

## DEPAUW STUDENT GOVERNMENT

WHITE PAPER NO. \_

*A White Paper concerning First Year Diversity Programming at DePauw University and our recognition of the Administration's response.*

### **Introduction:**

“DePauw is committed to supporting students in their intellectual and identity development. We seek to promote intercultural dialogue, respect, inclusion and community. Our goal is to foster learning opportunities through engagement, advocacy, and empowerment to assist in developing active citizens of the world.”

(DePauw University Webpage, February 2014)

In accordance with other leading National Liberal Arts Colleges, DePauw has become home to a diverse group of individuals. Our students today hail from over forty different countries, hold a variety of spiritual beliefs and stand as advocates for the LGBTQ community. Now, while diversity undeniably enhances the overall academic atmosphere of a university, its contribution is minimal if students do not feel comfortable engaging with one another on a day-to-day basis. Without proper diversity programming, students cannot fully realize the benefits of intercultural dialogue and are unable to learn from one another. Today, we want to revisit the reoccurring challenges inherent in having an increasingly diverse campus. This white paper will address DePauw's previous approaches to diversity programming, highlight the necessity for improved programming and recognize recent efforts made by the DePauw faculty and administration to foster a safe space for all students, especially within their first year. We would like to acknowledge the amazing work and assistance provided by the offices of Multicultural Student Services, International Student Services and Campus Life and the Diversity and Equity Committee.

### **Background:**

Discussions about inclusion, privilege and intersecting identities are anything but new to DePauw. In addition to a resolution passed by Student Congress in 1998, a Multicultural Requirement White Paper was passed in 2012 asking the university to implement a multicultural requirement for students in the form of a semester long course or through additional out-of-class programming. This paper, built upon recommendations by surveyed students, was written in response to then recent cultural insensitivity. While the university responded with additional opportunities for intercultural dialogue such as RealTalk, such programming reaches a minute portion of the student body. Similarly, a video on diversity awareness at DePauw immediately followed by mentor group discussion during the First Year Experience, while well intentioned, fails to truly educate students on the power of privilege and necessity to deconstruct difference.

### **Diversity Programming Relevance:**

In light of recent events, it has been made painstakingly clear that there is diversity insensitivity on this campus and that many difficult, albeit crucial, steps must be taken to combat these challenges. If these challenges are not better addressed, we risk the further isolation of historically underrepresented groups on this campus, and we will leave a generation of students without the ability to converse openly and confidently with one another. As stated in the Multicultural Requirement White Paper, members of the Hispanic community voiced their concerns as early as 2010, attempting to raise awareness of racial insensitivity. Similarly, members of the LGBTQ community rallied to end discriminatory practices on campus in 2011.

As recent as late February, an article published in The DePauw and Huffington Post clearly articulated the need for more student awareness and better programming. In "Excuse Me, But Your Privilege Is in our Way," Ashton Johnson poignantly articulates the struggles that many students from historically underrepresented groups feel on campus, claiming that "a particular group of people has the privilege to freely move, behave and/or navigate around this campus." This is clearly inexcusable and the discomfort and hurt that many feel must be eliminated. Fortunately, her article has sparked conversation about how these challenges might be most effectively dealt with. Groups such as The Movement and Feminista have even rallied together to articulate their concerns in a safe space for student discussion. And luckily, our faculty members and administrators have responded with some aggressive initiatives that deserve recognition.

### **First Year Diversity Programming Solutions:**

In addressing the problem, one of the more popular solutions proposed by students has been to improve diversity conversations during the freshmen year. Having programming at the beginning of freshmen year is beneficial for several reasons, the most important being that it will help all students feel comfortable from day one. No student should feel inferior to his/her fellow classmates, and students are most impressionable during those first few weeks. While we acknowledge that the First Year Experience already includes a discussion on intersecting identities and a video featuring DePauw students and their experiences, these could be improved. We found that many first-years felt that they could not connect with the student speakers in the video, and that the discussions afterwards were not well facilitated and only grazed issues of privilege, awareness and insensitivity.

Therefore, in response to these concerns, the university faculty and administrative already have new initiatives in place for next semester. Due to the swift nature of their response, it is important that we applaud them for their efforts. While these are certainly not all of the changes taking place within the upcoming school year, here are the changes that we believe will be most vital to improving students' first impressions and initial experiences at DePauw:

- The implementation of student Intercultural Community Conversation Facilitators for first-year residence halls
- Enhanced RA and Mentor training to better facilitate intercultural dialogues
- More formalized First-Year Orientation events with additional programming throughout the semester
- New programming for First Generation College Students
- The development of a peer-to-peer education program for students within the Greek system that stresses the importance of good intercultural dialogues

**Conclusion:** If DePauw's campus climate is to change for the better, it is important that we begin with our First-Year students. This institution of higher education has the potential to not only provide students with a richer experience, but has the responsibility to educate students on social and cultural awareness and sensitivity. These skills will serve them well at DePauw and in their years to come. We cannot thank the DePauw faculty and administration enough for listening to student concerns and providing timely responses. We fully support the new programming initiatives and know that we have the power to be a better, more tolerant DePauw.

Motion By: *Ashley Kald*

Seconded By: *Quone Gordon*

Aye: 29


Nay: 0

Abstain: |  
~~Absent:~~



Walker Chance, President

Attest:

  
Colleen McArdle, Secretary

