Leading with Courage

A professional learning experience on the African American presence at UC

Dynamics of African American Language and Culture, and the Politics of Inclusion in Higher Education

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Thanks for Having Me!

It is such an honor to be part of the University of California, the greatest university in the world.

I came to UCSB to educate the next generation of professors to have a heart and mind for the individual student experience. We are doing that through:

- University of California Historically Black College and University (UC-HBCU) Partnership with support from the National Foundation REU program

- National Science Foundation Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (AGEP) grant with a focus on teaching at teaching focused universities

- Mellon Foundation Engaging Humanities
“I was leaving the South to fling myself into the unknown... I was taking a part of the South to transplant in alien soil, to see if it could grow differently, if it could drink of new and cool rains, bend in strong winds, respond to the warmth of other suns and, perhaps, to bloom”

-Richard Wright
Jamaal Muwwakkil

• First generation college student from Compton, CA
• Transferred from LACC to UCLA
• Currently studying in Linguistics PHD Program at UCSB
• 2019-2020 UC Student Regent Designate(!)
Goals as Student Regent

• Focus on Public Engagement
• Patch the leaky pipeline of transfer from CC → UC

I understand these two points of engagement by centering the Black non-traditional prospective UC students and their needs.

The through-line for both of these is research.
What an Honor to Be Here!

Undergraduate Research is at the heart of inclusion. All students deserve a full understanding of what a research university truly has to offer.

With our reputation for research and our MSI status, we are building the university of the future. Outreach is at the foundation of our work.
Key Community Based Action Research Questions

How do we value African-American students’ home language(s), language varieties, and cultural backgrounds and build on them while helping students learn the language of higher education?

What will it mean for the UC to be both a highly resourced research university and a Minority Serving Institution?

What role will Black people and the legacy of HBCUs bring to that definition?
How did I get into these questions?

Interested in the relationship between language variation and assessment of aptitude and achievement

And I had great graduate student mentors!
What students ask themselves about their school culture and climate (Pre-K through Postdoc)

• Am I safe here?
• Will I be successful here?
• Is there something in this for me?
Collective Priorities for Black People in the UCs

• Why are we here?
• Will I be successful here: What are our highest individual priorities and goals?
• Is there something in this for me: What are our highest collective priorities and goals?
• What is the purpose and function of the UC academic and professional experience for Black people?
• If you want to speak up, we hear you.
• If you can’t speak up, we understand.
• If we have the privilege to speak up, we have a responsibility.
Black Californians are going to college

1. 6% of California (~2.3 million people) is Black

2. 65% of Black high school students graduating in California are not prepared/eligible for UC/CSU attendance

3. 72% of Black Californians in college enroll in a California community college

4. 49% of Black Californians have some college but no degree

1. United States Census Bureau
2. California Department of Education, 2017; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata Sample, 2016, includes adults 25-64 years old
4. California Department of Education, 2017; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata Sample, 2016, includes adults 25-64 years old
Rhetorical Framing of the UC

I encourage you to think about the following questions:

*Center your own experiences as advice that you offer to students

- What do you tell students about the UC?
- How do you characterize the UC?
- Who do you say the UC is for?
- What does the UC do?
- For whom is the UC best suited?
Themes from outreach materials

• Diversity
• Innovation
• Location
• Fame
• Athletics
Our self-presentation sets student expectations

Misalignment between student expectations and the function of the university produces wasted time and emotional fatigue.

Students whose expectations are set based on an aspirational model that does not align with the practice (pedagogical/structural) of the UC then lose time and access to resources.

We do harm to students when we sell them a bill of goods only for them, after years if at all, understanding the actual structure of the UC. Often, too late to for them to take advantage of the unique opportunities available at the UC.
Why is it important for underrepresented students to do research as undergraduates?

• Collaborate with other students and work closely with a faculty mentor
• Learn about issues and methods in academia and the world while applying concepts learned in your courses
• Sharpen problem-solving, reading, writing, speaking skills
• Grow as a critical, analytical, and independent thinker
• Get money/academic credit to research issues that you are interested in!
• Find out if research is for you
• Increase your chances of getting into graduate school/getting a great job
Equity in Higher Education As an Undergraduate Research Issue

Who do what we do for?

- The specificity of the question is what matters

As we worked to make undergraduate research more inclusive, we have to examine who we are educating now and how we spread that information more widely.
Inclusion through undergraduate research and public service

Students interested in UC should understand benefits of attending a research university.

Prospective employers should be aware of the benefits of hiring a graduate that was an undergraduate researcher.

Undergraduates who do research:

- show greater independence with work and thought
- acquire a strong work ethic
- learn ethical standards
- improve their communication and multi-tasking skills.
Why is it important for underrepresented students to do research as undergraduates?

- A professor who cared about them as a person
- A professor who got them excited about learning
- A professor who encouraged them to pursue their dreams.

Gallup Poll based on Web surveys conducted Feb. 4-March 7, 2014, with a random sample of 29,560 respondents with a bachelor’s degree or higher, aged 18 and older, with Internet access, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.
WHAT THE HUMANITIES DO

The Humanities are about what it is to be human.

Understanding others in the world through their LANGUAGES, HISTORIES, & CULTURES.

They foster social justice and equality.

reveal how people have tried to make moral, spiritual, and intellectual sense of the world.

They teach empathy.

Source: 4Humanities: Advocating for the Humanities

UCBAC Conference 2019 UC DAVIS #ucbac19
Engaging Humanities

• Comprehensive program for incoming UCSB first year and transfer student to grow as thinking, develop skills that will contribute to success in college and in desirable careers, and build on their desires to make a difference in the world.

• Our goal is to make explicit what students need to do/know on the front end of any enterprise/course/engagement.

• Faculty and graduate students, interviewed recruiters in industry about what skills they are looking for in employees and how those skills are developed in our courses.
Supporting Undergraduate Research for High-Achieving Underrepresented Students
Charity Hudley, Dickter, Franz (2017)

- Learning the hidden curriculum
- Balancing time and energy for research while dealing with financial or discriminatory challenges
- Finding supportive faculty
- Knowing your rights and responsibilities as an undergraduate researcher
- Paying it forward: Community Based Participatory Research
How does all of this relate to our research as linguists?

I have been comprehensively dedicated to undergraduate education throughout my career – from the summers I spent working with incoming African-American students at the University of Pennsylvania to my current role as director of undergraduate research at UCSB.

At first, I thought it was a separate of my job and a way to unsuspend my own disbelief that I was in a discipline that focused so much on African-American language but had so many African-American linguists as scholars. Now, I realize that the fostering of undergraduate education is central to everything that I do as a linguist that explicit planning for the success of African-American students in higher education gets at the heart of what we need to do sociolinguistically to make sure speakers of African-American English are included in every aspect of our scholarship.
Talking College Project/UCSB-HBCU Scholars in Linguistics

Black language matters because Black lives matter.

All Black college students deserve to explicitly know how Black language is a tremendous aspect of our culture and heritage.

All Black college students deserve to know how knowledge about race and language is also critical to addressing racism in all of its insidious forms.

Through systematic across campus partnerships we can all work together to ensure that our message of linguistic empowerment and linguistic justice is heard by as many students as possible both in Southern California and beyond.
Talking College Project/UCSB-HBCU Scholars in Linguistics Logistics

Prior to the start of the summer program, students take a special, seminar style online introductory to Linguistics course, which builds base knowledge of linguistics and relevant research skills.

Students then work in small research teams according to their topic of interest and collect data from their respective college and universities.

Upon arrive to UCSB in late June, students will be involved in the Talking College project, which is designed to empower African-American students as they make cultural and linguistic and choices during their college years.

The 8-week residential program entails research, coursework, professional development, and social events.
Key Questions From Our Actual Interviews

• Has anyone ever told you that you sound like you are from somewhere specific? What do you think they noticed? Did you (or would you) take it as a compliment?

• Has anyone else ever tried to make you change something about the way you talk? What? Was it your teachers? Parents? Friends?

• Which social details do you think may have influenced the way you speak? Have you noticed any differences in the way you speak compared to your college friends or college professors?

• Thinking now specifically about college, have you ever been praised for your language? Are there any situations in which your language has been criticized?
The classroom can be hostile to Black students' language.

Professors can hold negative linguistic attitudes that, students report, can compromise their confidence and sense of belonging on campus (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2014; Dunstan, 2013; Fama, 2007)

Components of Knowing African American Language

- Knowing about African-American Language
- Knowing African American Language looks and sounds like
- Knowing how African-American Language impacts a given curriculum and praxis
Leave Today with #1 – What is African American Language

"African American Language is conceptualized as the language and discourse patterns of African slave descendants in the United States, which reflect the survival of African languages in the English used by these descendants."

Why a Framework of Deserving?

• This work is for Black College Students everywhere.

• We would like to submit a plea to Black scholars in particular to share this work with their students regardless of their major as this is a direct address to Black students rather than just for a linguistics audience.

• “Imagine if a lot of us knew?”—Myaah Hayes, Norfolk State University
Language is culture so your language is your Black is your beautiful

“The essence of a culture is not its artifacts, tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. It is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies; it is not material objects and other tangible aspects of human societies. People within a culture usually interpret the meaning of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors in the same or in similar ways.”

(James Banks and Cherrie Banks, 2017)
All languages have value. Your language is not broken, nor are you.
Variations in African American Language

Internally
The position of a consonant cluster in a word: stir, resting, rest

Externally
The age and gender identification of the speaker
Mutual intelligibility

Speakers of different but related languages or varieties of a language understand each other without prior familiarity or special effort.

We can understand each other to varying degrees.
We still use our language because we preserve meaning.

While we can fully express ourselves in other varieties of English, we preserve meaning and cultural value through our use of African American language.

You *might could* find it
He *done* fixed supper
The soup ( ) hot
She *BIN finished* her homework
Your Black don’t have to look or sound like mine

- What does it mean to sound Black
- What does it mean to sound White

The research so far hasn’t fully reflected these facts.
How does this information impact students’ college experiences?

Our language helps us belong. And not just to other people but to ourselves.
How does this information impact students’ college experiences?

Your intelligence is not tied to your language but your academic achievement may have been impacted due to linguistic bias.

These are the tangible aspects of racism.

**equality vs. equity**

In the first image, it is assumed that everyone will benefit from the same supports. They are being treated equally.

In the second image, individuals are given different supports to make it possible for them to have equal access to the game. They are being treated equitably.

In the third image, all three can see the game without any supports or accommodations because the cause of the inequity was addressed. The systemic barrier has been removed.
Priorities for Black People in the UCs Revisited: Come tell me during the reception!

• Why are we here?
• Will I be successful here: What are our highest individual priorities and goals?
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• If we have the privilege to speak up, we have a responsibility.
Move away from mentor and role model models (especially hero centric ones) into a model of concrete action and activities that are syncretic

• To do all this we need more frank conversations about what we are trying to achieve and why. We need to talk finances, cost of living, and intellectual growth.

• We don’t have to have the same priorities, but we need to have a sense of the range, timing, and budget model.

• For me, it’s a focus on undergraduate access to the research university, graduate student development into faculty, and forging the way for all of us into leadership positions.
Forging the Way: Leadership for Change

• Faculty must also be provided with models to develop the professional and leadership skills needed to foster that same level of inclusion in the faculty ranks and in campus leadership positions. Identifying and training a diverse cohort of future academic leaders is critical to the academic mission of the university.

• **Forging the Way: Leadership for Change** is a seminar designed for faculty at UCSB with demonstrated records of action on issues related to diversity and inclusion either at UCSB or in their academic disciplines.

• Once per quarter, the seminar will feature an invited leader from another institution who has provided demonstrated leadership around issues relevant for MSIs and our students. The other seminar meetings are designed to be highly responsive to faculty participants’ desires for professional learning.

• The goal of the program is for participants to recognize their leadership skills and to bring them into conversation with others to strategize about developing a portfolio which will lead to advancement as academic leaders.
Conclusion and Further Directions

• Academia is just beginning to fully describe the African-American experience in academia.

• Programs and pathways both in linguistics and in higher education at large Black students to be involved in the research work that it will take to make structural change.

• The Diaspora is real, and we can be whole again.
Thank You All!

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#ucbac19
Join us for a reception in the Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts Yocha Dehe Grand Lobby 5:30–7:00 p.m.