

UMOJA COMMUNITY



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- **Dr. Susan Cota**, Chancellor emeritus, Chabot-Las Positas Community College District
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UMOJA COMMUNITY

Mission Statement

Umoja, (a Kiswahili word meaning unity) is a community and critical resource dedicated to enhancing the cultural and educational experiences of African American and other students. We believe that when the voices and histories of students are deliberately and intentionally recognized, the opportunity for self-efficacy emerges and a foundation is formed for academic success. Umoja actively serves and promotes student success for all students through a curriculum and pedagogy responsive to the legacy of the African and African American Diasporas.

Organizing Principles

Our community:

1. shares a name with a core set of pedagogies and promising practices;
2. supports the academic success of all students
3. supports the persistence and retention of all students toward defined educational goals: transfer, certificate, associate degree;
4. integrates both instructional and student services;
5. integrates direct instruction of information and technology literacy;
6. integrates sound assessment strategies and a set of core benchmark measures;
7. includes recruitment and regular training of students, staff and faculty through seminars, conferences, and other professional development;
8. facilitates the sharing of resources: financial, curriculum, methodologies, pedagogies, materials, and contacts;
9. commits to collaborating with campuses at a local level so that there is integration of the core Umoja community with the particular college mission, goals, strategic plan and student equity efforts.

Background

The Umoja movement began at the Umoja I conference at Diablo Valley College in October of 2006. It was agreed at a business meeting that faculty should unify efforts to improve the success and retention of African American students across the state. Twenty faculty signed up to do the unifying work and from there two steering committees were formed—Northern and Southern. The Southern California Steering Committee hosted Umoja II at Chaffey College in March of 2007. At a business meeting, the two committees officially united with the reaffirmed purpose of creating a statewide program.

The steering committee which represents twenty-three California community colleges was initiated solely by volunteers. After many months of research and meetings, the steering committee completed a comprehensive and detailed draft of a statewide program. The work is based on the materials, practices and experiences of the fifteen programs focused on African American students that already exist in the California community college system. The draft program is also aligned with practices and recommendations of the “Basic Skills as a Foundation for Success” document from the state Chancellor’s Office. In October 2007, Chabot College will be hosting the Umoja III conference to share the draft program and collect feedback and consensus from attendees. The Umoja Community is still in the development phase and the steering committee will continue to be very intentional about integrating feedback and expertise that help shape the core program and its resources.

A consortium of Chief Executive Officers and community college administrators was formed in support of the Umoja movement. The consortium is currently providing guidance and some seed monies. The Umoja steering committee continues to meet with legislators, the Chancellor’s Office, foundations and other interested parties to lay the groundwork for a future statewide program. After gathering consensus and input from our colleagues throughout the state, the steering committee will share the Umoja Community model with Chief Instructional Officers, Chief Student Service Officers, the Community College League and the Board of Governors. Our goal is to begin piloting the Umoja Community at 3-5 colleges in 2008.

Educational Philosophy

Umoja is a community of educators and learners committed to the academic success, personal growth and self-actualization of African American and other students. The Umoja Community seeks to educate the whole student—body, mind and spirit. Informed by an ethic of love and its vital power, the Umoja Community will deliberately engage students as full participants in the construction of knowledge and critical thought. The Umoja Community seeks to help students experience themselves as valuable and worthy of an education.

Educational Philosophy, Continued

The Umoja Community gains meaning through its connection to Africa and the African Diaspora. African and African American cultural and spiritual gifts inform Umoja Community values and practices. The Umoja Community seeks to nurture knowledge of and pride in this reality. The learning experience within the Umoja Community will provide each individual the opportunity to add their voice and their story to the collective voices and stories of the African and African American Diasporas.

African American students are integrally/inextricably connected to global struggles for liberation throughout the African Diaspora. In light of this, the Umoja Community views education as a liberatory act designed to empower all students to critique, engage, and transform deleterious social and institutional practices locally and globally. The Umoja Community will practice and foster civic engagement so that all its participants integrate learning and service. Likewise, the Umoja Community will instill in our students the knowledge and skills necessary to enable them to make positive differences in their lives and the lives of others.

Research—Statement of Problem

Earning a college degree plays a vital role in a person's ability to compete successfully in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. Research indicates that college graduates will earn twice the yearly income of non-graduates making college graduation an important component in a person's future earning potential (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004). However, not all students are achieving the same levels of academic success in college. Statistics demonstrate that significant disparities exist academically between African American students when compared with white students. In California, the percentage of adults who have a college diploma is lower for blacks at 11 percent than for whites at 21 percent (The State of Black California, 2007). During the 1990s, African American students dropped out of college at a rate that was 20 to 25 percent higher than the national average for white college students. Those black students who did successfully complete their college degrees did so with a grade-point average that was two-thirds of a grade below their white counterparts (Steele, 1999).

Research from Sallie Mae (a major source of financial aid funding to college students) indicates that the enrollment and graduation rates of African American college students continue to lag behind other populations at an alarming rate. The percentage gap between the proportion of African American students without bachelor's degrees and their white counterparts has grown by 34% since 1980 according to Kathleen deLaski, President of The Sallie Mae Fund (B. Miranda, November 7, 2005). The college graduation rate for African American students is a growing national concern.

A study by the San Francisco – based Public Policy Institute of California, found that blacks and Latinos have the lowest completion rates of community college students statewide. In addition, in the California Community College system, African Americans are among the lowest performers in the areas of English and Math, with African American males being the lowest achievers (Chancellor's Office, 2003). The Daraja Project (Chabot College), one of the programs upon which the Umoja Community is designed, effectively addresses low performance in English. Between 1994-2004, Daraja students (age 21 or under) successfully complete the Basic Skills to Freshman Composition sequence at a rate 19% higher than African American students (age 21 or under) not in Daraja (Chabot College, Office of Inst. Research).

Researchers have identified several factors that contribute to the lack of academic success of African American students within the United States. Much of the research points to specific issues within the academic institution that remain largely unexamined and unaddressed by college administrators and faculty. Low teacher expectations, negative teacher perceptions, and minority stereotyping lead directly to feelings of alienation and abandonment in the classroom for African American students (Lee, 2004; Steele, 1999). Other research points to the lack of an early intervention program within the first few weeks of the semester as a factor of underachievement (Rowser, 1997). The Los Angeles Times (February 2, 2007) reported that the California Community College completion rates were higher among students who attended colleges full time, were enrolled continuously, completed an orientation course and registered on time for most of their courses. Project Success (El Camino College), another program upon which the Umoja community is designed, addresses these issues by providing counseling, early registration, supportive instructors who teach in learning communities and mentoring. As a result, institutional research data indicates that Project Success students have, over the last eighteen years, consistently achieved a significantly higher GPA and retention rate as compared to African American students not in the program.

With all of this in mind, the Umoja Community has been intentionally and deliberately designed to promote the success of African American students by providing a learning environment where African American students are affirmed, where their lives and voices are both validated and celebrated, where they are encouraged to succeed, where teacher perceptions are positive, and where teacher expectations are high. In addition, the program offers a mechanism for early intervention and the ability to evaluate the needs of each student individually and to provide the necessary support services. The Umoja Community is a culturally responsive instructional approach to learning with faculty who are both knowledgeable and enthusiastic in their approach to addressing the academic and support needs of all students. Umoja is the first statewide approach of its kind to specifically address the retention and academic success of students through the focus and power emanating from the African American experience.

Umoja Community Design

Umoja Village

The Umoja Village is a component of the Umoja Community, a dedicated space welcoming all students, a space designed by students and staff, a space that nurtures academic success. The Umoja Village will provide opportunities to increase exposure to historical and cultural experiences from the African Diaspora. The Umoja Village will be a place for the expression and celebration of our students' voices. The Umoja Village will intentionally cultivate relationships within the broader institution to help support students.

Minimum requirements to be a student member of the Umoja community:

- Complete application/intake form
- Complete mandatory orientation
- Enroll in Guidance/Counseling courses
- Complete comprehensive Student Educational Plan
- Meet with counselor twice per semester
- Participate in core Umoja-sponsored program activities
- Complete Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Board of Governors Fee Waiver (BOGW) Form
- Meet with mentor twice per semester

Academic Component

Beyond the minimum requirements, colleges interested in adopting the Umoja Community model will strive to implement a Learning Community and/or Cohort of students. The Umoja Community model is intentionally flexible both in order to accommodate variations at the local level and to allow colleges to grow their own expression of the Umoja Community over time.

Learning Community Model (Umoja students taking two or more linked classes)

Guidance/Counseling Courses (1st & 2nd semester)
English Course
Math Course
Library Information Literacy Course
Other course with African American Emphasis

Cohort Model (Umoja students enrolled in classes within the general population)

Guidance/Counseling Courses (1st & 2nd semester)
Other identified course(s) with African American emphasis

Note: Students are required to participate in the Guidance courses and will be encouraged to participate in other courses as determined by local college. There will be continued service to a student who meets the minimum requirements until that student reaches their educational goal.

Umoja Community Basic Components

The following list of components reflect all the areas currently drafted. Each of these components includes a full complement of documents: descriptions, definitions, samples, timelines, duties, activities, models, spreadsheets, strategies, promising practices, and other practical information to assist local colleges in implementing the Umoja Community model. These components make up a comprehensive program and statewide resource that will be accountable and sustainable over time. The Umoja Community steering committee intentionally designed these components to enable our community to grow, learn and develop as we move forward.

Instructional Component

- College Guidance Courses
- English Reading and Writing Courses
- Mathematics Courses
- Library Information Literacy Courses
- African/African American-Centered Courses

Support Services Component

- Matriculation
- Financial Aid/Scholarships
- Academic Support
- Cultural Activities
- Mentoring
- Counseling Services
- Workshops
- Incentives
- Student Club/Organization

Organizational Component

- Mission Statement
- Organizing Principles
- Promising Practices
- Core Beliefs, Values, Habits of Mind
- Educational Philosophy
- Pedagogical Practices

Organizational Component, Continued

- Outreach/Recruitment Strategies
- Training—annual cycle
- Funding Strategies
- Educational Resource Management Strategy
- Steering Committee (Council of Elders) (statewide and local)
- Advisory Board (statewide and local)
- Mentor Council (statewide and local)
- Transfer Agreements with Historically Black CUs, CSUs, and UCs
- Central Office with Director and staff
- Umoja Day – student leadership conference

Administrative Component

- Budget (based on formulas)
- Staffing (based on formulas)
- Coordination Duties
- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with participating college
- Inquiry Model
- Research
- Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and Assessment
- Cost per Full Time Equivalent Student (FTES)
- Mentor Guidelines

Umoja Community's Links to Basic Skills Initiative

Currently, African American students are disproportionately represented in basic skills courses when compared to White students. The Umoja Community addresses most, if not all, of the effective practices highlighted in the 2007 *Basic Skills as a Foundation for Students Success in the California Community Colleges*. The Umoja Community program components that link directly to effective practices outlined in the report are as follows:

- **Umoja** is based on a clearly articulated mission and purpose which includes overarching values and beliefs.
- **Umoja** is highly centralized and coordinated.
- **Umoja** facilitates and supports student completion of coursework as early as possible within the educational sequence.
- **Umoja** includes a comprehensive system of support services with a high degree of integration among academic and support services.
- **Umoja** consists of faculty and advisors who are both knowledgeable and enthusiastic about developmental education and the academic success of African American students.
- **Umoja** includes a mandatory orientation, assessment, and course placement.
- **Umoja** includes regular program evaluations and the use of data as mechanisms to improve practices.
- **Umoja** provides counseling support which is substantial, accessible, and highly integrated into academic courses.
- **Umoja** disseminates financial aid information to support all of their students.
- **Umoja** instructional practices are intentionally designed to address the holistic development of all aspects of their students.
- **Umoja** is fundamentally based on culturally responsive teaching.
- **Umoja** includes a high degree of structure within the educational courses.
- **Umoja** employs a variety of instructional methods to meet the needs of African American students.
- **Umoja** involves instructional strategies that are shared between participating faculty.
- **Umoja** aligns student entry skill level and course content to college-level performance requirements.
- **Umoja** faculty and advisors closely monitor student performance and student progress.
- **Umoja** has in place comprehensive academic support mechanisms that include: trained tutoring, counseling, academic success workshops, and learning style assessments.
- **Umoja** encourages and supports faculty development. The improvement of teaching and learning is connected to the program goals.