Center for Black Studies

Assessment Report

2005-2010

Dr. LaVerne Gyant, Director
The Center for Black Studies has been here at NIU since 1971 as part of the International Studies Program. It was established in response to student unrest and their demand for cultural programs and events. A curriculum which focused on the contributions, experiences, and history of African people throughout the world, especially here in the United States, was developed and a support center was later included to assist students as they matriculate through the university.

The Center for Black Studies focuses on academics, recruitment and retention, community outreach, and student support. Currently the Center offers a minor in Black Studies, a mentoring program (Survive and Succeed Program), support community service with the DeKalb School District (Clinton Rosette and DeKalb High School), houses a number of student organizations, and support research on all aspects of the experiences of people of African descent.

The Center for Black Studies is committed to academic excellence and the promotion of social responsibility.

Program Objectives for Students:

a. To provide courses that relate to the life, history, culture, and experience of people of African descent
b. Offer an interdisciplinary minor in Black Studies
c. To create programs and activities that will assist in the recruitment and retention of students
d. Provide opportunities for students to participate in community outreach activities
e. Plan programs, lectures, activities, and cultural events
f. Advise and support student organizations
g. Community outreach through hosting campus visitations
h. To be a “home away from home” for students, faculty, staff of African descent
Student Learning Outcomes:

a. To provide students with an opportunity to learn and enhance their knowledge about the life, history, culture, contributions, and experiences of people of African descent
b. To provide students with the tools, information, and support they need to matriculate
c. To prepare student for their role as leaders, scholars, and change agents
d. To provide students with information and activities that will encourage them to attend NIU
e. To plan activities and programs which will enhance students international and community experiences
f. To provide students with the skills and resources which will enhance their educational experience in other classes
g. To design programs and activities which will prepare students to be contributing members of society

Assessment Methods

The assessment utilized at the Center for Black Studies included surveys, course evaluations, review of students papers regarding programs and activities, review of students who are in the minor, and students who participate in the Annual Black Graduation. The majority of the assessment comes from comments from our students.

In the response from the last report, we were informed that our assessment focused more on "activities or functions rather than on measurable student learning outcomes or student retention." Some of this data is difficulty for us to assemble being that our students are majors in colleges such as Liberal Arts and Sciences, Education, Business. So the data that we are reporting does focus mostly on activities and functions. The data that we can present regarding student learning outcomes is very basic—grades, number of students enrolled in classes and the minor. It would be good if we did know how what are students are learning in the courses offered at the Center have been transferable to their major. Likewise, having data on how the Center contributes to the retention is very basic—conversations with students, assisting them with their classes, advising them on what they need to do to get back in school, staying out of trouble, handling financial aid, and other issues. We are looking at ways to see how SPPlan is helping to retain students. Again based on informal data gathering, we do
know that students who have participated in the SPlan have been retained and those who have left, left for financial or personal reasons, could not get into their major, or had academic challenges.

To date we do not have any data on campus visitations, the number of students who may have come to NIU based on their visits, and what students have learned from participating in community outreach programs. In regards to programs and activities, the learning outcomes are limited. In at least four of the classes offered at the Center, students are required to attend at least two programs and write a one paragraph reflection. These reflections are not always shared.

With this in mind, please note that we may not have quantitative data for some of the questions from the last assessment, but we do have qualitative information.

Black Studies Minor and Course Offerings

Objectives:

a. to provide courses that relate to the life, history, culture, and experience of people of African descent
b. Offer interdisciplinary minor in Black Studies

Learning Outcomes:

a. To provide students with an opportunity to learn and enhance their knowledge about the life, history, culture, contributions, and experiences of people of African descent
b. To prepare students for their role as leaders, scholars, and change agents
c. To provide students with the skills and resources which will enhance their educational experience in other classes
d. The Black Studies minor follows the guidelines and model core curriculum as suggested by the

Students enrolled in the minor may apply through the Center for Black Studies. The Black Studies minor requires eighteen hours. This includes 12 hours from core courses and 6 hours from electives, with two concentrations: African (which is limited due to available courses) or African American.
Students who are in the minor come from various majors, we even have some students who have tried to develop a contract major which would allow them to take only Black Studies courses. Currently we have 50 students, and over the last five years 55 students have completed and graduated with the minor. Because students come from various majors, the only way we know who has graduated is if they participate in the Annual Black Graduation. Each year we have approximately 6 students with the minor who participate in the graduation. At the end of each semester, we forward letters to Records and Registration informing them of the students who have completed the minor and what courses they have completed.

In regards to the number of students who do not complete the minor, the number is approximately 5 students each year. The reasons students do not complete the minor is because they have changed their major, especially in BGS or conflict with their major requirements. We do know that at least two students who changed their major to BGS, tried to do a contract major where all their remaining classes would be Black Studies.

Recruitment for students in the minor is generally word of mouth. Information is also shared at Open Houses, organizational fairs, and through guest lectures.

To meet the above objectives, the Center for Black Studies currently has 27 courses on the books. These courses have been designed to meet the recommendations suggested by the National Council for Black Studies, as well as suggestions from students and faculty. Because the minor requires students to take 4 core courses—IDSP 200, IDSP 219, IDSP 300, IDSP 493—we strive to offer these courses each semester. The other courses offered each semester are based on rotation schedule and who is available to teach them. Included in the course offering, we have IDSP 302, special topics, which allow us to teach courses that are not offered by other units or of special interest to the faculty or students. For example, students suggested that we have a class that focus on Black Greek leader organizations. We have been offering this class as a special topic for the last 3 years; enrollment for this
class is about 20 students every fall semester. Another class suggested by staff focus on the development of African American women as leaders. This class has been offered for the past two years with an enrollment of 20 students and is co-taught by 3 staff. Please note that the minor includes courses offered from departments such as political science, sociology, and music. However, many of these courses are on the books but have not been offered in years. For example, Swahili is on the books in Foreign Languages but it is not been taught in several years and they do not have anyone to teach it. So the Center has been offering it as a special topic course, student who need it for credit have to request permission from Foreign Languages to have count as their language requirement. Likewise, these departments have minimal contact with the Center for Black Studies.

Regarding the impact the courses have on the students learning outcome, this is noted via the course evaluation, conversations with students, and the number of students who continue to take Black Studies courses. Over the last 5 years, the enrollments for the classes have increase by 2%. Students enroll in the classes because they cannot get into their major classes, their advisors recommend them especially to those who are on AP, recommendation from their peers, or they notice a class that they feel relates to their major. Attach is a copy of the course evaluation and comments from students.

**S-Plan (Survive and Succeed)**

**Objectives:**

a. Support the recruitment and retention of students of African descent  
b. Plan programs, lectures, activities, and cultural events

**Learning Outcomes:**

a. To provide students with tools, information, and support they need to matriculate  
b. To prepare students for their roles as leaders, scholars, and change agents  
c. To provide students with skills and resources which will enhance their educational experience in other classes

The SPlan Mentoring Program provides freshman and transfer students with a support network
aimed at making their transition to NIU a successful one. The SPlan focus on the following: selecting peer advisors from various Black student organizations on campus; introducing SPlan participants to supportive faculty and staff; and providing a safe haven away from home at the Center for Black Studies. Our vision is to facilitate graduation for all participants.

Students who participate in the SPlan are self-selected and are regularly admitted students and are not connected with Athletics, Honors, Chance, and BMI. However, students who are in all but Chance can, and often do, submit a request to join SPlan; some of them attend all of the SPlan meetings. They learn about the program through campus visitations, open houses, the Minority Reception, and word of mouth. Students generally signed up for the SPlan either at the Minority Reception or open houses. For example, approximately 50 students signed up at the 2010 Minority Reception. All students who sign up are welcome to participate and attend the weekly meetings; however, they all may not have a mentor.

Incoming students are paired with current students who work with them in their transition and completion of college. The pairing of incoming freshman with upperclassmen that share the same interest or attended the same high school has proven to promote success in retention and students getting into their majors. The mentor is able to share some of the challenges that they themselves have encountered and acts as a bridge for the college transition.

The SPlan provides the transition period for students; these students benefit from attending weekly meetings with the entire group and one-on-one with both their mentor and the Coordinator when needed. This year we had a 125 students sign up for SPlan, but only 75 mentors (some took on 3 students) were available. For those students who do not have mentors, they meet with Ms. Regina Curry, coordinator, or a graduate assistant, at least once or twice a month.

It is important to account for student success through their participation in the SPlan, so that we can better track and monitor the effectiveness of this program on student outcomes as it relates to the
total student retention. Again because these students come from a variety of majors, we can only track
their retention until the end of their freshman year.

NIU target goal is 3,200 freshmen, however for the last three years this goal has not been met.
Niu admitted 2,700 freshmen for the 2010/2011 academic year out of this 9% were of African descent,
with 500 of them enrolled in Chance. Of the 9%, 125 participated in SPlan.

How do SPlan students compare academically with those who do not participate? We do not
have this data. Once again, students in the program come from various majors and based on
conversations with them, they do not mention to their advisors that they are in the programs. What we
have found is that students in the SPlan tend to work closer with Ms. Curry versus their advisors. I do
believe that if we could have some cross discussion or work with a cohort of students, we would be able
to obtain this data.

Ms. Curry sends out 250 progress reports twice a semester for both the freshmen and the
mentors. The progress reports are mailed out the 6th and 10th week. Upon receipt of the progress
reports, Ms. Curry meets with the freshmen, discusses their challenges, recommends, and rescoures for
them, and develops a plan that will help them to be successful. The one on one meeting provide the
students with resources and encouragement to achieve a 3.0 GPA or better.

Out of the 150 students monitored since 2007, 103 of those who attended their scheduled
meeting with the coordinator took advantage of the resources (e.g. tutoring, study groups and meeting
with the instructors) are on track for a successful university completion. For those students who ended
with a 2.0 and below for their first semester, we developed a course for the spring semester designed as
an academic exercise to show students of African descent how to succeed on a PWI. In this class
students sign a contract agreeing to accept their responsibility as students; they share their challenges,
seek advice from their colleagues, develop a study and time management plan, and meet with Ms. Curry
every other week outside of class time. To date we have not tracked how successful this class is. Based on conversation with students, we do know the class has helped a number of students.

Another example of the success of the SPlan, was identified when the Center revised the John H. Clarke Honor Society. Last spring we invited 404 students of African descent with a 3.0 or better to join the honor society. Names of students were obtained from Records and Registration. Out of the 95 students who were inducted in the honor society, 35 of them were or had been members of SPlan.

In regards to retention, we do know that students who have participated in SPlan have been retained and graduated. The data for this is based on the students who serve as mentors their sophomore year and again by those who participate in the Annual Black Graduation. For those who have not been retained, they have shared with Ms. Curry why they choose to leave NIU—transferred to another institution, left for medical or family reasons, for financial reasons, could not get in their majors, or encountered adjustment issues.

Research shows that students who are involved in activities and become a member of student organization develop a sense of inclusion and ownership in the institution. Again, based on general conversations we do know that a number of students who have participated in SPlan have gone on to be active in student organizations and student leaders.

Here are a few of the outcomes students have met thru their participation in SPlan:

- Freshmen experience and learn to navigate their new environment for a smooth transition
- Freshmen develop a sense of knowing where to find a church/mosque, where to purchase hair and skin care products, beauty shops and barber shops (essential)
- Freshmen learn how to access the resources available to students on campus, develop new/enhance study skills and time management which result in 2.0 or better
- Freshmen learn how to communicate with professors, administrators, teaching assistances, and understand the importance of meeting with their professors
- Freshmen develop leadership skills
- Freshmen learn self-discipline and self-management
- Freshmen learn various ways instructors convey information and how to select, apply, and evaluate appropriate strategies for active listening and note taking
Campus Visitations

Objectives:

a. To create programs and activities that will assist in the recruitment and retention of students
b. Provide opportunities for students to participate in community outreach activities
c. Community outreach through hosting campus visitations

Learning Outcomes:

a. To provide students with information and activities that will encourage them to attend NIU

This is one area that we are especially weak in. To date we can only provide information on how many visitations we have, where the students are from, and how many students participate. We do not know how many of these students decided to or have been admitted to NIU. The few we do know, is because they have been to the Center, participated in SPan and/or BMI. They have stated that they came to NIU because of the information share with them by the students who spoke with them.

During the course of the year, we have 8-10 visits a year from various high schools, community organizations, and churches. This includes regular visits from Kenwood High School and the Talented Tenth Community Organization. These visits can include from 10 to 50 students with 2 to 6 chaperones.

General Assessment

Every other year, the Center asked students to complete a survey to let us know how we are doing, if their expectations have been met, what they would like to see (courses, programs, events, resources), and what they do not like. This year approx. 150 students completed the survey.

Based on the responses, students found the classes to be enlightening, eye opening and liked the way the classes were taught. In others words, students believed the courses have taught them not only about themselves but why they need to work hard, get involved, and maintain good grades. All of the students who responded were either enrolled in at least one class or came to the Center at least
once a week. Seventy percent noted that the Center met their expectation from being friendly to helping them with their classes to using the computer lab. Another 83% said they visited the Center twice a week for the same reasons as previously stated including visiting a staff member, to study, to meet friends or to attend a meeting. Areas students would like to see the Center provide—leadership conference, opportunity to travel, more resources for the Center, tutors available, and support from other units. For the programs and activities, they are interested in seeing more diversity programs/events, community service opportunities, graduate and professional workshops, interaction with Black alumni, bring in more speakers, and cultural events.

**Gaps in Assessment**

As has been stated throughout this report, the data for our assessment is very basic, there are a number of areas where we do not have information due to the fact that our students come from various majors, and we do need to find ways to better monitor the SPlan, campus visitations, programs and activities, the school mentoring programs, and our classes. Program and activities are assess only when instructors make that a requirement for their class and have students write a one paragraph reflection paper. This is generally not shared with the director or the staff unless requested.

Despite the gaps in assessment, the Center has strived to meet its objectives and the objectives of the university.

**Resources Needed**

Based on the NCBS and ABCC (Association of Black Cultural Centers) external review, the Center continues to be inadequate to meet its mission and objectives. Likewise, the Center is not involved or considers in some of the new assessment tools regarding the retention of freshmen.

We would like to request funding to develop assessments for SPlan, campus visitation, programs and activities, and students who participate in the community outreach at Clinton Rosette and DeKalb High School. We also would like to have funding to develop online course evaluations.
Comments from Students

➢ “I was thankful to have been a part of the SPlan organization and allowing me to be a mentor to two freshmen. It greatly helped me become a better individual and student. It allowed me to help others as well as achieve greater academic success. I am grateful to have been part of SPlan...Without the help of SPlan, I would not have been able to continue being a student here, Being a member of SPlan allowed me to continue at NIU and grow academically. Ms. Curry has always been a special part of my academic career as well as a mentor and leader to me.”

➢ “I feel like this is my home and I feel loved, encouraged experience also spiritual. A great cultural learning gift here is only available for those willing to seek them.”

➢ “In a way could have better resources...”

➢ “Trips to other schools & historical places, study groups, more classes & events, language class.”

➢ “Unfortunately I learned about the CBS during my last semester here at NIU. I am a transfer student and the programs were not advertised. Actually, the only reason that I became aware of the CBS was because I decided to take the African Psychology class before I graduated (especially considering I have had only on Black professor while studying at NIU).”

➢ “I believe it needs to expand as far as classes and the amount of technology.”

➢ “A lack of resources and teachers..”

➢ “Programs for non-Blacks.”

➢ “Very enlighten and challenging.”

➢ “Show me leadership on campus”

➢ “The SPlan has been important in my transition.”

➢ “SPlan caters to new freshmen and transfers by helping them understand the in’s and out’s of NIU’s campus. From financial aid, judicial affairs to Greek and non-Greek organizations, SPlan covers it ALL! For me, SPlan built me up to the person I am today. I am currently the chapter vice president of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and the secretary for the John Henrik Clarke Honor Society...Last year I was the secretary for SPlan but this year I chose to step-down in order to let someone new try their hand at being a leader. I think that I am a leader on this campus and I feel that I learned my leadership skills from SPlan.”

Total Numbers from 2005 to 2010:

Students in the Black Studies Minor 50

Students in SPlan 300 mentees 125 mentors

Campus Visitations 25

Class offerings 8 each semester Average students enrolled 30 per class
Programs & Activities  20
Participation in Black Graduation  500
Foundations of Black Studies
IDSP 300
Course Evaluation

Please rate the answers on a scale from 1-5: 1 = Poor, 2 = Below Average, 3 = Average, 4 = Above Average, 5 = Excellent

General:

1. Usefulness of papers and term project adding value to the course? ___
2. Effectiveness of course in enhancing your awareness of other cultures? ___
3. Effectiveness of course in improving your critical thinking skills? ___
4. Did the course meet your expectations? ___
5. Did the course material relate to your major field of interest? ___
6. Did the course enhance your knowledge about other race/ethnic groups? ___
7. Did the course provide you with information from other fields & disciplines? ___
8. Did the course enhance your knowledge about global perspectives? ___
9. Did the course help you understand the history, experience, and culture of people of African descent? ___
10. Were the course materials related to live experiences? ___
11. Overall course evaluation ___

Instructor:

1. Knowledge about the subject? ___
2. Communication skills? ___
3. Were course objectives identified? ___
4. Were the criteria for evaluating your performance clearly identified? ___
5. Overall instructor evaluation ___

Course Specific:

1. This course provide me with an understanding of Black Studies ___
2. This course provided me with information and resources that I can use in other classes and life. ___
3. This course introduced me to new material about the African experiences. ___
4. This course help me to improve my writing and research skills. ___

Comments/Suggestions
Center for Black Studies
Student Survey

Please complete the following information. Your feedback is needed and greatly appreciated!

A. Student Status
Undergraduate: Freshman year____ Sophomore____ Junior____ Senior____
Graduate: Master’s____ Doctoral____ Other____
Major: __________________________ Minor: __________________________
Anticipated Graduation Date: ________________

B. How did learn about the Center for Black Studies? (Check all that apply)
   ___Web page   ___Newspaper article   ___Channel 8   ___E-mail   ___Campus Event
   ___Friend/word of mouth   ___class   ___Flyer/Poster   ___Other ______________________

C. Tell us about yourself. (Check all that apply)
   ___Male   ___African American
   ___Female   ___Asian American
   ___Employee   ___Latino/Latina
   ___Student   ___White
   ___Native American   ___Other ______________________

1. How often do you visit the center?
   1-2 times a week____  3-4-time a week____  Never____

2. What are your expectations of the Center for Black Studies and have they been met?

3. Did you know that the Center for Black Studies offers: (Check all that apply):
   ___A place to discuss individual concerns   ___A computer lab
   ___Student support services   ___A home away from home
   ___A mentor program for 1st year students   ___Black Studies Courses
   ___Educational Programs (speakers, films, etc)
   ___Annual Programs (Black History Month Celebration, Kwanzaa, Pageant, Chill Fest)

4. How would you rate the services available at the Center?
   Poor____  Fair____  Great____

5. Rate your experience with the Center for Black Studies Staff (i.e. Professors, Grad Assistants, Teacher Assistants).
   Poor____  Fair____  Great____

6. Does the Center meet your expectations? Please explain.  

Turn Over
CBS Student Survey (continued)

7. I would like to see the Center for Black Studies provide/offer...

8. Would you recommend The Center for Black Studies to others? ___Yes ___No

9. What have you found to be the most helpful in the Center for Black Studies?

10. Have you even taken a Black Studies course? _____ Which course? ________________
    If yes, rate your experience below:
    Poor___ Fair___ Great___

11. I have found the class(es) in Black Studies to be...

12. Would you support a major in Black Studies? ___Yes ___No Why or Why not?

13. What types of programs/activities interest you?

14. Do you belong to any student organizations? If so, please list below.

15. What type of students organizations are you interested in? (Check all that apply)
    ___ Greek ___ Dance ___ Modeling ___ Theatre ___ Choir
    ___ Professional ___ Social/Cultural (i.e. BSU, SISTERS, BROTHERS)

16. Would you support a Center for Black Studies Facebook page? ___Yes ___No

Comments:
S-Plan
SURVEY

Name ____________________________________________

Z# ____________________________________________

Major ____________________________________________

Cell# __________________________ Residence Hall # __________

Why did you choose to enroll at NIU? ____________________________

What is your field of study? ____________________________

Alternative (or secondary) area of study ____________________________

Do you have a plan in place to assist you in achieving your academic goals?
Yes ___ No ___ If yes, what is your success plan? ____________________________

I am open to the opportunity to get assistance from my peers who excel in areas that I
need help in. Yes ___ No ___

What would you say are your greatest strength(s)?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What would you say are your greatest weakness(s)?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

I need help with time-management. Yes ___ No ___
I need help with study skills. Yes  No

I like to do things on my own, asking for help is a last resort. Yes  No

How do you see participation in SPlan benefitting you?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

How did you learn about SPlan?
Open House  Minority Reception  Campus Visitation  Word of Mouth

Comments