Multicultural Center Planning Group
Report and Recommendations
May 2017

Submitted by:

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**Background**

Members of the Multicultural Center Planning group met for ten weeks in Spring 2017 to complete their charge: “…to recommend a vision, purpose statement, and plan for a multicultural center to the KSU Foundation that can be used for a feasibility study and case statement development. The group is also charged to honor the work completed previously, using it as a starting point for further planning.”

As part of this charge, the group:

- reviewed the original conceptual work, gathered information, and reviewed similar models at peer institutions,
- worked to address the questions raised by donors and others related to the use, outcomes, budget, and staff for the center,
- invited broad participation of stakeholders across the university – student organizations, faculty groups, department, units, any group or individual that wished to participate – to address key planning questions,
- engaged individual donors, corporate diversity and inclusion experts, and others to bring additional perspectives to the effort, and
- based on the feedback received, completed recommendations herein submitted.

As part of our learning, we met with Tim Taylor of Phillips 66, Brandon Clark and Mirta Chavez of the Office of Diversity, Bill Smriga of the K-State Union, and with the Senior Leadership Team: Provost and Senior Vice President April Mason, Vice President Pat Bosco, KSU Foundation CEO Greg Willems, and Interim Associate Provost Zelia Wiley.

Two campus surveys were conducted: a group survey that was shared with presidents and advisors of all university student groups (via OrgSync) and with deans, directors, and department heads to share with faculty groups (via the university leadership listserv). We received 131 responses to the group survey, from which the individual survey was developed. The individual survey was completed by 790 individuals (65% of respondents are undergraduates). A wide range of perspectives are reflected in the survey data, which in turn informs this report and set of recommendations.

A bibliography of resources consulted and created by the planning group is attached. Documents will be archived as part of the institutional record.

**What we learned**

Through this process of inviting broad campus participation, the planning group identified the following key findings:

The center needs to be a space for coming together.

There are students at K-State who do not feel welcome, comfortable, or that they belong.

All students, faculty, and staff need greater cultural awareness and engagement to prepare well
for and succeed in their professional, personal, and civic lives.

A center is one component of the needed infrastructure to advance diversity, inclusion, and social justice at K-State.

A center offers the opportunity to coordinate, promote, and integrate existing efforts and build new ones.

A center demonstrates the value the university places on diversity, inclusion, and social justice.

A center communicates a welcome, supportive, and enriching environment for the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty and staff as well as students.

Current MSO space is inadequate. Much of the students’ work and activities are conducted off campus, occurring in faculty and staff homes and dependent on students’ ability to store and transfer items, and so are invisible to many.

Location matters.

People are unclear as to how a center will be funded, and some are opposed to using state and tuition funding to build a center given the current constrained fiscal environment.

There are priorities for addressing diversity, inclusion, and social justice, such as scholarships, that compete with the funding necessary for a center.

A center is perceived by a minority of respondents as part of a “leftist, liberal agenda” and could be polarizing for some members of the K-State community in this political climate.

Terms such as “multicultural,” “diversity,” and “inclusion” mean different things to different individuals and groups, and thus coming to consensus about absolute definitions of such terms was difficult even for the planning group.

Communicating the purpose of the center is challenging. Even though earlier efforts for a multicultural center had the dual purpose of addressing needs of multicultural students and inviting broad engagement with issues of diversity and social justice, perception persists among some respondents that a center could exclude or divide constituents, rather than serve the university as a whole.

Survey respondents believe a center would benefit them as individuals in the following ways:

- Increase Civic and Community Engagement
- Promote Educational Success
- Augment Workplace Satisfaction and Effectiveness
- Inspire Campus Involvement
- Encourage Personal Growth
- Foster Career Development
While perspectives vary on how well K-State supports reflection, education and action on issues of diversity, inclusion, and social justice through its coursework and programs, use of space to support such activity was rated consistently low.

We learned that the most valued use of the center is for student organization space and resources, including multipurpose/recreational/kitchen space; services and programs for student success, including those that support recruitment, retention, and graduation of students of color/underrepresented students; cultural competency development programs and events for students, faculty and staff; and community outreach activities.

**Recommendations**

Given what we learned, the planning group has based the recommended vision, purpose statement, and plan on the following observations and guidance:

We need space that is welcoming, comfortable, and provides a sense of belonging to students who have been historically underrepresented, particularly domestic multicultural students.

We need space that invites everyone to learn and engage with cultures and experiences different from their own.

We need space that recognizes and encourages intersectionality, specifically including the LGBT affinity groups under its umbrella.

The center requires champions, including a leader with passion and accountability for it success.

There are important connections to be made with curriculum, university leadership, the community, and other centers of student support. The center should serve as a community resource on diversity and social justice.

A center could advance expanded and needed programming including bias incident response, providing an opportunity for students, faculty, and staff to report incidents, process their experiences in a constructive way through private and group counseling sessions, and participate in educational programs that help individuals and groups combat bias.

The center must provide adequate space to support the work of MSOs currently performed off campus, including a kitchen, rehearsal/performance space, office space and storage.

The location of the center should be central to the direction of campus growth and development, and positioned to be well supported and sustainable.

We must communicate clearly that the center will be privately funded.

Scholarship dollars are a priority--this is not an either/or proposition. Scholarships offered to students who then do not feel welcome or supported are ineffective. A center confirms that students worthy of recruitment and admission are worthy also of support through graduation.
We must communicate through this center that greater cultural awareness fosters neither a conservative or liberal agenda, but rather is a requirement for students, faculty, and staff to operate effectively in today’s world, which is part of our charge as a land grant institution.

The center should be named and described in ways that best mark it as a place of coming together for reflection, education, and action.

Below are the vision, purpose statement, and plan for moving forward recommended by the planning group, in preparation and support of a feasibility study and case statement development by the KSU Foundation.

**Vision:**

*Coming Together for Reflection, Education, and Action*

The center brings people together for reflection, education, and action on issues of diversity and social justice; expands students’ cultural horizons while honoring their respective cultural experiences; provides a welcoming environment for prospective and current multicultural students and for students of varied sexualities, genders, abilities, and religions; and promotes and fosters the intercultural and cross cultural understanding, skills, and strategies for students to be successful at K-State and beyond.

The center will both contribute to and assert a campus environment that respects and cares for all students.

**Purpose Statement:**

Our land grant mission compels us to provide access to learning, and to improve the quality of life of Kansans and of all communities where our graduates live and work. Our K-State 2025 strategic vision, with the cross-cutting element of diversity, compels us to lift the profile of Kansas State University as a nationally recognized leader in the development and support of multicultural students, and as a welcoming and inclusive learning environment for all members of the K-State community. The purpose of the center is two-fold, and must be pursued as a *both/and* not an *either/or*: to improve the campus experience and quality of life for multicultural and other types of diverse students who will become an ever-growing proportion of the K-State student population, and to enhance the promotion of diversity and cross cultural understanding and engagement among all university constituents on and off campus.

The center offers an opportunity to explore, understand, and confront structural inequity, and provide practical, hands on experiences to enhance attitudes and norms of inclusion and collaboration. This orientation allows any marginalized individuals or groups to find support and voice as part of the center, as well as a physical space for organizations, departments and other stakeholders to engage in reflection, education, and action. This center will advance cultural appreciation, foster collaboration, promote discourse, engagement and better inclusion, and will stand as a tangible symbol of K-State’s commitment to a truly inclusive K-State community.
Plan:

Essential Components

As a space for reflection, education, and action – a place to belong and a place to engage challenging issues of difference, equity, and justice, essential components include:

- Adequate space to support MSO activities, including meeting space, offices, storage, commercial grade kitchen, and step and dance rehearsal space (mirrored, moderated sound/sound-proof)

- Space for services and programs that support recruitment, retention, progression, and graduation of historically underrepresented students currently run out of the Office of Diversity (such as meeting and office space for Project Impact, College for a Day, etc.)

- Informal and formal gathering spaces to engage with campus and community for programming, advocacy, and dialogue.

- Informal and formal spaces for group and individual reflection

- Separate and distinct space, with own entrance and identity

- Culturally-relevant architecture and design

- Green/sustainable design elements and systems

- Staffed and/or equipped appropriately for maximum student access

- Barrier-free (physically and psychologically)

Expected Outcomes

With appropriate space, the center will:

- Improve the campus experience and quality of life for students as well as faculty and staff we wish to attract and be part of the K-State community

- Serve as a nucleus supporting a dynamic network of services, programs, and initiatives across the university to advance diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice

- Bring on campus and make visible the remarkable work of our MSOs

- Improve the recruitment, retention, and graduation of students of color
• Improve the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty and staff

• Challenge members of the K-State community to engage cross-culturally to improve the campus climate

• Build ally-ship, form connections, and address the many forms of marginalization and discrimination experienced by our students, faculty, staff, and community

• Serve a greater community than our campus community by being a resource for Manhattan and the State of Kansas, able to impact regional, and likely state thinking about diversity issues

• Demonstrate the university’s principles of community

**Next Steps**

While the committee addressed many of the questions identified as necessary to move forward with a feasibility study and case statement development, including defining the uses, outcomes, and opportunities of the space, there are key decision points that must be resolved by senior leadership before the KSU Foundation can successfully pursue a funding strategy.

**Leadership** – In the organizational structure currently under consideration, the Associate Vice President for Student Life/Director of Multicultural Student Affairs would have primary responsibility for the proposed center. We presume this includes being a champion on and off campus, assisting with fundraising, and working with senior leadership to determine the offices, staff, and programs to be housed in the center. These decisions inform the building specifics such as square footage, number and uses of spaces within the building footprint, etc., which are required to determine project cost. These decisions also address critical questions related to the resources needed to staff and support the center.

The proposed organizational structure leaves unresolved how opportunities to bridge student affairs and academic affairs will be pursued, such as the Tilford grants and other cultural diversity curriculum efforts. This also has implications for uses/occupants of the center.

**Naming** – As mentioned above, the center needs to be named and described in ways that best reflect this as a place of coming together for reflection, education, and action. Terms such as diversity, inclusion, and social justice can become dated, politicized, or otherwise unhelpful to advancing the work of the center. A few suggestions from the committee:

• Identify a word that is a symbol and has meaning of what the center represents, perhaps an Osage word (particular to place and culture)

• Consider the Dahlia flower as a potential name of the center (please see link that discusses the meaning of the flower [http://www.flowermeaning.com/dahlia-flower-meaning/](http://www.flowermeaning.com/dahlia-flower-meaning/)), combined with the themes of reflection, education, and action that surround
the Coretta Scott Gardens as timeless themes: The Dahlia Center of Reflection, Education and Action

- Consider naming the center for a person who represents the purpose and mission of the center. Black Faculty Staff Alliance recommended to name the center after Veryl Switzer

**Timeline** – In this transitional time of leadership and organizational restructuring, a definitive timeline is difficult to recommend. The committee wishes to emphasize, however, that continued progress must be made, made transparent, and timelines must be developed and communicated to ensure forward progress and accountability.

We recommend that this report be a) shared with the university cabinet, b) utilized in the search and hiring process for the university’s new leader(s) of diversity efforts, and c) presented with a charge to the new leader at the start of his or her service to the university. The senior leadership team can begin now to address questions related to issues of resources, organization, and staffing, and develop scenarios for consideration necessary to move expeditiously to feasibility study/case statement development.

Members of the committee welcome the opportunity to continue to inform and advocate for the advancement of this center in whatever ways are helpful.

**A note about fundraising:**
The committee understands and recognizes that this project will be funded solely through philanthropic dollars and that donor capacity is limited. Concerns were raised that the donor pipeline for funding diversity initiatives needs to be developed. Again, if members of the committee can be helpful with ideas, networks, or resources, we welcome the opportunity.
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