

Cal Poly Pomona

Cultural Centers' 2010

External Program Review Response



AUTHOR: DR. BYRON E. HOWLETT, JR.
INTERIM DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF STUDENT LIFE &
CULTURAL CENTERS

REVIEW TEAM: DR. JEFFREY F. MILEM
DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR AND ASSOCIATE DEAN
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

DR. LORI S. WHITE
VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS
SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

EXECUTIVE SPONSOR: DR. REBECCA GUTIERREZ KEETON
ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT AND DEAN OF STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION

During the 2009 – 2010, the Cal Poly Pomona Cultural Centers reached a significant milestone by celebrating their 15th year anniversary. In light of this accomplishment, it was very fitting for the Cultural Centers to undergo a Program Review. The Cultural Centers were critically reviewed by two respected multicultural education practitioners in Higher Education. The reviewers were Dr. Jeffrey F. Milem (*Distinguished Professor and Associate Dean at the University of Arizona*) and Dr. Lori S. White (*Vice President for Student Affairs Southern Methodist University*). Dr. Milem and Dr. White spent 3 days from January 27 – 29, 2010 meeting with Cal Poly Pomona faculty, staff, students, alumni, and campus partners to review the Cultural Centers. In addition to meeting with these major constituencies, they took the time to examine various documents related to the Cultural Centers. The reviewers were specifically asked to assess the following aspects of the Cultural Centers:

1. The department's mission, programs, and services and performance in areas of diversity, equity and access
2. Financial management, facilities, use of technology and equipment
3. Culture of evidence
4. The effectiveness of the current Cultural Center model
5. The perceived purpose and value of the Centers

Additionally, the Reviewers were asked to make recommendations regarding:

1. The enhancement of the current Cultural Center model
2. Managing reductions in budget and staffing
3. The long-term vision setting for the Cultural Centers

The review team highlighted areas of significant accomplishment and provided suggestions for improvement along with solutions, all of which were focused on how the Cultural Centers could continue to evolve to best serve the University. This program review response comments on the final recommendations, assessment responses, and includes some of the department's plan for moving forward in the post-review period.

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS

The final report of the review team provided an objective and concrete review of the Cultural Centers. In their cover memo to the final report submitted to Dr. Rebecca Gutierrez Keeton on April 8, 2010, the reviewers wrote “You all have much to be proud of regarding the work of the Cultural Centers...” Time and time again throughout their report, high praise and regard were given to the impactful work provided by the Cultural Centers. Dr. Milem and Dr. White expressed that “the six different Cultural Centers appear to be an important part of the cultural ethos of Cal Poly” (p. 2). In addition to interviewing various campus stakeholders as well as drawing upon their own professional knowledge and expertise, the review team examined pertinent documents and resources to formulate the approach to be used in the Cultural Center’s program review. In their findings, five major themes emerged:

1. The impact of “Economies of Scale” and the Cultural Centers’ relocation: centralized (co-location) versus decentralized.
2. Expanded communication and outreach efforts by the Cultural Centers.
3. The Cultural Centers’ having an additional focus on facilitating student retention and persistence.
4. Lack of Resources provided to the Cultural Centers in order to achieve the level of work expected from them by various campus stakeholders.
5. In collaboration with the Cultural Centers, the importance for the President, Vice President for Student Affairs, and Associate Vice President & Dean of Students to help establish some clear priorities for the work of the Cultural Centers and the Coordinators given the overwhelming and sometimes competing demands.

Consideration of these themes, the review team’s final recommendations, the Cultural Centers’ strategic plan and the current economic climate will help guide future planning efforts for the Cultural Centers.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

ENHANCEMENT OF THE CURRENT CULTURAL CENTER MODEL

- The highest priority for the work of the Cultural Centers and that of the Center Coordinators, given the university's current retention/graduation rates should be on activities that facilitate student persistence, retention, and success.
- More formalized relationships should be developed and maintained with the academic units and with academic support services on campus. The reviewers specially said, "The learning outcomes work being done by the Cal Poly Cultural Centers in collaboration with the Ethnic and Women's Studies faculty is something that is a wonderfully distinct aspect of the Cal Poly educational experience and more should be done to highlight these efforts" (p. 3). They went on to comment that "Additionally, the Centers should work to establish similar curricular connections between the Centers and other academic disciplines" (p. 3).
- All of the Cultural Centers should be relocated to the "stable" area (building 26) of campus. This would create greater efficiencies by reducing the number of services and functions that are currently provided in nearly every Center (e.g., common use of administrative support personnel, a single computer lab, a single resource area for doing advertising, common meeting space for group meetings and projects, etc.).
- Having all of the Cultural Centers in close proximity would make it easier for collaborative work across the various Cultural Centers and constituent groups to occur. However Dr. Milem and Dr. White specifically said that "the recommendation to co-locate the Centers should not be interpreted as a move toward Center consolidation" (p. 5). The Program Reviewers attributed this finding to strong historical and programmatic reasons.
- Each Cultural Center Coordinator should have a specialty focus area that they would coordinate for all the Cultural Centers (e.g., campus climate, intergroup relations work, recruitment, retention, visibility of the cultural centers, etc.) The reviewers specially stated "that each Coordinator be selected and trained to develop a particular expertise and that Coordinators are charged with providing support for that area on behalf of all the Centers" (p. 4).

RESPONSE

It is agreed that the following activities and projects will be put in place in response to the recommendations:

- A. Professional Development/ Intergroup Relations Project
 - An immediate (Summer 2010) engagement by all Cultural Center staff that targets developing diversity competency training.
 - Utilize cross training and other training modes to cover a developed list of subjects such as multicultural identity development.

B. Centralized Staff Location Project

- Working collaboratively with the Vice President of Student Affairs, the Associate Vice President & Dean of Students, and other members of the cabinet, the Cultural Centers will take the lead to develop a plan to relocate all Cultural Centers to building 26 by the end of the summer of 2012.

C. Cultural Centers will create a plan during the summer of 2010 to establish core function “specialist” areas of expertise for which each Coordinator will be responsible.

D. The Cultural Centers will work actively to identify new academic partnerships in an effort to establish a more visible campus role in student success, retention, and persistence.

MANAGE REDUCTIONS IN BUDGETS AND STAFFING

- The Program Reviewers strongly believed that there should be more delegation of programming activities to student staff. The Program Reviewers said that “the Center Coordinators are expected to do too much in their current roles. Much of this is appropriate to expect, but much is not. Many of the programming activities that the Coordinators do can, and should be, delegated to student staff” (p. 12).
- According to the Program Reviewers, “the Center Coordinators can assume some important functions that are currently neglected (i.e., Leadership Retreat, Retention/Persistence/Student Success Activities, Outreach and Collaborations with Academic Units and Academic Support Units) and need to be a part of the work that the Centers do” (p. 12).
- The Cultural Centers should work closely with the Office of Institutional Research to ensure that their assessments align with those areas of the university experience that the Office of Institutional Research thinks are most critical, with particular attention of the impact of the Centers on student retention.

RESPONSE

It is agreed that the following activities and projects will be put in place in response to the recommendations:

- A. Change the hiring and training practices for Cultural Center Student Assistants in order to have these students become experienced high-level student programmers versus office assistants through a Social Justice Leader model.
- B. During summer 2010, revisit the heritage month programming model and begin to move toward Cultural Center Coordinators focusing on two – three “signature” programs. While still involved in programming for established Heritage Month programs, Coordinators will relinquish the coordination of these programs to a Social Justice Leader, Committee of Programmers, or both. The Program Reviewers stated that “more responsibility for the planning and implementation of programs should go to the student clubs and organizations that are affiliated with the Centers” (p. 5).
- C. Communication Project
 - Work on increasing visibility of the mission-critical student success, retention, and persistence roles that the Cultural Centers play at Cal Poly Pomona.

LONG-TERM VISION SETTING FOR THE CULTURAL CENTERS

- The reviewers think it is important that the Vice President for Student Affairs and the Associate Vice President & Dean of Students establish clear priorities for the work of the Cultural Centers and the Coordinators. The program reviewers indicated that the Coordinators are expected to do too much in their current roles with too few resources. Specifically the reviewers said that “Every effort should be made to reduce the heavy expectations that Center directors have to oversee and extensively supervise all of the programming that occurs in the Centers” (p. 5).
- The reviewers recommend that the President and Vice President for Student Affairs express more direct and frequent support for the important work that the Centers do to support the core values and mission of the University and the Division of Student Affairs. This needs to be done via their words and actions.
- The Cultural Centers should provide a brief summary to the President, Provost, Vice President for Student Affairs, AVP/Dean of Students, and Faculty Senate to show how they support the University’s overall strategic goals, learning outcomes, retention & persistence efforts, and other meaningful impact they are making for the campus.

RESPONSE

It is agreed that the Cultural Center Coordinators are the experts regarding diversity work, and thus will guide the establishment of setting clear priorities, in conjunction with the Vice President of Student Affairs and AVP/Dean of Students. The Cultural Centers will create a succinct regular update regarding mission critical activities and work which will be forwarded to the President, Provost, Vice President for Student Affairs, AVP/Dean of Students, and Faculty Senate.

- A. The Cultural Center Coordinators currently meet on a bi-weekly basis. They will continue to do this, but specifically add discussions about how their work is collaborative and how they are conveying their work effectively to campus stakeholders.
- B. An annual meeting shall be arranged with the Vice President for Student Affairs and AVP/Dean of Students with the collective Cultural Center Coordinators to share assessment results and discuss future directions and goals.
- C. Given the current level of state support (i.e. funding, resources, etc.), the Cultural Centers Coordinators’ work need to be subdivided and reprioritized to focus on mission-critical issues. The Cultural Center Coordinators need to do less programs and more intergroup relations, retention, and campus climate work.

ASSESSMENT RESPONSES

CULTURAL CENTERS' MISSION, PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AND PERFORMANCE IN THE AREAS OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND ACCESS

The reviewers assessed this area strong overall.

- Each Cultural Center provides a “safe space”, which was defined by the reviewers as a place on campus where ethnic and cultural minority students can go to find others from their same background and where they can gather, find support, refuge and a range of services and activities toward their successful degree completion. The reviewers believed that this was a critical and crucial element of Cultural Centers’ operations to maintain.
- The Cultural Centers provide a large number of effective programming (cultural, educational and social) for the campus.
- Referral to other campus services was found to be appropriate.
- The Cultural Centers provide ample opportunities for student involvement.
- The Cultural Centers foster a sense of community for students involved in the Centers.
- Each Cultural Center does an effective job with advocacy for the populations of students served by its own individual Center.

RESPONSE

It is agreed that the Cultural Centers provide a high level of service to the campus community, especially students. It is also recognized that various campus stakeholders are pleased with the level of programs and performance provided in the areas of Diversity, Equity and Access. The Cultural Centers will continue its student centered philosophy to embrace a “Celebration of Diversity”, which is one of our six University core values. Additionally, the Cultural Centers will continue to provide extensive support to campus diversity efforts (i.e., New Student Orientation diversity training & workshops; assisting Admission & Outreach with recruitment efforts; assisting the University Library to offer culturally educational programs and services, etc.), while raising awareness of diversity issues to create teachable moments that can build respect and understanding among campus community members. Starting in academic year 2010 – 2011, the Cultural Centers will actively strategize on ways to assist the campus with closing graduation rates between students of color and white students.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT, FACILITIES, USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND EQUIPMENT

The reviewers assessed this area as poor overall.

- There are a number of duplicative services provided by each Cultural Center that could possibly be shared (i.e. libraries, computer labs, etc.)
- The furniture in most of the Centers looks old and worn out, and equipment appears to be dated.
- The Cultural Centers have limited space to serve the clientele.
- The Cultural Centers receive minimal state funding (primarily for the Coordinator salaries) and receive budget support for programming from the Associated Students and the Housing budgets. Therefore, any reduction in state funding to the Cultural Centers would impact the staff and the day-to-day operations in a deeply negative manner. The current lack of Cultural Center state funding, as well as any future reduction in funding, effects staffing and the perceived value of the centers.

RESPONSE

It is agreed that this area of the assessment review is the poorest. Student Affairs Information Technology Services (SAITS) already provides extremely valuable technology and support services to the Cultural Centers. Although it is clear that great work is done by the Cultural Centers, the lack of support from the state to fully fund the centers has inevitably taken its toll in the form of worn out and outdated furniture. Suggestions from the program reviewers to create “economies of scale” is indeed a viable option to manage minimal funding while maintaining the current important work of the Cultural Centers while extending their impact at the same time. The Cultural Centers’ Coordinators will:

1. Work collectively to develop a strategic plan to combine some of their individual resources and services (i.e. libraries, computer labs, etc.) in order to reduce duplication efforts.
2. There will be a greater focus on updating the furniture in each Center.
3. Although the reviewers do not believe that development work should be one of the main foci for the Cultural Centers, given the current university economic realities, the Centers will continue to find different sources to help supplement current levels of funding in order to continue mission critical work.

CULTURE OF EVIDENCE

The reviewers assessed this area as strong overall.

- The Cultural Centers currently do a sufficient number of individual center-based assessments and evaluation reports, which the reviewers indicated as being very good and valuable. However, the assessment that is currently done does not holistically translate to the campus community the value of the work of the Cultural Centers in helping students understanding diversity and assisting in increasing retention rates.
- The current assessment work underplays the connection between Cultural Center programming and student learning of diversity and multiculturalism.
- The Cultural Centers need to find ways to succinctly summarize their various assessments for the university's senior leadership, faculty and others for whom it is important to have data related to the work done by the Cultural Centers.
- The reviewers suggested that the Cultural Centers connect how their work impacts campus retention efforts.

RESPONSE

It is agreed that the general culture of evidence generated by the Cultural Centers is strong overall, but that an increased effort to connect how their work impacts campus retention efforts needs to be emphasized. The Cultural Centers will determine ways to collectively communicate assessment results to all campus stakeholders so that everyone better understands the value of the Cultural Centers to the campus and the way in which outreach efforts and programming enhance student learning, student identity, student engagement, and student retention. This will be accomplished by:

- A. The on-going and intentional use of Division of Student Affairs goals related to diversity and student retention.
- B. During summer 2010, identify and begin to utilize one – two assessment instruments that will illustrate how the work that is done by all the Cultural Centers contribute to student learning and retention. The Cultural Centers will be able to use this data from year to year to measure student learning and retention effort outcomes, as well as assist to determine future needs of students.
- C. The Cultural Centers will work closely with the Office of Institutional Research in order to show how the work that they do impacts student learning outcomes and campus retention efforts.
- D. The Cultural Centers will create an executive summary of assessment data to share with the campus.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CURRENT CULTURAL CENTER MODEL

The reviewers assessed this area as strong overall, with some recommendations for modification.

- The reviewers made it infinitely clear in their report that “there are no data that demonstrate a particular cultural center model (separate Cultural Centers for each ethnic/cultural group versus a Multi-Cultural or Cross-Cultural Center model) is inherently more effective than another” (p. 10). Furthermore the reviewers expressed that, “One strength of the current Cultural Center model is that it allows the staff of each Cultural Center to focus the majority of their time and attention on the particular group that their respective Center serves” (p. 10). Additionally, the strength of the current Cultural Center model allows each cultural group to have a distinct space to call their own and for students of similar backgrounds to gather. More typically in a multi or cross cultural center, there tends to be fewer staff who are expected to serve all students using the same center. This could result in reduced service to students. One potential pitfall of the current model is the lack of intergroup engagement. The reviewers specifically stated that “the Cultural Centers must find ways for greater intergroup and cross-cultural engagement. Intergroup workshops and the Cross Cultural Retreat are once held programs that ought to be brought back” (p. 3).
- The reviewers recommend that the current Cultural Center model continue with some modifications. The reviewers believed that the Cultural Center Coordinators are already being expected to do too much in their current role, specifically the amount of programming (p. 5 and p. 7). The program reviewers indicated that the Cultural Centers should focus more on student retention efforts.

RESPONSE

It is agreed that this area is strong overall and that the current Cultural Center organizational model is an important part in helping the transition for students served by each Center. It is agreed that the current model works and should be kept. However under the current model, the Cultural Centers will place a greater focus on creating intentional opportunities for students to engage in intergroup dialogue. The Cultural Centers will meet the goal of cross-culturally engaging student populations in the following ways:

- A. Create “specialist” among the Cultural Center Coordinators that focus on the following areas: campus climate, intergroup relations work, recruitment, retention and the visibility of the cultural centers.
- B. Beginning in summer 2010, the Cultural Centers will begin the planning of a move to the University Plaza.
- C. Building upon the strong relationships with faculty in EWS, the Cultural Center Coordinators will seek out additional faculty relationships to create intergroup dialogue opportunities connected to a specific class. It will be expected that each Cultural Center Coordinator select one faculty member each year with whom to work closely with on a specific project/program that will contribute to student learning and/or retention efforts.
- D. Re-establish the Cross-Cultural Retreat.

THE PERCEIVED PURPOSE AND VALUE OF THE CULTURAL CENTERS

The reviewers assessed this area as strong overall, countered with some perceived challenges.

- The Cultural Centers provide needed diversity programming for the campus.
- The Cultural Centers are fundamental in helping the University achieve its diversity goals and help to provide a unique Cal Poly Pomona experience.
- Cultural Center programs and services help facilitate a range of critical learning outcomes for students including identity development and greater cultural awareness.
- The Cultural Centers provide “safe spaces” for students and are perceived by students to be welcoming and affirming. The Centers are of particular importance to commuter students because they help commuters connect with the campus which can often be challenging for commuters.
- The Cultural Centers help ground students and transition them from a focus on self-culture to multi-cultural competencies.
- The Cultural Centers Coordinators are feeling stretched in many directions due to the broad range of expectations from campus stakeholders about role and priorities of the Centers.
- There is a need for more intergroup/cross cultural workshops.
- Some on campus view the work of the Cultural Centers as “fluff” and not mission critical.
- The Cultural Centers will not reach their full potential without appropriate state funding.
- The Cultural Centers need to increase their visibility to the campus-at-large and to people outside of Student Affairs.

RESPONSE

It is agreed that there are both positive and negative perceptions of the Centers. It is important to state that some of the negative perceptions of the Cultural Centers could be attributed to the rather high transition (turnover rate) of the Coordinators, which in turn leads to decreased relationship building and less visibility. Coordinators may also not be as visible as needed due to the high demands placed on them by many segments of the campus community, and a need for the Coordinators to be everything to everyone when it comes to issues of diversity on campus. It will be the immediate goal of the Cultural Centers collectively to dissect each of the perceptions to find ways to begin to work on changing perceptions to positive realities. Some specific steps that will be taken to meet this goal include:

- A. Create a communication plan that directly connects and communicates how the work of the Cultural Centers is mission-critical.
- B. Create a Cultural Center “Welcome-Back” campaign.
- C. Review and expand Cultural Center web pages.
- D. Create unified monthly press releases with photos for Polycentric and local newspapers.

CLOSING

In recognition of 15 years of successful work by the Cultural Centers at Cal Poly Pomona, it was important for the reviewers to reflect upon what had been accomplished in the past, take stock in what is currently being done in the present, and to formulate recommendations to help the Cultural Centers strategically plan for the future. Looking at the past, Dr. Milem and Dr. White reported that “Given the 1990 WASC report that expressed concern regarding Cal Poly’s lack of commitment to diversity, with more recent 2000 and 2009 Campus Climate studies indicating that students had positive views of diversity, felt a lack of racial tension on campus, felt that the administration and staff were supportive of ethnic/racial minority needs and placed a high value on the work of the Centers” (p. 7).

Regarding the present, the reviewers indicated that “we believe that there is a relationship between the presence and work of the Centers (particularly the ethnic Centers) and Cal Poly’s diverse student population and relatively positive race relations on campus” (p. 7). Furthermore, the reviewers expressed that “Cal Poly is also one of the top 100 institutions for LGBTQ students and there is clearly a relationship between the work of the Pride Center and this ranking” (p. 7). Projecting into the future, Dr. Milem and Dr. White wrote that there is still much significant work to be done by the Cultural Centers. Specifically the reviewers stated that “Certainly the poor retention and graduation rates among different ethnic populations is one important indication that Cal Poly still has important work to do to create more equitable educational experiences for its diverse student body” (p. 7).

The reviewers’ insightful comments and recommendations will allow the Cultural Centers an excellent opportunity to critically look inward at the work that they did, do, and will do in order to produce effective sustainable future results. It is with tremendous gratitude to both Dr. Milem and Dr. White for taking their extended time to critically review and examine the work of the Cultural Centers at Cal Poly Pomona. Their examination of documents, interviews of many campus stakeholders, along with their professional expertise in the field of multiculturalism provided a sound review for the Cultural Centers that will assist us in contributing relevantly to the campus community for the next 15 years.