

RUNNING HEAD: ACTION PLAN

Action Plan
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Goal:

Through the following action plan I desire to gain awareness and knowledge in regards to the African American culture. I also hope to develop multicultural skills that will allow me to better serve and understand all students of color on the college campus where I serve and may serve in the future.

Objective One: Awareness of the African American Culture

Activity 1: Gospel Sing at Azusa Pacific University

Objective:

Attend Gospel Sing at Azusa Pacific University to gain awareness of the African American culture through the perspective of a worship service/experience.

Description of Activity:

Gospel Sing took place on February 9, 2008 in the Felix Events Center at Azusa Pacific University (APU). Gospel Sing is an annual event produced by APU's Office of Multi-Ethnic Programs. The stated purpose of the evening (from the program) is "to bring the Azusa Pacific University community together in a night of cross-cultural worship." The evening was filled with performances by gospel choirs from across the nation, dance teams, and Christian recording artists.

Reactions and Feelings:

My first reaction to the event as a whole is I loved it! Pastor Dorothy Porter was the first to speak at the event. She recited scripture and prayed. During the time of prayer, I was so moved. Her prayer was so passionate, so deep, and so honest. As soon as she finished praying, I remember thinking that I wish I could attend

her church on a regular basis so I would be able to come into the presence of God in that manner more often.

All of the performances throughout the evening were well done and thoroughly enjoyable. The men's (The Black Men's Fellowship) and women's (Umoja) step teams were so energetic. Stepping is so intriguing to me, I think mostly because I do not think I could ever do it. From everything I know about stepping, it has its roots in the Historically Black Colleges and fraternities. One of the aspects of Umoja that I truly appreciate is that there are individuals of almost every racial background on the team. Umoja means unity and I feel there is unity within the team based not on racial differences, but on oneness in Christ.

The performance by Marques Nelson and the worship team he leads was beautiful. At some point during their performance I was made aware that this worship team used to be one of the regular worship teams that lead in chapel, but they no longer have that role. I am not sure of the reasoning behind not having this worship team lead on a regular basis, but I truly feel the university as a whole is missing out. During the student panel in diversity class, one of the students talked about how they had to really adjust to the type of worship the chapels at APU offer, because it was so different than they were used to. As has been discussed in class and throughout the readings, diversity benefits the university as a whole and I believe diversity in worship styles can greatly benefit students' spiritual lives.

Gospel Sing drew in the outside community like no other event I have seen at APU. I would say that over half of those in attendance were from the community. It pleased me so much to see entire families welcomed into the APU

community to take part in worship with us. I wish the diversity present in the audience that night was present everyday on the campus.

Throughout the evening, there was a sense of being free to worship God in whatever manner one chooses. Audience members were raising their hands, dancing in the aisles, and kneeling in reverence. This feeling of freedom is not one I have found in many “white” churches. I am not sure what aspect of African American culture (and South American cultures) makes worship so expressive through song and dance, but it is inspiring to be involved in this type of worship.

Activity 2: Black Student Association’s Coffee House

Objective:

Attend the Black Student Association’s Coffee House at Azusa Pacific University to gain awareness of the African American culture through vocal performances, poetry readings, dance and artwork.

Description of Activity:

I attended the Coffee House put on by the Black Student Association (BSA) on February 28, 2008. The event took place in Upper Turner Campus Center and approximately 225 people were in attendance. Coffee Houses occur two to three times a semester and the BSA Coffee House takes place annually in February (during Black History Month). The event showcases African American students and alumni as they sing, dance, read original pieces of poetry, paint and play instruments.

Reactions and Feelings:

What an amazing night, filled with extraordinarily talented individuals! When I arrived I had to sit in the very last row because there were so many

people in attendance. One of the first acts I saw was a young man who does spoken word. Spoken word, is a mix between poetry and rap (in all reality, rap is a modern day form of poetry). The meaning of his words were so profound, I honestly could have listened to him for hours. This young man also had a very special talent of being able to “beat box” and sing/rap at the same time. My thoughts during this performance were amazement, but I also did think about how spoken word and “beat boxing” appear to be a profoundly African American form of expression. Though there are many individuals of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds who also express themselves creatively in these forms, my first reaction would be to classify these forms of expression as being part of African American culture.

Another individual I really enjoyed watching was a young woman who painted throughout the entire evening. It was incredible to watch a canvas go from blank to a finished piece of art in such a short period of time. One of the reasons this impresses me so much is because I am not artistic and it amazes me that individuals are able to use a brush and some paint to create a beautiful piece of artwork.

The audience was composed of a diverse group of individuals. All in attendance appeared to be enjoying the evening; they were laughing, clapping along with the music and dancing. Though the audience was diverse, there was a sense of community within the room. I can not pinpoint the how or why behind this sense of community, but it was a wonderful addition to the event.

Overall, the Coffee House was a fun and entertaining evening and I am glad I attended. I do not believe I gained too much in the area of awareness of African American culture, but I do know I gain some insight into the gifts and talents of specific

Black students on campus. This knowledge will hopefully help me to build relationships with some of those individuals in the future because it will help me to know more about them individually as opposed to them just being a student on campus.

Activity 3: Movie about African American Culture.

Objective:

Gain awareness of the African American culture by watching a movie that accurately depicts African American culture.

Description of Activity:

I watched Tyler Perry's movie *Why Did I Get Married*. The movie was released in 2007 and features Tyler Perry and Janet Jackson. The film delves into the lives of four couples who have known each other since college. Every year the couples get together for a week-long reunion. At this year's reunion all the marriages are tested when secrets are shared and spouses reveal that they have been cheating. After the couples leave the retreat they are forced to decide why they got married and if the relationship they are in is worth pursuing.

Reactions and Feelings:

Why Did I Get Married was a very interesting movie. As I watched the movie all I could think about is how this movie is representative of married couples in the United States, regardless of their race or ethnicity. The problems the couples faced ranged from working too much and cheating spouses to a child's death and not desiring to have another child. In this representation of marriage in the United States I had a difficult time picking out how the movie depicted African American culture, except for the all African American cast. I realized the reason I had such a hard time seeing the

depiction of African American culture was because I am so accustomed to movies about African Americans being about gang/street life, sports, or how African Americans have overcome racism and prejudice. This movie did not have any of those themes, except for a character who had been a professional football player.

There were two specific stereotypes in the movie a classmate and I discussed. First, one of the women owns and runs a hair salon. To be honest this is not a stereotype I first think about when I think of African Americans, but in the last few years several movies (with all African American casts) have been about barber shops. In these movies, the barber shop is the hub of the African American community, the place people come to catch up on the latest gossip and gain wisdom on life's problems. Though barber shops are places where these types of activities do take place, I do not think it is strictly an African American "thing."

The other stereotype I observed in the movie was that all of the women were very outspoken and somewhat dominant in their relationships with their husbands. In a group of four females, I do not believe all four would have such strong personalities. African American women, as represented in the media, often tend to have these characteristics, but I know not all Black women have dominant and outspoken personalities.

As a whole, I feel this movie does accurately portray the African American culture in the United States because it gives a glimpse into the lives of four African American couples as they go about their daily lives. Because the characters were psychologist, architects, sheriffs, pediatricians, lawyers, retired football players and hairdressers and not the stereotypical gangsters, freedom fighters, or star athletes

represented in most of the media today, this movie probably gives a better glimpse of the majority of the lives of this minority group.

Objective Two: Knowledge of African American culture

Activity 1: Black Student Association Meeting at Azusa Pacific University

Objective:

Attend the Black Student Association (BSA) meeting at Azusa Pacific University to gain knowledge of African American culture through the perspective of college students.

Description of Activity:

The BSA meetings take place weekly in the lounge in Adams Residence Hall. The purpose of BSA is to create a support system for Black students on APU's campus. There were between 25-30 students in attendance. Approximately 5 of the students in attendance were not Black.

Reactions and Feelings:

I attended a BSA meeting on March 27, 2008. The topic for the evening was Barrack Obama's speech, which had addressed the attack on his campaign and the pastor of his church. The two young ladies leading the discussion were sure to create a safe environment for everyone in attendance to speak their minds, by clearly stating that this was not a time to promote or attack any presidential candidate and/or time to attack anyone's views or statements. To encourage the students to speak one at a time, a pillow was passed to those who had their hands raised and only the person with the pillow could talk.

After being shown a video clip of several of Reverend Wright's sermons, the participants were asked if "the comments made by Reverend Wright were racist?" I will admit, I was sure the students would say the comments were not racist (which I personally do not think the majority of the Reverend's comments were racist); but, to my surprise the majority of the students who responded said they did think Reverend Wright's comments were racist. One of the students discussed how he believed the comment about the US of KKK was racist because it would be like a white pastor referring to the United States as the US of the Black Panthers. It was strange to me to hear an African American call another African American racist. I suppose I always think of racism being something that only Whites can commit.

The students also discussed several other issues related to Reverend Wright's comments and Barack Obama's speech. All of the students who spoke were very articulate; I do not think I was that articulate about anything, especially politics, when I was in college. There were a couple of times throughout the meeting where the discussion began to get a little heated, but the two girls facilitating the meeting and the BSA President, Tiffanie Montgomery, were quick to remind the students that the meeting is a safe place for all students to share their thoughts and ideas.

At the end of the meeting all those in attendance got in a circle and hold hands, with fingers intertwined. The intertwined fingers represented the group's strength when they are bound together. At this point, those who wanted prayer were asked to step into the middle of the circle and they form their own little circle. After those who desired to be prayed for were in the center, Tiffanie prayed. At the end of the prayer everyone lifted their hands (still linked), lifted their right leg, and on the count of three

everyone stomped their right leg and shouted “Umoja” (meaning unity). I have to say it was a very powerful moment.

Attending the BSA meeting, really allowed me to hear from a wide variety of African American student voices. I truly believe it helped me to make a better connection with the African American community on APU’s campus because I was able to sit and listen to what they have to say about issues that are currently part of their reality. Often times, I only hear the “White perspective” because it is what I am surrounded by. It was very beneficial for me to have to sit back and listen to other’s perspectives; in fact I would say it was enlightening.

Overall, I really enjoyed going to the BSA meeting. I admit I was a little nervous walking into the meeting. I could not help but think about how these students might perceive this white girl, who they have probably never seen on campus before, walking into their meeting. My fears of being an outsider or not welcomed did not come to fruition. This group of students was very welcoming of anyone who walked through the door. Though they are a Black Student Association, they truly do provide an environment where anyone of any “color” would feel like they belonged.

Activity 2: Book about African American culture.

Objective:

Read a book that delves into the African American culture in order to gain knowledge of the culture through the perspective of the author.

Description of Activity:

I read Patricia Raybon’s, non-fiction book, *My First White Friend: Confessions on Race, Love, and Forgiveness*. The book was published in 1996 and

documents Patricia's journey from anger and rage of the white race to love and reconciliation.

Raybon, P. (1996). *My first white friend: Confessions on race, love, and forgiveness*.

New York: Penguin Group.

Reactions and Feelings:

My First White Friend was the perfect book for me to read for my action plan because it touched on so many different aspects of African American culture, racism and reconciliation. This book was one I wish I could have underlined and highlighted in because the author had such profound things to reveal, but unfortunately I was borrowing the book from a friend so I had to compromise by folding the corners of the pages. There are many folded corners in this borrowed copy of the book, so I will not discuss all of my thoughts about the book, but I will discuss the ones that were the most profound to me.

“And we held our bodies stiffly to walk like Negroes. We didn't bob or sway or drag. We talked like he taught us and we kept ourselves quiet and clean and orderly because, like him, we had to survive the journey from the old colored life to the new Negro one. And this was important business” (p. 23). In this excerpt, Raybon is discussing how she and her siblings would walk and act in a certain manner because that is how their father had taught them to behave. As she reflects, she realizes the reason her father taught her to behave in this fashion was so she would represent her race well. This part caught my attention because it so vividly captured a day in the life of a little girl who lived in a strongly racist era. It saddens me that this little girl lost part of the freedom of childhood having to pretend to be something she is not (a perfect child) so White

America would look on her in semi-approval or as a “good little black girl.” It makes me think, how many of the African American students on college campuses today are still living this mentality of having to be the perfect African American student, instead of figuring out who they truly are.

Another section of the book that struck me as powerful was the end of the third chapter, where Raybon is talking about forgiveness. She discusses Jesus’ mandate to forgive infinitely, no matter the sin. Raybon reveals she has tried to answer the sin of racism towards African Americans with her own hatred of the White race. Just as with any sin, there needs to be forgiveness and forgiveness provides freedom. Raybon admits she often fails at forgiveness, but she continues to get on the path towards forgiveness on a daily basis. I really took this section to heart because of Raybon’s obvious reliance on God to overcome her prejudices and racism. As I study and work at a Christian university it seems issues of diversity are always tackled from a God-centered point of view, but it is refreshing to read about typical people seeing racial reconciliation from a Christian perspective.

“There’s a cloying sweetness to it, playing the racial martyr and being angry and indignant. Even when you’re not angry and indignant. It’s just expected of you...” (p. 105). When I read this statement, it really made me think. I found it so odd that the author claims that playing the victim is expected of minorities. I had never thought of this before, but I think it is true. Some of the stereotypes about African Americans prove it. Single, African American mothers are on welfare or in other words they are “victims” of their circumstances. African American teenagers are gangsters, victims of their neighborhood. White America sets low expectations for African

Americans in our country because there is an ideology that they will never conquer their victim status. African Americans conquered their victim status long ago; it is time for expectations to change!

“That was then. And now is now” (p. 136). Throughout the book, Raybon encourages readers to continue forward towards racial reconciliation. “White folks and black folks alike are indebted, and we must bury our paralyzing anxieties about race-worries that somebody else is getting ahead faster, or that somebody’s racial sin demands somebody else’s heated revenge. It’s time, instead, to start living up to our collective and individual potential as a blessed human community” (p. 136). The first time I read this quote I breathed a sigh of relief. I have heard African Americans say they would like to move forward from the past, but often times I feel they do not move on. (I guess that is a stereotype I hold) Raybon’s story proves to me that she has moved forward and is more concerned with the reconciliation of humanity. Raybon inspires me to be an advocate for love and forgiveness in all aspects of diversity.

Activity 3: Interview Three African American College Students

Objective:

Interview three African American college students in order to gain knowledge about the college environment from the student perspective.

Description of Activity:

I interviewed three college students who attend Azusa Pacific University and identify as African Americans. All three interviews occurred on the school’s campus. The three individuals I interviewed were as follows:

Tiffanie Montgomery: Female; Senior; Liberal Studies; BSA
President

Melody Porter: Female; Sophomore; Nursing; MESA Co-leader

Jamari Robinson: Male; Sophomore; (forgot to ask); RA next year

Reactions and Feelings:

I have opposing feelings about this part of the assignment. I thoroughly enjoyed interviewing these three individuals and I feel I learned more from the interviews than I did from any other part of this assignment. However, I really struggled with getting to the point of interviewing these students, because it was so hard to access students who would sit down and talk with me. I spent about four weeks attempting to set up appointments with students. First I emailed students I had met and/or worked with throughout the year hoping they would agree to be interviewed because we had some form of relationship. Over a week later, I had not heard from any of the students so I emailed again. At that point I heard back from Tiffanie that she would do an interview with me. Feeling somewhat desperate, I went into the Multi-Ethnic Programs office and asked the Administrative Assistant if she knew of any students who would be willing to be interviewed for this assignment. She told me she would ask around, but she was fairly sure students who did not know me would not feel comfortable talking to me about diversity issues. I told Tiffanie about what was going on and she said she would try to help me out by making an announcement at the BSA meeting. Although I interacted with several students at the BSA meeting, the only student who agreed to be interviewed was Melody (whom I had sent an email to about two weeks before). As the due date for this assignment drew closer I got desperate and thought of an African American student who I had met in passing several times in my office because he is going on a mission trip. I pulled out his file and got his email address, thankfully Jamari agreed to be interviewed.

Due to this difficulty in finding interviews, I asked each of the students if being interviewed regarding being African American and/or diversity issues was something they would do with anyone. Tiffanie said she had no problem talking about these issues because she feels like it is one of her roles on campus as a Multi-Ethnic Leadership (MEL) Scholar. However, Melody and Jamari said the only reason they agreed to be interviewed was because they had some form of relationship with me. Melody expanded on this by saying she gets emails about being part of interviews like this one fairly often and she just never answers the email. I find myself in a weird place because part of me wants to encourage students to talk to everyone they can about these issues so others can learn like I did. The other part of me understands where they are coming from, with not wanting to share, because I do not share intimate details about my life with people I do not have a relationship with.

Tiffanie Montgomery: A truly amazing young woman! When Tiffanie talks, I listen. Coming to APU, Tiffanie did not expect to be completely supported as an African American student. Though she had felt “at home” at APU on her first visit, her past experiences at a small, predominately White, private, Christian school helped her acknowledge that she would not find support from everyone. Overall, she has felt very supported at APU and credits that to being involved with Multi-Ethnic Programs (MEP) as a MEL Scholar and being highly committed to the Black Student Association. Tiffanie has felt unsupported on campus, on occasion, due to the constant organizational shifts in leadership within the MEP Office. During her time at APU she has seen a Director and an Administrative Assistant leave, yearly change-ups in the Graduate Assistants in the office, the hiring of a new Director, and the search for a new Assistant

Director. These changes have caused a necessity for Tiffanie to step-up into roles within the office that have required her to put a lot into the office and she does not necessarily feel that she has gotten as much back. When I asked Tiffanie what it was like to be her at APU her response struck me as such the normal college student answer, “I am just trying to figure out who I am.” In that she discussed “fighting for balance” between conforming to who people expect her to be and who she really is. Tiffanie also told me that she struggles with being vulnerable with people on campus because she has a hard time telling who really cares about her and who just pretends to be her friend because she is so well known on campus. One of her goals for this year has been to learn “how to build intentional relationships so she can be more vulnerable with people.” Part of attaining this goal for Tiffanie has required her to stop hanging out in the MEP Office as much, because she feels it had become a crutch for her socially. She really hopes to reach out and build relationships with those “beyond BSA and MEP.”

Next I asked Tiffanie what percentage she would say her ethnicity defines her identity at APU. Her response intrigued me. Tiffanie said she believes others would say her ethnicity defines about 85% of her identity. It defines a large majority of her because they see her involvement in MEP and BSA, the community she spends a large majority of her time with, and of course her skin color. However, there is 15% that others see as being more “main stream culture” and they would be likely to say she acts like a White girl when she says certain things or participates in certain activities. Tiffanie, however, said that 100% of her ethnicity defines her identity at APU. “I can’t deny who I am, but I am defined by 100% of a lot of other things.”

When I asked Tiffanie how she feels about diversity at APU, she told me she does not feel diversity is about numbers. “Even if there was a lot of diversity numbers wise, it may not enhance the school.” In fact, she feels “APU is doing pretty well” in regards to diversity.

The last question I asked Tiffanie was if she had any advice for Student Affairs professionals. She had three pieces of advice. One, Student Affairs professionals need “to know who they are so they can be genuine and understanding with the students who come to them.” Two, Student Affairs professionals from top to bottom need to be aware of the need for places where minorities “can dialogue and feel they belong.” Thirdly, the term African American is not defined “by one set of values, beliefs, or traditions.” She challenged me to think about how I define someone’s “Blackness.” Every person is unique and cannot be defined by a term so broad it is used to categorize individuals from dozens of nations and a dozens more cultures.

Melody Porter: My time with Melody was more of a conversation than an interview. The interview was so enjoyable, I felt like I was spending time with one of my good friends. I asked Melody about how she has felt supported and/or unsupported on APU’s campus. She told me that overall she feels very supported on campus, but feels especially supported by the MEP Office. Melody is a MESA Co-leader and is highly involved in the MEP community. She feels this support comes from the freedom to ask questions, vent and just be herself without fear of judgment by those in the office. In regards to feeling unsupported, well she responded that she feels unsupported mostly by students of the “majority culture.” I asked her if she meant White

students and she hesitated and said “yes.” I told her I was glad she could be honest and share this with me.

One of the topics Melody and I discussed was what she was most surprised about in coming to college. Four things came to mind for her. One, the workload. She told me that freshman year was doable, but this year her studies have gotten very intense. The second thing that surprised her was how fun college really was. “There is always something to do.” Thirdly, she was surprised at “how accessible the professors are” to the students. “They really care about us.” Lastly, she noted that she has been surprised at how much she learns outside of the classroom. She gave examples of learning how to strengthen her leadership abilities and learning how to better relate to people.

Melody and I also discussed what statements and/or behaviors, in regards to racism, prejudice and stereotypes, are the most offensive to her. She told me that she lets most of it go because it goes back to “how they were raised.” People cannot change what their parents taught them. However, she does find it very offensive when people are “unwilling to be open to new things, yet expect minorities to adapt and change even though they aren’t willing to adapt.” During this point in the conversation I told Melody that often times I am slightly fearful of interacting with minority students (as a white individual) because I am afraid I will say something offensive due to my ignorance. Melody giggled and told me just to be myself and not to worry, people can usually tell when someone is doing something out of hate or intolerance as opposed to just not knowing. I responded with, “Well Melody, if I ever say something offensive to you (or

any other students on campus) please call me on it.” She said she would, but she doubted she would need too.

I also asked Melody about what percentage she feels her ethnicity defines her identity at APU. Her response, “100%, that is who I am. It is just like being a woman, it is who you are.” She also told me she loves being African American because she “likes being different.” She feels she is at an advantage because she is “forced to open [her] eyes” and she will be “better prepared for the world once she leaves APU.” Melody is confident in who she is and it shows.

Melody also confided in me that she has thought about leaving APU numerous times for two reasons. First, “the cost!” I laughed and said I completely understood that one. Her second reason for thinking about leaving was harder to hear. She told me that often times it is “hard to be on campus because I am working so hard and things [in regards to diversity issues] aren’t changing.” I told her, I could understand how that would be frustrating and I encouraged her to hang in there because things are changing, it is just hard to see.

The last question I asked Melody was if she had any advice for Student Affairs professionals. After I explained to her what a Student Affairs professional was, she told me the best advice she has for those in the field is to “just be available when students need to talk and provide moral support.”

Jamari: I could have spent hours and hours talking with Jamari. We talked about everything from his upcoming mission trip to how students working for Hospitality Services need a raise. This interview was different from the others because

we kept getting interrupted by almost everyone who walked by. It made me smile, because Jamari knows a lot of people on campus and they would just start talking to him.

The first topic Jamari and I discussed was the ways in which he has felt support and/or unsupported on campus. He responded that he feels very supported in his faith development at APU. He is involved in D-groups and has had Resident Advisors that have served as mentors to him. Jamari said he loves that everywhere you go on campus there are people who you can “struggle through learning about what Christ call you too” together. Culturally, he does not feel as support by the university. He struggles with the idea of having to “assimilate and accommodate to the majority” or isolating himself from the majority. He told me that Black Men’s Fellowship, BSA and MEP have been helpful in helping him “debrief and not become bitter or extreme.” Interestingly enough, Jamari feels most at home with the Asian Pacific American Student Organization (APASO). He explained it by saying, “I can be more of myself because I don’t have to be a Black man amongst other Black men. I can just be me.”

When I asked Jamari what had surprised him in college, he said “the diversity.” I asked him what he meant by diversity and he told me that in high school people defined themselves by their ethnicity and race; however, at APU everyone is so diverse “because they have had such a broad world experience.” Some of Jamari’s examples of diversity on APU’s campus were as follows: missionary kids, third culture kids, students who have studied abroad, different faith backgrounds, and even different forms of schooling leading up to college. He said the big question is “how do we unify by

making our own culture together.” That is a great question and one that I do not have an answer for.

Jamari answered the question about the percentage he feels his ethnicity defines who he is on APU’s campus a little differently than the girls. He told me that on campus 80% of who he is “him being him” and the other 20% is him responding to “the ideals” people have about him. In the world, Jamari said that feels 90% of him is defined by the color of his skin. We spent some time talking about how skin is a filter through which people view us, just like gender. There is nothing we can do about how people use that filter to judge us, because we cannot change who we are. However, like both of the girls, Jamari agreed that 100% of his identity is defined by his skin color, just like 100% of his identity is defined by the fact that he is a man and 100% of his identity is defined by the fact that he is a Christian.

I asked Jamari if he had every thought about leaving APU. He told me, “Yes, after freshman year.” Jamari told me his expectations of what a Christian campus should be were not met, but after some thought realized he “should learn from those unmet expectations” and try to make a difference.

My last question for Jamari was about his advice for Student Affairs Professionals. Here is what he had to say: “They should be willing to listen and they should provide support. Also, they should be willing to be uncomfortable and vulnerable. Students are waiting for you to listen to them, encourage them and motivate them to action.”

Overall: I was so blessed by these three interviews. I feel I received completely honest answers and I learned a lot about these three students. I am so

excited to have started deeper relationships with Tiffanie, Melody and Jamari because I know they have a lot to teach me and hopefully I can be an advocate and encouragement for them.

Objective Three: Develop multicultural skills to work more effectively with college students of diverse backgrounds.

Activity 1: Imago Dei (Azusa Pacific University's Diversity Training)

Objective:

Attend Imago Dei, a diversity training workshop at Azusa Pacific University, to develop multicultural skills in order to work more effectively with college students of diverse backgrounds.

Description of Activity:

Imago Dei took place on March 6-7, 2008 in the Los Angeles Pacific College room at Azusa Pacific University. Imago Dei is a diversity training workshop that occurs several times each academic year. There were approximately 15 faculty, staff and graduate students in attendance at the two day workshop. The workshop explores the Biblical view of diversity, Imago Dei, which means Image of God, through activities, lectures and media.

Reactions and Feelings:

I admit I was not very excited about going to the Imago Dei diversity training. However, I was pleasantly surprised and ended up really enjoying the workshop.

When the seminar first started I looked around the room to observe who was in the workshop with me. Two of the 15 participants were non-Caucasian.

Approximately half of those in attendance were under the age of 35, with most of us being in the College Student Affairs program. The other half of the participants were easily over 45. Of the 15 people, 3 were men. Seeing all the older women in the room, all I could think about was how prejudice these women probably are and how some feelings were going to get hurt over the next couple of days. I was so very wrong! From issues of race to sexuality, these women are some of the biggest advocates for diversity on campus. Several of the women shared of issues within their own families that had caused them to seriously re-think their prejudices. One, in particular, stuck with me. One woman shared that her best friend's son (who was like a son to her) had been afraid to tell her that he was gay because he feared she would not want anything to do with him. She shared that she had never completely understood how love could overcome prejudice until that moment. She went to this young man and shared with him that no matter what she loves him. This story touched me so much because similar situations have happened to me with the high school students I work with. They tell me their deepest secrets (they are gay or they are addicted to cocaine) and all I can do is see this precious child of God sitting in front of me, begging to not be rejected. I love the idea of Imago Dei-viewing diversity through God's perspective. God created each of us uniquely, in His image. Who are we to say one is better or worse than another?

The other activity that really impacted me was the "Tale of O". First we watch a video about O's (minorities) living in a world of X's (majority culture). The video itself was not too impressive, but the point got across. After the video we filled out a worksheet and discussed it with a small group. The four boxes we had to fill in were: Times I felt like an O, Time I felt like an X, Strategies for Empowering O's, and

Strategies for O self-empowerment. The group of three I was in talked and talked and talked. We shared stories of feeling like an O, feeling guilty for being an X, and times when we have been both the X and the O at the same time. I do not remember all the stories, but I walked away from this activity encouraged and empowered.

Of course there is always room for improvement, but overall I feel this diversity training is an asset to the APU community. I hope this workshop continues to be available to faculty and staff, so our university can continue to grow in the area of diversity.

Activity 2: Skills and Comfort Level Assessment

Objective:

Assess my current skill and comfort level in working with African American college students in order to work more effectively with college students of diverse backgrounds.

Description of Activity:

Throughout the entirety of the Action Plan process, I have been reflecting on my experiences and how equipped I feel to serve and advocate for African American students.

Reactions and Feelings:

First I want to say that I asked several individuals if they knew of an assessment tool that would help me decipher my skill and comfort level in working with African American college students. No one was aware of any resources. So, I decided to reflect upon my learning and thought process while doing this assignment and where I am now.

Going into this assignment, I felt I had a high level of skill and comfort in working with individuals from other cultures and races. But what I found overall is that I have the skills to work with individuals from diverse backgrounds, but I lack the comfort level and/or confidence in working with them.

I have had many cross-cultural experiences, in missions, where I have been the minority. I have had to learn new customs, eat strange foods, and attempt to speak languages that I did not even know existed. My greatest level of skills in working with diverse others came through two experiences, teaching English in Thailand and living in a rural village in Thailand. Both of these experiences forced me to be placed in situations where everything I knew as “normal life” no longer existed. While working in the Thai school, I was forced to re-evaluate my American ideals of education and exchange them for the Thai ideals. In the village, I learned that keeping track of time is a very western ideology and I needed to be okay with my schedule not going as planned. What I gained from these experiences is a knowledge that different is okay, and often times better than the norm. I believe I have a good base knowledge of multicultural skills from my experiences. By processing through this assignment I have gained some tips and pointers which will specifically give me skills in working with African American students. There is always going to be room for improvement in this area because I will never fully be able to understand what it is to be an African American, but I am on the right track.

In regards to comfort level in working with African American students, I am lacking. As I discussed with all three of the students I interviewed, I have this fear that I am going to say something offensive when I am around African

Americans. I honestly do not feel this way around any other race, ethnicity or culture. I can not recall any situations in the past that would have established this fear. The one thought I have on this is that perhaps because the area I grew up in did not have a large African American population (though other minorities groups were present), I never learned how to feel safe in interacting with them. I hope that does not sound wrong, I am not afraid of African Americans, I am just afraid of making the injustice they have faced greater than it already is. By doing this assignment though, I feel I have grown enormously in my comfort level. Spending quality time with my three interviewees really allowed me to be open and honest about my fears. In return, I was given permission to make mistakes and encouraged to just be the loving and caring person God created me to be.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the highest level of skill and comfort possible), I would rate myself a 7. I have a lot of growing to do, but I am excited to do it so I can better serve students like Tiffanie, Melody and Jamari.

Activity 3: Relationship with a Multicultural Mentor

Objective:

Establish a relationship with a multicultural mentor who will help me evaluate my skill level and development in regards to multiculturalism so I can work more effectively with college students of diverse backgrounds.

Description of Activity:

I picked Chiraphone Khamphouvong, Director of the Office of World Missions at Azusa Pacific University, to be my multicultural mentor. Chiraphone is the most culturally competent individuals I have met. She speaks multiple languages,

has lived on several continents, has served with the Peace Corps, and is extremely well traveled. Chiraphone is also my assistantship supervisor.

Reactions and Feelings:

Though this activity was something that was assigned for this quarter, I feel I have been going through a multicultural refining process since the beginning of my assistantship in the Office of World Missions. The amount of individuals who come through our tiny office is hard to imagine. What is even harder to imagine is the places, cultures, ethnicities, values, and languages that are represented by the people who we encounter. Working in the office requires multicultural skills, so Chiraphone makes sure all of us in the office are on top of our game.

As Chiraphone and I sat down and talked about this specific assignment, a Bengali student came up and started talking to me. I have been working closely with this student over the last several months because I am actually going to be traveling to Bangladesh and staying with his family for a couple of weeks for the Global Relief program our office is running. During our conversation we began talking about the different types of foods I am going to encounter while I am visiting (which I am not too excited about...fish and rice are not my favorites) and we also talked about religious festivals and holidays in Bangladesh. Throughout the conversation I asked a lot of questions and tried to gain as much knowledge as possible. After the student walked away, Chiraphone said, "Well that was a great example of being multi-culturally competent". She explained that she felt I was very respectful in all the questions I asked and she hopes I continue to ask questions when there are aspects of a culture, religion or people groups that I do not understand. The one thing she has reprimanded me for was

the other day I pointed at something in the office with my foot. To an American that may not mean anything, but in many parts of Asia (Thailand especially) feet are considered the most unacceptable part of the body. They are never to be pointed at someone or something. I should have known better. It actually made me very sad that I did this because it makes me realize how long it has been since I have been immersed in that specific culture and I miss it.

The big area that Chiraphone suggested I work on was my ability to work in diverse organizational environments. I agree this has been an area I have been working on all year. As Chiraphone and I have tried to dissect the issue, what has surfaced is that for so long (this is going to sound conceited) the way I have done things in the work setting has always been highly praised. For example, I was hired by a real estate development company for the sole purpose of organizing their filing system. Basically, whatever Erin thought was best was what everyone had to conform too. The same was also somewhat true at the non-profit I was helping to start. Though I was not the president of the organization, I was handed full command of decision making during my time there. Now I have come to APU and there is a structure already in place and I need to conform to it. It has been hard!

When I met with Chiraphone last week, she told me she felt that I am growing and continually learning to be more flexible and sensitive to diversity every day. There is definitely room for me to continue growing and I plan to do so.

Stage Two of Action Plan

If I were to take the next steps and continue my action plan there are three things that I would like to do that I feel would allow me to continue in my multicultural development and more specifically in working with African American college students.

First, I would consistently spend time in the Multi-Ethnic Programs Office. Students of diverse backgrounds are not necessarily going to come to me so I need to be intentional about going to where they are. The most realistic way of doing this would be for me to eat lunch in the MEP office one or two days a week. I have gone into the MEP Office during lunch time and it is crowded. It would be a great way for me to sit down with students and talk about life, school, the election, or whatever may be going on in their world at that point in time.

The second way I would like to continue working on my action plan is by becoming an advocate/support for the Black Student Association. I probably would not attend all of the meetings, due to the fact that they are student run and having a faculty or staff person present could possibly take away from the freedom they feel to express themselves in that place. However, I would love to advise and/or mentor some of the students who are in leadership positions within BSA. I would also be willing to be an advocate/go-between for their organization when it comes to working with the university, faculty and staff.

Another way I would hope to continue my action plan, though I think it might be fairly far-fetched, is to become an Imago Dei facilitator. Imago Dei training is a crucial aspect of advocating for diversity on APU's campus and I would really like to be part of that. I am not sure of the requirements to become a facilitator, but I am sure the training is extensive and I would most likely not be approved to be a trainer anytime within the next

year (or two or three). This is a way in which I can truly see myself making a difference on campus in the future and if I am able to work at APU after I graduate from this program, it would be something that I would try and pursue.

Implications for Student Affairs Practice

How will I use all of this information within my practice? I really can only begin to imagine. There are three broad areas where I can see myself regularly implementing my awareness, knowledge and skills within almost any aspect of student affairs I may find myself in: being an advocate, being available, and seeing the Imago Dei in each student.

Being an advocate for African American students and/or students of diverse backgrounds is not a practice that can be done one time, it is a daily commitment. I can be an advocate for diversity in almost every aspect of the student affairs profession. I can be an advocate when I serve on committees, as I work with faculty, as I work with students, when I hire employees, and even when I program. Advocating for diversity is a mindset and I hope to instill it in myself so it is evident in every aspect of my career in student affairs.

In all three of the interviews for this assignment the students' advice for student affairs professionals was to be available. Being available for students can be very time intensive and emotionally straining, but it truly benefits the student, the student affairs professional, and even the campus. Being available for students is not a part of student affairs practice that will be difficult for me. I am very relational and thoroughly enjoy sitting down with students and listening to their joys and frustrations. This implication for

practice is the one I am most excited about because it is one I know I will be successful at.

The last implication for practice I hope to embrace as a Student Affairs professional is being able to see the Imago Dei (image of God) in each person I encounter. By embracing this view of others, I will be forced to go beyond the outward appearance and my own presumptions about individuals and instead will have to seek out who God has uniquely created them to be. This mindset will also help me to be an advocate for diversity because ingrained in me will be the knowledge that every individual is needed and valued because they are God's child.