

Enrollment Management & Student Affairs
Cultural Resource Centers

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March 2016

Student Speak Out Memo

On December 1, 2015, Portland State University (PSU) students organized a “Students of Color Speak Out”. At this event, many students shared personal experiences of racial injustices and challenges with inclusive spaces, curriculum content, and campus climate.

Several members of the PSU Diversity Action Council (DAC) attended the day-long event to show solidarity as well as capture testimonials and information that would help support the University’s diversity work. Those notes are included here.

One result of the Speak Out was University President Wim Wiewel responding to demands set forth by the students. This came in the form of an announcement of the creation of two additional Cultural Resource Centers aimed at serving the African/African American/Black and Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander student community to be opened by Fall 2016. Our website serves to share information about the progress made to open and maintain these two new student centers.

<https://www.pdx.edu/dmss/gathering-space-building-community>

We admire the students for their courage, honesty and advocacy for progressive change.

Sincerely,

Cultural Resource Centers

Portland State University

Students of Color Speak Out Notes

December 1, 2015

Note taker: Kirsten Keith

9:00am - 12:00 noon - Student of Color Listening Session

students started the conversation with a smudge ceremony and introductions of name and pronouns

Question prompts were posted around the room and on social media (<https://www.facebook.com/events/1016315305077480/1022194847822859/>) to provide opportunities for engagement

discussion centered around below question prompts

Question:

gender pronouns not being respected in the classroom from faculty

faculty using texts and materials that are problematic and discuss marginalized identities in derogatory ways

faculty not being open to feedback or critique on problematic content in classes some awesome faculty that support marginalized students

white students using People of Color (POC) spaces to “access more diversity” and “learn” about POC.

A balance needs to be created on campus (especially in classrooms) where marginalized students are not used as teaching or experiential tools. “I’m not your social experiment”.

Question: Do you feel important, included, valued on campus?

No, identities not reflected in leadership on campus or in Portland. Impacts feeling of important No, there’s not African American Center

feel valued by other students for diverse perspective but don't feel valued through curriculum I.E. the ethical standards in Social Work are very white centered

"My experience is never ever in the textbooks"

PSU being lauded at the most diverse campus doesn't feel good because there aren't faculty who look like me

repeated requests for inclusion of indigenous populations in class and request repeatedly ignored. Resources were recommended - feels like erasure. Support provided through NASCC.

Had to find resource centers and carve out a home on campus. feel alienated from the rest of campus.

academics designed for one type of learning and one type of mind - neurodivergent people funneled to DRC - issues must be validated through DRC

Faculty not trained to work with people who learn differently

have to explain myself in humiliating and embarrassing ways when trying to access supportive services like tutoring and library services

adjunct faculty are not properly compensated or trained to work with neurodivergent people

feeling overvalued and undervalued - faculty saying they value marginalized students' voices faculty annoyed if marginalized students bring up issues and topics that do not align with course content

marginalized students expected to speak for their entire populations

faculty teach curriculum without acknowledging contemporary events happening in the world like Black Lives Matter etc.

Islamophobia and death threats are carried with me into campus

Such a gift to get to sit in classes where I feel respected and have the opportunity to be vulnerable

Indigenous Nations program is a safe space to feel honored.
“Amazing to have that space”

I don't know how to create that space in other programs

sensitive topics bring up racist thoughts from peers - faculty and mentors don't actively participate in the discussion. Faculty do not know truth of marginalized communities

“We aren't dead - we're alive and in class” Safe space conversations feel like they are meant for white students

professors are not trained or knowledgeable about how to interrupt racist and other harmful ideas presented in class conversation and curricula

Social Justice classes focused on diversity 101 for white students

“I don't want to feel like my education is always a struggle I haven't had the energy to engage in those conversations and be traumatized”

It's draining to have to educate and call out faculty about racism in their classes - it shouldn't have to be a student's role

“We should get credit for carrying these tiring conversations”

There needs to be some reciprocity for the work students have to do to educate faculty and deal with daily microaggressions

students are tired - they just want to get through the class INS department is where I feel loved

the university has money to make t-shirts that say diversity but we don't have money to educate faculty to be knowledgeable about diverse issues - “it's unacceptable”

Experience of having a faculty of color who built a classroom experience where it was a viable option to call out racist language in an affirming way

mechanisms need to be created to educate faculty about how to better

handle oppressive conversations in classrooms to create more robust educational environments

Break Taken

Question: How do we help create the institution we want?

Professors need to be willing to call out or address problematic behavior have faculty of color to catch problematic moments and interrupt those moments have a real place for students to congregate why are the indigenous nations and gender, race, and nation faculty in a run down building with asbestos why won't campus make room for alternate funding structures (tribal funding in example) that does not align with PSU deadlines that cause students to accrue fees and penalties etc. if folks have time, get on university committees addressing PSU's strategic plan make it a requirement for the board of trustees to have practical experience with what students are experiencing on campus (sit in on classes etc)

process should be created that allows for an ongoing conversations with faculty who have been reported for being racist etc in class evaluate faculty on their strengths and weaknesses and desire to be an educator want faculty that understand how anxiety works to help alleviate feelings of power distance that prevents students from attending office hours and engaging with faculty in meaningful ways thanks to faculty that chose to attend the event to create a connection between faculty and students mitigation strategies to aid students in speaking out in class to educate their peers -

“what strategies can PSU offer to help students who do want to address racism and other problematic behavior in class?” what would it look like to organize as students of color? Could we have a board that communicates directly with administrators? It's important to function within academia to have a structured way to communicate with the campus administration.

Question: How do you feel when oppression surfaces in the classroom? What have your instructors and ta's done/not done

about it? What worked? What didn't work?

feels isolating - experiences get framed as the student's problem and not the institution's problem lack of institutional memory in regards to student activism within academic departments it's been the faculty and TA's that produce oppressive experiences and curricula in classrooms oppressive language is used in classes that are addressing oppression - no formal way to address issues besides discussing amongst students - frustrating and disheartening

overwhelming - "triggering of trauma around erasure and assimilation certain faculty request assimilation into larger pedagogy of thought" what worked: faculty and TA's have noticed communication styles - makes room for many different communication styles to speak comfortably what worked: Faculty and TA's have asked how they can be supported in the classroom accountability process for faculty around oppression within the classroom oppression in the classroom feels "shitty and awful" speaking out in the classroom feels isolating from the learning environment - produces a dynamic where students are carrying the burden of emotional labor for other students inherent power dynamic between faculty and students makes addressing a problematic faculty member intimidating follow up with faculty and ask them to explain oppressive issues in the classroom Specific report of faculty member who feels like a bully, violated rights, feels isolated from class, had to leave the class and organize a by arrangement to finish the required course. Feel set up to fail when professors are not culturally competent especially when that faculty member is the only person who teaches a required course.

Student of color isolation begins when they leave their homes and continues on campus. Oppressive moments in class feels threatening - grades are at stake. Specific experience shared that student called out professor on inaccurate information and received punitive grading for calling out faculty member. for neurodivergent students, the policy that missing more than one class results in a grade issue is problematic and an access issue. Accommodations are not enough. Policies on missing class for family death etc are not

designed to work for all communities

Thanks given and transition to next event

Notetaker: Virginia Luka

12:00pm - 2:30pm - Lunch & Film: "WALKOUT"

Prayer offered by Cornel Pewewardy Film: Walkout by Edward James Olmos

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0452703/>

2:30 pm: Discussion: "Race in Education: How students of color can impact change"

Tony acknowledged the conversations happening on Facebook regarding this event.

Reactions to the movie:

- "Film featured a struggle I was not familiar with, I am thankful for it"
- The content was new to me...and it is important for us to know about it, especially Latino folks
- The movie was really empowering, especially seeing they were high school students
- the movie featured the power of organization, seeing the family support was also important to see
- Movie was powerful and inspiring, and relevant for today
- Reminded me of the apartheid movement, the same energy, empowering
- the movie is a testament to what can happen when you get out of your comfort zone
- This movie speaks to what students can do, get people to rally

together for change

- Power film...participated in a walk out a few years ago (2006)...they were suspended for participating...the walk out was to protest racist policies

- “I have seen this movie before...and the movie was what inspired me to go to college...”

- As a college student...if you walk out of class...you will miss a lecture...I need to think about this more

- The Latino/a population is the largest minority group...we are still struggling...movies like this keep our spark going to gain access to more resources to support us

- I grew up in LA and was familiar with this historical event...hard to believe some of these were happening in the 1960s...corporal punishment, janitorial punishment, not being able to speak your home language without punishment

- I was thinking the whole time that the fight for justice is very similar...the police brutality, protest...it takes baby steps for the larger movement to happen

- Moved by the movie to see so many young people fighting for justice

- movie was powerful, my sister is in high school and faces issues of discrimination

- This movie is a reminder that people need to educate themselves about our different histories

- Communities and students of color continue to push back injustices...only through solidarity can we achieve justice **How can students of color impact change? How do we get our needs met in a way that is sustainable?**

- If you don't try to change something that you don't like...you are a part of it
- We need to understand and get to know other cultures and realities
- Perhaps we should start with changing the system we are at instead of the wider system abroad
- It seems like here...at PSU...it seems like people need to do a lot of groundwork to understand the roots of issues...
- White people in the room...please be cognizant that we (POC) aren't here to educate you, but if you ask us to help you understand...please respect what is shared and reciprocate
- Find an organization that works to support issues that you care about...and if you can't find one...start an organization!
- We need to take care of ourselves (as individuals and as community members)...this is exhausting work...this work constantly falls on the shoulders of students of color
- I like to volunteer, but being a student is a priority...I do what I can...I attend events on campus and post about issues on line to share my thoughts
- In regards to self-care....as a woman of color...I've learned to take care of myself by not explaining who I am to anyone if I don't feel like it
- This place is different, and that is ok...being here, I always feel like I need to be my best self...if they see me being "dumb", then anyone else they see who looks like my...they will think they are "dumb"...so many times people just don't know how words or actions will affect others...I take care of myself by presuming positive intent...I have a conversation with them about what is said...
- Sometimes people don't understand, if you get

offensive...then the other person can get defensive

- This is a war, we are soldiers, we have to take care of ourselves...but it is hard if we are students, working hard and staying up late completing assignments and being involved on campus
- It is central that we need to discuss and acknowledge current events...for example...if I am in a class that is about social justice class...then why aren't we talking about MIZZOU, Ithica, #BLACKLIVESMATTER, etc...
- Be of service in a good way
- This event was set up to create a stage to discuss demands in a positive way...and to celebrate where we come from, and our differences, and our experiences
- It takes belief that something is wrong and to stand up for what is right
- When it happens to one person or group, affect others... ●
2:30pm - 3:30pm - SIGN MAKING This section didn't happen to make more time for discussion. **SMITH BALLROOM 3:30pm - 4:00pm - Doors Open: Smudge Ceremony** Melissa Bennett from the NASCC and a few Indigenous students did a prayer and smudge ceremony in the SMSU Ballroom before the event began **4:00pm - 6:30pm - STUDENTS OF COLOR SPEAK OUT**
- Tony F. played a Black Lives Matter video: "Hell you talk about" by Janelle Monae that called a list of names of People of Color who were murdered recently.
- "Silence is the enemy...sound is the weapon..."
- Melika B. shared part of a letter she wrote for Basic Rights Oregon about oppressive acts in Texas.

- A Christian prayer was offered by a Black student.
- There was a dance performance by a student names Hector (he is known for traveling to Mexico to teach dance). The performance is about Love/Lost Love/Shared Love.
- We were introduced to the Alphas, a Greek Fraternity on campus
- We were introduced to the Black Student Union
 - Ask for a Black cultural space
 - Shared “I am PSU” poem
- Tony: Shared debrief of event so far and asked for faculty and staff who have been participating in the event to go on stage and share, too.
- Alyssa Pagan shared:
 - The strategic plan states its intention to “capitalize on Diversity”
 - PSU is proud of the diversity on campus, and makes money off of brown people
 - Seems like PSU is only supporting diversity to make money
 - Addressed White Student Union:
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 - “This is different....we know who started this page” Seemed to imply this was created by a PSU student who “they” knew.
- Patrick from PSU Kaibigan - Filipino American Student Association:
 - Ask for API Cultural Center
 - Spoke about the declining enrollment of APIs at PSU

- Mentioned API making up the 2nd largest minority at PSU
- Janit,
 - Ask for API student retention coordinator
 - API academic program/curriculum
 - API Cultural Center
 - Ethnic-based scholarships
 - Disaggregation of API data (allow us to see who is here, who is left out)
- Jennifer, PSU Vietnamese Student Association:
 - Ask for an API Cultural Center
 - Spoke about the lack of student support for API students
 - PSU can do better Other list of demands
- Several asks for API and Black cultural centers
- trans students of color not feeling safe

PSU Coalition for Asian Pacific American Studies

- disarm PSU
- students not seeing themselves represented in the staff/faculty/curriculum
- hire more faculty/staff of color
 - create a taskforce for Black student support
 - improve recruitment and retention of students of color A student read an open letter to President Wiewel. ASHE/ NASCC students shared their positive experience of having a

center dedicated to their population. They asked for an upgraded curriculum that highlight their Indigenous histories (they shared that some classes they've taken exposed them to Euro-centric historical content that can perpetuate stereotyping, misconceptions, and the oppression of Indigenous populations).

Two student from PCC did a brief skit and shared their thoughts, which echo what other students have already said.

End of program, around 8 pm.