The Intercultural Center 2004-05: History, Purpose, Accomplishments

By

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The Intercultural Center exists to facilitate the transformation of KCKCC from a monocultural institution to a fully multicultural institution. From its founding in 1923 until 1951, the college was racially segregated, with a white campus and a black campus. To its credit the college dismantled this separate and unequal system just ahead of the landmark Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, decision made by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954. While the physical separation of students ceased, the administrative and instructional staff was overwhelmingly white, and the culture of the institution (i.e. as found in its campus climate and curriculum) remained predominately the Eurocentric monoculture even after the addition of a very small number of African-American professional employees in the 1960s. Today, only the college’s maintenance, custodial, and secretarial staffs display the ethnic diversity proportionate to the demographic make-up of our community and student body.

Recognizing the need for campus leadership to implement a program of multicultural organizational development (MCOD), in 1997 the Intercultural Center was established, under the supervision of the Vice President for Executive Services. As an approach to institutional growth and transformation, MCOD has meant that we would undertake a system-change strategy as well as promote opportunities for the personal and professional growth of all employees as individuals.

The Intercultural Center has coined a name for the educational philosophy that describes our multicultural organizational efforts and community development goals – Affirmative Education – which, of course, also echoes (and includes) the call for affirmative action in the hiring of professional employees. Affirmative Education, therefore, has the purpose of affirming the American Dream of equality and justice for all. This is a system-change strategy that by necessity includes the following elements –

Affirmative Education Checklist

- Celebrate diversity.
- Pursue equality.
- Infuse multicultural content across the curriculum.
- Employ nurturing arts of instruction.
Affirmative Education – as the Intercultural Center’s program of MCOD – aims at fulfilling the promise of higher education in our service area by “building community.” This involves a social justice commitment that the “new elitism” of some conservative educators causes them to reject. This backlash often leads them to become opponents of MCOD and community-building. We, however, take pride in following the lead of the former Chair of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, Ernest Boyer, when we understand the term community not only as a region to be served, but also as “a climate to be created.” We wish to create a multicultural climate where all students, regardless of class, race, gender, religion, or exceptionality, can expect to find the educational resources to grow personally and succeed academically. Likewise, we seek to create a climate in which all members of the community can expect to feel included and welcomed in campus programming and at events and find access to college facilities and resources. Affirmative Education thus counters the negativity often expressed (overtly or covertly) by mainstream powers against society’s minority groups. The United States has a motto: e pluribus unum – out of many one. Affirmative Education counters the imposed unum of Anglo-dominated hierarchy, inequality, and Anglo-conformity, with the authentic unum of egalitarian partnership and multicultural democracy.

The Intercultural Center has thus become engaged in several key community-building activities: building learning communities of students, faculty, staff, administrators and Board of Trustees members on campus and off-campus acting in collaboration with public officials of the Unified Government, the School Board of District 500, the YWCA, Harmony, U.A.W. retirees’ union, the NAACP, El Centro, and other community organizations.

Real challenges continue to confront us. For example, the college recently completed a communications audit conducted by an outside consultant, Dr. Idalynne Karre. Dr. Karre noted that structural and cultural barriers are hindering the college’s communication efforts. (She recommended the creation of diverse, cross-functional teams of college employees to build trust and intercultural solidarity, which is exactly the objective of our Intercultural Center programming and activities.) Similarly, there was
a recent college-wide survey that focused on the understanding of the college mission that various stakeholders have (faculty, students, academic deans, and staff). The multicultural component of the mission was one of the top two mission priorities held by members in each category of stakeholders, except for the academic deans, where this item did not register at all as a top interest. This reflects what we feel as a real lack of leadership and support from the Academic Services area of the college controlled by Dr. B. Kaye Walter. While we are grateful for her support for NCORE and Perkins Grant related projects, we regret deeply that she has boycotted all programming of the Intercultural Center over the last several years, and does not seem to be encouraging her academic deans to participate either.

Despite these problems, we are happy to report that this year the Intercultural Center has been more extensively utilized by students, faculty, staff, and the community, than ever, and has accomplished important tasks in each area of its Affirmative Education agenda. We owe special thanks to our four major partners in diversity work at the college: 1) the Human Resources Office (under the leadership of Dean Leota Marks and Linda Pendelton); 2) the Office of Professional and Staff Development (under the direction of Dr. Ben Hayes); 3) the Workforce Development Office (under the supervision of Darcy McGrath with support from Jeanne Crane-Smith); and 4) Student Affairs (under the leadership of Dean Richard Lee and Linda Sutton, with support from Jerry Reid, Vice President for Student and Financial Services).

We would like to recall here briefly some of the chief accomplishments made during the 2004-05 academic year with regard to the multidimensional aims of Affirmative Education.

Last year as every year the Intercultural Center started off by publishing its Directory of members of the year’s Intercultural Council. The Intercultural Council is an advisory group of college employees (numbering usually 30-40) who pledge to work in various ways in collaboration with the Intercultural Center to facilitate multicultural organizational development at KCKCC. The Directory includes pictures of the Intercultural Council members and their individual statements of educational philosophy. Always included is also a page with pictures of the college’s Board of Trustees and a statement of support by the college president, as well as the Intercultural Center’s statement of purpose and our Affirmative Education Checklist. Likewise, we always reprint the Board’s “Policy on the Enhancement of Positive Human
Relations,” which articulates the institution’s commitment to the maintenance of an harassment-free environment on campus. The Intercultural Council meets once a month throughout the academic year, and every month two members of the Council take special responsibility (as monthly Co-Facilitators) for that month’s program of intercultural activities. This special leadership is absolutely crucial since the Intercultural Center otherwise has but one full-time administrator (Co-Director and Professor of Sociology, Melanie J. Scott) and one part-time (40%) administrator (Co-Director and Professor of Philosophy, Dr. Charles Reitz). The Co-Directors jointly develop programming for the diverse cultures that make up our community and campus, and conduct professional development seminars for our faculty and staff on themes of diversity, equity, peace, and respect for civil rights and civil liberties.

In the following ways the Intercultural Center takes a proper pride in having been a catalyst (in collaboration with the above-mentioned partners) for significant transformational leadership in multicultural education reform on campus:

**Celebrating Diversity:**

*Celebration of Peace, Unity, and Hope:*
- September 11th Remembered – Faces of America

*Jose Soto Workshops:*
- Developing Intercultural Communications Skills: An Institutional Imperative

*Judy Ancel Workshop:*
- “Workforce Diversity: Labor’s Values and the Common Good”

*African American History and Culture Celebration: Theo Wilson, Jim Mair, Sharon Thompson*
- Learning About America through Jazz: The Black Contribution

*Asian Heritage Celebration:*
- The Hmong Community in KCK

*Fulbright Scholar:*
- United Arab Emirates (with Social Science Dean Henry Louis and Darcy McGrath)

*Re-design of Intercultural Center’s Décor*

*Hallway Display Cases Under Construction*

*Proposal for Arts Integration into Intercultural Center*
- Prospective “Center for Intercultural Arts and Learning”

**Pursuing Equality and Social Justice:**

*Educational Equity Seminar:*
- Charles Reitz at JCCC

*Trabajando Juntos:*
- Working Together with the Latino Workforce:
  - Jeanne Crane-Smith, Darcy McGrath

*Women in Non-Traditional Employment Roles (W.I.N.T.E.R): Leota Marks and Linda Pendleton*
- Jackie Snyder, Jennifer Cobb

*Eyes Wide Open Exhibit:*
Boots of U.S. Soldiers killed in combat in Iraq and Sandals of Iraqi Civilians Killed
Equitable Schooling and Educational Rights for All Children
Letter to Dr. Burke about problem of racism in David Duckers’ Travel Policy proposal and NCORE
Chun Hu Case: problem of racism in college’s employment practices

Infusing Multicultural Content Across the Curriculum

75 classroom faculty participate in a variety of diversity trainings
8 faculty attend National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education
Perkins Grant and Workforce Diversity Project:
    Coordination by Melanie Scott, Stephen Spartan, and Charles Reitz
    Discussion Document: Charles Reitz and Stephen Spartan
    Business Division Curriculum Project: Janet Velazquez, Allen Lenoir

Employing Nurturing Arts of Instruction

Lloyd Daniel Workshop:
    Social Justice and Liberation Education: “A New Teacher for a New Nation”

Strategizing for Student Success

KUMC meeting in NYC with our 14 member NCORE delegation to dialogue about student success
Panel of International Women Students

Acting Affirmatively in Hiring

Political Science Search
Sociology Search

Diversifying Relations with College Vendors

Zolamo Galleries
Two Hens and a Rooster
Modupe’s Kitchen

Empowering Students, Faculty, Community

Intercultural Center’s Community Advisory Board:
    Two Members run for KCKCC Board and win!
Kansas City Kansas Democrat InDEED Project:
    UG, District 500 Board, YWCA, Neighborhood Groups; Brochure draft created
    Partnership with student artist, Sam Nevils, who creates imaginative logo for KCK Democracy InDEED brochure
Six administrative and staff employees attend the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education
Students visit Unified Government offices for African American Read-In with Commissioners
Partnership with Editor of Student Newspaper, Advocate, Lexie Shockley
Tom Weis: Faculty Symposium Enhancement
Awilda Olsen: Latin American Campus Visitors Campus
Darren Elliott: Great African American Speeches
Janice McIntyre: African American Literature Student Read-In in Intercultural Center

Collaborate creatively with community, faculty, administration

JCCC invitation to Morteza, Melanie and Charley to present our Intercultural strategy
MCC invitation to Morteza, Melanie and Charley to present our Intercultural strategy
Unified Government: Visit of Croatian Delegation from Karlovac
Unified Government: African American Literature Read-In with KCK Commissioners
Unified Government: African American Scholarship Contribution, at Reardon Center
Organized the First Annual President’s Recognition Luncheon to honor IC Co-Facilitators

Building Community

In addition to planning for the day-to-day functioning of the Intercultural Center, Melanie Scott has successfully employed her significant interpersonal and communications skills to build multicultural community spirit in Kansas City, Kansas, and Wyandotte County. For example, she has entered into partnership with the Heart of American Native American Center to hold an annual Pow Wow in the athletic center on our campus. In collaboration with the NAACP, she has also advocated (albeit unsuccessfully) holding the Juneteenth Celebration on college grounds. She facilitated a special event in which the Intercultural Center hosted a reading and book-signing with Kansas City Star Vice President for Community Services, Lewis Diuguid. She orchestrated this reception in honor of his new book, *A Teacher’s Cry: Expose the Truth About Education Today*. Because this book deals with his four years of experience in a local high school (Washington H.S.), Melanie also successfully involved members of the local school board and school administration in this event.

Melanie has also built what has become known as the Kansas City Kansas Democracy InDEED Project. This new civic association brings together community agencies, educational institutions, and government entities as allies working for the intercultural transformation of community institutions through joint educational efforts. *Its mission: to promote positive, pro-active, cross-cultural community inclusion in Wyandotte County.*

The name “Democracy InDEED” was coined to emphasize our community’s need for the practical implementation of democratic values, particularly the following:
DIVERSITY: Build a sense of community that respects and celebrates diversity. Develop an authentic wholeness and solidarity, not an imposed and artificial sameness.

EQUALITY: Advocate and defend positive human relations (including race, class, and gender relations) in employment, education, housing, health care, law enforcement, media, etc.

EMPOWERMENT: Support grass roots democracy through citizen action in the tradition of the civil rights movement, the women’s rights movement, and the labor movement.

DEVELOPMENT: Engage in human development strategies: organizational development, community development, economic development, professional and workforce development and personal development.

The Democracy InDEED Project is an informal coalition of local institutions and community organizations and leaders who are concerned about maintaining and developing democratic practices and values in Kansas City, Kansas, and Wyandotte County. Our goals include expanding contacts and cooperation within neighborhoods as well as within the public and private sectors, especially among those of us working on issues of diversity, equality, and democratic empowerment. We desire to increase the information, understanding and involvement within our community in general, and to build ties among the public service organizations: the Unified Government, the public school systems of District 500, Turner, Piper, Bonner Springs/Edwardsville, and Kansas City Kansas Community College. We seek also to protect dissenting voices that challenge existing undemocratic policies and conditions, and to advocate progressive changes of those policies and conditions. We operate as independent allies for education, accountability, and transformation. Mayor Carol Marinovich and college president, Dr. Thomas R. Burke, endorsed this project, and the Intercultural Center received a symbolic plaque from Mayor Marinovich acknowledging our work in building community in this constructive and inclusive manner.

Charles Reitz, and Stephen Spartan are also producing scholarship and publications that undergird the Center’s work. It is intended to help facilitate the professional development of other interested faculty and administrators on campus and beyond. For example, Charley has recently developed an approach to an active pedagogy that combines multicultural elements with critical social theory and a robust reconstruction of citizenship education. In this regard please see his book chapter “Elements of EduAction: Critical Pedagogy and the Community College” included in The Freirean Legacy: Educating for Social Justice (New York, Bern, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002). There he discusses how concepts central to the “pedagogy
of the oppressed” of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, may impact the community college climate, curriculum, classroom dynamics, and social service mission. EduAction focuses on the following key components of emancipatory education and community-building: *Solidarity* (developing student talent and success); *Content* (investigating sets of questions and problems, not proclaiming principles); *Directed Dialogue* (about causes and prospects, hopeful and empowering, avoiding all fatalism); *Multiculturalism* (inclusive, group work, active learning, service learning); *Community Impact Education* (higher education’s civic mission, democratic social action). These concepts were developed from his earlier contribution to Freirean theory in *Freirean Pedagogy: Praxis and Possibilities* (London: Falmer Press, 2000).

By virtue of a special Perkins Worforce Development grant this year, Stephen Spartan has worked with Charley to create a Discussion Document for the Intercultural Center’s Workforce Diversity Project. The product of their investigation and deliberation has been written-up under the title, “Workforce Remuneration and Wealth: Observations on the Origins and Outcome of Inequality.” This was also published in May 2005, by the Intercultural Center. This booklet’s purpose is fundamentally pedagogical: to elicit, through fact-based observations drawn from the national income accounts, several freshened perceptions of the basic workings of the economy that can help the reader better understand the origins of social inequality and the fairness/unfairness of current patterns in the distribution of income and wealth. The discussion document is intended for college teachers in several interrelated disciplines – sociology, economics, business, labor education, history, ethics, and critical thinking. Our thesis here has been that inequality is not simply a matter of the gap between rich and poor, but of the structural relationships in the economic arena between propertied and non-propertied segments of populations. A diverse workforce that is disconnected from a movement for cultural transformation advancing toward the goals of solidarity and multicultural democracy can fall victim not only to ongoing economic exploitation but also to a condition where individual workers experience intensifying anomie, frustration, anger, dereliction, and alienation. We argue instead for transformational multiculturalism and action for social justice. Melanie, Charley and Steve have enjoyed an especially close working relationship during the academic year 2004-05, which we expect to continue this collaboration into the future. We would like to stress once more, in conclusion: *it is*
only through the active engagement and assistance of many other college employees that the Intercultural Center has been able to develop a reputation for remarkable productivity in terms of our campus programming, events, and institutional impact. To accomplish its mission even more effectively in the future, the Intercultural Center needs to have a full-time office coordinator and a full-time administrative assistant. We are also requesting that the physical space of the Intercultural Center be expanded to accommodate the growing interest in the college’s efforts at Affirmative Education.

“Cowardice asks the question - is it safe? Expediency asks the question - is it politic? Vanity asks the question - is it popular? But conscience asks the question - is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular; but one must take it because it is right.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.