of BCCs at IUB. However, as the university experienced an influx of Black students these organizations could no longer meet their needs. Through the 1960s, Black students became catalysts for the creation of a campus BCC. The first center, "affectionately" known as the Black House, opened in 1968 near the edge of campus away from student pathways. Depicted as "an old dilapidated frame building," the Black House became unfit for students and demand for a new center increased (Bridges & McClure, 2004, p. 18).

The culmination of these demands resulted in the creation of a centrally located BCC on campus that was dedicated on February 11, 1973. The new center offered community and student activities, tutoring, counseling services, and cultural programming. Many agreed the greatest aspect of the center was that it made students feel at home. A fire at the BCC in 1986 and increased Black student enrollment fueled the need for a new facility; however, financial constraints restricted the university's ability to construct a new building. In order to receive state appropriations, former Indiana University president Tom Ehrlich linked the new BCC with a new theater facility. The Marcellus Neal and Francis Marshall Black Culture Center was dedicated on January 18, 2002 (Bridges & McClure, 2004).

Current Trends in Culture Centers

Increased enrollment of underrepresented student populations in the 1980s raised new questions regarding the existence of BCCs as additional student minority groups demanded cultural centers of their own (Hefner, 2002). Because underrepresented student groups sought similar centers affirming their ethnicity, institutions strove to provide equal representation. To accommodate additional roles, some argued that BCCs should become multicultural centers (Young as cited in Princes, 1994). "Many educators postulate that multiculturalizing campuses offer a more realistic chance of bringing about real and long-lasting racial stability on campuses and measurable academic and personal success for minority students" (Princes, 1994, p. 9).

Creating the Ideal Culture Center

Tomlinson (1992) conducted a research study on the perceptions of

BCCs' impact upon students, faculty, and staff from centers on eight responding campuses. This researcher hypothesized that an ideal cultural center at a PWI interweaves cultural education including lectures, seminars, conferences and research programs, student support including tutorials and counseling, and cultural entertainment. Another study posited an ideal ethnic cultural center featuring places to study, relax, entertain, eat, meet others, and provide a home-like atmosphere where students can get away from it all (Princes, 1994).

Methodology

The research process was designed with the intent of investigating the ecology, climate, and culture of this center at IUB. Based on the premise from Kuh and Whitt (1988) that students shape and are being shaped by their environments, this research examined how the environment of the NMBCC initiates this transactional relationship with student patrons. The researchers examined this relationship using an adapted environmental assessment model outlined by Upcraft and Schuh (2000). Data originated from researcher observations and student questionnaire responses.

Data Collection

The researchers used a two-pronged approach to collect data. First, the researchers conducted a visual audit of the facility. Specifically, the researchers toured the facility while documenting the presence or absence of cultural artifacts, visual aesthetics, building layout, and other structural components. Second, a mixed quantitative and qualitative questionnaire was used to provide a statistical analysis of specific factors in the environment while allowing students to emphasize particular issues.

The questionnaire was constructed using questions adapted from the "College Student Experiences Questionnaire" (Pace & Kuh, 1998) and "The College Student Report 2003" questionnaires (National Survey, 2002). Questions focused on four areas: facility perceptions, mission perceptions, frequency of facility usage, and background information. In addition, the questions were close-ended with responses given on a five or seven point Likert or semantic differential scale. The environmental referent sections of the questionnaire, open-ended exploratory sections, imitated the Resource Center of Independence survey as described by Upcraft and Schuh (1996). The Director of the NMBCC reviewed the content and organization of the questionnaire and invited student employees in the center to assess how user friendly the questionnaire was for potential student respondents.

Throughout a two week period, the researchers administered questionnaires to a convenience sample of 102 current students who used the

NMBCC and to student groups that utilized the center. The researchers distributed surveys from the information desk in the foyer during multiple hour-long blocks of time throughout the morning, afternoon, and evening hours. Additionally, the researchers attended two NMBCC programs to distribute and collect questionnaires.

Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed data through multiple methods. Researchers used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to process data collected from the quantitative portion of the questionnaire. Means and frequencies were calculated in order to gain an understanding of the most and least favorable perceptions and the most and least common uses. Then, in search of significant differences between Black and non-Black perceptions and uses, the researchers ran multiple t-tests at $p=.05$, $.01$ and $.001$ significance levels. Through coding and sorting the environmental referents, themes emerged from the data.

In relation to the visual audit, the research team sorted, coded, and analyzed observation notes to decipher themes. Using the same interpretive process as Strange and Banning (2001), the researchers identified nonverbal messages possibly conveyed to patrons of the NMBCC as well as highlighted congruencies and incongruencies that surfaced between these messages and the espoused mission. Once the data from both the questionnaire and visual audit were compiled, the research team compared the two sets of data as a form of triangulation. Similarities found within the two data sets may imply which possible nonverbal cues given by visual artifacts in the center are more influential than others.

Limitations

Due to time constraints, data collection spanned approximately two weeks, limiting both the size and composition of the sample in this study. Constraints of the study also may have had an impact as the research team approached the study with prior knowledge of the NMBCC and some of the issues surrounding the center. Finally, it should also be noted that this study involved an all White research team studying a BCC. The White researchers may have been viewed as "outsiders" imposing upon Black "insider" space (Jorgensen, 1989, p.12).

Results

Participants

One hundred and two student participants completed the survey. Ninety-three respondents reported their background information as summarized in Table 1. Data were collected on three sets of variables entitled,

"Perceptions of the Center," "Center Mission Perceptions," and "Use of the Center." The diverse sample offered many possibilities for investigation. The researchers focused on comparing Black student responses with all other races/ethnicities combined in light of the reported NMBCC mission. Specifically, the ethnicity/race variable was re-sorted into Black respondents ($n=53$) and non-Black respondents ($n=40$). Independent t-tests were run to analyze differences between groups on these two sets of variables.

Table 1

Background Demographics for Questionnaire Participants

	Asian Pacific Islander	Black/ African American	Caucasian	Latino/His panic	Other
	<i>n</i> =2	<i>n</i> =53	<i>n</i> =27	<i>n</i> =4	<i>n</i> =7
Year in school					
Freshman/first-year	0	9	1	0	1
Sophomore	0	8	6	1	1
Junior	1	16	10	0	1
Senior	1	11	5	1	4
Graduate	0	9	5	2	0
Gender					
female	1	37	16	3	5
male	1	15	11	1	2

Perceptions of the Center

Table 2 contains results for all 21 items pertaining to the student perceptions of the center. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" with a value of five to "strongly disagree" with a value of one. Overall, the respondents' reported perceptions were relatively positive.

The reported lowest perceptions of the center for both Black and non-Black respondents were "student organization office is sufficient" and "overall atmosphere of the student organization office enhances my experience." In addition, it is particularly noteworthy that Black respondents reported a neutral perception for "information desk suits my needs." The highest reported perceptions from respondents were "artwork is appealing," "NMBCC is accessible," and "architectural structure is visually appealing." Non-Black respondents reported high perceptions for "furniture is sufficient" and "overall atmosphere is inviting."

T-tests were run to compare Black and non-Black student responses about their perceptions of the center with statistically significant findings being discovered. Black students perceived the center less favorably than

non-Black students in regards to furniture ($t = 4.174$), the information desk ($t = 2.751$), study space atmosphere ($t = 2.051$), socializing areas ($t = 2.233$), and the overall center atmosphere ($t = 2.709$). Additionally, non-Black students reported more favorable perceptions than Black students on socializing area atmosphere ($t = -.127$).

Table 2

Perceptions of the Center

Survey Question	Black		Non-Black		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
The Neal Marshall Black Culture Center is easily accessible on campus.	4.52	.87	4.45	.68	-.414	.680
The architectural structure is visually appealing.	4.47	.93	4.63	.54	.928	.356
The architectural structure suits my needs.	3.88	1.24	4.18	.84	1.347	.181
The artwork of the center is appealing.	4.23	.78	4.45	.71	1.423	.158
The furniture throughout the center is sufficient for my needs.	3.55	1.26	4.45	.60	4.174	.000***
The furniture is comfortable.	3.75	1.25	4.30	.85	2.366	.020*
The furniture is functional.	3.94	.98	4.38	.81	2.266	.026*
The administrative offices are easily accessible.	3.62	1.35	3.68	1.10	.201	.841
The information desk suits my needs.	3.02	1.46	3.75	.95	2.751	.007**
The technological resources in the center are sufficient for my needs.	3.91	1.18	4.03	1.06	.502	.617
The programming spaces are sufficient for my needs.	3.66	1.19	4.03	1.03	1.550	.125
The overall atmosphere of the programming spaces enhances my experience.	3.85	.93	4.05	1.04	.983	.328
The study spaces are sufficient for my needs.	3.58	1.25	3.98	.92	1.665	.099
The overall atmosphere of the study spaces enhances my experience.	3.60	1.21	4.08	.92	2.051	.043*
The meeting rooms are sufficient for my needs.	3.49	1.41	3.75	1.35	.931	.374
The overall atmosphere of the meeting rooms enhances my experience.	3.42	1.34	3.68	1.33	2.460	.034
The socializing areas are sufficient for my needs.	3.26	1.57	3.98	1.07	2.233	.016*
The overall atmosphere of the socializing areas enhances my experience.	3.28	1.47	3.90	1.08	-.127	.028*
The student organization office is sufficient for my needs.	3.19	1.41	3.15	1.51	-.207	.899
The overall atmosphere of the student organization office enhances my experience.	3.26	1.30	3.21	1.52	-.200	.842
The overall atmosphere of the center is inviting.	3.85	1.32	4.48	.72	2.709	.008**

Note. Rating scale equivalent to 1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

Perceptions of the Mission

Table 3 lists results for student responses to all 11 items about perception of the mission. The seven-point semantic differential scale used for this section ranged from one being "weak emphasis" to seven being "strong emphasis." Overall, the perceptions of the mission from the respondents

were reported as strongly emphasized on all variables. The Black respondents and the non-Black respondents reported that "leadership development for all students" was least emphasized. "Social programming for all students" was emphasized the least according to Black respondents while the non-Black respondents suggested that "academic achievement for all students" was of relatively low emphasis. The mission perceptions for "cultural programming for Black students" and "public awareness of the Black experience" were perceived as strongly emphasized for all respondents. The Black respondents reported perceptions for "educational programming for Black students" and "cultural programming for all students" as being highly emphasized.

T-tests comparing Black students and non-Black students on their perceptions of the mission revealed statistically significant differences on four variables. Black students perceived less emphasis on the following categories than non-Black students: cultural programming ($t = 2.006$), social programming ($t = 2.231$), and leadership development for Black students ($t = 2.474$) as well as public awareness of the Black experience ($t = 2.829$).

Table 3

Mission Perceptions

Survey Question	Black		Non-Black		<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Emphasis on academic achievement for Black students	5.17	1.26	5.20	1.56	-.157	.876
Emphasis on academic achievement for all students	5.17	1.26	5.20	1.56	.089	.929
Emphasis on educational programming for Black students	5.44	1.23	5.82	1.67	1.169	.246
Emphasis on educational programming for all students	5.19	1.23	5.49	1.58	.963	.338
Emphasis on cultural programming for Black students	5.57	.93	6.15	1.63	2.006	.048*
Emphasis on cultural programming for all students	5.54	1.26	5.48	1.43	-.222	.825
Emphasis on social programming for Black students	5.26	1.06	6.03	1.93	2.231	.028*
Emphasis on social programming for all students	4.88	1.28	5.56	1.86	1.936	.056
Emphasis on public awareness of the Black experience	5.19	.84	6.15	1.99	2.829	.006**
Emphasis on leadership development for Black students	5.21	1.04	6.00	1.80	2.474	.015*
Emphasis on leadership development for all students	4.87	1.46	5.03	1.70	.474	.637

Note. Semantic Differential Scale from 1 to 7 with 1 being weak emphasis and 7 being strong emphasis

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Use of the Center

Table 4 contains respondents' reported usage of the center from all 14 items. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert-like scale from "very often" with a value of five to "never" with a value of one. Uses reported by the majority of respondents were recorded as "sometimes" and "seldom." Consistently, the lowest reported uses for the respondents were "utilized the student organization office" and "visited personnel in administrative office for mentorship." Non-Black respondents reported "held student organization meetings" as a low usage and the Black respondents reported "used group study spaces" the least.

The highest reported uses for Black respondents were "attended programs sponsored by the NMBCC" and "attended programs sponsored by other student organizations." The non-Black respondents reported "used the computer lab" most frequently. Additional frequent uses for the non-Black respondents were "socialized in the facility spaces" and "attended class."

Finally, comparisons of Black students and non-Black students on their use of the center revealed that Black students use the center more than non-Black students for attending programs and meetings either sponsored by the NMBCC ($t = -6.350$) or sponsored by other student organizations ($t = -5.142$), sponsoring programs and meetings ($t = -2.779$), utilizing student organization space ($t = -2.233$), and visiting administrative personnel for mentorship ($t = 2.327$) and administrative needs ($t = -2.585$).

Table 4

Center Usage	Black		Non-Black		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Survey Question						
Attended programs sponsored by the Neal Marshall Black Culture Center.	3.85	.82	2.45	1.30	-6.350	.000***
Attended programs sponsored by other student organizations.	3.70	.99	2.58	1.11	-5.142	.000***
Sponsored programs (through a student organization of which you are a member).	3.17	1.46	2.35	1.33	-2.779	.007**
Socialized in the facility spaces (i.e. casually met with friends, lounging).	3.06	1.32	3.10	1.17	.164	.870
Used individual study spaces.	2.62	1.40	3.05	1.34	1.483	.142
Used group study spaces.	2.09	1.15	2.53	1.32	1.679	.097
Used the computer lab.	3.38	1.43	3.15	1.51	-.741	.461
Utilized the student organization spaces.	2.06	1.28	1.55	.75	-2.233	.028*
Used academic resources provided in the facility (i.e., center library).	2.96	1.52	3.00	1.43	.123	.902
Visited personnel in administrative office for mentorship.	2.36	1.56	1.68	1.16	-2.327	.022*
Visited personnel in administrative office for administrative needs.	2.66	1.52	1.90	1.24	-2.585	.011*
Attended class.	2.96	1.88	3.23	1.72	.692	.491
Attended student organization meetings.	3.45	1.35	1.82	1.01	-6.383	.000***
Held student organization meetings.	2.55	1.61	1.58	1.13	-3.256	.002**

Note. Rating scale equivalent to 1=Never; 2=Seldom; 3=Sometimes; 4=Often; 5=Very Often

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Environmental Referents

Analysis of respondents' written comments highlighted four central themes as defined by the researchers: Physical Space, Atmosphere, Administration, and Services. Physical Space focuses on the structural style and layout of the building as well as student utilization of the NMBCC. Respondents seemed to appreciate the building's design and location on campus. One student commented, "I think the Neal Marshall Culture Center is easily assessable [*sic*]. The architecture is beautiful...." However, students reported problems identifying the main entrance of the center, questioned the size and location of the African American Culture Center (AACC) Library, and raised concerns about a lack of sufficient academic and social spaces.

Atmosphere referred to the abstract or intangible sense of surroundings felt by patrons of the NMBCC. A few students perceived the center as a great place to study. One student wrote, "I frequently use the library and social areas to get school work done because they are generally quiet and conducive to studying." However, the majority of respondents expressed discontent that the center lacked a home-like atmosphere. Students made comments such as "The NMBCC lacks the 'homey' [*sic*] feeling that most students desire in order to spend most of their time here."

Administration pertained to the staff of the NMBCC as well as how the center is operated. Many students were unaware of programming efforts or how to utilize the offerings of the center. Students related, "Many opportunities aren't known," and "I never know where to go or who to talk to about events at the NMBCC." Students also saw room for some improvement in the center's programming efforts. One student shared, "I am not sure they are exploiting the opportunity to its fullest."

Services referred to the tangible resources either currently used or presently lacking within the NMBCC. There are mixed opinions on academic resources, such as accessibility to technology and study space, at the center. One student shared, "The library is very small and does not have a good amount or choice of books," while another responded, "Generally [the] NMBCC seems like a positive supportive space for students." There was also sentiment that inadequate food offerings deter students from coming to the center.

Discussion

Six themes emerged after compiling the results of the questionnaire data and researcher observations. These themes are a house but not a home, building navigation, visual aesthetics, lack of awareness of services, administrative distance, and student wants and needs. These themes also reflected distinct perception differences reported between the Black and non-Black

student respondents.

A House but Not a Home

BCCs on PWIs are often intended to create a safe haven for Black students on campus (Patton, 2004; Princes, 1994). However, student respondents do not consider the NMBCC a home away from home, a noted characteristic of IUB's former BCC. The results indicated that students use the center to do something specific rather than simply to "hang out." This theme is particularly pronounced between Black and non-Black student populations. According to the survey results, Black students mainly use the center to attend programs and meetings and non-Black students tend to use the center for social and academic purposes. This trend was further supported by the environmental referents, where multiple comments were made addressing the lack of a home-like atmosphere. One participant shared, "[The] Space does not utilize the needs of students who want to have a home away from home" and several others reported that the center does not have a "homey feel." Tinto (1993) purported the importance of social systems for student persistence; the lack of a safe haven for Black Students on IUB's campus possibly inhibits this.

Building Navigation

Participants responded they do not know where the main entrance to the center is located and that it is difficult to navigate through the building. Although pictures of the NMBCC repeatedly highlight the east entrance to the building, the main entrance to the center is actually located on the west side of the center. This theme was substantiated in referent comments such as, "Where is the actual opening to the building?" Another individual stated the, "Structure could have been more user friendly." In addition to confusion over the main entrance, uncertainty exists due to blurred structural demarcations between the center and the theatre department. Strange and Banning (2001) referred to this issue as "wayfinding," emphasizing that students need environmental clues to help avoid irritation and uncertainty while moving throughout a building.

Visual Aesthetics

Lee (2003) discussed the importance of creating a culture center that is both visionary and responsive to future needs. Students commented positively on the NMBCC's design, specifically saying that its newness contributed to the center's visual appeal. The architectural appeal was rated highly by all of the respondents as indicated by the means reported in the facility perceptions portion of the questionnaire. One respondent noted, "The building is absolutely beautiful and as a Black student I appreciate it." Additionally, the artwork was highly perceived by all student respondents. One student

reported that the center has a "very beautiful-aesthetic, what struck me right away is that a certain culture is created by the art and common spaces. It invokes but [*sic*] a sense of history and we-ness." It is important to note, however, that the majority of the artwork was hung during the time period of this study. Therefore, the new artwork may have been especially prominent for respondents when completing the questionnaire.

Lack of Awareness of Services

Respondents reported a low use of the student organization office and holding student organization meetings. This may be due to a general lack of awareness of the services offered by the NMBCC. Specific referents included, "I am largely unaware of many of the services offered by the Neal Marshall BCC. Perhaps communication/good press would help inform more of the student body." Respondents also reported they are unaware of the location of the information desk which impacts the awareness students have of events and services offered by the center. "No one is ever at the information desk," wrote one student. In contrast, the computer lab was rated high as a utilized space for the total sample. However, students may be unaware of the location of the actual computer lab. Though the questionnaire refers to the computer lab located on the second floor of the NMBCC, researchers observed this lab was often empty whereas another room of computers in the AACC Library, labeled as the Collaborative Learning Center, was often used and thus probably perceived as the center's computer lab.

Administrative Distance

Results from the study implied a potential disconnect between the students who responded to the questionnaire and the administration at the NMBCC. Although one student referred to an administrator as, "always available and willing to help students..." overall NMBCC respondents reported that they do not visit personnel in the administrative office for mentorship or other needs. As purported from Tomlinson (1992), one aspect of a successful BCC is quality interaction between students and staff. Additionally, the interactions faculty and staff have with African American students can strongly influence racial identity development in a positive way (Torres, et al., 2003).

Student Wants and Needs

Students are using the center, but they have different wants and needs from what is currently being offered. This incongruence can have a negative impact on student persistence. The levels of social and academic integration can impact students' decisions to persist or depart from an institution (Tinto, 1993). Given this, social integration of Black students at PWIs can be particularly difficult and BCCs are meant to fulfill these unique needs

(Tomlinson, 1992). At the NMBCC, for instance, students indicated a desire to have food available in addition to a social space. Students reported specifically, "A pool table room, tv room, comfortable couch is what I want. I want to be able to kick off my shoes and relax and I can't do that now" and "It may also benefit the center to put some type of refreshment stand like at the library. It would bring more people here." These respondent suggestions would make students feel more comfortable and at ease in the NMBCC environment.

Recommendations

In interpreting themes from the results, several recommendations surfaced. Major recommendations include incorporating student feedback when making administrative decisions, create a home-like atmosphere in the center, mission assessment, and enhancing administrative connections. Additionally, there are several suggestions for future research. These recommendations are specific to the NMBCC and also worthy of considerations for stakeholders conducting assessments of BCCs at PWIs.

Incorporation of Student Feedback

It was clear from specific themes such as student wants and needs that students, Black students in particular, should have a stronger voice within BCCs. Torres and others (2003) cited the importance of incorporating the views and opinions of students during the formation phase of policy development because students are impacted by end results. To increase student satisfaction with culture center offerings, it is useful to examine how students utilize programs and services currently available to them. Through listening to direct student feedback, administrators may gain a realistic appraisal of student use and perception.

Create a Home-like Atmosphere in the Center

The need to create a home-like environment was especially salient in students' written comments in this study. Historically, BCCs provide a "home away from home" for Black students on PWIs and respondents of the study identified this cultural element as a salient need (Patton, 2004). In keeping with the incorporation of student feedback, BCCs may consider the following characteristics to create a more home-like atmosphere: comfortable furniture, social areas for students with games and a television, and food services. A comfortable environment provides an atmosphere that allows them to share the Black experience.

Mission Assessment

Assessment of individual BCC missions in light of student needs could

help centers more effectively serve the Black student populations on their campuses. Kuh (2000) suggested the opportunity for student growth begins with an assessment of institutional objectives. Pertaining to BCCs, Bennett (1971) emphasized that "for Black students, the center will be a place for defining and redefining Afro-American culture in whatever way seems most relevant to them" (p.19). The unique needs of Black students on individual campuses become clearer through assessment of center missions.

Enhance Administrative Connections

Students in this study did not indicate strongly established connections with administration for mentorship or administrative needs. However, research emphasizes the positive impact of faculty and administrative mentorship for Black students at PWIs. Specifically, interactions both inside and outside the classroom help students feel they matter and are cared about, ultimately aiding their academic and social integration on campus (Astin, 1999; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Tinto, 1993). Administrators working at BCCs have the opportunity to connect with students through casual, yet meaningful interaction and dialogue. Those who can facilitate this process create a more supportive environment for Black students.

Future Research

BCCs should consider conducting individual environmental assessments to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Additional research at the NMBCC and other BCCs is recommended through longitudinal studies as well as studies including the perspectives of students, staff, and administration. More specific studies such as examinations of programming effectiveness and congruency between programs offered and espoused missions may yield additional insights as well.

Conclusion

The NMBCC has expanded the range of opportunities for Black students at IUB. NMBCC staff, administration, and students have utilized the space for educational and social purposes. With the continued commitment to improve the environment and services provided by the NMBCC, the benefits of the center are likely to increase. It is hoped that this study will aid in this process. The method for an environmental assessment like this one can be applied across the country to investigate the transactional relationship between student use and perception of BCCs on PWIs.

References

- Astin, A. W. (1999). Student development: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 518-523.
- Bennett, W. (1971). The Afro-American culture center. *Harvard Journal of Afro-American Affairs*, 2(2), 18-29.
- Bridges, B. K. & McClure, M. L. (2004). *A home to call their own: A history of the Neal-Marshall African American culture center*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Fraenkel, J. R. & Wallen, N. E. (2003). *How to design and evaluate research in education*. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies Inc.
- Hefner, D. (2002). Black cultural centers: Standing on shaky ground? *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 18(26), 22-30.
- Hurtado, S., Milem, J., Clayton-Pederson, A., & Allen, W. (1999). *Enacting diverse learning environments: Improving the climate for racial/ethnic diversity in higher education*. (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report Volume 26, No. 8) Washington, DC: The George Washington University, Graduate School of Education and Human Development.
- Indiana University Archives. (n.d.). *Black Culture Center, 109 North Jordan Avenue, Bloomington, Indiana* [photograph]. Bloomington, Indiana.
- Indiana University Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center. (2001). Retrieved September 24, 2004, from <http://www.indiana.edu/~nmbcc/mission.html>
- Indiana University Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center. (2003). Retrieved September 24, 2004, from <http://www.indiana.edu/~nmbcc/history.html>
- Jones, L. (2001). Creating an affirming culture to retain African American students during the postaffirmative action era in higher education. In L. Jones. (Ed.), *Retaining African Americans in higher education* (pp. 3-20). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Kuh, G.D. (2000). Understanding campus environments. In M. J. Barr, & M. K. Desler. (Eds.), *The handbook of student affairs administration* (pp. 50-72). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kuh, G.D. & Whitt, E.J. (1988). *The invisible tapestry: Culture in American colleges and universities*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, 17(1). Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, Graduate School of Education and Human Development.
- Lee, S. (2002, January 15). Creating the right cultural center for your campus. *NASPA NetResults*. Retrieved on September 25, 2003 from <http://www.naspa.org/netresults/index.cfm>
- National Survey of Student Engagement. (2002). *The college student report 2003*. Indiana: Indiana University.
- Pace, C. R. & Kuh, G. D. (1998). *College student experiences questionnaire*. Indiana: Indiana University.
- Patton, L. D. (2004). From protest to progress? An examination of the relevance, relationships and roles of Black culture centers in the undergraduate experiences of Black students at predominantly White institutions (Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 2004).
- Pittman, E. (1994). Cultural centers on predominantly white campuses: Campus cultural and social comfort equals retention. *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 11(16), 104.
- Princes, C. D. W. (1994, March). *The precarious question of black cultural centers versus multicultural centers*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education, Harrisburg, PA.

- Strange, C. C. & Banning, J. H. (2001). *Educating by design: Creating campus learning environments that work*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Strange, C. C. & Banning, J. H. (2001). *Physical environments: The role of design and space*. In Strange & Banning, *Educating by design*.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tomlinson, L. M. (1992). A qualitative investigation of administrators' assessments of cultural centers on predominantly white campuses. In M. Lang, & C. A. Ford. (Eds.), *Strategies for retaining minority students in higher education*. (pp. 85-94). Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.
- Torres, V., Howard-Hamilton, M. F., & Cooper, D. L. (2003). *Identity development of diverse populations: Implications for teaching and administration in higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Turner, C. S. V. (1994). Guests in someone else's house: Students of color. *Review of Higher Education*, 17(4), 355-370.
- Upcraft, M. L., & Schuh, J. H. (1996). Assessing campus environments. In L. Upcraft & J. Schuh. (Eds.), *Assessment in Student Affairs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Upcraft, M. L., & Schuh, J. H. (2000). Assessment in student affairs. In M. J. Barr, & M. K. Desler. (Eds.), *The handbook of student affairs administration* (pp. 257-264). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Benjamin Correia graduated from the HESA program in 2005. He received a B.A. in Religious Studies from Albertson College of Idaho in 2001. At IUB, he served as a Graduate Supervisor at Wright Quadrangle for Residential Programs and Services and Building Manager of the Indiana Memorial Union. Ben greatly contributed to the research and development of this report but was unable to participate in the preparation for publication.

Laura Davis graduated from the HESA program in 2005. She received a B.A. in English from the University of Vermont in 2003. At IUB, she served as a Counselor in the Office of Financial Aid and as a Graduate Supervisor at Wright Quadrangle for Residential Programs and Services.

Lucy LePeau graduated from the HESA program in 2005. She received a B.A. in Psychology from Marquette University in 2000. At IUB, she served as a Resident Leadership Specialist at Willkie Quadrangle for Residential Programs and Services.

Adam Patricoski graduated from the HESA program in 2005. He received a B.A. in English from Saint Vincent College in 2003. At IUB, he served as a Graduate Supervisor at Briscoe Residence Center for Residential Programs and Services.

Michael Schmeckebier graduated from the HESA program in 2005. He received a B.S. in Public Affairs from Indiana University in 2000. At IUB, he served as a Graduate Assistant at the Career Development Center.

Indiana University
Higher Education and Student Affairs
Gift Form

As members of the Indiana University Student Personnel Association, we thank you for your contribution to the organization! Your continued support is crucial to the financial health of the Journal. We hope you consider sending a gift this year as you enjoy the 2005 edition of this high-quality student publication.

Please accept my gift of \$ _____

For: _____ IU Student Personnel Association (32-E009-15-7)
_____ Other _____ (38-E009-02-2)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Please make checks payable to the Indiana University Foundation, the designated fundraising agent of Indiana University.

****Please be sure to note on your donation that the gift should be directed to the Indiana University Student Personnel Association (32-E009-15-7). All donations marked "Education" will be directed to the School of Education general account.*

I/we wish to make my/our gift by (please check one):

_____ Mastercard _____ Visa _____ Check Enclosed

Card # _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

The Indiana University Fund supports new and ongoing projects and special initiatives by providing funds for immediate use throughout the University. A portion of funds and/or income therefrom may be used to defray costs of raising and/or administering the funds.

Mail To: IU Foundation/School of Education
PO Box 2298
Bloomington, IN 47402-2298