

About the Multicultural Center

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Interim Director Kim Stewart-Brinston talks about the Multicultural Center.

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Transcript

For me, one of the things I gained from IUPUI is a sense of who I am, outside of some of the general stereotypes that people have for me. I had a chance to grow, and, hopefully, the Multicultural Center will provide that same support that I felt I had as an IUPUI student, through nurturing mentors, interaction with strong faculty who cared about me, who actually gave me that extra push to make it through the degree.

And, that's something else that I hope the Multicultural Center does. While, ultimately, we will focus on some of the student life programming and helping to complement what happens currently through Campus & Community Life, I really want to see a strong academic push from the Multicultural Center, helping students from underrepresented populations get better connected to the services here to help them graduate in a timely fashion.

Conversations about a Multicultural Center started on campus a while ago. I know, for the last five years that I've been on campus, there have been a group of people who have been very interested or concerned that IUPUI has not developed the Multicultural Center. Even as I started working on some community outreach activities, I would hear things about Vincennes having a multicultural center, and all of these other little institutions. So I really started to say "why doesn't IUPUI have one?" And, a group of concerned faculty and staff did approach the Chancellor about three years ago to talk about the need for a multicultural center, or the idea of a multicultural center, and I was a part of that group.

In those initial conversations, there was definite buy-in. But, we didn't have enough of a push from the campus community to really get the momentum going. At the same time, there was also some concerns with students about how they were being addressed, or how they were being supported, here at IUPUI. So, because of that, there was a whole movement with the BSI [Black Student Initiative] that also addressed the multicultural center.

As the interim director, the charge is simple: to begin transitioning the space. To help get the partners who are part of the Multicultural Center get moved into their permanent locations. To help to define some of the activity that will come out of the Multicultural Center initially. To work with students, faculty and staff to provide the opportunities for ways for them to collaborate, to work on new programs, to have the energy to move workshops and things like that forward. The last thing that I'll be working on is to get the structure in place, so when the new vice chancellor steps in, they're stepping in with the facility structure in place. But, ultimately, the new vice chancellor will be the one to put their stamp on the center, and will be the ones that really direct how the center develops over time. This is just a short appointment to keep us moving, to ensure that no progress is lost as we continue to search for a new vice chancellor for diversity.

First and foremost, you should expect to see people moving in. You will not have students saying "UC is just vacated and no one's there." We will move in to the space, we will get people in the space, we will begin utilizing the space for student programming. There will be some specific student programs that will come out in the next semester. I think we'll also start to see more opportunities for student engagement and input. One of the things that I want to be very clear about is that students have a voice in how the Multicultural Center progresses at this point. And, hopefully that sets the stage so as it continues to progress, the new vice chancellor continues to have a concerted effort to make sure student voices are included. For now, what I want is their input.

The Multicultural Center is really seen as the first floor and basement of the University College building. So, with that in mind, there will be some renovations that have to happen. We have Jag Junction that's been vacated upstairs, and we can't just leave that space as it is. So, one of the things that has been proposed is to take that space and transform it into a multicultural resource library center, where we have videos, we have books, we have space for workshops. Where we can really make that space usable, but advance people's understanding of culture, of identity development on this campus. So that's some of the things we're thinking about in that space. Right now, there was an initial committee that was brought together to talk about the initial implementation of the Multicultural Center. They are the ones who actually came up with the idea of an interim director being put in place. They definitely had some ideas about this. I think we need to expand the conversation and get other people's input about how they see the multicultural resource center work for them. And, that's the thing, we don't want to create anything that's not going to be used, so we need to make sure that when we think about that resource center, how does it serve faculty, how does it serve staff, and how are students going to interact with it. If we can get a good idea of that, it's going to help us in the development of that space.

Also, upstairs, the plans are that Adaptive Educational Services are going to move into space upstairs. Based upon the very small location they've had in the basement of Cavanaugh. So, now they will be part of the Multicultural Center. That just adds to the type of cultural engagement we'll be able to provide to students. Because, if we think about being underrepresented students, a lot of time we think about ethnicity. And, that's definitely valid and something we want to address, but then there's some other identities. We need to figure out how do we support students who need to develop a better sense of those identities. So, if we're looking at disabilities, if we're looking at some of the religious diversity, there will be opportunities to kind of engage those students and those populations through the programming we do in the Multicultural Center. A lot of the conversations happening on campus involve where do some of our student organizations belong. And, while we know that they belong within Campus & Community Life and the structures that have been put into place in the Campus Center, they also are looking for some additional space, to have a home in the Multicultural Center. So, definitely the Black Student Union, Latino Student Association, Native American Student Association, the GLBT group, all of them will have space here in the Multicultural Center. In addition to that, our faculty and staff council affinity groups will have space in the Multicultural Center, and a support person.

I think one of the things that the students definitely raised is wanting a space specific to their identity, or a space where they do not feel like they have to define themselves. That I can just be who I am and I don't have to explain certain things. I think that's one of the things that the Multicultural Center will provide, is that space and place to be who you are, outside of the larger environment. But, at the same time, I think it provides the larger community a chance to get a view into the lives our underrepresented student populations, to become a part of the campus, as far as how do we embrace others who are different from us, how do we move forward in our understanding of different cultures.

When we talk about inclusion at IUPUI, yes we want to talk about ethnic diversity, religious diversity, sexual preference, we really want to embrace everybody. But we really have to understand that there are historical reasons why certain populations have been underrepresented. So, we need to also focus specifically on those populations to figure out how best to help them to feel a part of IUPUI, so they are successful here. So, it really is focusing on those racial identities to some point. To say, african american, latino, native american, asian american, even GLBT, how do we get you acclimated to the campus? How do we get you the services that are going to help you transition between high school and college? And, then, how do we help you find a home on the IUPUI campus, where you don't feel you have to explain or defend yourself. You can just be who you are.

During this whole process, the university has kept up to date a diversity website, and I encourage you to go out and look at the diversity website that is on the IUPUI homepage, so you can take a look at all of the committee reports. The conceptualization committee report is there. The implementation committee report has not yet been added, but will be added soon so you can take a look at that. And, as we progress, always you can feel free to contact me and I'm looking forward to input from anyone who has some concerns, or who wants to give some insight in how they or their unit can get involved in the Multicultural Center.