

TEXAS A&M ESSENTIALS

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Benefits of Diversity-Related Student Programs and Learning Centers

As a public land-grant research institution, Texas A&M University is a microcosm of an increasingly diverse and global society and workforce. The main campus has a plethora of diversity-related programs and learning centers that foster student success and inclusiveness. Many of these programs are located within the Divisions of Academic and Student Affairs. Some are more unit and college-based, while others are university-wide. Examples of university-wide efforts include, the Department of Multicultural Services, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender (GLBT) Resource Center, the Department of Disability Services, the Veterans Resource and Support Center, and the Women’s Resource Center.

Historically, diversity-related programs and learning centers were established on college and university campuses for students who are underrepresented or marginalized due to their race or ethnicity, and were asking to be reflected and supported in the cultural, academic, and social aspects of their university campuses. Currently, these programs and centers have expanded to also include a host of social and cultural identities related to age, culture, gender, nationality, physical and mental ability, political or ideological perspective, religion and spirituality, sexual orientation, and social and economic status. The charge of diversity-related programs and learning centers have broadened to meet the student success needs of underrepresented students and provide diversity, inclusion, and social justice education for the campus community.

There are several misconceptions about diversity-related programs and centers. Some of these misconceptions include that they promote self-segregation and separatism, serve specific populations or groups only, and provide social rather than academic programs. Research disseminated by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, as well as information gathered from faculty, staff, administrators, and students show that while diversity-related learning centers are essential for social and psychological support, create a sense of belonging, and raise diversity awareness on a college campus, they also serve academic purposes. For example, diversity-related learning centers are used by faculty as a research and educational resource for enhancing classroom teaching, research, and learning outcome goals and curricular efforts, bolstering student and faculty recruitment and retention activities, and enriching critical dialogues in as well as outside the classroom. These resources help to remove barriers that negatively impact student academic success, retention, graduation rates, and engagement of underrepresented students.

Students point to a variety of educational benefits as well, which include a support system which helps with adjusting to college life, personal growth experiences, developing a sense of identity and historical relevance about self within the institutional setting, and inclusion education surrounding the value of difference in the university community. Further, information gathered through campus climate as well as post graduation survey measures indicate that diversity related centers broaden perspective-taking and build capacity for social and cultural competence required in today’s workforce.

Leadership and Respect—two of our Aggie core values—are integral to lifelong learning, effective communication, and understanding. Diversity-related programs and centers benefit and shape the educational experience of all our students. When all Aggies, regardless of social and cultural identity are welcomed, valued, challenged, and supported during college, they are fully prepared to meet the global challenges of tomorrow.

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