

Project Title Afro Terrace; Academic and Emotional Support Project  
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**What are you proposing to do and how will you do it?**

We propose to expand the Afro Terrace Living and Learning Community, which provides academic and emotional support for University of California, Merced students' of the African diaspora. Afro Terrace was founded by third students in 2014. The mission statement of the community is: To unite and establish a living and learning community that focuses on academic excellence, community outreach and providing a mentoring program that fosters student development throughout their college experience.

Our primary goal for the 2016-2017 academic year is to aid in the recruitment, retention, and support of black/African students at UCM by providing academic support and a safe space for students in the Afro Terrace community. We note that this community is open to any student who is committed to the success of the organization and/or who is identified as an underrepresented minority student and at-risk of dropout or prolonged graduation.

Our specific project aims are to (1) have students maintain a 2.75 GPA, (2) encourage a 4-year graduation rate, and (3) reduce stereotype threat among the students.

We propose the following activities during the 2016-2017 academic year (and to be sustained for each following year) that will help us achieve our goals:

- Creation and distribution of UCM academic resource and information handbook
- Weekly study sessions (also where academic resources will be distributed)
- As needed office hours with faculty advisor
- Bi-Semester Academic Workshops (Creating 4 year graduation plans, Time management, Emotional Intelligence, Strategies for success for students of color)
- Training on overcoming stereotype threat by a certified trainer
- Faculty Presentations

We request \$5000.00 from the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Grant to fund the aforementioned activities. Specifically, funds will be used to (a) create a academic resource bank (e.g., scantrons, notecards, planners), (b) create the UCM academic resource and information handbook; (c) provide food and incentives for workshops, and (d) cover travel and honorarium for the trainer. If needed, we will seek additional outside funds or co-sponsorships through the university. A detailed budget is provided with the application.

**How will the program contribute to and enhance UC Merced's campus climate as a more equitable and inclusive place to study, research and work?**

Expanding the scope of the Afro Terrace Living and Learning Community will contribute to a more diverse and inclusive campus climate for all students by assisting with the recruitment, retention, and support for black/African students who are able to thrive at

UCM.

Research on institutions of higher education has consistently found that diverse campuses are beneficial to the entire student body. Diverse campuses introduce students to multiple perspectives, increases students' own self-awareness and social development, and better prepares students to work in a global society. Although UCM has racial and ethnic diversity, certain populations continue to be marginalized here. More specifically, the learning community targets historically underrepresented minority students at institutions of higher education and those currently underrepresented on UC Merced's campus; thus, emphasizes support for black/African students. Black/African students are not well represented on this campus.

According to UCM's student statistics (<http://irds.ucmerced.edu/student.htm>), this population has been identified as having lower retention rates, prolonged graduation rates, and decreasing enrollments on UCM's campus. For instance, the 4-year graduation rate for African Americans in the Natural Sciences was only 10% for the 2009 cohort and 14% for the 2010 cohort. All other groups' rates were above 20%. Actions to address the issue of prolonged graduation rates and low retention rates are urgent as of 2015-2016 as the University of California, Merced is enforcing 9 semester graduations with the Normal Progress Policy. This policy requires students to complete their degree requirements within 9 semesters and requires a petition for any extended time. With the UCM student statistics showing that African/Black students need an average of 6-years to equate its graduation rates to any other student group at 4 years, it is imperative that actions are taken. These numbers are startling particularly when examining the 2009 cohort where African Americans four year graduation rates were as far as 20% below rates of White and Asian students. This goes to show that unless action is taken, the normal progress policy will disproportionately harm graduation rates of African/Black students and overall the university.

Perhaps even more alarming is the dwindling overall population of black/African students. The student statistics reported by UCM's Institutional Research and Institutional Support show enrollment data beginning Fall 2011. Black/African students made up 6.7% of the student body in 2011, but they currently make up only 4.7% of the student body. The data shows that there has been a decline in black/African student enrollment each year. More resources are needed at UCM to help recruit and retain black/African students.

Importantly, black/African students who are at UCM need to be better supported. Black/African students only made up 3% of those students who took the Campus Climate survey; therefore their voices were limited. In addition, black/African students were included in the underrepresented minority category, which also included Hispanic students. This conflates black/African students voices with a population that has a large representation on this campus. In any case, 25% of underrepresented minorities said they felt very comfortable with the overall campus climate. When numbers are further disaggregated, we find that black/African students report the highest level of disrespect on campus (4.4%). We believe our initiative will increase the comfortability and respect

of black/African students on campus.

The less marginalized and the more supported students feel, the more likely the students will come to and graduate from UCM. Therefore, our initiative will provide needed academic support for black/African student success at UCM. This is directly related to increasing the presence and retention of black students on UCM's campus. Finally, we argue that all students, regardless of racial status, will benefit by being at a campus that supports a diverse and inclusive student body.

**Describe how this project is a new, high impact, collaborative, experimental and/or sustainable approach to enhancing and/or addressing an area of campus climate.**

This project demonstrates a highly sustainable approach to addressing a limitation of UCM's current campus climate: aiding in the recruitment, retention, and support of black/African students by providing academic support and a safe space for students in the black/African community. Most other UC's have a resource center that specifically focuses on enhancing the success of underrepresented groups on its campus. For instance UC Davis has The Center for African Diaspora Student Success, UC Irvine and UC San Diego have the Black Resource Center; Santa Cruz has the African-American Resource and Cultural Center; UC Berkeley: Black Recruitment & Retention Center; and UC Santa Barbara has the African Diasporic Cultural Resource Center. UCM does not have any targeted centers, and the current academic center does not address or support specific needs for all underrepresented groups at UC Merced. With the absence of a university-led resource center, which many other developed universities have, Afro Terrace has served as the academic resource center for black/African students at UC Merced.

Afro Terrace is a student ran organization, driven by students seeking resources on their own to increase their capacity at UC Merced. Many of its programs and initiatives have been successful by student funding and donations, but lack of funds has limited the high impact we desire. Additional funding will increase the organization's capacity to provide academic support for black/African students at UCM. With the additional support to the organization, we will have the capacity to help create a more inclusive campus climate that will further impact the rest of the campus.

For instance, many students at UCM experience a challenging time locating resources especially as they transition, and the resource handbook will allow students to learn earlier on about general resources available for them as well as services catered for black students. The earlier students learn about these resources, the more likely they are to be successful.

Additionally, this project will allow for more spaces to be available on campus where black/African students can feel comfortable. By adding snacks, incentives and needed academic resources, more students will have greater need and reasons to utilize these spaces. This has been successful in several departments and organizations such as Fiat Lux. Some long term differences as a result of the program include increased interest and enrollment of black/African students. One of the main questions many parents and

guardians ask is what resources are available for their student at UCM. Many are usually unsatisfied when the answer is only the university-led academic centers and black student organizations. With the awareness that more is needed to support their student, this project would ease the minds of many parents and make them feel comfortable with their decision to choose UCM.

The Afro Terrace project is developed to address these issues as there are no other current initiatives taking such actions. We seek to address this concern before there are greater consequences. Most of the activities outlined for this project are already in place. For instance, current members have to attend four hours of weekly study sessions, meet with an advisor if they receive a D or F during mid-semester, and participate in workshops. Securing recurring funding from the DEI grant will build upon the foundations of Afro Terrace and help it become more sustainable.

**Describe the expected difference(s) the project will make on the issues addressed, the audience(s) it will serve, and the number of people it will affect.**

The project seeks to intimately serve 70 students due to the available resources. This 70 students includes 40 first year students who will live in Afro Terrace designated dorm rooms, and 30 students who have moved through the program and now serve as mentors. However, many of the resources such as the study sessions, workshops, training, and faculty receptions will be available to all interested UCM students.

We expect to increase in the academic performance of Black/African students as well as other students involved in this project. We expect to see higher GPAs in the short term, and greater 4 year graduation rates in the long term, among students involved and committed to this program. With access to academic resources and support from this program, students will feel more supported and motivated hence being able to envision themselves graduating from UCM.

By providing academic support and a safe space for students in the Afro Terrace community we hope to aid in the recruitment, retention, and support of black/African students at UCM. This project will not only benefit students in the program. Rather, we argue that all students, regardless of racial status, will benefit by being at a campus that supports a diverse and inclusive study body.

**How will the project bring together two or more campus entities, advance mutual goals and/or share knowledge? Specifically identify how the project will be integrated into the activities of teaching, research or public service.**

The Afro Terrace project brings together multiple student organizations, faculty, and residential life.

The Afro Terrace project will be made possible by the support of the following student organizations; Black Student Union, African Student Union, National Society of Black Engineers and Distinguished Ladies. These organizations come together to make up the Pan Afrikan Council, a group of leaders from each organization, with a common goal of enhance the black experience of students at UCM. Members from these organizations

have addressed concerns about the climate at UCM and there is a consensus that actions need to be taken. With Afro Terrace being the academic component of the council, the rest of the organizations support endeavors of this project since they will positively impact members from all these organizations. The organizations are willing to help in areas of advertising and marketing, collaborating in workshops, as well as in co-hosting weekly study sessions. They will also help with project evaluation by providing feedback.

The faculty at UCM will also be resourceful in the implementation of the project. Most have already expressed interest in supporting the black organizations. The faculty presentations are one way of closing the gap between black/African students and black professors. With only 8 black faculty members, many black/African students end up graduating without having the opportunity to take courses with those that look like them. Importantly, the opportunity to meet and network with them will lead to research collaborations.

**Describe the leadership, capacity and qualifications of the individual or group to implement the project.**

The Afro Terrace project is being led by the current President, Internal Vice President, and Academic Advisor. The rest of the organization executive board, which includes External Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Commissioner of Academia, Publicist, and Historian will also assist in implementing this project.

The president and co-founder is Mercy Maina. Ms. Maina is a third year Political Science Student at UCM. She currently works as a Lead Academic Advisor for Undeclared students and will host biweekly advising sessions for the Afro Terrace students. The vice president and co-founder is Bridgette Smith. Ms. Smith is a third year Microbiology Student at UCM. Ms. Smith has also formally worked as a Programming Assistant for UCM Housing and Residence Life and continues to work closely with the department for the expansion of Afro Terrace. Ms. Smith and Ms. Maina were recently recruited by the Office of Admissions to work as Student Ambassadors. Through this role they assist in recruitment and enrollment of students of the critical mass. Both Ms. Maina and Ms. Smith have been dedicated in the development and expansion of the organization. Ms. Maina and Ms. Smith along with another co-founder, Daralynn McCall started this organization in the academic year of 2013-2014. This organization was led by these students, and in 2015, Afro Terrace was recognized by UC Merced's Leadership Awards as the Outstanding New Organization of the Year. The three founders and other executive members have worked diligently towards the expansion of Afro Terrace over the years and due to the success of the program and their efforts, Afro Terrace will turn to AFRO (Afrikans for Retention & Outreach) Hall with the support of UC Merced Housing and Residence Life. Afro Terrace executive board continues to strive to provide safe places and an effective academic environment for Black/African students and exemplify their leadership skills through the development of the organization.

As President and Vice President, Ms. Maina and Ms. Smith will oversee success of the overall organization. They will continue to collaborate with admissions and Housing and

Residence Life to ensure success. They will delegate tasks to the rest of the executive board members and ensure that the given timeline is followed.

The faculty advisor is Dr. Whitney Pirtle. Dr Pirtle is Assistant Professor of Sociology at UCM. Her areas of expertise are in race, identity, and mental health. She has formally and informally advised students of color for the past 8 years. For instance, she was a student advisor with TrIO's Upward Bound program at Grand Valley State University and she co-founded the Women of Color Social Science Collective at Vanderbilt University. As faculty advisor, Dr. Pirtle will oversee the operations of Afro Terrace and hold monthly office hours, provide academic assistance for students who do not meet the GPA requirement, organize faculty presentations, and assist in other operational tasks.

**Describe how likely the project is to be continued and incorporated or replicated by other organizations on campus and demonstrate why.**

Afro Terrace was founded in 2014 and has continued to grow. Afro Terrace currently has a strong foundation that will be sustainable for years to come. Due to the success of the organization thus far, various organizations have already reached out about how to model some of its programs. Afro Terrace continues to be willing to meet with other campus groups interested in replicating its model for other students.

Afro Terrace currently includes an academic component which includes study sessions, academic/professional development workshops, and advising support for struggling students. It also includes a living and learning community which has hosted 22 students up to date. Due to the success of this program, Afro Terrace will turn to AFRO (Afrikans For Retention & Outreach) Hall with the support of UC Merced Housing. As of Fall 2016, it will expand to hosting 40 students. This hall will include access to the organization resources as well as an in-house mentor and a 1-unit college success course with the emphasis on navigating the university through a multi-cultural lense. Afro Terrace also consists of a mentoring program which has so far included over 60 students. In addition, the organization has dedicated to service and collaborates with Love Faith and Hope, a Merced non-profit to guide, mentor, share tips and tools for succes with Merced County Youth primarily those from underrepresented communities.

Since its foundation, Afro Terrace has been consistent with all its program. There has been growth in all areas with the support of growing number of enlisted members. In 2015, Afro Terrace was recognized by UC Merced's Leadership Awards as the Outstanding New Organization. It has continued to gain support from various departments such as UC Merced Housing, UC Merced Admissions, Office of Student Life, The Blum Center and various student organizations. Given the strong foundation, support for Afro Terrace, and with additional funding, we believe the project will be fully sustainable.

**Provide the full timeline - from start to completion - for the project.**

The project is for one academic year, 2016-2017, but it is to be replicated each year from here on out.

Spring 2016:

-Incoming students begin to opt-in to Afro Terrace during their acceptance to UCM.

Fall 2016:

-As soon as students arrive on campus they meet the Afro Terrace resident assistant and executive board. During this orientation students will learn the expectations and commitments of Afro Terrace.

-Within the first month of school, students will take a self assessment.

-During the first semester Afro Terrace will host study sessions, and organize the "Creating a 4-year graduation plan" and "Time Management" workshops, and two faculty introduction sessions (proposed faculty are Dr. Pirtle and Dr. Hatton).

-Grades will be reported at mid-terms. Any students with GPAs below 2.8 will meet with Dr. Pirtle.

Spring 2016:

-During the second semester Afro Terrace will continue to host study sessions, organize the "Emotional Intelligence" and "Strategies for success for students of color" workshops, and two additional faculty introductions (proposed faculty are Dr. Dawson and Dr. Harris).

-Half-day training on stereotype threat will be held during this semester.

-Grades will be reported at mid-terms. Any students with GPAs below 2.75 will meet with Dr. Pirtle.

-In the last month of the second semester students will retake the self assessment.

-2017 incoming students opt-in to Afro Terrace during their acceptance to UCM.

### **What are your project goals and expected outcomes.**

We propose the following activities during the 2016-2017 academic year (and to be sustained for each following year) that will help us achieve our goal of:

Activity 1: Creation and distribution of UCM academic resource handbook. This will be created by current Afro Terrace members and will be distributed during Fall of 2016.

Examples of what will be included in the resource handbook includes: contact information for faculty and staff allies, information on financial assistance and scholarships, tips for living on campus and in Merced.

Expected Outcome: Students will have greater knowledge of UCM's campus and will have a better sense of where to go for needed services. This will help students feel more comfortable on campus and aid in their academic success.

Activity 2: Weekly study sessions. Study sessions will be available Sunday-Friday. They will be monitored by the Afro Terrace executive board or an approved member. The study sessions rooms will be near the residence halls for convenience as well as in the Student Activities and Athletics Center. During the study session, students are able to retrieve academic resources from the resource bank. The bank will be stocked with testing material, pens, pencils, books, rentable donated textbooks. To encourage studying during the weekends, snacks will be provided..

Expected Outcome: To increase the overall time that students spend studying by providing more comfortable spaces on campus. To increase opportunities of networking and collaborating among black/African students by uniting them.

Activity 3: Monthly office hours with faculty advisor. Dr. Pirtle will hold office hours every 2nd Tuesday of the month so that students can come for academic guidance and strategies.

Expected Outcome: Black/African students will be more satisfied with the opportunity to consult someone of a similar background. It will allow them to confide about information they may be otherwise unwilling to share. It will reduce fear of stereotype threat that many black/African students attest to feeling when talking to counselors and advisors.

Activity 4: Bi-Semester Academic Workshops hosted by Afro Terrace mentors. Workshops will be on the following topics:

- Creating 4 year graduation plans
- Time management
- Emotional Intelligence
- Strategies for success for students of color

Expected Outcome: Students will have greater knowledge about tips to succeed and excel in academics and professional life from the peers they look up to. Students will come away from each workshop with tangible academic and life skills. Passion planners will be distributed to dedicated members during the time management workshop. These planners will be resourceful with student's self management, goal-setting and prioritization. They also include inspiring notes and reflection that will guide students through their academic journey. The collaborative nature of the workshops will facilitate a welcoming learning environment. The information shared will contribute to academic success.

Activity 5: Training on overcoming stereotype threat by certified trainer. We will host an outside trainer/consultant for a half day training on stereotype threat. An example trainer is Steve Stroessner, who runs the website, [www.ReducingStereotypeThreat.org](http://www.ReducingStereotypeThreat.org).

Expected Outcome: Students will learn what stereotype threat is and how to confront and overcome the problems associated with stereotype threat. They will come away with coping skills to use. They will also be able to network with an outside professional.

Activity 6: Faculty Presentations. Black/African faculty will be asked to come introduce themselves and their research to students in an informal setting.

Expected Outcome: Black/African students will be more satisfied with the opportunity to interact with faculty of a similar backgrounds. The sessions will help reduce fear of stereotype threat that many black/African students attest to feeling when talking to

counselors and advisors. We also expect that these presentations will lead to research collaborations.

**What is your definition of success? How will you measure it?**

Our goal is to aid in the recruitment, retention, and support of black/African students at UCM by providing academic support and a safe space for students in the Afro Terrace community. This is a big goal but we are optimistic. In order to assess whether we are making progress toward our goal we have operationalized our one-year success measures as:

A. 90% of the first-year cohort students achieving a 2.75 GPA. This will be measured by self-reported grades.

B. 90% of the first-year cohort return to UCM for their second year. This will be measured by Fall 2017 class enrollments.

C. 90% of all first-year cohort pledging to return as a mentor in their 2nd year. This will be measured by student's pledges for the 2017 academic year.

D. 90% of all first-year cohort increasing their academic confidence and overall comfort at UCM over the year. This will be measured by comparing self-reports of academic confidence and campus comfort taken during the pre- and post-assessments.

**What tools will you use to collect the data needed to measure the progress and success of each expected outcome? When will you use them?**

All data will be self-reported at two points in time. During the first month of the fall 2016 semester, students will take an assessment that will ask about their expected GPAs and other academic goals (i.e., how many times per week will you study). It will also ask questions about their academic confidence and comfort on campus. Example questions of academic confidence are: "how would you rate your academic skills compared to your classmates", "do you feel comfortable asking questions during a lecture", and "imposter syndrome refers to having a persistent fear of being exposed as fraud when it comes to your academic abilities. How often do you ever feel like an imposture in the classroom". Comfort questions are borrowed from the campus climate survey. Questions include, but are not limited to: "how comfortable are you with the overall campus climate", "have you experienced conduct or communications directed towards you that you believe created an exclusionary, intimidating, offensive and/or hostile working or learning environment within the past year", and "do you believe the campus climate to be respectful".

During the last month of the Spring 2017 semester, students will take another assessment. It will ask students to report their GPA, the courses they are enrolled in for the following year, and if they pledge to be a mentor with Afro Terrace. The assessment will also ask students repeat the questions of academic confidence and comfort on campus.

The faculty advisor will collect and analyze the data. Self reported GPA's above 2.75, continuing enrollment, and pledges to Afro Terrace will be considered successes. Positive, significant differences measured by paired sample t-tests of academic confidence and campus comfort will also be considered successes.

#### PROJECT SPONSORING UNIT

All projects must be sponsored by a UC Merced student organization, or campus department/ by-law unit, School or Graduate Group. The sponsoring unit is responsible for administering and reporting on funds. Project managers must be current UC Merced campus members. Budget Managers must be current UC Merced staff members.

UCM Sponsor Afro Terrace Living & Learning Community

Budget Manager Connie McBride

Budget Manager Email Address [cmcbride@ucmerced.edu](mailto:cmcbride@ucmerced.edu)