

Awareness Harmony Acceptance
Advocates



AHA Advocate Talk: Patricia Lovett



Samantha Ellison: How and why was the Multicultural Center founded at BSU?

Patricia Lovett: The Multicultural Center at Ball State University was established in the early 1970's as the Special Programs House. "Special Programs" was Ball State's response to the request of African American students for a haven on campus staffed by persons sensitive to their feelings of isolation and alienation. Toward the end of the 1970's the program name was changed to the Office of Minority Student Development (MSD), however its mode of operation remained unchanged. By the late 1980's, the MSD office began to change directions. The office sought to involve the total campus in its initiatives. The model was embraced by a variety of faculty, staff, administrators, and students. The MSD's involvement in campus life continued to increase and was welcomed by the staff and students. By the 1990's the office had undergone two major changes. In addition to African-American students, other historically underrepresented minority populations of domestic born students of color were added to its responsibilities, namely, Asian-American, Hispanic American, and Native American students. An associated name change was in order, hence the name Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA). The OMA became the official advising and housing entity for those student groups. During this time the OMA was highly visible, heavily involved, well-respected campus unit. In the year 2000, those underrepresented minority student groups

(the big 4) formally advised and housed at the OMA were moved to the Office of Student Organizations and Activities (currently known as Office of Student Life) located in the L.A. Pittenger Student Center. The OMA underwent another name change to be called the Multicultural Center. The students refer to the Center as the “Multi”.

SE: How does the Multicultural Center help to combat prejudice experienced on campus?

PL: By educating the students about the issues and encouraging them to form their own opinions. We discuss the importance of being open to change. But most of the student’s experiences with prejudice is centered around the older generation and them not being open to differences or change.

SE: How does the Multicultural center promote and appreciate cultural diversity?

PL: Here are the following traditional programs that are supported by students through their attendance:

Perspectives Discussions is a series that gives students, faculty, and staff an opportunity to discuss current events and important topics. The group meets the third Wednesday of each month.

The *Heritage Film Series* features movies or documentaries that present historical and social perspectives from various cultures. A different culture is featured each month throughout the year.

Cultural Lunches are held every first Friday of the month. The lunches feature authentic cuisine that highlights foods from various cultures.

The *Excel Mentoring* program is a three-day summer program designed to address issues experienced by students of color as they transition from high school to college. Excel is open to all freshman students who have been admitted to Ball State University.

The *Welcome Back Celebration* helps students become acquainted with the programs and services the Multicultural Center has to offer. Freshmen and transfer students have the opportunity to meet representatives from a variety of student organizations, including fraternities and sororities.

The *Multicultural Center Achievement Awards Ceremony* is an annual event recognizing the achievements of students, faculty, and support staff in advancing the Multicultural Center’s and the universities commitment to diversity.

The *Cultural Heritage Month Awareness* programs are nationally recognized months highlighting the various cultures represented at Ball State University. It is a great way for students, faculty and staff to learn about the heritage and customs of others cultures. The programs celebrate and explore domestic and international racial, ethnic, gender, and religious identities. Programming can range from lectures, art exhibits, dialogues, and more.

- Hispanic Heritage Month – September

- National Coming Out Month – October
- International Education Month – November
- Native American Heritage Month – November
- Kwanzaa Celebration – December
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day – January
- Black History Month – February
- Women’s History Month – March
- Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month – May (Celebrated in April at Ball State)

SE: Why is the presence of a Multicultural Center & Multicultural Organizations so important? Especially, at an institutional level?

PL: In order for colleges to accomplish their college completion goals, the higher education community will need to make a substantial investment in time, resources and fundraising; also finding new creative ways to assist this population of students and reevaluating the resources they already have in place, such as increasing the effectiveness and student involvement in multicultural center/services at universities. Studies have shown that institutions that have cultural centers matter a great deal to students. The students have a physical location where they feel a sense of belonging, people who listen to them, recognize their cultural perspective and can nurture their development as productive citizens. Because of the development of cultural centers on campus, these students have a different outlook on their college experience (Patton, 2006).

SE: What resources does the Multicultural Center provide to students?

PL: The *Harry Watkins Conference Room* is a small meeting place that seats about 20. The room is named in honor of the first African-American man to graduate from Ball State University

Cultural Times Newsletter is a monthly newsletter providing awareness of programs and services offered as well as issues and ideas. The newsletters are distributed through the Multicultural Center website.

The *Malcolm X Library* contains more than 1,000 books, newspapers, videotapes, and magazines related to diverse cultures. The library is also used as a meeting space that seats 40.

The Computer Lab houses three computer stations and one printer for students who wish to study in a quiet atmosphere free from distraction.

The Multicultural Center staff for Ball State University provides personal advising.

The Multicultural Center also offers a kitchen for students to cook meals for ethnic celebration and luncheons throughout the year.

SE: How did you become interested in diversity and social justice?

PL: The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding

that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities.

I'm interested in these issues because I have to deal with them my whole life.

SE: If you could change one injustice about the world what would it be and why?

PL: I would change the injustice of poverty in the U.S., the highest poverty rate is among single women.

- The poverty rate for all persons masks considerable variation between racial/ethnic subgroups. Poverty rates for blacks and Hispanics greatly exceed the national average. In 2010, 27.4 percent of blacks and 26.6 percent of Hispanics were poor, compared to 9.9 percent of non-Hispanic whites and 12.1 percent of Asians.
- Poverty rates are highest for families headed by single women, particularly if they are black or Hispanic. In 2010, 31.6 percent of households headed by single women were poor, while 15.8 percent of households headed by single men and 6.2 percent of married-couple households lived in poverty.

SE: If you could spend a day talking to any activist alive or dead, who would it be and why?

PL: Nelson Mandela, because of his tireless efforts of trying to dismantle apartheid, racism, poverty and inequality in South Africa. He spent all those years in prison and he never gave up hope.