

# Cañada College

## Cultural Center Focus Groups

### Spring 2021

Prepared by: Michelle Simotas

Focus Group Facilitators: Michelle Simotas, Luis Chavez, Julian West, and Jessica Li



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## Executive Summary

Career Ladders Project held seven focus groups at Cañada College in February and March of 2021 with several student, faculty, and staff populations including Hispanic/Latinx, immigrant/migrant, international, Black/African American, Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and LGBTQ. The primary goal of the focus groups was to gather information from the diverse community to shape the goals, activities, aesthetic, and values of the cultural center that Cañada College is developing over the next year. The questions in the focus groups sought to better understand when students felt supported, if and where they felt unsupported, and how a cultural center might help to provide intentional programs, activities, professional development, and anti-racist training to better support the diverse community at Cañada College.

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## Introduction

Career Ladders Project held focus groups with 24 students, 3 faculty, 10 staff over six days beginning February 22 ending March 2. All college constituents were invited to participate through wide dissemination of information in all-college emails, social media, and a posting on the college's website. Interested participants were encouraged to sign-up for the focus group of their choice. There were focus groups for each of the following populations: Hispanic/Latinx; immigrant/migrant/international; Black/African American; Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander (AANAPI); LGBTQ; and a general population/non-specific focus group open to all. All focus groups were held virtually, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed to ensure that the summary of findings and recommendations accurately reflects the voice of the focus group participants. This report does not include analysis. CLP summarized and synthesized the insights and recommendations of the participants without analysis to ensure their experiences and ideas were accurately captured and shared with the larger college community.

At the request of Cañada College leadership, the focus groups were conducted to better understand the needs of the college community as the college moves to create a cultural center on campus, and as college leaders strive to be more intentional in supporting anti-racist work at the college and more supportive of racial and ethnic groups represented in the community. The college's office of institutional research supported the recruitment for the focus groups through collegewide emails. All focus groups were held remotely via Zoom web conference and audio recorded to collect transcripts to be used in this report.

The focus groups were designed to gather information from the community on the following outcomes:

**Outcome 1:** Understand what experiences/events/relationships Black/African American, immigrant/migrant, Hispanic/Latinx, international, Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and LGBTQ staff, students, and faculty perceive as critical to their success.

**Outcome 2:** Understand challenges that may be unique to Black/African American, immigrant/migrant, Hispanic/Latinx, international, Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and LGBTQ staff, students, and faculty, how they address those challenges, and how they perceive their college as helping or hindering.

**Outcome 3:** Understand how the college’s cultural center can support diverse students to feel welcomed, valued, and a sense of belonging.

## Participant Demographics

Focus groups included students, faculty, and staff. In each focus group, participants held a mix of roles (students, faculty, or staff). There were focus groups for each of the following populations: Hispanic/Latinx; immigrant/migrant/international; Black/African American; Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander (AANAPI); LGBTQ; and a general/non-specific focus group.

38 students, faculty, and staff participated in the focus groups:

Do you identify as Latinx and/or Hispanic?		Do you identify as any of the following racial groups? (choose all that apply)		How would you define your gender? (please choose as many as you like)	
Yes	9	White or Caucasian	8	Female, woman, feminine of center, Non-binary	3
No	22	South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, or of an Indian subcontinent population)	1	Female, woman, feminine of center	21
No Response	7	East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean)	7	Male, man, masculine of center	6
		Filipino, White or Caucasian	2	Prefer not to say	1
		Black and/or African American	8	No response	6
		American Indian and/or Alaskan Native	1		
		No response	11		

# Student/ Staff/ Faculty Perspectives

**Outcome 1:** Understand what experiences/events/relationships Black/African American, immigrant/migrant, Hispanic/Latinx, international, Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and LGBTQ staff, students, and faculty perceive as critical to their success.

Across all groups, participants noted that simple gestures of friendliness, openness, and kindness helped to feel welcome and comfortable seeking out support when needed. Students noted that when staff and faculty took the time to explain jargon used at the college and talk through the processes rather than just telling them where to go or what to do made a difference in their ability to navigate the college. The participants also noted that seeing people on campus who share their ethnic, racial, and cultural background as well as seeing depictions of their cultural heritage helped them to feel a sense of belonging.

**Outcome 2:** Understand challenges that may be unique to Black/African American, immigrant/migrant, Hispanic/Latinx, international, Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and LGBTQ staff, students, and faculty, how they address those challenges, and how they perceive their college as helping or hindering.

All Hispanic/Latinx; immigrant/migrant/international; Black/African American; Native American, Asian American, and Pacific Islander; and LGBTQ reported that there is a lack of genuine recognition of their culture, cultural customs, and cultural visual representations at the college that causes them to feel disregarded at times. Similarly, all populations reported that the lack of diversity in the faculty, staff, and administrators at the college contributed to feelings such as a lack of belonging or recognition. The Black/African American group noted that although they are recognized during Black History Month, they do not feel appreciation and support beyond that. The AANAPI group noted that there is a general lack of understanding about the differences in Asian cultures that leads to negative stereotyping. Several participants across multiple groups also noted that the lack of student life such as community-building events, speakers, and other activities on campus prevents students from overcoming many of these challenges because there are no opportunities to learn about other cultures and to build an open and inclusive community.

**Outcome 3:** Understand how the college’s cultural center can support diverse students to feel welcomed, valued, and a sense of belonging.

Participants across all groups noted that a cultural center would support the development of a more inclusive and supportive culture at Cañada College by balancing two goals: 1) providing a place for community, connection, and cultural celebrations represented through art, food, and music; and 2) fostering an environment or “safe space” to have the hard conversations about race and culture. Many participants also mentioned that they need a place to learn about each other’s cultures and to support the development of faculty, staff, and student leaders who can champion the efforts at the college. The Black/African American participants including students, faculty, and staff spoke openly about the racism and alienation that they have faced at the college and would like to see the cultural center house a program like Umoja specific for this student population. All groups emphasized the need for dedicated paid staff and students to manage and support the center ensuring a welcoming, positive, and safe atmosphere. Participants noted that without paid staff to manage the center they feared it would become neglected and less impactful.

# Key Findings by Population

## Black/African American | 8 participants

Black/African American students, faculty, and staff shared feelings of disenfranchisement, lack of community, and lack of representation. One participant reported that “it’s like we are just the forgotten people” and another said that “there [is] no space to find any community for black students.” They noted that the lack of Black/African American representation in the faculty and staff at the college contributed greatly to these feelings of not belonging and lacking community. One person noted, “We’re all feeling like we’re floating and where are the black people at?”

The participants reported that although they often hear college administrators discussing anti-racism and support for equity, they do not see that support manifesting in resources committed to programs and services that specifically support the Black/African American community at Cañada College. The participants would like to remedy that by having the college devote resources to programs that make Black/African American students, staff, and faculty feel welcomed and supported at the college. Some ideas included: a central location on campus for the Black/African American community to convene, a mentor program, an instructional support program like Umoja, and an effort by the college to confront the anti-blackness on campus. Participants reported that they see peer-to-peer support among Black/African American students, but they do not see the college dedicating resources to supporting Black/African American students. One participant noted, “The only time Black students were celebrated or when Black people were celebrated is when it was a Black student-led event.” Participants would like to see a strategy, plan, and intentional support provided to Black/African American students by dedicated staff incorporated into the cultural center. And they would like to have a voice in the planning process; one participant said, “We have to be approached as if you’re earnestly seeking to hear what we have to say, and you really want us at the table.”

## Immigrant/Migrant/International | 7 participants

The immigrant/migrant/international focus group participants noted that the International Student Center is a place where students felt like they could receive the support they needed to navigate college processes. Some participants who were undocumented students or second language learners noted that they need more support and that there is a lack of recognition of the unique struggles faced by students for whom the language and culture are foreign. Students noted incidents where they felt excluded or attacked because of a lack of understanding especially around events, words, or phrases that are considered racist or have racial implications in this country but do not in their home country. They would like to receive more support from the college in understanding the historical and cultural implications of the current racial and social justice movements in the U.S. because without that understanding and knowledge they are afraid to speak or participate in discussions out of fear of saying the wrong thing.

Students noted that they would like a center that they can walk into and be accepted and supported with programming that includes celebrating their culture and helping them gain a better understanding of other cultural groups at the college. One participant said, “I’d like an inclusive space for all members of the campus community to explore, learn, and share their cultural identities and differences.” Another student mentioned that they would appreciate a place in the cultural center where they can get “information on how to receive resources as an undocumented student.”

### **Hispanic/Latinx | 6 participants**

The Hispanic/Latinx focus group participants agreed that they feel welcomed when people are friendly, when they see Hispanic/Latinx representation in faculty, staff, and students, and when their culture is acknowledged and celebrated. The students also reported that when they feel taken care of by the faculty and staff they feel more comfortable and motivated. Like the other groups, the Hispanic/Latinx group identified a need for a central place on campus to learn about and celebrate other cultures, to see “more visual representation and in different forms,” to develop cultural competency across cultures, and to engage in dialogue that leads to deeper understanding of others’ cultures.

This group also identified the need to develop cultural competency and recognition of the lived experience of mixed race students, faculty, and staff as well as other intersectional identities. One participant reported needing “a space to have conversations and to share cross- generational, cross-cultural dialogue on our different intersections of identities and the ways that sometimes our privilege erases the identities of others.” They identified a need to do anti-racist work at the new cultural center by learning about histories of the communities represented at the college, the history of white supremacy in the United States and where it manifests in our daily lives, and the histories of indigenous people. One participant expressed a desire for a cultural center that has “meeting spaces and sofas. Somewhere where [we] can have food or store food so that it feels like a community space.”

### **Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander (AANAPI) | 6 participants**

Like the other groups, the Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander focus group participants reported feeling welcome and comfortable when people are friendly, when they see AANAPI representation in faculty, staff, and students, and when they receive support and guidance through college processes, jargon, and procedures in a non-judgemental way. Multiple students reported that having professors who were happy to help them when they were struggling, even if it meant staying longer after class or during office hours, made a big difference in their experience. Students in this group noted that the campus atmosphere is not very lively, stating that they’d also taken classes at Skyline College, which seemed to have a lot of activities occurring throughout the semester, whereas Cañada College lacked much student life.

Several students reported that they often feel that their culture is overshadowed by cultures at the college with larger representation, underscoring that Native American cultural representation is almost non-existent. Students also noted that they felt the image of the model minority led to hurtful microaggressions and unattainable expectations in their classes. One participant noted, “An expectation that the Asian Americans and Pacific islanders have to live up to the model minority myth [has led to] instances of stereotyping or micro aggression behaviors.” This group emphasized that a peer mentorship program that supported students in the diverse community at the college would be a valuable part of the cultural center, along with opportunities to learn about other cultures. Participants also expressed that it would be empowering to bring professionals from similar cultural backgrounds to share their career journeys. They also reported a need to better understand all Asian American cultures. One participant said, “Asian Americans are so diverse and [we] get clump[ed] under one group, right, and then we have Pacific Islanders.” They expressed a desire for a place to celebrate, discuss, and recognize the rich diversity of the cultures within the AANAPI community.

### **LGBTQ | 2 participants**

The LGBTQ focus group was the smallest of the groups. Participants in this group seemed to be speaking more generally to their experiences as first-generation college students and to the college experiences of Hispanic/Latinx students. The data gathered from this focus group has therefore been included in the Hispanic/Latinx findings. CLP recommends the college make an effort to gather more input and feedback from the LGBTQ community.

### **General Population/Non-specific | 8 participants**

The participants in the General Population/Non-specific focus group, which was open to all, reported similar experiences to other groups concerning where and when they feel supported and welcomed at the college. Participants specifically noted that when they are greeted with kindness, supported to find what they need, and assisted by faculty and staff willing to explain processes and jargon, then they feel they can be successful. This group had several returning students who noted that student clubs and groups had been very beneficial in supporting their return to college and would like to see them incorporated into the development of a cultural center. One participant mentioned “language meetups for people that are coming from outside the country, to be able to talk, you know, on specific subjects in English, to improve their English.” They noted that they would find it valuable to have a place in the cultural center to learn about other cultures, ways to learn more about structural racism and where it manifests in mainstream American culture, and language and tools for learning about and discussing anti-racism. This group noted that there are times when not knowing the most sensitive and current language around cultural sensitivity and anti-racism can be a source of shame that prevents open and honest communication. One participant said, “The anti-racist campus is the thing to talk about, and if you don’t know all the new social justice jargon, it can feel like ooh! Do I belong here?”

# Recommendations

## Recommendations for the Cultural Center

Based on the findings described in the previous section and the suggestions and ideas directly expressed by focus group participants, CLP has identified some preliminary recommendations for the college to consider in developing their approach. All recommendations came out of the focus groups. These are not recommendations based on an analysis of the focus group findings, but more a synthesis of recommendations from participants. Cañada College's work to broadly engage the college community through focus group inquiry is a promising start and CLP encourages the college to capture the experiences of communities that are underrepresented in these findings.

- **Recommendation 1:** Dedicate resources to support the Black/African American community through intentional academic support, a dedicated space to discuss their experiences both inside and outside the college, and dedicated activities, workshops, and speakers that support the college in addressing anti-blackness experienced by the Black/African American community at the college.
- **Recommendation 2:** Plan programming, speakers, discussions, and workshops that intentionally address the issues of racial bias and racial discrimination.
- **Recommendation 3:** Hire and train a team of diverse student ambassadors or mentors to support the cultural center.
- **Recommendation 4:** Hire dedicated staff who can support the cultural center to foster a welcoming community atmosphere, to hold events that celebrate the diverse community, and to create a space in which to share and learn about the cultures of students, staff, and faculty at the college.
- **Recommendation 5:** Provide all faculty and staff with diversity and inclusion training that equips them with strategies to manage situations where anti-blackness and racial microaggressions are occurring.
- **Recommendation 6:** Leverage the cultural center as a place for activism and the development of student leadership.
- **Recommendation 7:** Gather more feedback and input on the visual representations of cultures for the cultural center and campus. Some suggestions included murals, flags, and other artwork that celebrate individual cultures.
- **Recommendation 8:** With a cross-functional and racially diverse team of students, faculty, and staff, launch a learning journey to explore other cultural centers on college campuses to gather ideas about aesthetic, programming, values, and management.



- **Recommendation 9:** Explore ways to appreciate and represent cultures throughout the year, not just on dedicated appreciation months.
- **Recommendation 10:** Develop a cultural center steering committee or group composed of student leaders from the cultural, racial, and ethnic communities at the college, along with faculty, staff, and administrators who can guide and support the students in the development and continued programming of the center.

## General Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** Explore ways to make the college campus more visually welcoming and inviting to the diverse community through murals and activities that represent and appreciate the cultures of the student body.
- **Recommendation 2:** Dedicate resources for faculty professional development on supporting diverse students in the classroom.
- **Recommendation 3:** Explore ways to revise faculty and staff hiring practices that recognize both traditional and nontraditional experiences and qualifications to ensure a diverse pool of faculty and staff applicants.

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## Conclusion

These focus groups provide an important window into the experiences of the diverse community at Cañada College. To support the development of the cultural center and the ongoing discussions and insight needed to ensure the center provides timely, relevant, and intentional programming that serves the needs of the community, the college needs to develop a structure that empowers student voices on an ongoing basis to guide the planning and development process of the cultural center. With strong student engagement, college leaders can ensure the cultural center is meeting the needs of the community.

# Focus Group Protocol

**Outcome 1:** Understand what experiences/events/relationships Black/African American, immigrant/migrant, Hispanic/Latinx, international, Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and LGBTQ staff, students, and faculty perceive as critical to their success.

- Tell us about a time that you felt valued and welcomed in an educational setting or other new setting such as a new job? What was something that made you feel welcomed or valued?
- Now think about a time you felt unwelcome or out of place in an educational setting or other new setting such as a new job? Can describe one or two specific things that led to or heightened that feeling? Was there something specific that would have helped you to feel more comfortable in that moment?

Prompt: Now think about your experiences in college from the moment you entered college and up to now.

- Think about the first time you came to Cañada College. What were your first impressions when you came to the campus?  
*Probes: Do you remember the first person you met? Who was the person? A college staff member? An instructor? Another student? Other? What were those first interactions with college staff and students like? Did you feel welcomed?*
- Are there places on campus where you feel most comfortable? Safe? How would you describe them? What makes them appealing to you? Are there places where you are more likely to gather together with other LGBTQ students/staff? What makes those places appealing to them?

**Outcome 2:** Understand challenges that may be unique to Black/African American, immigrant/migrant, Hispanic/Latinx, international, Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and LGBTQ staff, students, and faculty, how they address those challenges, and how they perceive their college as helping or hindering.

- When you have problems with your course work or are facing challenges that are creating obstacles for you, where do you go for support? Whom do you seek out?

Prompt: Do you seek out any instructors? Counselors? Other staff? Other students in your classes? How about outside of college? Community or family members?

- Are there challenges in being a student/staff here that you think are likely to be more challenging for LGBTQ folks? Are there challenges in being a LGBTQ student/staff at Cañada College that are unique—that other groups of students on campus do not face?

**Outcome 3:** Understand how the college’s cultural center can support diverse students to feel welcomed, valued, and a sense of belonging.

Framing: Cultural Centers can help college campuses build community, educate the community about diverse cultures and instectional identities. Some campuses use these centers as a safe space to have difficult conversations and provide learning opportunities about race, culture, and identity. Cañada College is planning a cultural center and hope to learn from you what you might like to see there.

- Imagine you are meeting with college leaders and you have the opportunity to provide suggestions about the form and function of the cultural center. Thinking about your own experience at the college, what supports, spaces, activities, or resources would you like to see in a campus cultural center?
- What groups do you think are particularly important to support in the cultural center? Can you give an example of specific ways you envision the cultural center supporting that group?
- Thinking of the community you belong to. What do you think would be really meaningful to see/experience in the cultural center for your community?
- Tell me one opportunity, event, or training that you would be excited to participate in at the new Cultural Center would foster feeling welcomed, valued, and a true sense of belonging.