

AY 2023-24 CSULB Academic Senate Retreat

Elevating Black Excellence at CSULB



Present to you by
Academic Senate Executive Committee
March 12, 2024

INTRODUCTION

The annual CSULB Academic Senate Retreat took place at the Japanese Garden on the afternoon of October 26th, 2023 and focused on elevating Black excellence at CSULB. The brilliance of Black children and adults is axiomatic [1], but CSULB has work to do in order to be a place that consistently elevates and honors Black excellence, that recruits, welcomes, and empowers Black excellence, and that contributes to thriving Black excellence.

More than 100 members of the CSULB community gathered to discuss this important topic. Members from Black Excellence Collegium at each of 10 tables facilitated discussion; members of Academic Senate's Executive Committee recorded the ideas generated in these discussions, which are synthesized in this report. As a result, this report represents only an excerpt or fraction of the experience of the current CSULB community, and readers should take care not to let it speak for the whole community as it is now or as it could be.

This report draws on the collective wisdom of the retreat attendees and facilitators via several questions about what the university and individuals therein are already doing to support Black students on campus and how the university can better elevate Black excellence. While there were many indicators of good things that the campus was enacting to support Black students, one point that emerged repeatedly was that CSULB needs to be more intentional overall in recruiting, illuminating, and supporting the thriving of Black excellence, including communicating with, reaching out to, and providing resources to current and potential Black students, staff, faculty, and administrators. Consensus was reached at this retreat that it is not enough for the university to passively offer resources or proactively recruit local Black students; instead, the university must center the needs and experiences of Black members of the community and transform itself to support thriving Black excellence.

PERCIEVED CURRENT CHALLENGES TO NURTURING THE GROWTH OF BLACK STUDENTS' EXCELLENCE AT CSULB

Recruitment Challenges

Some potential issues with the Long Beach College Promise were brought up, such as the fact that some tracks chosen through LBUSD do not lead to majors offered by CSULB and that 50% of students who completed high school don't meet CSU requirements. In addition to transition barriers, misinformation and obfuscation of Black excellence that underestimates Black

students' ability and capability in pursuing a college degree, or certain majors have historically discouraged Black students. In high schools, a lack of inclusive curriculum to discuss history, a lack of awareness about equity gaps, and social justice issues may also limit the opportunities designed for students to develop critical thinking and reasoning skills.

Retention Challenges

One of the major challenges mentioned was the minimal presence of Black students in the classroom, and limited student organizations that center Black experiences and thriving. There seems to be limited space or campus community intentionally created for Black students to develop a sense of belonging and feel safe and welcome. Along the same vein, when advice and mentoring are not tailored according to different needs, Black students may feel less supported than their non-Black peers. How do faculty continue to develop equitable teaching pedagogies, evaluation methods, and advising skills that are culturally sensitive to Black students? How do staff and administrators continue to work with faculty to support Black students by making both qualitative and quantitative changes? For example, what resources and support can the university provide to facilitate the interaction and conversation between non-Black and Black students and faculty?

Framing

Recruitment and retention focus this issue on which individuals are “in the room” and can emphasize individual choices over structural change. Sustained institutional changes that support thriving Black excellence will help recruit and retain Black students, and CSULB should take care not to recruit Black students only to fail to support and empower them.

PERCEIVED CURRENT CHALLENGES TO NURTURING THE GROWTH OF BLACK FACULTY/STAFF'S EXCELLENCE AT CSULB

Recruitment Challenges

There has been a long history of CSULB failures in recruiting Black faculty and staff, which leads to inadequate representation of Black faculty and staff across committees, departments, and communities. Contributing factors include, but are not limited to unaddressed microaggressions, the absence of a systematic and consistent institutional plan to encourage Black students to pursue post-baccalaureate degrees or seek jobs in higher education, a lack of adequate and tailored institutional support for Black faculty and staff, limited supports for effective interracial dialogues to develop a more inclusive culture, and as a result a sense of distrust in place of what should be confident belongingness. The combination of factors listed above leads to ongoing challenges in the recruitment and retention of Black faculty and staff.

ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT BLACK STUDENTS

It is important to remind ourselves that it takes the entire Beach Community to make our campus more inclusive and welcoming for Black students. It is not the sole or primary responsibility of Black faculty, staff or administrators. Therefore, how each of us may contribute to these university-wide efforts in light of our racial identities is an important question moving forward. It is a long-term commitment, and the ultimate goal should not have to be achieved by Black faculty and staff alone.

Recruitment Efforts

1. More intentional and focused outreach efforts

More university-led and department-supported outreach efforts may increase the visibility of CSULB. These efforts could include participating in college fairs in Black communities or neighborhoods. Instead of having scattered and duplicate efforts in recruitment, the outreach office may lead the effort in coordinating focused recruitment events with support from academic units and other associated offices and units. Distributing pamphlets and flyers that lay out specific information and resources (e.g., scholarships, Black student mentoring program like BOSS program, Beach XP) for Black students at the outreach events may be a good starting point.

2. Partner with high schools in the neighboring communities

One possibility includes establishing a program like Long Beach Promise with other neighboring school districts and school districts that have more Black students, with a focus on preparing more Black high school or middle school students for success in college. In conjunction with the outreach events, the university can partner with school districts to uplift Black students by introducing different college majors and career paths to them.

3. Create a Black student network that begins in high school and includes college graduates

A sense of belonging may be strengthened through an intentionally created Black student network during high school. Students need to hear about experiences at the Beach from their friends, peers, and neighbors rather than getting generic information from the university. By helping Black students build a lifelong network from high school through entering the workforce, CSULB can further support that sense of belonging. Connecting high school students and current college students with Black alumni to learn from their success stories will inspire them to pursue their dreams at CSULB.

Retention Efforts

Once Black students start their journey at the Beach, it is essential to support them until the finish line. Having a better understanding of how Black students feel about the climate on campus (e.g., what makes individuals come and stay, what makes them want to leave) may offer useful guidance when planning CSULB's retention efforts.

1. Create an inclusive and welcoming culture for Black students

Attendees discussed the importance of creating inclusive classrooms that regularly facilitate effective intercultural and interracial dialogues. These dialogues should happen both inside and outside of the classroom, so students feel safe expressing racial realities and learning about identity and issues related to race. Learning opportunities and conversations should be intentionally created to develop an ongoing learning community. It is also important to acknowledge each student's presence and let them know the Beach wants to be a supportive environment. For faculty, having a syllabus that contains an inclusive and welcoming message may be a friendly first step. All university employees can let the students know employees' intention to be part of their journey and that employees will support them until the finish line. Always reach out to the student when they sense something unusual (e.g., a short message like "how are you doing?") and check in more often throughout the semester.

Attendees praised programs that connected Black students with Black faculty and also recommended more chances for our Black students to hear from Black alumni regarding their many different paths to success. Attendees also recognized that there is a risk of Black students being on the receiving end of microaggressions when they meet with non-URM faculty, though non-URM faculty are involved in helping Black students feel welcome on campus and providing them with resources.

2. Offer more specific and tailored resources to support Black students' needs

Existing services, such as counseling, research experiences, mentoring, and advising, could be restructured with specific funding, time, and resources designated for Black students. The support and resources we offer should not be generic but well-thought-out and intentional, carefully considering their lived experience. For example, specific office hours and counseling time may be created for Black students to comfortably discuss sensitive issues. An intentional mentor-mentee arrangement could also be considered to ensure that Black students feel supported. CSULB could host events focusing on Black success and build Black community throughout the year, not just during Black History Month. Keeping the conversation going may also be helpful. Attendees also discussed the use of centralized messaging to avoid information overload; thus, relevant and key information can be delivered more effectively to the intended student body.

3. Be a mindful and encouraging mentor

Without further taxing Black faculty and staff, it is everyone's responsibility to learn how to advise, support, and mentor Black students. Referring Black students to Black faculty and the Black Resource Center is not a solution but an option. Continuing to improve employees' skills in mentoring and advising Black students through a culturally responsive approach and nonjudgmental attitude is the ultimate solution for creating a true Black community at the Beach. The critical step is always how we turn these thoughts and ideas learned from workshops into actionable plans and deliverable outcomes. Be mindful of individual differences both across and within a racial groups when we mentor and advise students. Offer Black students encouragement and reassurance to pursue scholarships, awards, fellowships, and research grants when students feel hesitant about their ability and competence. Faculty, staff, and administrators should be advocates for our Black students.

POTENTIAL STRATEGIES FOR ELEVATING BLACK STAFF/FACULTY EXCELLENCE

Similar to Black student recruitment efforts, creating structures and environments that support a sense of belonging among Black individuals and communities at CSULB is necessary for recruiting and retaining Black faculty and staff. How we continue to ensure Black voices are heard and well-presented across the campus requires ongoing efforts in recruitment and retention.

Recruitment Efforts

1. Create pathways for leadership and employment

As part of the continuum of Black student recruitment and retention, a next step is encouraging and supporting Black students to pursue doctoral degrees and consider working in higher education. Another recruitment strategy is through intentional cluster hiring with a focus on content related to Black culture (e.g., music, culture, history, language, etc.). This effort can be led and coordinated by Provost rather than colleges, with a clear intention to hire Black faculty with specific skill sets/expertise.

2. More equitable salary and benefit packages

Compensation is an issue for all faculty, but the dominant process of becoming higher education professionals was built on a model of white individualism that disproportionately disenfranchises potential Black professionals. CSULB should value potential and current Black

faculty and staff by offering an equitable salary and benefit package (including childcare). The living expenses in Long Beach and Southern California are high. To attract and retain Black faculty and staff, these fundamental needs must be addressed. Black faculty and staff not only need to feel welcome and a sense of belonging at the Beach but also feel valued through tangible rewards and recognition.

Retention Efforts

1. Promote ongoing intercultural dialogues

Similar to the points discussed for student retention, it is essential to create a sense of belonging and community that encourages ongoing intercultural dialogue and to regularly seek input from Black faculty and staff. While constant consultation with our Black faculty and staff is critical, the taxation of Black colleagues should be closely monitored. Taxation may be mitigated by proper compensation, recognition, and adequate and meaningful support from non-Black colleagues. It is important for non-Black colleagues to constantly remind themselves/ourselves that recruitment and retention of Black faculty and staff is a collective effort, not the sole effort of Black colleagues.

2. Better leveraging of existing resources and support mechanisms

There are several resources available on campus. However, a lack of visibility, unclear goals, and duplicative processes make it difficult for all faculty and staff to navigate campus resources when faculty and staff need support. Better utilization of Faculty Equity Advocates (FEA) to enhance collaboration across colleges to support Black success and to promote dialogues across Black and non-Black colleagues should be clearly laid out as a campus-wide objective. In addition, FEA could provide intentional spaces that offer discussions and honest conversations about feasible action plans to overcome barriers and promote Black employee success. Black affinity groups may also collaborate with FEA to ensure resources and support are properly reached by Black faculty and staff. Affinity groups can also host intercultural conversations to expand the events from Black faculty/staff only to the entire Beach community. To promote Black excellence, CSULB needs a clear and actionable plan, from new faculty training to offering ongoing support through Faculty Affairs, Staff Council, Campus Climate Committee, affinity groups, and all academic units. In addition to streamlining and strengthening existing resources, providing additional opportunities, recognition, and stipends for Black faculty and staff to advance their skillset and prepare them to advance their careers is also valuable.

