

STAYING ROOTED

USING *CURRERE* TO CONNECT MULTICULTURAL CENTER PRACTICES WITH FACULTY TEACHING IN STUDENT AFFAIRS AND HIGHER EDUCATION COURSES

By Erica Campbell
Miami University

REGRESSIVE: IF IT WASN'T FOR ODA, LEARNING HOMEPLACE

My undergraduate experience at Miami University was so-so, largely because I did not fully understand the culture of attending a historically white institution. Not all HWIs are the same, but Miami, an original public Ivy institution, felt different. Why? Whiteness. The institution was created with the intent to serve white, upper-middle-class to wealthy students, and the intersection of race and class in the classroom, along with what was institutionally promoted at the time, shaped much of my experience. There were some highs but far more lows. I received C's when I knew I had produced A-level work. I was doubted when I was sick and out of class for nearly a month because my absence coincided with Green Beer Day. I do not drink, but that didn't matter. Moments like these accumulated and made it clear that something was missing. This was not high school, nor was it my neighborhood, church, or community spaces that centered Blackness and affirmed marginalized identities. It all came down to the persistent feeling of needing to be affirmed, both inside and outside of the classroom. I needed something different, an outlet that felt grounding and affirming.

The summer before my senior year at Miami, I decided to stay in Oxford and take classes. A peer I had known since high school told me she was working in the Office of Diversity Affairs, ODA. I asked her to make a connection, and toward the end of the summer I was hired. I continued working in the office through my senior year. At the time, I felt unsure about what I wanted to do next. I had an administrative background through the business school, but corporate America did not feel like my calling.

Working in ODA, I experienced mentorship from people who were genuinely committed to my development, people who saw me as important. ODA offered space, the freedom to show up as myself, all of who I was. I remember the ability to beat an African drum pulled from the bookcase with a friend, dancing freely, without being chastised. We were welcomed. Smooth jazz often played in the background. People moved in and out of the space, checking in, encouraging one another, investing in my success. I often wondered where these people had been when I first arrived at Miami University, but I was grateful to have found them.

ODA was warmth, generosity, and a commitment to love and justice. It was home—a home I knew I wanted to stay connected to even beyond my undergraduate years. At the time, I did not know where this sense of home would take me, but I now understand that it set me on a path that would deeply shape my work as a scholar-practitioner and faculty member. ODA became my career, my research focus, and my passion for supporting others. It taught me an ethic of care before I had language for it. It taught me homeplace before I knew what to call it.



PROGRESSIVE: BACK TO THE FUTURE, REIMAGINING THE CLASSROOM

Returning to Miami University as a professor in the Student Affairs in Higher Education program has been a joy. This joy is rooted in the opportunity to imagine and reimagine the classroom as a space of possibility and transformation, one where graduate students preparing to support college students can experience learning, belonging, and affirmation. I imagine the classroom as a space that reflects the ethos of a multicultural center (MCC), a place where people are welcomed, where music might be playing, where creativity is present, and where assignments mirror the planning of programs or workshops that are cultural, engaging, and grounded in justice and inclusion.

Most importantly, I want students to feel at home and comfortable showing up as themselves. Relationships should extend beyond scheduled classroom meetings, intentionally disrupting the capitalist standards that plague higher education today. Hence, the classroom becomes a place where students have a voice, where they can dialogue about life, work, identity, and their experiences in higher education alongside their peers and with me as their professor.

The physical classroom itself might offer a flexible environment, with movable seating and tables that invite conversation, collaboration, and shared learning rather than rigidity or hierarchy. I also imagine the classroom as a brave space, one where students feel supported and challenged at the same time and where minoritized students do not have to perform in order to belong, despite knowing the pressures to do so elsewhere within a historically white institution. This is not a space students avoid or endure nor one they must leave to find a sense of home elsewhere. Creating such an environment requires continued attention to culturally relevant pedagogy and creative teaching practices that honor students' lived experiences.

This imagining is deeply informed by my own experiences of being seen by faculty. As an undergraduate student, one faculty member was intentional about making sure my voice mattered in spaces where I often felt overlooked. Later, during my doctoral program, another faculty member modeled what it meant to create academic spaces where my presence and perspective were valued. Even something as simple as her calling me "sunshine" made me feel seen, as if I were a bright light in her classroom. Ultimately, these experiences contribute to how I understand the classroom as a brave space and shape the kinds of learning environments I strive to cultivate. Whether these faculty members realized it or not, they embodied what it meant to be faculty grounded in multicultural center values.

ANALYTICAL: MULTICULTURAL CENTERS AS CURRICULAR AND PEDAGOGICAL SPACES

As I reflect on my becoming as a scholar during my PhD program, and now as a faculty member, I am better able to understand how multicultural centers function as curricular spaces. These spaces shape the knowledge and development of students who access them, the staff and administrators who work within them, and the scholars who research them. Multicultural centers are not simply places of support; they intentionally cultivate environments where social identity development, academic support, resource support, leadership development, and programming serve as meaningful sources of learning and growth (Patton & Hannon, 2008; Wilson, 2016).

Engaging the literature on multicultural affairs offices and centers helped me name practices I had long experienced but could not yet fully articulate. For example, multicultural center staff are often positioned as mediators between students and campus administrators (Young,





1991). Understanding mediation as a central function of MCC work helped me make sense of the relational and advocacy-based labor embedded within these spaces, particularly as students navigate power, privilege, and systemic oppression. This understanding also pushed me to think more critically about the classroom itself as a site of power. My undergraduate experiences of being doubted, misread, and academically undervalued did not occur in isolation; they were produced within classrooms shaped by surveillance, authority, and unspoken expectations about who belongs and who is seen as credible. Faculty can hold significant power in these spaces, power that can reinforce harm or serve as protection and advocacy for students navigating historically white institutions. My work in multicultural centers can help me to recognize these dynamics early on, shaping how I understand the ways power operates through curriculum, grading, evaluation, and classroom dynamics.

Looking back through my own scholarship, I have also come to understand the importance of not separating identity from educational work. I am who I am, and that matters. As I have written elsewhere,

working intently with minoritized students in a multicultural center allows you to see where historically white institutions fall short of supporting students, faculty, staff, and even yourself. It is with our standpoint that Black women MCC administrators should see themselves as valuable to HWIs. No one can examine higher education institutions like us, because of our standpoint. (Campbell, 2025, p. 96)

In this work, I also came to understand that “I could remain true to myself both inside and outside of a MCC at an HWI” (Campbell, 2025, p. 95). Together, these realizations affirmed for me that identity is not something to be set aside in professional or academic spaces, but rather something that fundamentally shapes how care, leadership, and resistance are enacted within multicultural centers and translated into classroom practice.

SYNTHETICAL: TEACHING WITH MEMORY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND CARE

At this point in my journey, the experiences that first shaped me as an undergraduate in the Office of Diversity Affairs, deepened through my work as a practitioner and later theorized through scholarship, now converge in my role as a faculty member. Returning to Miami University is not simply a full-circle moment, but a site of responsibility. The values I first learned in ODA, care, affirmation, advocacy, and community, now demand intentional enactment in my teaching. As Pinar (2020) reminds us, “the educational point of *currere* is, then, intensified engagement with classroom life, supported by the cultivation of a consciousness that remembers the past with an eye on the future while focused on the present” (p. 52). For me, this means that multicultural center praxis cannot remain situated in memory or theory alone, but must actively shape how I design curriculum, engage students, and exercise power within the classroom, as I remain accountable to myself and to students within historically white institutions.

Rather than attempting to directly replicate a multicultural center within the classroom, I carry forward its ethos by allowing it to inform how I understand my role as faculty. This involves creating learning environments where students are not required to perform for legitimacy, where their identities are not treated as disruptions, and where dialogue, reflection, and relationality are central to the learning process. Baszile reminds us that the purpose of *currere* is not simply





reflection, but transformation, noting that “the hope is that it does bring about self-transformation and as such it will shape one’s public work toward justice” (Baszile, 2015, p. 125). In this sense, *currere* becomes a call to align who I am, what I value, and how I teach. Through this process, I come to understand multicultural center work not as a closed chapter of my past, but as a living curricular influence that continues to shape how I teach, how I lead, and how I show up for students in ways that intentionally connect pedagogy with justice.

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