BLACK PLACEMAKING AT
SDSU
A REPORT 2024

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INTRODUCTION

This qualitative case study examines how Black students build and maintain a sense of community at San Diego State University (SDSU). Despite representing only 4% of the student body, the Black community at SDSU is defined by resilience and active engagement, with Black liberatory spaces serving as its foundation.

The study was conducted during a period marked by significant social upheaval, including the George Floyd protests and the COVID-19 pandemic, providing a unique backdrop for exploring the experiences of Black students. Critical spaces for Black student life at SDSU include the Africana Studies Department, the Black Student Union (BSU), and the Black Resource Center (BRC). These spaces are instrumental in creating supportive communities that facilitate academic success and cultivate a sense of belonging.

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METHODS

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 18 Afrikan Student Union (ASU) members, observations in Black spaces on campus, and social media analysis.

Thematic analysis, triangulation, and reflexivity were employed to ensure robust and credible findings.

The study applied **Black placemaking** as the conceptual framework to highlight Black student agency amidst racial barriers and challenges.

"Highlighting Black student agency amidst racial barriers through Black placemaking"

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FINDINGS

The findings from the study demonstrate that the Black community at SDSU is resilient and actively engaged, with the BRC and ASU playing crucial roles in fostering belonging and support. These spaces help Black students explore their identity, receive peer support, and advocate for change despite significant hidden labor costs.

No. 01 — Community Defined by Resilience:

The Black community at SDSU is characterized by resilience, with students forming a strong attachment to their community despite being a numerical minority. The ASU plays a crucial role in fostering this resilience.

No. 02 — Community Defined by Active Engagement:

Active participation in Black spaces and events is essential for building community. Engagement with the ASU and BRC significantly enhances students' social and academic development.

No. 03 — Role of the ASU:

The BSU serves as a central hub for Black students, providing a safe space for expression and advocacy. Its activities are vital to fostering a sense of belonging and community.

No. 04 — Black Liberatory Spaces:

These spaces, which include the Africana Studies Department, ASU, and BRC, are foundational to the Black campus community at SDSU. They provide places where Black students can explore their cultural identity, find support, and build resilience against a predominantly white institutional context.

No. 05— Hidden Labor Costs:

Sustaining the Black community at SDSU involves significant hidden labor by Black students, often unrecognized by the broader campus. This labor includes organizing events, providing peer support, and advocating for institutional change.

Black Liberatory Spaces

Black liberatory spaces in PWI environments are dedicated places that prioritize the needs and interests of Black students. They encompass intellectual, physical, and communal spaces that explore Black history and culture, offer social gatherings for open discussion, and act as connectors to vital resources and networks. These spaces cultivate a sense of belonging and support, allowing Black students to thrive despite the pervasiveness of anti-Blackness, ultimately fostering academic success and a stronger community bond.
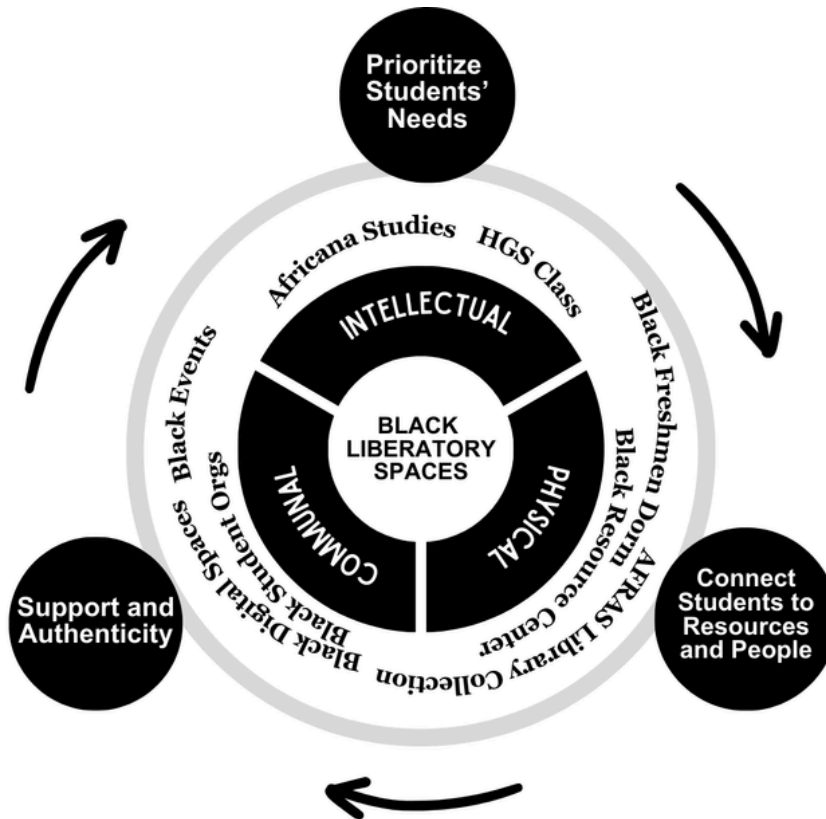
Intellectual

- Africana Studies
- Henrietta Goodwin Scholars Program (HGS)

Physical

- Black Resource Center
- Black freshmen dorm
- AFRAS Library Collection

Communal

- Black student orgs (ASU, NPHC)
- Black events
- Black digital spaces

This study emphasized Black campus communities' resilience and agency in shaping their environments to meet their needs. However, to achieve genuine equity and inclusion, institutions of higher learning must recognize and actively support the development of Black liberatory spaces. On PWI campuses, Black liberatory spaces:

- **Prioritize Black students' needs**
- **Connect Black students to resources and people**
- **Provide support and avenues for cultural expression**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance support for Black students at SDSU. These recommendations focus on increasing resources for Black student organizations, boosting representation and support for Black faculty and staff, addressing systemic barriers, and recognizing the hidden labor involved in sustaining the Black community.

Enhance Support for Black Student Organizations:

Increase funding and resources for the BRC. ASU and similar organizations to sustain their activities and support for Black students.

Increase Representation and Support for Black Faculty and Staff:

Include a brief description, rationale and intended impact. It helps to keep it concise yet conPrioritize hiring and retaining Black faculty and staff to provide mentorship and support for Black students.

Foster Early Engagement and Community Building:

Encourage incoming Black students to engage with Black spaces and organizations early in their college experience. Provide orientation programs that introduce them to available support systems and communities.

Address Systemic Barriers and Promote Equity:

Implement policies and programs that promote equity and address Black students' unique challenges.

Acknowledge and Support Hidden Labor:

Recognize the significant efforts by Black students in sustaining their community. Provide institutional support and compensation for this labor to ensure its sustainability.

IMPLICATIONS

The study's implications highlight the need for targeted support programs to improve Black student outcomes at SDSU. By recognizing the successes of initiatives like the BRC's academic program and increasing the presence of Black faculty and staff, the university can create a more inclusive and supportive environment.

Model for Student Success:
- The BRC's academic program boasts a **100 % 5-year graduation rate** for its participants, which is exceptionally high compared to university averages. This success highlights the effectiveness of targeted support programs and can serve as a model for improving student outcomes across the university.

Impact of Black Faculty and Staff:
- Black faculty and staff play a crucial role in mentoring and supporting Black students, which is essential for their academic and social success. Increasing their numbers can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment.

Holistic Support Programs:
- Implementing comprehensive support programs that address academic, social, and emotional needs can significantly improve the experiences and outcomes of Black students. These programs include financial aid, mental health resources, and career services.

Promote Cross-Racial Engagement:
- Facilitating interactions and understanding between Black students and their peers from different racial backgrounds can help improve the campus climate and promote a more inclusive university culture.

By understanding and supporting the unique needs of Black students, universities can create a more inclusive and supportive environment that fosters their academic and social success.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the time and effort of my students. Thank you for allowing me access to your world. Some of you I recently met, and some of you I have known for years. Your effort, passion, and love for building your community inspires me and gives me hope for a brighter future. Keep dreaming, keep fighting, and know that I will always be here to support you.

This dissertation is dedicated to Black students, Black educators, and Black people. I love you.

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