

## CVL + NK Notes on Having a Cultural Center Component

**There is consensus that the proposed center include a centrally located physical space.** Consensus is also emerging that the proposed center have a “cultural center” component in addition to having a teaching/research/activist component. To better understand the cultural center idea we briefly summarize what we have at Cornell and what some of our peers do in this regard.

### *Cornell*

Some of our cultural “centers” are residential, some are programmatic, and some are both.

These resource centers are housed in 626 Thurston Avenue (near the Fall Creek bridge):

[Asian & Asian American Center \(A3C\)](#)  
[LGBT Resource Center](#)  
[Multicultural Student Leadership & Empowerment](#)  
[First-Generation and Low-Income student support](#)  
[Undocumented and DACA support](#)

Willard Straight houses the [Women’s Resource Center](#) and our [Office of Spirituality and Meaning Making](#), inclusive of CURW and chaplaincies dedicated to particular denominations (who also fund and support the chaplaincies) resides in Anabel Taylor Hall.

Culturally based residential living environments include [Akwe:kon](#), [Holland International Living Center](#), [Latino Living Center \(LLC\)](#), [Loving House](#), [Multicultural Living Learning Unit](#), and [Ujamaa](#). Several of these residential units, particularly the LLC, Akwe:kon, and Ujamaa, host many events, programs, and gathering spaces for associated communities. LLC, Akwe:kon and Ujamaa are the only stand-alone buildings, while the other units are embedded in larger residence halls.

All of the non-residential resource centers are housed under the Dean of Students Office while the residentially based units are in the Department of Housing & Residential Life. Both DoS and Housing are in Student Campus Life under Vice-President Ryan Lombardi.

### *University of Pennsylvania*

Reporting to the [Office of the Vice Provost for University Life](#) are six cultural centers. The [Greenfield Intercultural Center](#) fosters intercultural understanding on campus through cross cultural activism, reflection, and dialogue. The [Center for Hispanic Excellence: La Casa Latina](#) promotes greater awareness of Latino issues, culture, and identity at Penn. The [Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Center](#) enriches the experience and fosters the success of Penn’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students. [Makuu: The Black Cultural Center](#) seeks to enrich and support the principles of diversity and community in Penn student life, with an emphasis on students of African descent. The [Pan-Asian American Community House](#) serves as the central resource for advising East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander American students, student organizations, and their activities, as well as those

interested in the Asian American diaspora. The [Penn Women's Center](#) seeks to foster community, expand awareness, and enhance the educational experience for the women of Penn.

### *Columbia*

Columbia has an [Intercultural Resource Center](#) that is devoted to promoting a just society and exploring intercultural and diversity issues within and beyond the Columbia University community. The IRC provides a forum for education and social exchange that encourages self-discovery, increased social awareness and an appreciation of the cultural histories within and between communities on campus.

### *Yale*

Yale maintains four [cultural centers](#): an Afro-American Cultural Center, an Asian American Cultural Center, a Latino Cultural Center, and Native American Cultural Center. Each serves as gathering places for communities of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The centers foster a sense of cultural identity, encourage student leadership, facilitate critical reflection, and stimulate informed action and social justice advocacy. They also act as social hubs and community bases for students, supplementing the social environment of the larger Yale College community. Cultural centers house student organizations and host meetings, plays, art exhibits, and parties. In addition to meeting space, each center offers a library, a kitchen, computers, and a variety of other facilities. Each center is led by a director who is also an assistant dean of Yale College.

### *Princeton*

At the [Center for Equality](#) diverse perspectives and experiences of race, class, gender and their intersections are supported and challenged, questioned and answered. These values are cultivated through the celebration of heritage months, dialogues and discussions, our Princeton University Mentoring Program (PUMP) and the Carl Fields Fellows peer educator program. Additionally, our Center's student friendly space offers numerous opportunities for relaxation and engagement — comfy lounges, study breaks, movie nights, galas, festivals and more. The Center maintains a list of all it's [student cultural groups](#).

### *Brown*

Brown has a [Center for Students of Color](#).

### *Harvard*

Highly visible within the Student Affairs website is this [multicultural resource guide](#). The [issue of creating a multicultural center/](#) has been debated for decades.

### *University of Michigan*

The UoM has a single [multicultural center](#).

### *University of Wisconsin*

The primary mission of the [Multicultural Student Center](#) is to collaboratively strengthen and sustain an inclusive campus where all students, particularly students of color and other historically underserved students, can realize an authentic Wisconsin Experience. The [Black Cultural Center](#) serves Black students (including African-American, Caribbean, Afro-Latinx, and African Diaspora) by facilitating opportunities for academic and social support, co-curricular programming, and community building. The [Latinx Cultural Center](#) facilitates an environment for Latinx identifying students that provides academic, professional and social opportunities that critically engage their identity and build communities of support at UW-Madison. The [Asian-Pacific Islander Desi American \(APIDA\) Student Center](#) provides academic, professional, and social opportunities that critically engage students who so identify.

### *Stanford*

At Stanford the Centers for Equity, Community, and Leadership is a unit in Student Affairs comprised of the seven community and cultural centers on campus: the [Asian American Activities Center](#), the [Black Community Services Center](#), the [El Centro Chicano y Latino](#), the [Queer Student Resources](#), the [Markaz: Resource Center](#), the [Native American Cultural Center](#), and the [Women's Community Center](#)

### *UC Berkeley*

The [American Cultures Center](#) serves as a hub for many activities related to critical engagement with the study of ethnic, racial and cultural diversities. It encourages academic partners, community organizations, faculty, staff and students to consider the range of opportunities (lectures, workshops, grants, conferences, etc) for collaboration. The [Multicultural Community Center](#) is a student-won, student-led space, that strives to integrate student-driven and community-oriented management, decision-making and visioning in everything that we do. In conjunction with our close partners, the MCC facilitates students' greater involvement in multicultural-related education, collaborations and cross/inter-cultural community building.

## Additional References and Perspectives on the Cultural Center Idea

The [Association for Black Culture Centers](#) provides additional perspective. The role of cultural centers is the subject of these two books:

### [Culture Centers in Higher Education: Perspectives on Identity, Theory, and Practice](#) (2010)

Are cultural centers ethnic enclaves of segregation, or safe havens that provide minority students with social support that promotes persistence and retention?

This book fills a significant void in the research on ethnic minority cultural centers, offers the historic background to their establishment and development, considers the circumstances that led to their creation, examines the roles they play on campus, explores their impact on retention and campus climate, and provides guidelines for their management in the light of current issues and future directions.

In the first part of this volume, the contributors provide perspectives on culture centers from

the point of view of various racial/ethnic identity groups, Latina/o, Asian, American Indian, and African American. Part II offers theoretical perspectives that frame the role of culture centers from the point of view of critical race theory, student development theory, and a social justice framework. Part III focuses specifically on administrative and practice-oriented themes, addressing such issues as the relative merits of full- and part-time staff, of race/ethnic specific as opposed to multicultural centers, relations with the outside community, and integration with academic and student affairs to support the mission of the institution

[Campus Counterspaces: Black and Latinx Students' Search for Community at Historically White Universities](#) (2020)

Tracking a cohort of more than five hundred Black and Latinx students since they enrolled at five historically white colleges and universities in the fall of 2013 *Campus Counterspaces* finds that these students were not asking to be protected from new ideas. Instead, they relished exposure to new ideas, wanted to be intellectually challenged, and wanted to grow. However, Keels argues, they were asking for access to counterspaces—safe spaces that enable radical growth. They wanted counterspaces where they could go beyond basic conversations about whether racism and discrimination still exist. They wanted time in counterspaces with likeminded others where they could simultaneously validate and challenge stereotypical representations of their marginalized identities and develop new counter narratives of those identities