

9-27-2016

History of the LU Diversity Center

Erin Dix

Follow this and additional works at: https://lux.lawrence.edu/lib_pp

© Copyright is owned by the author of this document.



Intro: This was a collaboration between staff at the Diversity Center, Wriston Art Gallery and Archives. My job as university archivist is to help people learn about Lawrence history through our collections of unique records, papers, photographs, and so on. So I'm here to share some of what we've learned in working on this project. Most of the materials on display here and in this presentation came from collections in the Archives.

Our goal here was to showcase the history of the Diversity Center at Lawrence and more broadly, the people (faculty, staff, students, and organizations) that have provided leadership on diversity-centered initiatives over time. We quickly found that this was a complex and fluid history, with lots of change over time – and this was a little overwhelming. We did our best, but there are plenty of relevant parts of our history that are not covered here. If anyone wants to chime in with questions or corrections, please do!

BUILDINGS AND SPACES

1969-1997: Black Cultural Center, 411 East Washington Street

1974-1997: Women's Center, Colman Hall

1997-2013: **Diversity Center**, 207 South Meade Street

2013-2016: Memorial Hall lower level

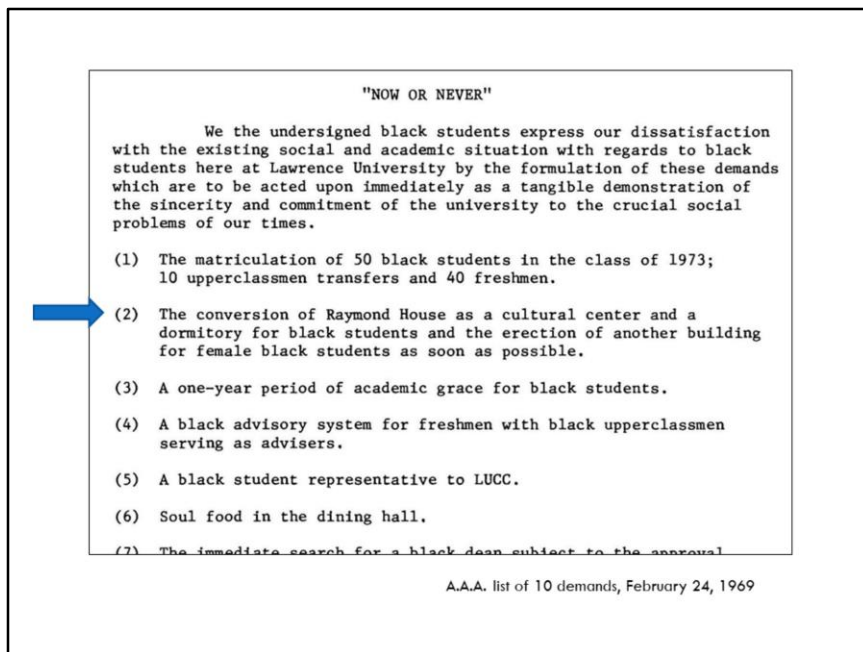
2016- : here!

I want to start with the history of the physical space (since we're celebrating this beautiful new space for the DC.) The DC was established in 1997, but the roots of this space date back to the spring of 1969.



Association of African Americans, 1972

Lawrence had been actively recruiting African American students since the mid 1960s, and by this time there were 19 students enrolled. But they found an atmosphere that was not adequately supportive. So some of them formed an organization called the AAA: Association of African Americans in the fall of 1968. (Brief aside: the AAA changed its name to the Black Organization of Students, or BOS, in 1981. BOS became Black Student Union (BSU) in 2012. So this group has been around for almost 50 years.)

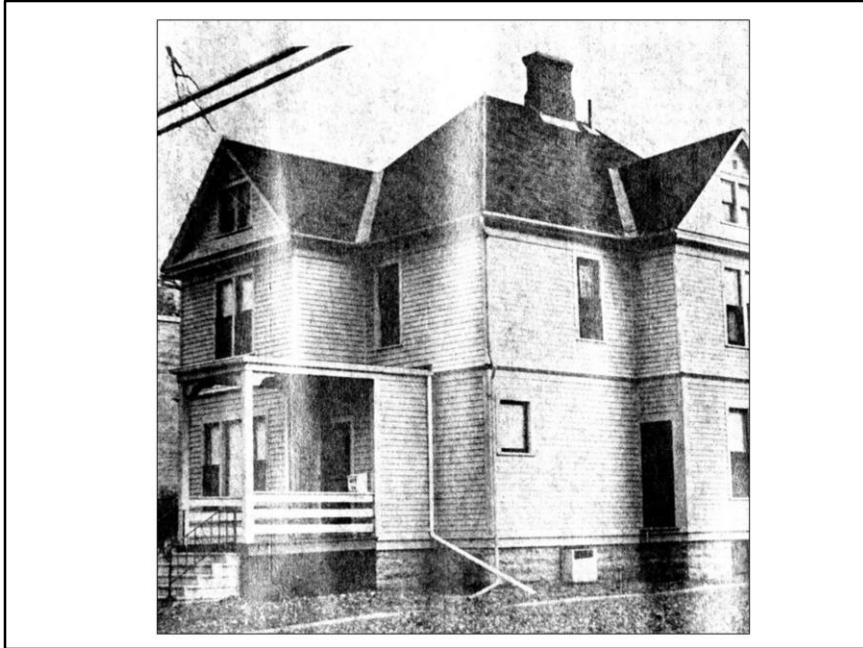


On February 24, 1969, a group of students from AAA presented a list of ten demands to President Curtis Tarr. (The document was signed by 13 out of the 19 black students on campus at the time.) Number 2 on the list was "The conversion of Raymond House as a cultural center and a dormitory for black students and the erection of another building for female black students as soon as possible." ("Raymond House" at this time was on Park St, across from the president's house.)

At first I did not understand fully your idea of a cultural center. I can see now why my personal preference for the use of space in a residence hall or the Union might not meet the requirements you have for such a center. Thus I am willing to pursue with you the possibility of assigning a house for this purpose; whether it is to be Raymond House or another one would depend upon suitability to your needs, availability, and the status of the dwelling with the building inspector.

Curtis Tarr's response to list of demands,
February 28, 1969

Tarr responded in detail to each demand four days later. With regard to the house, he said: "At first I did not understand fully your idea of a cultural center. I can see now why my personal preference for the use of space in a residence hall or the Union might not meet the requirements you have for such a center. Thus I am willing to pursue with you the possibility of assigning a house for this purpose..."



The Black Cultural Center officially opened at a house at 411 East Washington Street (no longer standing) on January 24, 1970. This remained the Black Cultural Center until 1997. During these almost 30 years, the house was the location for formal and informal events open to campus, meetings for the AAA/BOS, and it also served as a safe space for black students.



Students on the porch of the Black Cultural Center, 1977

Even though this house was specifically for African American students and not for all multiculturalism or aspects of diversity, it makes sense to recognize this as part of the longer history of the Diversity Center.

Women's Center Open to Everyone

by Cathy Boggs

On Tuesday evening the Mary E. Morton Women's Center in Colman Hall was officially opened for use by the Lawrence student body. Downer Council held the housewarming to celebrate the event. Guest speakers included Ms. Barbara Pillinger, Ms. Dorothy Draheim and representatives from the Fox Valley Chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW).

The women's center is named in honor of Lawrence's former Dean of Women, who died Sunday. At Tuesday's party her successor, Dean Pillinger, delivered a short eulogy recalling

Miss Morton's many years of service to young people. M. Draheim, who recently retired as the school's registrar and cared for Miss Morton during her long illness, spoke of the pleasure the Dean would have received had she lived to see the women's center named in her honor.

Completing the evening saw a skit put on by six members of the local NOW chapter including Lawrence librarians Mary Struckmeyer and Doris Giese. The subject of the skit was the women's place in American society, past and present.

Located in the former Zeta Alpha Phi sorority room, the women's center is open to all students who are interested in issues related to women. The room is furnished with comfortable chairs and sofa, a thick shag rug, a stereo, T.V. and large bookcase. The room features the basics of a women's lending library.

In all, the new campus women's center is a good place for holding meetings, rap sessions or informal talks with friends on issues of importance to everyone. The key is available from the Colman desk.

The Lawrentian, March 1, 1974

Similarly, the Downer Feminist Council maintained a Women's Center in Colman Hall from 1974 to 1997. This was a resource center and a space for meetings and events, "open to all students who are interested in issues related to women."

New multicultural house on campus

BY NEAL RIEMER

DFC, BGLASS, BOS and the Lucc Committee on Multicultural Affairs will be the main tenants of a new multicultural house on Meade Street. The Lucc Committee and the groups under its supervision are moving into a centrally located blue house on the east side of the fraternity quad.

The as yet unnamed house will be the main headquarters for the Downer Feminist Council (DFC), the Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian And Straight Society (BGLASS) and the Black Organization of Students (BOS). DFC and BGLASS will share the north wing of the first floor and BOS will occupy the first floor's south wing.

In past years, Lawrence rented the house to members of the

feels it should provide a place for members of the group to socialize with other members of BOS. The BOS wing will receive a newly remodeled kitchen, which should help in social endeavors.

BOS Co-president Paula Gudmundson said that "the new place will have videos, books, maybe a computer, something accessible to students or to the black community in general."

Gudmundson said that their wing is "mostly to be used for meetings," but also hopes to have Coffeehouse-style talks with members of faculty and administration on issues pertinent to African-Americans.

Joe Tennis, former president of BGLASS, busy this week moving the DFC/BGLASS library to the new locale, said BGLASS and DFC



The Lawrentian, September 19, 1997

In 1997, a house at 207 South Meade St opened as the Diversity Center. The center was intended to serve as the home for the Multicultural Affairs Committee of Lucc (now CODA), the BOS (now BSU), DFC, and BGLASS (Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and Straight Society – now GLOW.) By this time there was also some staff devoted to diversity-centered programming, which we'll get to shortly.



Diversity Center, lower level Memorial Hall, 2014

Then in 2013, the Diversity Center was relocated to the lower level of this building. This made it a bit more centrally located, but there were a lot of other issues with the space. The list of demands and concerns by students of color from last fall included a concern that the Diversity Center's location across from the VR prevented it from being a truly safe space. This, and just the clear need for a better space to serve as the home for the DC, led to the shift to this space.



Riverview Lounge (now the Diversity Center), circa 1960

(Sidenote: when this building was Memorial Union, this was the Riverview Lounge – home of dances, LUCC meetings, election viewing parties, all sorts of things.)

STAFF AND PROGRAMS



1990-1993: **Dr. Herbert Perkins**, Associate Dean of Students for Multicultural Affairs



1993-1995: **Chris Nwabeke**, Associate Dean of Students for Residence Life and Multicultural Affairs

The first faculty/staff person hired specifically for diversity-centered initiatives was Herbert Perkins, hired as the Associate Dean of Students for Multicultural Affairs in 1990. He was to “help develop an environment in which we can learn from the experience of people representing diverse backgrounds.” Dr. Perkins was also a professor in the Anthropology department but his duties prevented him from doing much teaching – he was responsible for serving as a resource for students of color as well as advising international students. He left in 1993 to pursue opportunities more centered on teaching.

Chris Nwabeke was Associate Dean of Students for Residence Life and Multicultural Affairs 1993 to 1995. That was a whole lot of responsibility for one person – it involved overseeing residence life as well as everything Herbert Perkins had been doing for international students and domestic students of color. In 1995 the Student Affairs office was reorganized and this position was eliminated. For a few years, no full staff positions were dedicated to multicultural affairs. There may have been some RHD collateral positions that involved part-time multicultural affairs responsibilities. This changed in 2000.

- 2000-2001: **Timothy Gibson**, Assistant Dean of Students for Multicultural Affairs
- 2001-2006: **Rod Bradley**, Assistant Dean of Students for Multicultural Affairs
- 2006-2008: **Mohammed Bey**, Assistant Dean of Students for Multicultural Affairs
- 2008-2009: **Erik Farley**, Assistant Dean of Students for Multicultural Affairs
- 2009-2016: **Pa Lee Moua**, Assistant Dean of Students for Multicultural Affairs; Associate Dean of Students at the Diversity Center, 2016-

"The Office of Multicultural Affairs' mission is to help provide the resources necessary for all students to express and explore culture and identity. The Multicultural Affairs staff engages in issues that relate to diversity and acts as a catalyst regarding academic, social and cultural support for students. The office seeks to provide a forum by which issues of culture and identity can be broadly addressed on campus and in the surrounding communities. The office collaborates with university departments and organizations within and outside the Lawrence community to enhance and expand programs services and other activities for students while continually supporting the academic mission of the institution. The office assists various student groups in presenting major campus events that draw many visitors to the campus each year, such as Pride Awareness, African-American Celebration, Identity Forum, and Women's Heritage."

- OMA mission statement, 2002


Between 2000 and 2009, four people held the title of Assistant Dean of Students for Multicultural Affairs. They were assisted in Diversity Center programming by student and residence hall director collateral assignment positions. Pa Lee Moua took over in 2009, and she is now the Associate Dean of Students at the Diversity Center – and there are now new full-time positions for programming and coordinating DC activities. So we've seen great progress in recent years with staffing for the DC.

Fox Valley sponsors King celebration

The Fox Valley will celebrate the legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with a multi-cultural, interfaith event Jan. 16 at Memorial Presbyterian Church in Appleton.

The celebration, titled "Martin Luther King: Celebrating Our Diversity," will actually begin at 7 p.m. with a gathering in Houdini Plaza in downtown Appleton. The brief ceremony will include remarks by Appleton Mayor Dorothy Johnson. Those gathered will light candles and march to the site of the service, singing "We Shall Overcome" and other songs in the spirit of unity and equality.

The Lawrentian, January 14, 1992



Martin Luther King Celebration


Keynote Speaker: Arun Gandhi
Gandhi Institute, Christian Brothers
University, Memphis, Tennessee

Sunday, January 17 and
Monday, January 18, 1993

Sunday, 7:00 p.m.
Why the King and Gandhi Dreams Remain Unfulfilled
Lawrence Memorial Chapel

Monday, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.
Nonviolence or Non-Existence: Options for the 21st Century
Riverview Lounge, Memorial Union

Sponsored by Multicultural Affairs through
Libby Endowment Funds
Co-sponsored with Appleton churches



One of the longer-running programs that the Diversity Center/OMA staff have supported is the annual MLK, Jr. Day community celebration. This started in 1992 as a march from Houdini Plaza to the celebration held at Memorial Presbyterian Church. The goal of the event as stated at this time was "to celebrate the diversity of the Fox Valley area and to rekindle the spirit of Martin Luther King's dream for a society that looked past differences in color, creed and religion." Sponsors of the event included the Multicultural Affairs Office, BOS, a number of local congregations, and other community organizations. The next year, the event was hosted in the Chapel and the primary sponsor became a local non-profit called Toward Community: Unity in Diversity (within the last few years this organization merged with another to become Celebrate Diversity Fox Cities). As you may know, last year's MLK, Jr. Day event was the 25th annual, and the featured speaker was Angela Davis. This is an important collaboration between Lawrence and the wider community, and the Diversity Center/OMA has played an important role in helping to start and sustain the event.

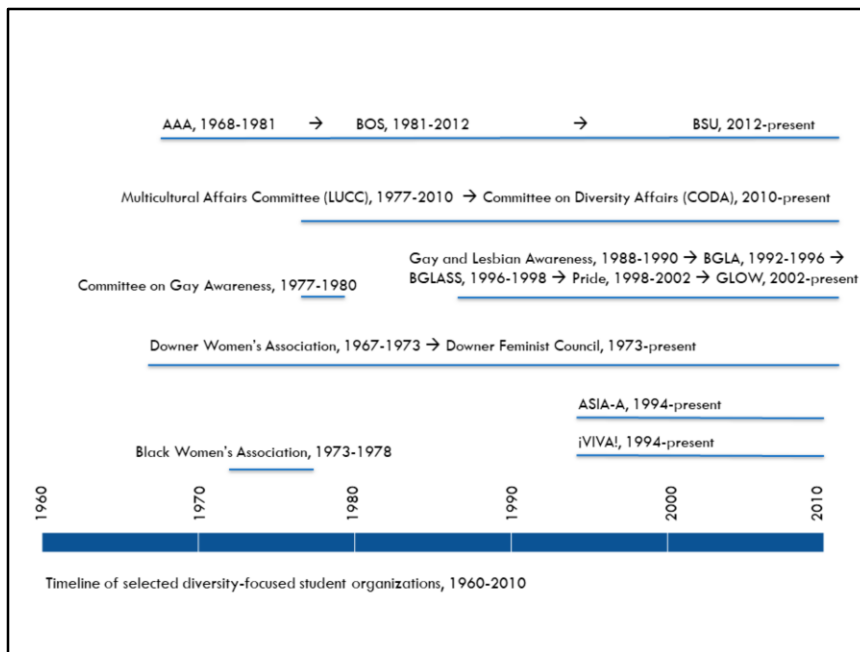


First Posse scholars at Lawrence, 2007

Another collaborative effort that the Diversity Center has helped to support is Lawrence's participation in the Posse program. The Posse Foundation supports students who show strong leadership skills in attending selective colleges around the country, in groups of ten. Posse scholars receive full tuition scholarships for all four years, and they support each other as well as engage in campus leadership. This year's posse is the tenth at Lawrence – the first posse started at Lawrence in the fall of 2007.

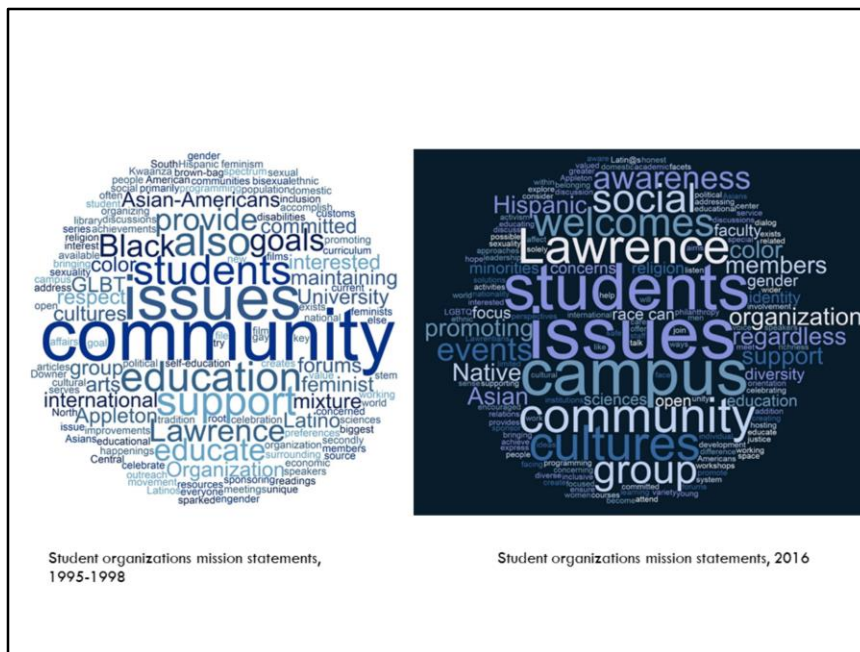


I want to close by spending a bit of time discussing the evolution of student organizations focused on aspects of diversity, because these organizations (and students in general) have been major drivers of all of this – the establishment and strengthening of the Diversity Center as a physical space, a set of resources, professional staffing and support. In general, there are a few organizations in this category today that have a pretty long history at Lawrence. Then in the early to mid-1990s, many more organizations started cropping up. And plenty of others have since then as well, so that now there are more than 20 student organizations recognized by LUCC that are focused on aspects of diversity.



I wanted to try to illustrate this trajectory, so I made this timeline. It's not a complete timeline – there are plenty of organizations left out here from the later years. But you can see the longer-term organizations: we talked about AAA/BOS/BSU. DFC has a similarly long history. The Multicultural Affairs Committee of LUCC (which changed its name to CODA in 2010), was established in 1977. The same goes for GLOW: as far as I can tell, the first student group focused on LGBT issues was the Committee on Gay Awareness established in 1977. It had a period of dormancy in the 1980s, but was renewed as Gay and Lesbian Awareness in 1988. Its name has changed a number of times, but it's essentially GLOW. ASIA-A and VIVA were established in 1994, and other groups not listed here formed, especially after the Diversity Center was established in 1997.

I have the Black Women's Association (1973-1978) listed here for a few reasons. This was another group that I didn't know anything about until we were digging around for this project. Even though it was a shorter-term group (and there have been many, many student orgs like this over time – it takes a steady stream of dedicated leadership to sustain a student group through the constant turnover of the student body, and that's not always easy), it is an ancestor of some more recently-formed organizations.



To close, we wanted to find a way to illustrate the connections between student organizations focused on aspects of diversity. On the left is a word cloud made using the mission statements and descriptions for diversity-centered groups dating from about 20 years ago, and on the right is one from groups today. There are some differences but a lot of similarities as well. For students, it can be hard to see the context of your four years here, the longer history. My conclusion, and what I would hope you might take away from this presentation and this exhibit, is that there have been many people, generations of people, here at Lawrence (students, faculty, staff, administration, community members, etc.) working to improve diversity and inclusion over the years. Progress has been made, and it will continue to be made – but only with the continued efforts of all of us.

QUESTIONS?



Lawrence University Archives

Library, Level B

Monday-Friday, 1-5pm

archives@lawrence.edu

I'm happy to take questions. I want to add, too, that if you're interested in learning more about anything we touched on here or other aspects of Lawrence history, please contact me or come visit me in the Archives!