



Office of Student Life & Cultural Centers
**Learning through Dialogue and Faculty Collaborations:
The Impact of a Faculty-Facilitated Dialogue Series in a
Cultural Center**
Assessment Report

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Choose One: Learning Outcome Assessment

Date of Assessment Implementation: May 2019

Date of Report: July 2019

Purpose of Assessment

The African American Student Center implemented a biweekly dialogue series on Thursdays in the student space to be facilitated by Cal Poly Pomona faculty. The purpose of the dialogue series was to explore, broaden, and analyze the constructs of race, gender, class, and sexuality in our community. Every other Thursday from 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm (during university hour), students engaged in a dialogue about topics that affect the Black experience in America. The Black experience in America is a testament to the complex tapestry of ideas, identities, and actions contesting the contradictions of American democracy, while simultaneously developing new praxes of trends into America's national identity. During *Dialogue Thursdays*, faculty of African descent were invited to facilitate dialogues around historical trends, current events, and pop culture. This purpose of this assessment was to explore the influence of the *Dialogue Thursdays* series on the development of students who frequently participated in the series during Spring 2019.

Division Learning Outcome Model Leaders - lifelong learning

Targeted Learning Outcome

1. Students will be able to participate in critical dialogue about the Black experience and attitudes surrounding the Black experience
2. Students will be able to explore their own social identities and how it relates to each dialogue topic
3. Students will be able to recognize the significance of systemic oppression and the historical incidents that have affected Black people in the Pan-African diaspora

Assessment Methodology

Theory to Praxis for this Dialogue Series and Assessment. *Critical Race Theory (CRT)* guided the praxis to provide minoritized students with this counter-narrative space. CRT was utilized to break down social barriers and to build community among those who participated in the series. Historically

marginalized student populations used counter storytelling through folklore, hymns, and art. During *Dialogue Thursdays*, students were encouraged to engage in conversation to validate their experience and learn through the experiences of their peers.

Intersectionality provides a framework for the multifaceted ways discrimination operates under the pretext of multiple social identities. It is an analytical tool that explores the relations between various dimensions of social and power pedagogies. *Intersectionality* offers a framework to identify the interconnections of social inequality while creating a complex network to identify those who society has outcasted or overlooked. *Intersectionality* also provides insight into how multifaceted the Pan-African diaspora is and how the experience of people of African descent are connected through a commonality. Students engaging in *Dialogue Thursdays* used the skills of their social identities to bring context to their Black experience.

Design.

Survey Instrument. Through dialogue, we were able to assess whether students were critically thinking about their experience and the experience of others within the diaspora of African people or Black people. After each dialogue, a survey was disseminated to each participant to assess their learning as a result of the dialogue topic. After the series, a survey was disseminated to all participants to assess the program overall and to see if it is something the students found helpful in defining their own opinions and identity.

Three dialogues were analyzed for this assessment. Each dialogue was held at the African American Student Center and facilitated by Cal Poly Pomona faculty

1. Program Date and Time: Thursday, March 28, 2018, 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm
Total Attendance: 12
Topic: Voting
2. Program Date and Time: Thursday, April 11, 2018, 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm
Total Attendance: 16
Topic: Nipsey Hussle and Black Death
3. Program Date and Time: Thursday, May 05, 2018 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm
Total Attendance: 13
Topic: Self Care

Observations. The African American Student Center Graduate Assistant (GA) observed all three dialogues for one hour at the site of the assessment (African American Student Center).

Results

Survey assessments were collected from each student who participated in each dialogue topic, and each student was asked to complete a survey assessment for the entire series.

Seventy percent (12) of the students attended every dialogue topic, and seventeen self-reported assessments were completed for the overall survey assessment. Sixteen out of seventeen surveys stated that they had a better understanding of the topic and learned something new after each dialogue.

Two major themes (Space for exploration of one's own identity and awareness and the need for exploration of Black identity outside of the United States) emerged from the data collected in this

assessment. The two themes derived from categories of codes in the data collected by observations and surveys.

Space for Exploration of One's Identity and Awareness. While there was an understanding of how their Black identity was marginalized and oppressed, students who participated in the dialogue began to recognize the assets and privileges they possessed within their identity as well. There was reflection from students around the need for exploration and awareness of their identity. Faculty facilitator helped students critically think about their experience as a Black student from diverse perspectives, and students appreciated the opportunity to have space for identity development with faculty members.

Need for Exploration of Black Identity outside of the United States of America. Students expressed an increased understanding and recognition of the systemic oppression and the historical incidents that affect Black people in the diaspora, but there was a need for a deeper understanding of the Black experience beyond the United States of America (U.S.). Students spoke openly about privileges they possessed as citizens of the U.S. and how the experiences outside of their identity as Americans or American citizens are not often considered. Some students acknowledged their understanding of other Black experiences through their ethnicities or cultural identities (ex. The understanding of the Nigerian experience from Nigerian-American students who participated in the dialogue series).

Student Voices:

- One student stated that they liked *"hearing other peoples opinions through calm dialogue."*
- *"It was very informative and a safe space to discuss sensitive topics."*
- *"Everyone included themselves. The more perspectives, the better."*
- *"It was very eye-opening to me and forced me to consider things I had not before."*
- *"I like the fact that there are people of this community that think about what is wrong in the community and genuinely think about how to do better."*

Conclusion

With the need for innovative methods that are culturally relevant to address the retention efforts for Black students in higher education, the collaboration of academic affairs and student affairs is essential. *Dialogue Thursdays* is a part of the African American Student Center's effort to address this need. The ongoing series also aligns with Cal Poly Pomona's strategic plan, efforts to bridge the gap between academic affairs and student affairs, and the institution's call for faculty involvement in the cultural centers. The series also promotes identity development and a sense-of-belonging for Black students at predominantly white institutions and institutions where Black students are underrepresented like institutions within the California State University system.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this assessment provide an outline of how administrators, faculty, and staff/practitioners can enhance support systems of Black students and other minoritized populations on campus.

- Research- Continue to assess the learning and development of students who participate in faculty collaborations in student spaces and faculty-led dialogues. There is research around the role of

faculty in identity development and the sense-of-belonging for Black students at predominantly white institutions and institutions where Black students are underrepresented

- Policy- Consider creating policy around faculty involvement in student affairs and cultural centers. While any professional could have facilitated this dialogue series, the integration of faculty through the dialogue series in the student space opened an opportunity to bridge the gap of faculty and an area in student affairs.
- Practice- This is a culturally relevant practice that can increase student success of the population of Black students on campus. There should be an intention around the involvement of faculty in the cultural centers, but there were challenges. These challenges included: student retention for the entire series (ensuring the same students attended the dialogues) and faculty participation.

Closing the Loop

The dialogue series will continue and address the areas of growth recommended by the graduate assistant and student participants. The recommendations include: (1) an intentional advertisement that explains the benefits of the series along with its outcomes and (2) faculty outreach.

The African American Student Center will also work on innovative assessment methods to collect data to improve the program.