



INTERCULTURAL CENTER UPDATE

NEW Cultural Event Coordinator (CEC) Positions & Cultural Night Showcase Signature Event

ADAPTING TO SUPPORT INTERSECTIONAL STUDENT IDENTITIES

As an Intercultural Center, one of our commitments to the SMC community is to continually meet and serve the ever evolving needs of our student population. As our students' identities and concerns shift and change, so too must our services, resources and programming adapt to fulfill those needs. Today's college students no longer move through campus under a singular salient identity, but instead today's college students increasingly identify as living complex, intersectional lives. As such, our center's offerings must meet them where they are at, providing a safe and supportive space for them to explore and showcase the various realities of their intersecting identities.

Thanks to the generous support of Anthony Garrison-Engbrecht, Vice President of Student Life, we will now be hiring an additional 4-6 student staff to work at the center as Cultural Events Coordinators (CECs) in order to help us support our student population more effectively and more holistically. These newly funded positions will provide intentional structure and financial support to student leaders who are often called upon to volunteer their time to host cultural events outside of their academic and professional responsibilities.

PURPOSE & RESPONSIBILITY OF CECs

The purpose of the new CEC position is to bring more intentional cultural events and activities to the Intercultural Center, as well as to uplift, fund, support and showcase the diversity of our students, staff, and faculty on campus. CECs will be hired as hourly IC student employees, receiving the same extensive training in August and during our fall Diversity Retreat. Reporting to the Assistant Director, CECs will also receive bi-weekly 1:1 supervisor advising, check-ins and feedback.

CECs will be tasked with hosting and supporting community events and programs around Heritage Months (*i.e. Black History Month/44 Days, Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, Latinx Heritage Month, Women's History Month, Transgender Awareness Day, National American Indian Heritage Month*) in direct collaboration with our cross-campus partners (*i.e. DOC orgs, CCIE sub-committees, Office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion, etc.*). In addition, CECs will create passive programming around cultural identities and traditions, allowing for more nuanced context and conversations to occur around these important topics.

Currently, the IC is limited in our ability to collaborate with campus partners due to low staffing and a full student programming load. Our CEC's focus and dedication to building community and collaborating across campus will support the creation and execution of meaningful programs that highlight the important work of so many across our campus community.

Additionally, the addition of CEC staff will allow the IC to extend our hours of operation for our IC Cafe, a recent initiative that provides space for students to study, build relationships, and access free food, coffee, and printing throughout the day.

CULTURAL NIGHT SHOWCASE

One of the biggest changes that will take place under the coordination of the new CECs, is the transformation of our six current separate cultural nights into a large-scale, campus-wide signature event that will bring together intersectional student voices and cultural traditions in one Cultural Night Showcase.

The creation of this signature cultural night event will allow for several important internal changes that will center the needs of our students and create a more equitable experience:

- 1) Currently, the student exec teams that coordinate the six cultural nights are only paid a small stipend at the end of the year. This stipend does not begin to cover the tremendous labor and energy over many months that they spend planning and coordinating their cultural night. By hiring 4-6 CECs we can guarantee that students are paid appropriately for the labor they put into this event.
- 2) Another issue is the pressure put onto a small group of students who are asked each year to work tirelessly to put on a single event to represent their entire culture in one night, a task that is exhausting and is taking a toll on our student leaders, who are increasingly wary of taking on such roles. For example, many of the smaller cultural nights often struggle to get enough support to fill an exec team or even to find cast and crew willing to dedicate their time to put on a show (*i.e. Pacific Islander Cultural Night, or PICN, did not occur this spring due to low student involvement*). Our new adaptation will guarantee a strong, trained and supportive exec team, while allowing other students to focus all of their energy on their sets alone.
- 3) A third limitation of our current cultural night model is that we don't have the resources, and staff to support additional identities that want their own voices shared in their own cultural night. In the past two years alone we have had requests from Indigenous students, students with disabilities as well as students with religious and interfaith identities outside of racial/ethnic based groups, all wanting their own cultural nights. By not accommodating these requests we are presumed to be more supportive of only some of the marginalized populations on campus, something that we are not comfortable with.

- 4) Yet another issue is students having to choose between their own identities when participating in a cultural night because they either do not have the time to participate in more than one identity, or we do not have a cultural night that represents their identities in an authentic way. A single showcase that encourages sets created around intersectional identities will help to solve this issue.
- 5) In addition, cultural night exec teams are always asking for more staff, faculty and senior level administrators to attend their show. They want the same support, publicity and attention given to other signature events on campus, such as basketball games or CAB events. Our current cultural night slate makes it nearly impossible to avoid conflicts with other major events throughout the semester. By focusing our efforts on one major campus-wide event, we can ensure that the entire campus community is informed of and able to attend this event to support our most marginalized students who deserve their voices heard and their presence felt as they showcase the beauty and diversity of their respective and intersectional identities, cultures and lived experiences.
- 6) Lastly, we view this change as a transformation of our current cultural nights, not a disconnected event. As such, we will be working on a way to memorialize the current cultural nights, their history, student leaders and impact. We have several ideas currently, but we promise to work with student leaders within these respective cultures to find the best way to celebrate this important campus history.

CHANGE IS NEVER EASY, BUT IT IS ALWAYS NECESSARY

The Intercultural Center staff realizes that change is never easy. We realize that students, staff and faculty hold traditions near to our hearts. However, we also recognize that our mission is to meet our students where they are at, and to provide programming and resources that center our student identities, needs and voices in meaningful ways, throughout the year. We hope that these new student positions and the resulting monthly programming and large signature event will help reduce student stress, honor their labor and allow us to showcase the authentic, intersectional and beautiful cultures of all of our students.

We welcome feedback on these changes and will plan a gathering in the near future to listen to concerns, ideas and suggestions from the campus community.