



THE
FREEDOM
CENTER

PROPOSAL PROJECT



Overview

The Freedom Center statement reads as follows:

*The Freedom Center is an ongoing initiative **by** students of color **for** students of color. The center will be a safe space and a support system for students of color while growing awareness and knowledge of cultural diversity. The Freedom Center would provide students with the opportunity to gain leadership skills, employment, and volunteer opportunities, and support identity based clubs and organizations with a space to continue offering a safe and inclusive environment in our campus community. Most importantly, the center will aid the recruitment and retention of students of color, and ensure they succeed in higher education.*

For many years, it has been expressed and shown that there is a need for the Freedom Center. Throughout the years ASWOU executive members, and WOU students have worked on the center, whether it was advocating, looking for resources or reaching out for support. In addition, many clubs and organizations need this space to hold general meetings, executive meetings, store supplies, etc. Also, students need a space that will provide them with the resources necessary to be successful during their time at WOU. Nevertheless, students have advocated for a place like the Freedom Center, and it is time for there to be an action taken.

It is important to emphasize that students of color need a space where they will not feel marginalized and a place where students will feel comfortable with sharing their ideas, while

being successful in their higher education journey. The Freedom Center is meant to be a place where students of color feel safe. In addition, clubs/organizations will be able to use the space to collaborate. The establishment of a Freedom Center will also advance and support cultural competency and civic responsibility amongst all of the WOU community. The creation of a Cultural Center will reassure WOU's values of Community and Diversity & Respect, which state the following:

Community: *"Trustworthy, caring, safe environment for the cultivation of peace, civility and social justice; connections extending beyond the classroom, across campus and into our local and global communities"* ([WOU Mission](#)).

Diversity & Respect: *"Equity and inclusion; a fundamental basis in human diversity; appreciation for the complexity of the world; strength drawn from our variety of backgrounds, abilities, cultural experiences, identities, knowledge domains and means of expression"* ([WOU Mission](#)).

Goals

In the Freedom Center, we will ensure to work towards our three goals. First, the center will be diverse and inclusive with students of various backgrounds. Diversity is defined as being inclusive with all individuals, as well as embracing everyone's culture, beliefs, identities, and ideologies ([Diversity](#)). Inclusivity is defined as including and providing equal opportunities/resources to all individuals ([Inclusivity](#)). Our second goal will be to increase retention rates for students of color. From 2013-2016 the average number of students who graduated from Western Oregon University in four years is 27%. Out of 27% only 13% were

students of color, the rates of students being successful in higher education is very low. More than half of BIPOC students have not successfully graduated, which decreased retention and graduation rates at Western Oregon University ([WOU Graduation Rates](#)). Last but not least our goal will be to increase resources for students of color by creating an atmosphere where students will have access to volunteer opportunities, access to study areas, and other resources that will help them succeed during their college experience.

About the Center

The Freedom Center will be a space where cultural based student clubs and organizations will be able to identify and express their culture within one another. Not only will the center provide a space for clubs and organizations, it will also create a safe space where students of color will be able to unite and bond. There are multiple areas where students of color could get together, but the Freedom Center will be the designated space where students will walk in and just feel welcomed.

The center will create a welcoming place for students of color, increase retention within students of color, and increase the resources available for students of color. As a working community, and as an institution who is near close to being a Hispanic Serving Institution. The Freedom Center is the way to show to our students that we care about them and their success. Not only to the students who identify as Hispanic, but also all of the BIPOC community to feel welcomed and like they belong in the Western Oregon University community.

Services Offered

In the Freedom Center, we will do our utmost to ensure that students are receiving the services to better benefit their needs. For that reason we will be providing an Office Space for Executive Members in Club/Organization in which each club/organization will have a designated space that consists of a desk, desktop, chair, etc. where they will be able to complete their duties as exec members. Next are Meeting Rooms, which will be designated meeting rooms for smaller executive officer meetings and at-large club meetings. Have access to seating areas and technology. In addition is the Social Lounge Space, it will consist of a common area where students across clubs/organizations would be able to socialize and create a community. Next, is the Supply Room, where all supplies will be stored. All clubs/organizations, and students will have access to supplies to better serve their needs. Furthermore, there will be Volunteer Opportunities for students to gain leadership skills and experience in which students can evolve as individuals and serve our community. In addition, there will be an individual with the designated position of a Secretary, where the individual will ensure that the center is well organized, as well as keeping track of all club meetings and events. Next, there will be a Material Organizer. This position will be held by one individual who will be designated to ensure that all materials and supplies are stocked up and organized. Last but not least, there will be Open Study Rooms for students to feel safe and comfortable to complete their task. The services offered in the Freedom Center will allow students and student leaders to be successful in their time at WOU.

Resources Offered

In the Freedom Center we will ensure that there are resources offered to better benefit students from various backgrounds. It is important to provide our students with the resources necessary to feel welcomed in our community. First, we will provide but shall not be limited to Indegenious and Native Resources and opportunities which would include *Longhouse Location*, *Tribal Event*, *Tribal Rights*. Next, we will provide DACA/Dreamers and Undocumented Student Support which will consist of but shall not be limited to *Legal Support* which is a staff dedicated to assisting students through the different processes that DACA recipients and Dreamers must go through. As well as *Funding Support* which will assist students in locating resources for funding and financial assistance for renewal of DACA biannually or legal fees. In addition, we will provide but shall not be limited to Asian and Asian American Resources, by creating international student connections, as well as creating opportunities to organize events to support students' needs. Next, we shall provide, but will not be limited to, Black Student Resources, which will consist of creating opportunities for workshops as well as educating students about Black Lives Matter. Furthermore, we will provide but will not be limited to Polynesian and Pacific Islander Resources, which will consist of creating opportunities for students to hold workshops/events to educate students about their cultural background and identities. In addition, there will be Counseling and Academic support, which will consist of staff support and printed resources for students to access when needed. Last but not least, their will be but will not be limited to Workshop Opportunities regarding Racial Injustice, Cultural Competency and Discrimination in and outside WOU. Overall, the resources listed will better serve students and provide them with the resources to feel welcome.

Student Input

Students have expressed their interest and support for the Freedom Center because they understand that WOU needs a place like the Freedom Center on campus. We have received support from various Clubs/Organizations on campus such as Unidos, MEChA, BSU, and MSU. With the support of Clubs/Organizations we have collected student testimonials in support for the center. Students have expressed the need of the center on the testimony. Student testimonials can be found in the following link: [Freedom Center Student Testimony](#).

For many years, cultural based clubs, organizations and WOU students have emphasized the importance of the center. Recently we held a survey of the current students at Western Oregon University, 100% of the students expressed that there is a big need for the center. One student stated “there is currently no place on campus that is dedicated to minority groups. There is also no place for students who wish to submerge themselves in diverse settings to go. The impact it would have on me directly is that it would be a place for me to meet others who also promote cultural diversity and be surrounded by students alike.” While gathering all of the results from the survey, it was noticeable that students support and want the Freedom Center to be a new resource for the WOU community. Many universities in Oregon, such as Portland State University, Oregon State University and University of Oregon have cultural centers established on their campuses. The effects of cultural centers on campus has increased retention rates among students of color. In addition, The Freedom Center will support students by achieving their academic and social goals during their time at Western Oregon University. First year students are also being supportive with the Freedom Center Initiative. As new students of Western Oregon

University, they have seen the necessity of the Freedom Center in our campus. Students have been educated about the center and are willing to do their utmost to provide their support.

The Plan

The Freedom Center shall be an open space for students of color to feel safe and partake in the resources offered to be successful and feel welcomed. Our next steps are to use the feedback we received from students and make the Freedom Center a reality. With that in mind, as a University who is striving to become a Hispanic Serving Institution, the University should provide a space where BIPOC students feel welcome and safe. By doing so, it will also increase retention rates within students of color.

In addition, we are requesting the top floor of the APSC (Academics Program and Support Center) building. We believe that the top floor allows there to be space for the Freedom Center to provide its students with the resources they need to be successful at WOU. For many years organizations are placed in a room where it makes it hard for students to find. For that reason, we believe that the APSC top floor building is the ideal place for the Freedom Center.

Moreover, we plan on providing students of color with the best center that we could create. For that reason, we have created a layout of what the Freedom Center will look like in the APSC building. Every inch of the center will be utilized to provide students with the resources, support and necessities to feel safe and be successful. The layout was created with the intent to provide cultural based clubs/organizations with the space necessary to provide their members with their best potential. As well as, creating a well represented space for BIPOC students. The

layout of the Freedom Center in the APSC building can be found in the following link:

[Freedom Center Project](#).

In addition to the layout, we have created a budget for the start up of the Freedom Center. The budget is broken down based on the expense and consists of all of the expenses for the center such as payroll, fees, technology, furniture, employee pay, and resources. The budget can be found in the following link, [Freedom Center Budget](#).

Students of color are marginalized and diminished on campus, and the Freedom Center will be a place where students will feel safe to be themselves. In addition, the Center is an initiative that students have been trying to implement into WOU for many years. The Freedom Center will provide cultural awareness, cultural diversity, cultural competency on campus and celebrate the cultural diversity on our campus. We cannot continue to express the importance that the center will be for the university. Most importantly, this center is vital to ensure the voices of students who are underserved and underrepresented to finally be heard on their campus. Now is the time to enact change.

Many students have helped us evolve the proposal, they are some of many students who understand the need for the Freedom Center and want to create a change at WOU. We would like to give a special thanks to the following individuals:

- ASWOU Director of Visual Communications, Ruben Ramirez
- ASWOU Director of Equity, Kassidy Fegles
- Elizabeth Braatz
- Devin Thongdy

- Maria Barrera

Sincerely,

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