





## Student Diversity Initiatives

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

**Student Diversity Initiatives (SDI)** is housed within UT Austin's **Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (DDCE)**. SDI envisions a campus where proud, well-rounded, and academically successful students are equipped with the skills necessary to advance social justice work through education, engagement, and advocacy. SDI encompasses two units—the **Multicultural Engagement Center** and the **Gender and Sexuality Center: Serving Women and LGBTQA Communities**.

During the 2013-14 academic year, the programs of Student Diversity Initiatives reached more than 19,627 students, staff, and faculty members through workshops, training events, programs, and the varied on-site services of the Multicultural Engagement Center (MEC) and the Gender and Sexuality Center (GSC). Throughout the year, professional and student staff along with student volunteer leaders concentrated on supporting student success, enhancing student leadership, promoting excellence in staff and services, and working in concert to strengthen the combined impact of the Centers on campus.

### **Building a Socially Conscious Community of Engaged Scholars**

Student Diversity Initiatives carries out a unique responsibility within the UT community. SDI directs attention both to the particulars of the experiences of students of color, native and indigenous students, women, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students, and to the broadest benefits of fully realized diversity for the entire UT community. While seeking to develop and support students academically, SDI nurtures students who can bring about a more just and equitable campus and a better world at large. SDI speaks directly to the core purpose of UT itself: to transform lives for the benefit of society.

In 2013-14, the Multicultural Engagement Center and the Gender and Sexuality Center demonstrated that the work of education and social change is best accomplished when acting in unity. The students and staff of the MEC and the GSC collaborated with one another and with academic and student life units across campus to inspire academic and personal success, support student leadership, promote excellence, and strengthen SDI's collective impact across the campus as a whole.

# Student Diversity Initiatives

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2013–2014 ANNUAL REPORT

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### **THEME ONE: Supporting Student Success Through College and Beyond**

#### **FOCUS AREA 1.1: *Expanding the scope of cultural events to incorporate elements that support academic success and student retention***

- Examples of 2013-14 cultural events that supported academic success and student retention include Steps for Success, You Bring Out the Asian American in Me, and Four Directions. <sup>i</sup>
- Of the 14 seniors who were formally engaged with the MEC, 12 of the students (86 percent) graduated in four years or less. Of the other two, one was a double major and graduated in five years and the other graduated in four-and-a-half years.

#### **FOCUS AREA 1.2: *Providing emotional, psychological, spiritual, and financial support to students of color, indigenous students, women, and LGBTQA students to improve retention and sustain student presence on campus.***

- Every day 100 to 200 people come into each center (GSC and MEC).
- Because the GSC and MEC serve as strong channels of support, students refer to the MEC and GSC as their “second home” or “family” away from home.
- More than 10,000 students called or walked in to the GSC in 2013-14 for individual advising.
- A testimonial letter from another university employee describes the effect of such individual conversations:

*“[A student] told me she came into the GSC yesterday in tears because of homophobic slurs that were being spoken and not addressed in her class. She really felt better and empowered after speaking with you, and I thank you for that.”*

- Activities and events that provided emotional, psychological and/or spiritual support to students included the following: <sup>ii</sup>
  - Women Healing Women Retreat for Women of Color
  - Native American and Indigenous Student Symposium
  - Gloria Anzaldúa Luncheon Honoring Queer Feminists of Color
  - 2014 APAC Heritage Week
  - 2013 New Black Students Weekend
  - For Us, From Us Scholarships Barbeque

#### **FOCUS 1.3: *Making interventions to improve campus climate***

- SDI programming asserts a place for students of color, women, and LGBTQA students on campus, and asserts that UT is a place where students of color, women, and LGBTQA students are celebrated.

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- SDI programming that highlights and celebrates student achievement include the following annual events: <sup>iii</sup>
    - Latino Graduation
    - Black Graduation
    - Lavender Graduation
    - RAISE Awards
  - Other visibility events, run by student groups within the MEC and GSC include: <sup>iv</sup>
    - Black Family Day
    - Black Empowerment Week
    - “I Am” Campaign
    - QPOCA Bloq Party
    - Pride Week
  - Each year the centers sponsor events that are held to help students and other members of the campus community organize for the improvement of campus climate: <sup>v</sup>
    - State of Black UT
    - Indigenous People’s Day
    - Sister Outsider
    - National Young Women’s Day of Action
    - APAC’s consciousness raising workshops addressing Islamophobia
  - Ongoing programming that supports an inclusive campus climate is coordinated through both centers. Examples of this type of programming include:
    - The GSC Education Program offers workshops and professional development training to ensure that students, staff, and faculty on campus have accurate information about LGBTQA people. In the 2013-14 academic year, GSC staff and student presenters provided 20 departmental trainings and presentations, 51 classroom trainings and presentations, 14 trainings to student organizations, 11 trainings and presentations in residence halls, 4 trainings to residence hall assistants, and 5 trainings outside of UT campus, for a total of 112 presentations to 2,778 people.
    - The GSC also offered 24 workshops through Peers for Pride, a student-led theatre for social change program.
    - The MEC conducts efforts with other units on campus to promote higher education among high school students of color. The demographics of UT increasingly reflect those of Texas, and the 2013 incoming freshman class was majority minority, with nearly 51 percent students of color enrolling at UT.
    - Staff provide students with access to the MEC library and the GSC’s Ana Sisnett Library, work with student groups to host film screenings to raise visibility of marginalized populations, and advise student academic projects that improve campus climate.

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## **THEME TWO: Supporting Student Leadership**<sup>vi</sup>

- MEC and GSC student staff members make it possible for both centers to successfully fulfill the multiple roles that they play in the UT community.
- A group of seven to ten students serve on the GSC Student Leadership Committee, developing and implementing promotional strategies and planning and leading public programming.
- Students also lead the Feminist Action Project organization and organize their weekly event Feminist Fridays at the GSC.
- In 2013-14, APAC sponsored the Asian American Leadership Institute, a six-week peer facilitation program that addresses social justice, identity formation, and community building.
- The Queer Leadership Institute is QPOCA's signature leadership program.
- The Black Student Leadership Institute is a day-long institute sponsored by Afrikan American Affairs aimed to equip emerging and established leaders with the tools necessary to achieve personal and professional success.
- The Multicultural Leadership Institute is SED's signature leadership program.
- Latino Leadership Institute (LLI)/Latino Leadership Council also led a successful two-day Latino Leadership Summit.
- The Changemakers series helps students learn more about what leadership means and looks like using a social justice framework, both in and beyond college.
- Desserts for Leaders is a celebration of students who hold leadership positions across campus, as well as an opportunity for these students to connect with leaders from the community of Austin at-large.

## **THEME THREE: Promoting Excellence in Staff and Services**

### **FOCUS AREA 3.1: *Guiding Implementation of the Strategic Plan***

- MEC and GSC staff met biweekly to coordinate movement on the strategic plan. Staff created a set of implementation tracking sheets to monitor and spur progress towards goals and objectives.
- SDI staff worked together to develop methods for helping student leaders align agency programs with SDI's identified goals and strategies.
- As part of this strategic alignment, SDI staff have worked with student officers in affiliated student organizations on developing program content, maintaining organization records and budget documents, implementing leadership development efforts to ensure smooth leadership transitions, reaching outside of SDI to impact campus climate, and engaging in strategic efforts to identify and address issues of concern for students historically underserved on campus.

### **FOCUS AREA 3.2: *Increasing Program Evaluation***

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- In accordance with the Measures of Success listed in the Strategic Plan, SDI staff worked to develop assessment rubrics for individual activities and overall efforts, and to help students consider program evaluation at the beginning of their program planning processes and throughout implementation.

### **FOCUS AREA 3.3: *Research and Professional Development***

- Research<sup>vii</sup> aimed at discovering possible areas of improvement or innovative best practices that could be adapted to UT's MEC was carried out in the following ways:
  - SDI staff spent time researching multicultural centers at other large universities.
  - SDI staff researched the services and structure of similar multicultural resource centers at California State University-Los Angeles, Emory University, University of Central Florida, University of Oregon, University of California-San Diego, University of Washington-Seattle, and University of Wisconsin-Madison.
  - SDI staff communicated with staff of other centers via email and Skype and an MEC Program Coordinator traveled to Wisconsin for a site visit with the Multicultural Student Center.
- Professional Development for MEC and GSC staff: <sup>viii</sup>
  - The MEC assistant director attended A Dream Deferred Conference, The College Board's flagship national event for student life professionals who focus on the unique academic needs and challenges of Black and African American students.
  - The MEC program and outreach coordinator attended the national conference of the Association of Asian American Studies, which was held in Seattle.
  - GSC staff attended the annual conference of the National Women's Studies Association as well as "Creating Change," the national annual organizing and skills-building conference for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community and their allies.
  - The GSC education coordinator attended a facilitation workshop that provided advanced training in facilitation, education, and group process leadership.
  - A GSC staff member also took part in LeaderShape, serving as a cluster facilitator at the weeklong student leadership retreat and learning a great deal about student development and leadership.

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## THEME FOUR: Strengthening Our Impact by Working Together

**Shared Operations:** The MEC and GSC experienced improved operations on a day-to-day level with an expanded team that encompassed the staff of both centers.<sup>ix</sup> One area of focus this year was job descriptions and hiring practices. SDI staff developed a set of questions to ask all job candidates regarding their knowledge of social justice, developed language ensuring that all job descriptions include a knowledge base on social justice issues, and created common rubrics for program evaluation and assessment.

**Joint Programming:**<sup>x</sup>

- SDI staff worked together to generate listings of resources for students in both centers, including a listing of courses related to social justice topics, a listing of leadership development opportunities and conferences, a directory of academic resources, and a directory of health promotion resources.
- SDI staff created a shared calendar, compiling a shared list of commemorative dates and programming.

**Special Events:** The events surrounding the 25th anniversary of the MEC were a collaborative highlight of 2013-14. The MEC presented a week of activities between March 24 and March 28. Events are listed below:<sup>xi</sup>

- Covering Up the Stereotypes
- The Diversity Wall
- Screening of film “These Birds Walk”
- QTALKA: A Panel Discussion on Allyship and Identity
- Screening of film “The New Black”
- Third Annual Native American and Indigenous Student Symposium
- Justice Jubilee, a student-led, carnival-themed social justice celebration

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<sup>i</sup> More detailed descriptions of these events can be found on page 3 of the 2013-2014 SDI Year In Review document.

<sup>ii</sup> Detailed accounts of these events can be found on pages 5-7 of the 2013-2014 SDI Year In Review document.

<sup>iii</sup> Detailed accounts of these events can be found on pages 7-9 of the 2013-2014 SDI Year In Review document.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Detailed accounts of these events can be found on pages 9-10 of the 2013-2014 SDI Year In Review document.

<sup>vi</sup> Detailed accounts of these events can be found on pages 13-16 of the 2013-2014 SDI Year In Review document.

<sup>vii</sup> Detailed accounts of these events can be found on page 18 of the 2013-2014 SDI Year In Review document.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> Detailed accounts of these events can be found on page 19 of the 2013-2014 SDI Year In Review document.

<sup>x</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xi</sup> Detailed accounts of these events can be found on page 20 of the 2013-2014 SDI Year In Review document.

## For More Information

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Student Diversity Initiatives

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Gender and Sexuality Center

[ddce.utexas.edu/genderandsexuality/](http://ddce.utexas.edu/genderandsexuality/)

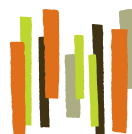
Multicultural Engagement Center

[ddce.utexas.edu/multiculturalengagement/](http://ddce.utexas.edu/multiculturalengagement/)

**VISIT THE DDCE AT:**

[www.utexas.edu/diversity/](http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/)

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