Concept Paper and Proposal – **Diversity Center/Safe Space Center**
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To: San Diego Miramar College CEC
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1. Summary

This is a proposal for a diversity-focused resource and gathering center for students. It would be a physical space on campus where diversity and inclusion are valued publicly and openly. It would be a place in which students who feel disenfranchised, left out, bullied, or alone could go to build a sense of community.  This "Safe Space" would welcome all students, including those of all ethnicities, religious backgrounds, and sexual and gender identities.

The center would serve several purposes centered around diversity and inclusion:
   o   act as a physical location for students to gather and connect with one another and with faculty mentors;
   o   (2) act as a resource center with information about campus and community resources;
   o   (3) develop programming and activities that respond to the needs of these students in relation to diversity and inclusion.

This proposal has been discussed and vetted with the Diversity and International Ed Committee. This draft includes their suggestions and feedback, but is still a working draft. We are open to suggestions, feedback, and guidance from the members of CEC.

Coordinator
A center coordinator will help develop the resources and programs of the center as well as be a trusted adult for students to connect with. This person does not have to be a counselor or mental health provider; however, they should be "Safe Zone" and Sexual Harassment trained. They should be aware of the different resources on campus (and in the community) should students need any kind of referral.

Interested stakeholders would choose the faculty member to fill the coordinator position from a set of candidates. The selection committee would likely include, but not be limited to, the Dean of Student Affairs, Dean of Matriculation and Equity, and/or members of the Diversity and International Education Committee (DIEC). The coordinator would require approximately 8-10 hours/week compensation, in release time or ESUs.

A year of pilot programming in order to collect data on the success of the center with less compensation would also be acceptable before fully funding the coordinator.

Mentors
A set of faculty mentors will be selected to also spend time in the center while it is accessible to students. Mentors will volunteer 1-2 hours of their time weekly, or, if enough mentors wish to participate, 1-2 hours bi-weekly. These mentors will be available to talk with students in an open and extra-curricular environment, fostering on-going connections between mentors and students. All mentors must be Safe Zone and Sexual Harassment trained.

The IDEA Faculty (Inclusion, Diversity & Equity Alliance) who host the annual Inclusion Event in the spring semester, as well as faculty serving on the Diversity and International Education Committee (DIEC), would be excellent groups of faculty to approach as potential mentors as they have independently shown personal interest in diversity.

Supervision
We envision the center as existing inside another larger space, such as the Academic Success Center (ASC), K Building, or LLRC where there is already staff or faculty that will physically be present while the door is open. For instance, let's use the ASC as an example. While the ASC is open, there is a staff person at the front desk, and additional staff and faculty around, including most likely staff member, Reylyn Cabrera, and faculty member, Donnie Tran. When the ASC is closed, the Diversity Center will also be closed. In addition, the Diversity Center coordinator will devote time weekly to physically being in the space.

The Space
As a gathering space, it needs to be inviting, comfortable, and large enough to accommodate a table for people to sit around should they want to have a seminar or discussion. The location of the center should ideally be decided upon by a group of stakeholders including the CEC, Facilities Committee, Vice President of Administration (Brett Bell's office), Vice President of Student Services, Dean in charge of the location chosen, and center coordinator with additional members drawn potentially from the faculty and staff involved in the DIEC or IDEA.

2. Goals

The goal of creating a resource and gathering center focused on diversity is to support students in personal growth and connection to the campus. In addition, it would support their understanding and awareness of diversity. Keeping students on campus, engaged in community-building, supports student retention rates.

This proposal most directly seeks to fulfill one of the main directives resulting from the Student Equity Planning Committee meetings, as listed in the San Diego Miramar College Student Equity Plan under the heading "GOALS, ACTIVITIES, FUNDING AND EVALUATION: AFFECTING SEVERAL INDICATORS… **F.2: Research possibility of multicultural center on campus for students to have a gathering place**" (p. 8, San Diego Miramar College Student Equity Plan http://www.sdmiramar.edu/webfm_send/12178).

In particular, this proposal supports San Diego Miramar College's Mission Statement (below) by creating a student **diversity** center that is focused on **equity** and as a result, increased academic and personal **success**.

> Mission Statement:
> *San Diego Miramar College's mission is to prepare students to succeed in a complex and dynamic world by providing quality instruction and services in an environment that **supports and promotes diversity, equity**, and **success**, while emphasizing innovative programs and partnerships to facilitate student completion for transfer, workforce training, and/or career advancement.*

Miramar prides itself on being a welcoming campus. However, without the kinds of resources or academic courses that speak directly to students of diverse backgrounds and identities, we may not attract or retain those students. Unlike other campuses in our district, Miramar has few Chicano/Latino, Black Studies courses and no LGBTQ/Queer Studies courses. The percentage of diverse faculty does not reflect the much larger diversity of our students, with few African-American, Latino/a/x, Filipino/a/x, Middle Eastern, South Asian, or American Indian contract faculty on campus. Much like television in the 1990s, diverse students do not see themselves reflected in the college campus.

We have few campus clubs, and those clubs are under strict district regulations, limiting the kinds of activities they can do. At this time (and for the past 10 years), students have not been able to seek mentors and community in student clubs such as MEChA (*Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán*) or the Muslim Student Association (MSA) as they can on many other college campuses. Nonetheless, this is not to discount the few ethnically based clubs, such as the successful FASA (Filipino/a/x), Persian Club, and a Black Student Alliance (BSA) that is only occasionally registered.

In a commuter environment, staying on campus to connect and engage is crucial for student persistence, retention and completion. Having a diversity and inclusion center would "support and promote diversity" (Mission Statement), and attract students of color or from disenfranchised populations who identify with a "diversity" label in some way.

This proposal also addresses several of Miramar's Strategic Goals, as shown in the chart below.

| Strategic Goal | Application of proposal to goal |
|---|---|
| I.2. Identify resources for appropriate programs and services to support student learning and success | ❖ The proposed resource and gathering center is a service for students that supports their success.<br>❖ The more students stay on campus, and feel connected to their campus, the more they are likely to have successful completion. |

| III.1. Identify curricular and co-curricular activities and college experiences that celebrate diversity and sustainable practices | ❖ This is the main Strategic Goal that speaks to this proposal, as the diversity center would serve as a co-curricular center that creates experiences and activities.<br>❖ Its main objective is to celebrate diversity in our student population.<br>❖ This proposal directly relates to Strategic Goal III.1. |
|---|---|
| IV.1. Identify current and prospective partnerships with educational institutions, business and industry, and our community | ❖ One of the objectives of the proposed center is to support students in the ways they need to be successful, by supporting who they are.<br>❖ This center would draw upon resources in the community to create partnerships that would support these students' varying needs in terms of identity and community.<br>❖ This would include invited speakers or activities coordinated through the center, as well as a wall of community resource brochures/information for students. |

3. SEP Indicators

The center would emphasize ethnic diversity, as well as aspects that make up ethnic identity, such as religious diversity. Therefore, this proposal affects students who are identified by student equity measurements, as well as those who are not yet identified, such as the LGBTQ community. However, with the passing of AB 1018 in October 2017, LGBT students will soon be identified and included in Student Equity plans. Therefore, this Diversity Center proposal can be seen as a step toward supporting those students as well, and helping their retention rates increase.

Data regarding targeted populations and SEP indicators included in this question are taken from the San Diego Miramar College Student Equity Plan (2015)
http://www.sdmiramar.edu/webfm_send/12178.

Ethnicity – targeted populations:
-- African-American
-- American Indian
-- Asian/Pacific Islander
-- Filipino (Filipina, Filipinx)
-- Latino (Latina, Latinx)

Ethnicity – non-targeted populations (not included currently in the SEP plan)
-- Middle Eastern (Persian, Iraqi, Afghani, Yemeni, etc.)
-- South Asian (Vietnamese, Laotian, Hmong, Cambodian, etc.)
-- African (Ethiopian, Somalian, etc.)
-- Other international

This proposal primarily plans to address the "ethnicity" indicators of student equity (SEP indicators), which includes religious diversity as a subset. In addition, it targets the forthcoming categories of LGBTQ students. Miramar already has successful programs and services in place that support students of differing abilities (DSPS), Veterans (Veteran's Affairs and Student Veteran Organization), ESOL (Basic Skills; ESL courses) and of economic disadvantage (EOPS, among others).

4. Outcomes

Outcomes for this proposal will be measured by physical use of the center and survey data. Outcomes are the following:

I. Students utilize the center for gathering and community building.
II. Students utilize the center to access information about resources on campus and in the community.
III. Students meet a variety of students from different backgrounds through center participation and programming.
IV. Students connect with faculty mentors in relationships that foster the students' personal growth.
V. Students experience personal growth through center participation and programming.

5. Activities supporting Outcomes

Each semester, the center can commit to completing the following activities, with modifications based on the particular needs of students currently participating in center programming.

1. Mentoring hours with faculty mentors
   -- to forge connections and mentoring relationships
2. Writing workshop with relevant themes
   -- as a tool for self-awareness; fostering pride in identity
3. Presentations by faculty, staff, and/or community members
   -- as a tool for learning, engaging, connecting to others, the campus, and the community
   -- to provide diverse role models
4. Showing of multicultural film with discussion
   -- as a tool for learning and awareness of self and others
5. Collaborative art project focused on diversity and identity
   -- as a tool for awareness of self and others; fostering pride in identity

6. Evidence based data – Miramar College

This proposal includes several charts from Miramar College's 2015 Student Satisfaction Survey. (http://research.sdccd.edu/docs/Accreditation/2015%20Surveys/Miramar%202015%20Student%20Survey%202015%20v1%20051815.pdf)

The following charts from Miramar College's 2015 Student Satisfaction Survey demonstrate the need for more programs devoted to diversity and personal development on campus. This is especially important given that diversity is stated in the college's mission. In addition, student responses show

that the college could do better in terms of fostering connections between people of differing backgrounds as well as to the college itself.

Fig 1: Please note Q44 and Q45 at 75%. This number increased from 2012, but it shows that a full 25% of students **do not feel that they have gained a better understanding and appreciation of diversity at this college.**

Equally concerning is that 25% of students **do not feel they have experienced personal growth in terms of understanding themselves better through their college education**. A resource center focused on diversity would support increased understanding and appreciation, while giving participating students increased opportunities to learn more about themselves in terms of identity.

## Personal Development
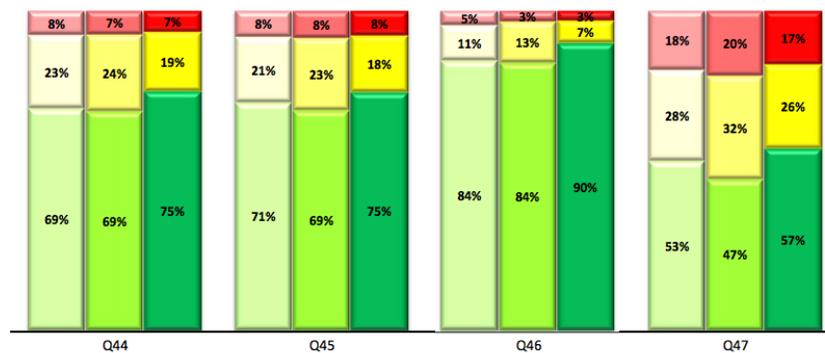


Q44. My experience at this college has given me a better understanding and appreciation of diversity.
Q45. My college education has helped me to understand myself better.
Q46. I have gained knowledge in different subject areas.
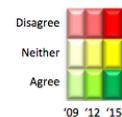Q47. I have gained computer skills.

Fig 2: Please note questions Q48 and Q49 below. More than a quarter of our students state they **have not learned about other parts of the world and other cultures** through their time at Miramar College.

30% have **not seen an improvement in their interpersonal skills through interacting with others**. A diversity center could help expose students to other cultures as well as help create connections between students who might not otherwise meet but may have a lot in common.

## Personal Development
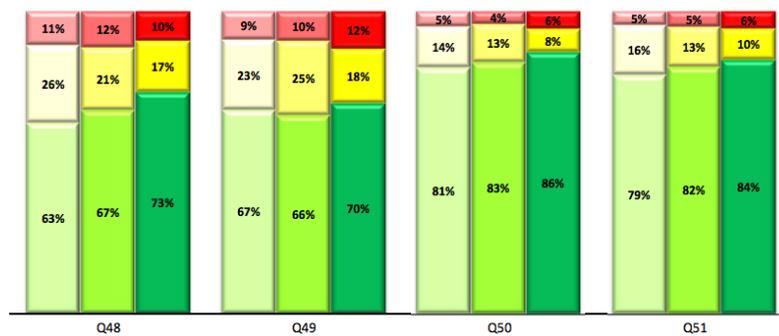


Q48. I have learned about other parts of the world and other cultures.
Q49. I have improved my interpersonal skills by interacting with people on campus.
Q50. I feel comfortable in this college environment.
Q51. I am treated with respect at this college.

Disagree
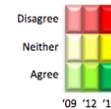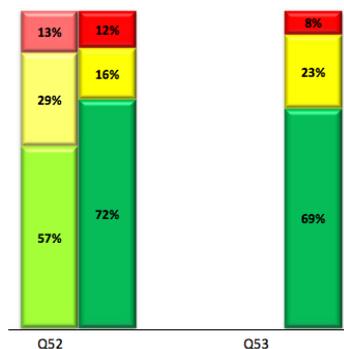Neither
Agree
'09 '12 '15

Fig 3. The measurements in Q52 and Q53 demonstrate **significant student dissatisfaction or simply non-engagement with student life**, including clubs and activities. The center could help fill in those gaps for students who utilize the space as well as students who benefit from any programming coming out of the center.

## Personal Development



Q52. I am satisfied with student life such as college athletics, clubs, and activities.
Q53. I believe that the co-curricular activities (e.g., clubs, service learning), or athletic programs have enhanced my educational experience at the college.

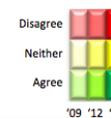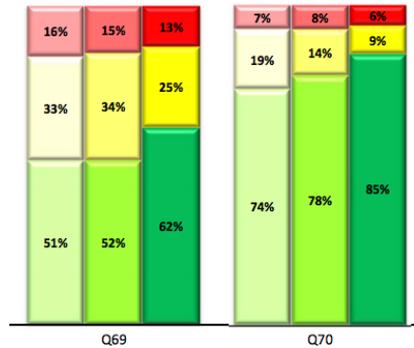Disagree
Neither
Agree
'09 '12 '15

Fig 4. Q69 demonstrates that more than a third of our students **do not feel a strong sense of belonging** to the college. This not only affects retention and completion, but also future alumni activities and giving. A center would support further connection to the college now, and in the future.

## Overall Questions



Q69. I feel a strong sense of belonging to this college.
Q70. Overall, I am satisfied with my experience with this college.
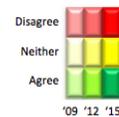
7.  Evidence-based data – External Research

Much external research and scholarship is devoted to supporting the retention and success of community college students. Themes that persist throughout the findings linked to increased persistence and student success include

- o (1) increased time on campus;
- o (2) engagement in college activities;
- o (3) mentorship and connections with others, especially fellow students and faculty.

Dr. Laura Saret, Ed.D. (Oakton Community College) in her paper, *Retaining Students in Classes: Putting Theory into Everyday Practice*, identifies college integration and a sense of community as crucial for student retention. She finds that

> "When students are **unable to become integrated into the college community, they are not likely to persist**… [T]his reason often applies to minorities and first-generation students who find the culture of the institution very different from their native cultures."

Connections with faculty and others can help: "When students don't interact with other members of the institution, particularly faculty, they will feel alone in the learning process and are **more likely to drop out.**"

8

Dr. Saret cites Alexander Astin (1984) who defines involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 297). This energy is demonstrated by the amount of time students spend studying, participating in campus activities, and interacting with faculty and other students. Therefore, creating additional opportunities for students to **increase "involvement" can help lead to persistence**.

Importantly, Saluri (1985) argues that "institutions send covert messages to students via policies and practices" (p. 441). Without resources on campus devoted to supporting the diversity of our student population, the **campus projects the incorrect image that it ignores the importance of students' diverse experiences and identities**. This "covert" message is **clearly unfounded** because the institution uses personal development as one of its measurements in the Student Satisfaction Survey, an important tool for planning and accreditation.

Toy (1985) concludes that "the quality of the relationship between students and their professors is of critical importance in determining satisfaction with the institution" and that "**faculty-student interaction both academic and social** is related to persistence" (p.383-4).

In the online article, *RETENTION: A Selected Critical Inventory of Best Practices*, prepared by Dr. Jeff Clark (2007), he sums up an important conclusion about what all institutions say about retention: "The retention factor considered **most important by all types of institutions is 'caring attitude of faculty and staff.'**"

Finally, Pittman (1994) hears students of color on his campus frequently say "**We need a safe space, a refuge, a place where we can go and just be ourselves** without feeling the pressures and constraints of an ever-present white world."

Creating a campus center for diversity and inclusion where students can gather, seek resources, and connect with faculty and other students would support these important findings.

8. Methods of Evaluation

Methods of evaluation used to measure the success of this program will include the following:
a. Student Log in/Log out – Similar to the ILC, as a measurement of how many students are using the center and for how long. Time frame: On-going; daily.
b. Surveys – After each activity or event, students will be given a brief survey to assess their engagement. Time frame: On going; frequent assessments throughout the semester.
c. Random surveys – At several points during the semester, a set of random surveys will be given to students to assess their overall engagement with the center and its programming. Time frame: On-going; 2-3 times per semester.
d. These surveys contribute to our data and evidence-driven campus culture.

9. Cross-Campus Connections

A diversity and inclusion center might forge successful connections with Student Success and Support Program (SSSP) initiatives, since the goals are similar. Furthermore, a successful diversity center would invite contributions and connections with many different areas of the college, such as language and

culturally focused courses and departments (Anthropology, English from a Latino Perspective, History of the U.S. from a Black Perspective, etc.).

10. Institutionalizing this proposal

The more students that know about the center, the more successful it can be. Therefore, I propose including a question on the Student Satisfaction Survey developed and managed by Miramar's Office of Planning, Research, and Institutional Effectiveness. The question would gather data on whether students would be interested in receiving information about the center. Those students could be targeted with materials inviting them to the center.

Those faculty serving as mentors could invite students from their classes to the center as an incentive to spend non-academic, social time with them. Faculty could share information with their colleagues through departmental meetings as well as Academic Senate.

In addition, a page would be added to the Miramar College website (perhaps under Student Services) welcoming students to the center.

Thank you for your consideration.

11. References List

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