The History of the Frieson Black Cultural Center

An idea born in 1968, the Black Cultural Center (BCC) is credited to being the brainchild of Ralph Boston, the Coordinator of Minority Affairs. This idea became a reality in August of 1975 when the Black Cultural Center opened its doors. Originally located in a two-story house, the BCC was home to several organizations such as the Afro-American Student Liberation Force, the Ebony Love Dancers, Repertory Company Theater Group, and the Liberation Concert Choir.

The BCC, which was directed by Dennis Littlejohn, served as a safe place for Black students. However, in 1980, Mr. Littlejohn was fired from his position. This action, coupled with concerns regarding funding for Black cultural programming, prompted students to protest. The result was a weekend-long sit-in at the BCC led by the Afro-American Student Liberation Force. An eviction notice ended the sit-in and led to the arrest of eighteen students; they were not violent but refused to leave. The day after the eviction, 200 students marched to Andy Holt Tower and demanded to see Chancellor Jack Reese, where they remained until the reopening of the BCC.

This event prompted the creation of the Office of Minority Student Affairs. The office began overseeing the BCC where they restructured its purpose from promoting, understanding, and appreciating the Black experience to serving all students regardless of race, religion, or background. There were several services added to the BCC, many of which are still active today. Eventually, there were discussions of leaving the two-story house that served as the BCC. In September of 1998, a task force that consisted of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community members worked to create a new space for the BCC. They reaped the results of their hard work on March 27, 2001, when the university broke ground on the current building.

Located at the corner of Melrose Avenue and Melrose Place, the new BCC opened its doors in June of 2002. The building houses an 80-foot brick frieze that displays African and African American history, a courtyard paved with bricks inscribed with donors’ names, and an African American Hall of Fame. The building features a library, state-of-the-art computer lab, student lounge, art gallery, multipurpose rooms, student organization suite, conference room, tutorial suites, and administrative offices. It proudly maintains an Academic Support Unit, a Book Loan Program, study sessions for final exams, and free peer tutoring programs. The building houses the Office of Multicultural Student Life (MSL), formerly known as the Office of Minority Student Affairs, prior to rebranding in 2011.

In 2015, the BCC was renamed the Frieson Black Cultural Center (FBCC), recognizing alumni Ron and Don Frieson’s $1 million gift to the university, and their leadership and commitment to diversity on campus. Ron and Don Frieson are African American identical twins from Memphis, TN who attended the university in the late 1970s. Due to the Friesons’ generous donation, the FBCC will continue to be a place focused on developing students dedicated to creating a diverse and inclusive global society.
What is S.E.R.V.E.S.? It stands for supports, educates, respects, values, empowers, and succeeds, but it embodies more than just an acronym. S.E.R.V.E.S. is the 2017-2018 departmental theme and is a representation of MSL’s and the FBCC’s rich history. Even before there was an office or building, UTK students were working hard to create a place for underrepresented students. A place where differences could be celebrated, cultivated, and shared. 40+ years later, we stand on the shoulders of those visionaries as we stretch our reach even further. The Office of Multicultural Student Life serves all students. We aim to give all students a place to call home. A home that is diverse in culture, creed, and character. A home that is caring and understanding. A home that showcases our differences and challenges our complacencies. A home that helps us learn in and out of the classroom. Serves is academic excellence. Serves is servant leadership. Serves is global diversity. Serves is active inclusivity. Serves is more than just an acronym, SERVES is a place called home.

- Tanisha L. Jenkins

Meet the Team

Ashley Simmons
Assistant Director

Ronni Williams
Assistant Director

Anderson Olds
Coordinator

Robert Hill
Facility Assistant

Carmanelette Rawls
Accounting Specialist

Diane Goble
Program Resource Specialist

Shanndor McClain
Graduate Research Assistant

Jheri Wills
Graduate Research Assistant
“I come to tutoring in MSL instead of other locations, because I know that when I come here my tutor is going to be inclusive, considerate, and helpful. I have always walked away having a better understanding of my coursework, and the tutors I have worked with provide examples and visual aids that are above and beyond what I would expect. The tutors are just nicer and more relatable than most and it makes being uncomfortable about the coursework a little easier. Thank you for the services you provide!”

~ Anonymous Student

For more information regarding our academic services you may contact the Academic Support Unit at asu@utk.edu.
The Asian American Association (AAA) proudly presented their annual 865 Night Market. This event gave student organizations the opportunity to display their culture through food, art, and conversation. This interactive exhibition gave each attendee an opportunity to experience various cultures. AAA’s ultimate goal is to enhance the awareness of Asian cultures and other ethnic groups.

Respects

Multicultural Student Life advises eight diverse student organizations. These organizations vary in countless ways, and we are proud that they call our office home.

Values

The Asian American Association (AAA) proudly presented their annual 865 Night Market. This event gave student organizations the opportunity to display their culture through food, art, and conversation. This interactive exhibition gave each attendee an opportunity to experience various cultures. AAA’s ultimate goal is to enhance the awareness of Asian cultures and other ethnic groups.

Luis Pedraza, the 2017 - 2018 Latin American Student Organization (LASO) president, greeted the guest speaker, Mayor Madeline Rogero, at the Cesar Chavez Celebration. This celebration is one of the many events LASO hosted this year to celebrate and educate the UT community about the various Latinx cultures.
Our student leaders are on the forefront of social, cultural, educational, and civic issues. Here is a spotlight on one of our amazing game-changers.

Empowers

The Black History Month Programming Committee

Created in November of 2017, the Black History Month Programming Committee’s (BHPC) purpose is to organize, connect, and orchestrate events and activities during the month of February. These activities honor and commemorate the accomplishments of Black history, while also aiming to create a more meaningful, educational, and empowering experience for UT students, specifically African American students. The BHPC seeks to encourage organizations to create intentional programming that appreciates and celebrates Black culture.

Along with student organized programming, the BHPC hosted five notable events, which included: The “I Am Black History Because …” Campaign, a trip to the Beck Cultural Exchange Center, a Black History Month Book Drive/Donation to Lonsdale Elementary School, the Celebration of Black Excellence Reception, and a Silent March to Ayres Hall. The committee sought to create opportunities for students to discover their personal contribution to Black history, learn from the past by exploring historical exhibits, contribute to the greater African American community, reflect on the accomplishments of African American alumni, and stand in solidarity for love and support of all African American people.

The Black History Month Programming Committee seeks to rebrand Black History Month at the university by emphasizing activism and forward thinking. The committee plans to stay on the forefront of social, cultural, and civic issues by expanding Black History Month beyond the month of February. The committee is striving to create a socially just and forward moving society that recognizes, celebrates, and protects Black history and culture.
The Multicultural Graduation Celebration & Recognition Ceremony

Succeeds

Congratulations 2018 Graduating Seniors!
And the Award Goes to...

Congratulations to the Multicultural Student Life leaders who received awards and recognition for their contributions to the UT community.

Sarah Feroza Freeland - Torchbearer
Michael Curtis - Chancellor’s Citation
Kiana Townsel - Chancellor’s Citation
Cecile Gadson - Carl Cowan Scholarship
Jaylah Radden - Carl Cowan Scholarship
Mariah McClerkin - Chancellor’s Citation
Diversity Educators - Chancellor’s Citation
Ariel Williams - Coca Cola Minority Scholarship
Antonio Butler - MSL Leadership to the T Award
Michael Powers - MSL Leadership to the T Award
Ayanna Crenshaw - Coca Cola Minority Scholarship
D’Markus Simpson - Coca Cola Minority Scholarship
Tanisha L. Jenkins - Zeta Phi Beta Woman of the Year
Maria Smith - Chancellor’s Citation; MSL Leadership to the T Award
Xavier Greer - Carl Cowan Scholarship; Coca Cola Minority Scholarship
Ronni Williams - Student Life Award Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion
Natalie Shinault - Lumsden-Greenberg Excellence in Career Management Award
Diversity Educators - Student Life Award Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion
Office of Multicultural Student Life - Commitment to Diversity Award Presented by UTK chapter of the NAACP
Now You Know!

The Office of Multicultural Student Life is excited to have Sophisticated Queens Unafraid and Driven as the newest member to the MSL Family!

Diversity Educators

Diversity Educators (DE) is a group of students who volunteer their time in order to educate their fellow peers about topics surrounding diversity and inclusion. Their topics range from religious privileges to the oppression of LGBTQIIA+ community in everyday life. Through these workshops, they strive to empower students to be leaders in our diverse community.

Diversity Educators have already made a lasting impact on UTK’s campus by facilitating 105 sessions this academic year. Many other student groups, as well as faculty and staff members, have recognized the positive impact that DE’s events and facilitations have had on the university. In 2018, the group was awarded the Charles R. Burchett Extraordinary Contributions to Campus Life Citation as well as the Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion Award from the Division of Student Life. If you are interested in requesting DE to present a workshop to your organization or class, please visit multicultural.utk.edu.

Brothers United for Excellence

Brothers United for Excellence (BUE) seeks to support the matriculation of male students of color by providing academic, social and professional resources, as well as promoting student engagement at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and the surrounding Knoxville community. Five members of BUE represented the University of Tennessee at the 2018 Men of Color National Summit hosted by Clemson University.
AUGUST
- Caribbean Splash Jam: BCPC
- Welcome Back Celebration: MSL

SEPTEMBER
- Rites of Passage: MMP
- Game Night: MMP

OCTOBER
- Vol Walk of Life: MMP
- Homecoming Comedy Show: BCPC

NOVEMBER
- Mr. & Mrs. Freshman Pageant: MMP
- 18th Annual SouthEastern Stomp Fest: BCPC
- Homecoming Tailgate: BCPC
- Pre-Kwanzaa Celebration: BCPC
- Finals Prep: MSL
- Late Night Breakfast: MMP

MONTHLY
- Mahogany Soul Café: MSL
  (Last Tuesday of the Month)

JANUARY
- MLK Jr. Day Celebration Featuring Deray McKesson: BCPC

FEBRUARY
- 13th Annual Black Issues Conference Featuring Angela Rye: MSL & NAACP
- Paint Night: MMP
- African American Literature Series Featuring Clint Smith: BCPC
- Noche De Baile: LASO

MARCH
- Night of Arts Featuring Aja Monet: BCPC

APRIL
- SurviVOL: BCPC
- 865 Night Market: AAA
- Multicultural Graduation Celebration & Recognition Ceremony: MSL
- Cesar Chavez Celebration Featuring Mayor Madeline Rogero: LASO
- Finals Prep: MSL
- Finals Brunch: MMP
For More Information:

AAA: Juvi Mallari (jmallari@vols.utk.edu)
BCPC: Morgan Jefferies (BCPC@utk.edu)
   BUE: Issac Holt (BUE@utk.edu)
   DE: Elexus Franklin (DivEdu@utk.edu)
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