

Black Student Organizations at Drake University

A History
by Kori Ponder

The original story of the student group, Coalition of Black Students (CBS), is an excellent one to begin tracing. With this narrative we hope you remember that it is important to celebrate every form of diversity we have at Drake University.



LaVerne Currie, 1968

On March 12th, 1968, LaVerne Currie founded an organization called the Black Student Forum. BSF, founded on the principles of integrity, pride in African-American culture, and the ability to educate the rest of Drake's campus on African-American culture, provided a network of support for black students. Currie and other students in the group began to fight for black equality in the Drake community, which had been ignored for many years beforehand. There are many prejudices and negative ideas circulating Drake at the time. The Civil Rights Movement was alive and well all over the United States. The Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act were just two that come to mind.

In 1968, a student publication called *VERITAS* published an article entitled "On White Devils," in which the writer was upset with the hateful nature of *Black Voice*. *Black Voice*, an underground student publication, hoped to spark black unity on campus by



providing literature that anyone could read. A fiery letter to the editor in the Times Delphic spoke about this critical article in the Times Delphic.

Carleton Lee, Chairman of the Executive Board of BSF, wrote this letter. In the letter, Lee talked about the importance of unity among black students, and it stated that the Black Student Forum "[wanted] black people to feel black and eradicate the complexes and stigmas that mar the beauty and meaning of blackness."

Another student publication that gained a lot of popularity within the black community at Drake was *The DrakeVine*. This student publication came out with a new edition every month with a calendar of events in which students could participate. During New Student Weekend, new students would receive the complete list of black student organizations they could join.

The next name of this organization became Drake Black Afro-American Society or D/BAAS. D/BAAS had similar goals as BSF, but with more action behind it all. D/BAAS was founded "to mobilize the thinking of [black students] who thought there were areas of needs not being met by the traditional means."

One administrator supported black students from the beginning: Dr. Donald V. Adams. At the time, Dr. Adams served the university as the Vice President of Student Life. In his position, he helped many students find their voices and he fought for black students as well. In order to combat racism and make a conscious effort towards making improvements, Dr.



Adams created the Black Student Advisory Committee to ensure black students were being heard. He also created the Racial Resource Committee for a similar purpose. In 1969, Dr. Adams created the position entitled Minority Student Advisor. This position was later discontinued with hopes of returning as a Minority Affairs Director. In 1969, Dr. Adams appointed Charles E. Sims to be the first Minorities Student Advisor. One of Sims' duties was to establish a Black Culture Center.

Diverse group gathers for Black Cultural Center opening

Peggy Whitcomb
news editor

The literally cold weather did not dampen the spirits of students and faculty and staff members on Oct. 26, who were at the ribbon cutting ceremony held at the Black Cultural Center's new home at 1146 28th St.

The theme for the ceremony was "Looking back and moving forward." LaTrina Williams (A&S), president of the Coalition of Black Students, said that the theme was chosen because members wanted to make sure they recognized the history and the ability to be an outlet to provide Drake's campus with more knowledge of the African-American culture.

CBS was founded in 1968 on the foundation of several principles: integrity, pride in the African-American culture.

Photo by Adam Morris, copy editor

A ribbon cutting ceremony was held on Oct. 26 for the opening of the Black Cultural Center.

Photo by Adam Morris, copy editor

Drake's campus with more knowledge of the African-American culture.

Photo by Adam Morris, copy editor

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The Black Culture/Cultural Center, or BCC, would be the new community space for black students. From 1968-1972, the first house for black students was utilized. In 1969, the center was located at 1166 27th Street. In 1975, Center was located at 1324 31st Street. In 1986, the Black Cultural Center, located at University and 33rd St., also got moved to 32nd St. and Forest Avenue. In 2000, the Black Cultural Center was almost combined with other multicultural organizations. On October 26th, 2001, the new Black Cultural Center was opened. The address currently is 1146 28th St.

From D/BAAS, this group of students decided to rebrand again with the new name of Black Students Organization or BSO. In the fall of 1975, Larry Williams is the first president of BSO. This name change was vital to the groups' success because it gets rid of the redundancy with "black" and "Afro-American" in the old name. With the establishment of the Black Cultural Center, black students now had a place to come together and hold meetings. The other new idea behind BSO is that every single black student on campus is considered a member regardless if they attend meetings.

In 1994, Black Student Organization made their final name change to Coalition of Black Students, or CBS. President of CBS, Brian Nelson, said the name change was meant to reestablish pride and a coalition is a better definition of what the group was aiming to do. Today, the Coalition of Black Students is "an inclusive, multicultural organization on the Drake University campus that seeks to unite, empower, and educate the Black/African-American student community through top-quality social, cultural, and academic programming initiatives."