

Through Our Eyes:
The State of the Black Student at
Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis

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Introduction

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis is an urban institution home to less than 2,500 Black students, and continuously dropping. This is do to the fact that the campus reflects a false sense of diversity, respect, and support for its Black student population. IUPUI says it aims to provide for you as a Black student, but in all actuality, it provide “nothing.” There is no mission, no goals, and no vision for Black students here at IUPUI. Our voices must be heard. Ultimately, Black students and their organizations on the campus lack communication, equity, equality, support, and respect here at IUPUI.

How is it that a university, located in a city with a population that is more than 20% black, lacks proper support for its black students? Our institution of higher education said this in its statement regarding diversity,

“When IUPUI began in 1969 as a newly constituted, shared campus of Indiana University and Purdue University, it was established in a historically African American neighborhood close to the center of Indianapolis and adjacent to Indiana Avenue, the home of the Madam C. J. Walker Theater. The new Urban League building is now also located there, thus linking the campus with a rich African-American tradition that has been *a founding value*” (www.diversity.iupui.edu/diversity)

IUPUI may recognize that it is in the center of a historically African American community and these African American traditions are a founding value, yet we do not see or experience these values on campus.

For years, Black students at predominantly white institutions have struggled for equity and respect; however these values are clearly not recognized or given any importance by the administration here at IUPUI. IUPUI likes to utilize the benefits of being in a predominantly black neighborhood, but tailors little to none of campus programming toward Black students. Yet we can count on IUPUI to exploit the faces of Black students on numerous websites,

brochures, banners, and other forms of publication to make the Black student population seem visible and representative of IUPUI.

What is diversity? IUPUI identifies its objectives as, “(1) diversity is an educational and social asset to be reflected in our learning and work objectives; (2) the persons who comprise our academic community reflect both the current diversity of our service region as well as the evolving demographics of a state and city that aspire to participate fully in a global society; and (3) IUPUI's social and physical environment will enable all of its members to succeed to the fullest extent of their potential” (www.iupui.edu/diversity)

Taking objective one (1), we do not learn about Black people except in six African American studies classes. Furthermore, there is not enough Black programming facilitated by IUPUI. Objective two (2) is false. There is not enough Black faculty or staff on campus, especially at the administrative level, and for Indianapolis to be over 20% Black, there should be more representation of black people in leadership positions on the IUPUI campus. Finally objective three (3), IUPUI does not create an environment for members of the campus to succeed to the fullest. As Black students, we have created our own environment that enables us to succeed without the help of IUPUI. We do most of our own programming, raise money for our events, and attract other Black students to IUPUI, not the university. All IUPUI does it push its Black students away by not adequately showing the value of the Black student population.

Additionally, this document is a tool to inform IUPUI Black students, faculty, staff, and support of the discriminatory issues that are taking place on this campus. It aims to prove that because of the degradation, disrespect, and discontentment that Black students endure on this campus, IUPUI does not retain its Black students or faculty and staff at the level they should.

This document will ultimately cite problems affecting the overall visibility and comfort level of Black students, staff, and faculty. Four specific problems that contribute to a negative and unwelcoming environment for black students will be addressed. These problems will be viewed against a backdrop of IUPUI's commitments to diversity. This will prove that the commitments are not being upheld, and are more for show than anything. Please be advised that the commitments stated on diversity are not at all in reference to that of the Black student population at IUPUI, despite “African American traditions being the founding value” for this campus. Next, the key stakeholders will be identified. Their names and administrative titles will be given. Afterwards, a detailed outline will be provided of what, as Black students we want changed. Finally, a summation of thoughts and emerging themes will be discussed.

The Problems

- *IUPUI officials do not communicate effectively with the Black student population.*

There have been countless times when Black students have been addressed in ways that have been inappropriate and disrespectful. Whether it has been behind closed doors or in a public setting, tones and choice of words have been used that should not have been used.

In addition, IUPUI officials did not communicate with Black students when the Mary Cable Building was demolished to provide more parking spaces. Mary Cable was an elementary school principal, was the founder and first president of the Indianapolis N.A.A.C.P., and in her honor a plaque in the new Campus Center will be displayed. The Administration says that the Mary Cable building was demolished because it had asbestos, and it was more expensive to renovate the building rather than destroy it and construct a parking lot. One must wonder why was the Mary Cable building left to deteriorate anyway. Why wasn't it kept up like Cavanaugh Hall or any other building on campus named after an elitist of the community? It's because IUPUI doesn't respect the Black history of the city. Rather than build a new building to replace the old Mary Cable building, or have an office for black student affairs in the new Campus Center, a plaque will be displayed in her honor. Once again, IUPUI proves how much it values the African American traditions that are supposedly so much of a foundation for this campus.

In reference to the university's commitments to diversity and its correlation with effective communication, this is what IUPUI states: "Provide a civil learning and work environment free from discrimination and intolerance so that each member of the IUPUI community can succeed to the highest level of their potential. IUPUI will set high expectations for personal conduct and achievement...(www.iupui.edu/diversity)" Without effective communication, our environment is far from effective, and the lack of communication and inappropriate communication disproves any type of freedom from discrimination and intolerance. As Black students, our success in reaching our highest potential is cultivated through the environment that we as Black students create, not the environment which is laid out before us. Therefore, is the previously mentioned commitment to diversity being upheld? No.

- *There is not enough black programming on the IUPUI campus, facilitated by the University, as they do other groups. Furthermore, black student organizations do more programming on this campus than any other organization and we are not recognized for this.*

There are all types of groups, organizations, and populations on the IUPUI campus. Campus and Community Life even sponsors and facilitates an entire month for GBLT. However, during Black History month, campus programming to recognize this month is

completely supported by black student organizations. During Weeks of Welcome, Jag Days, or Campus Days, black student organizations are not given the recognition they deserve. During Campus Day during this fall semester, a sign in the lobby of the University College stated that the cafeteria area would have information regarding the Greek organizations and multicultural organizations. However, neither was represented. In fact, a sign displaying a picture of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. was present. However, Omega Psi Phi is not a recognized student organization on the IUPUI campus. Nor were they present at the Campus Day. There were no Black Greek Organizations, Black organizations, or multicultural organizations present, despite the numerous email requests to Campus and Community Life over a span of about six weeks.

In addition, Black Greek Organizations under the National Pan Hellenic Council facilitate 18 weeks of programming during the course of an academic year on campus. The Black Student Union facilitates 12 programs during the course of an academic year, not including weekly study tables. By our calculations, this means that these two Black organizations alone facilitate over 130 days worth of programming here at IUPUI. There are about 160 days out of the academic year. In translation, Black student organizations do 81% of the student programming at IUPUI. This is more than any other student organization combined at IUPUI. Even with this type of phenomenal activism by Black students at IUPUI, Campus and Community Life still does not contribute to any type of support for black student programming or even make an effort to attend such functions. Then again, according to Campus and Community Life staff, “in order for us to attend a program, the organizations should submit, in writing, a request asking us to attend”.

In reference to the university’s commitments to diversity and its correlation with Black programming, IUPUI states as a goal to, “Develop programs and activities that increase the sense of diversity in the arts and the aesthetic dimensions of the campus...Develop co-curricular programs and interdisciplinary activities that increase the sense of diversity on campus” (www.iupui.edu/diversity). The university does not host new Black student programming or support the current Black student programming in place. So is this diversity commitment being upheld? No.

- *There is a lack of equity and true cultural competence for the Black student population.*

Black students at IUPUI have no justice. When we discuss our grievances, we are ignored, pushed away, or discouraged. In the past, when we’ve asked for respect and understanding to the unique issues that Black students face, IUPUI turned its back on us.

What does it mean to be culturally competent? This means that one has the ability to be culturally acceptable, knowledgeable, and understanding of another culture. Black students want

to be accepted as who we are, not what the university wants to mold us into. We cannot be lumped together with other minority students. Our educational and social needs are all uniquely different from each and every population. IUPUI wonders why retention rates are so low for Black students and staff. It is because cultural competent behavior is almost non-existent at the administrative level, and “trickles” down the ladder, thus affecting everyone, especially the students.

One of the performance diversity indicators evaluated by the Chancellor’s Diversity Cabinet, is “to engage students, through the curriculum and co-curriculum, in learning about their own and other culture and belief systems” (http://www.iport.iupui.edu/performance/perf_diversity.htm). However, IUPUI offers only six African American studies classes. The curriculum in the history classes touches on the same material about black people that is taught in high school. According to the curriculum established by IUPUI, the most significant contribution we made to America was slavery. Why don’t we learn about Black people being kings and queens in Africa? Why don’t we learn about significant leaders in US history other than Martin Luther King Jr., Frederick Douglass, and Rosa Parks? It’s because our university doesn’t take the time or energy to develop a culturally competent curriculum, which proves that their commitment to diversity on this issue is false. The commitment states, “Promote culturally competent practice in the professional schools... Ensure curriculum content and pedagogical strategies that reflect a commitment to diversity” (www.iupui.edu/diversity). There is no culturally competent practice because there is no culturally competent material being taught in the schools. Are these commitments being upheld? No.

- *IUPUI does not allot funding as they should to Black Student Organizations.*

Funding for Black student organizations has been limited because our programs or organizations have been deemed “selective” (sororities/fraternities) or non-beneficial to the entire IUPUI student body. According to Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1968, a public institution in higher education is mandated to provide funding for sororities and fraternities, and if the institution doesn’t have university guidelines for sororities and fraternities, then a separate fund for these organizations should be in place. Black Greek Organizations are not the same as other Greek organizations, therefore, should not be held to the same guidelines set forth by Campus and Community Life.

Furthermore, how is it that a sports and recreation organization can be allotted funding to participate in a dance competition, however a fraternity cannot attend a leadership conference? Or why wasn’t the Black Student Union able to receive funding to attend a cultural event? Yet

another organization on campus was allotted money to attend the International Festival. These are all discriminatory behaviors.

Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc., wanted to request funding to attend a leadership conference, where the members would learn leadership skills, which would be used to better its organization, members, and the campus, considering that it does two weeks of programming an academic year on IUPUI's campus. Before the proposal for funding was submitted, a member of Phi Beta Sigma was discouraged and told "don't even apply" by a staff member of Campus and Community Life only because Phi Beta Sigma, along with other Black Greek Organizations are labeled as "selective", once again placing a stigma on Black Greeks. Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. was also denied funding to attend a leadership conference. Where does the term "selective" come from? It is not stated in any bylaws or policies with a definition. It is a term and definition created by Campus and Community Life administration.

However, Swing Cats were awarded \$1600 this fall semester to attend a dance competition, which was not open to IUPUI students. Furthermore, the organization wasn't even certain if they were going to compete or not. Nevertheless, they did state that by attending the competition and possibly attending, they would uphold the IUPUI name, thus bettering the student population.

These are four grievances expounded upon so that we can have a better understanding of the underlying issues we are dealing with.

Key Stakeholders

The following is a list of people and offices to which these grievances are addressed to:

- President Adam Herbert, President of Indiana University.
- Chancellor Charles R. Bantz, Chancellor of Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis
- Indiana University Board of Trustees
- John Jones, Associate Dean of Students
- Karen Whitney: Dean of Students and Vice Chancellor of Student Life and Diversity, and newly appointed Campus Diversity Officer
- Michelle Verduzco, Director of Campus and Community Life
- Susan Canady: Assistant Director of Campus and Community Life
- Sandy Flowers, Coordinator for Student Development

- Undergraduate Student Government
 - Nathan Kohley, President
 - Jordan Adams, Vice President
 - Kurush Savabi, Treasurer
 - Jeffrey Johnson, Senate Leader
 - Erika Yasuna, Secretary

What we want changed and our demands

Communication

- Publication of events, policies, and procedures that affect IUPUI students
- Publication geared for black students to serve as a resource guide, which means the reinstatement of the Black Student Resource Guide

Respect

- Accept and respect us as Black students
- Take the time and learn about the various Black organizations
- Mandated training for all university officials (Board of Trustees, Chancellor, Vice Chancellors, etc.)

Support

- We want to see more Black people in administrative, faculty, and staff positions
- We want administration to attend Black programming

Cultural Competency

- More Black history in the curriculum at the undergraduate level
- A Black Student Center to house an area for African American culture, an office that advocates for Black student affairs (consisting of qualified Black faculty and staff), an office for Black Student Union, and an office for the IUPUI-National Pan Hellenic Council.
- We want an undergraduate degree curriculum for African American studies

Funding

- Create a budget of \$78,000 for black student organizations

Conclusion

Black students of Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis are tired of the mistreatment we have received. The negative attitudes and behaviors are less than human, and we deserve and demand to be treated with the utmost respect that any student deserves and should receive. Discrimination is alive at IUPUI; disrespect is abundant; discontentment is burning among black students. The success of IUPUI black students is not a priority of IUPUI, it is a political formality so that the campus can “look” good, while using our faces and images to its advantage.

We are taking a stand against the barriers IUPUI has placed against us as the Black student community here. It is time for this campus to see that promoting diversity is more than just putting our faces on websites and brochures. It is time for this campus to embrace us and realize that we are vital members of the IUPUI community. One of the commitments that IUPUI has made to us is that it will, “Offer a physical environment free from barriers that would limit the ability of students, faculty, and visitors to participate fully in the life and work of the IUPUI community.” Well, we are enduring these barriers, and it is time for those walls to come down. The *revolution* has begun.

As of Black Thursday, November 2, 2006

You have until Monday, November 6, 2006 at 8am to have in writing a detailed description of how our demands will be met, as well as a timeline of having everything complete by May 1, 2007. This has to be submitted in writing to the President of Black Student Union, Dominic Dorsey at dodorsey@iupui.edu.

If Black students find the response of the University to these demands unsatisfactory and not received within the allotted time frame, legal action against Vice Chancellor Karen Whitney, Chancellor Charles Bantz and the University will be taken for racial discrimination in the allocation of student activity funds, as well as direct violation of student rights as detailed in the Student Code of Conduct, Part I: Student Rights.

In addition, if these requests are not complied with, we will demand the immediate resignation of certain staff within administration and Campus and Community Life.