



NC STATE
Academic and
Student Affairs

Redefining Safe Spaces: Creating Opportunities to Connect for High-Risk and Marginalized Populations

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Learning Objectives

- Review current challenges impacting college students
 - Focus on connection and support
- Provide an overview of the development and expansion of drop-in programming
 - High-risk and marginalized students
- Creation of intentional and inclusive spaces
 - Racial identity support, trauma, and healing

A person with long dark hair, wearing a colorful striped shirt, is sitting at a glass desk, working on a laptop. A water bottle and some papers are on the desk. The desk is in front of a large window that looks out onto a dense green forest. A semi-transparent blue rectangle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the main title. On the left, the text 'NC STATE Academic and Student Affairs' is displayed next to a vertical white line.

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Current Challenges

Isolation and Belonging

- DASA First Year First Term and First Term Transfer Surveys 2017
 - More than half surveyed reported that having a sense of community in their college/major is very important
 - Less than one-third reported experiencing it to a great extent
 - 1 in 5 students reported feeling no sense of community with formal organizations (ex. Residence halls, villages, student organizations, athletics)
- CARES Referral Data on Loneliness/Isolation
 - 2020-2021 YTD: 128 referrals
 - 2019-2020: 242 referrals

“This school is so big, it is easy to feel isolated if you don’t find a group of people that you can be around.”



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Drop-in Spaces

Where It Began & Why

Overview

Philosophy

- Suicide Prevention
 - Promote belonging and social connections
- Researched based spaces
- Community building via small groups



First Space: Flourish

A collaboration between Prevention Services and the Horticulture department that:

- Facilitates student wellness connections.
- Was developed from evidence-based research surrounding the benefits of horticulture therapy.
- Promotes physical and mental wellness, social skills, and emotional growth.
- Provides experiential and educational opportunities.

Expansions

Pack Park

- Space was created in response to an increasing need for support of students around grief and loss experiences. Pack Park is a staff led space that provides students the opportunity to develop community among the members of the Wolfpack who have been affected by the loss of a loved one. Pack Park provides a place for students to find comfort, renewal, and honoring of the memory of their loved one through peer support, education, and healing-based programming.

Start the Convo

- Group began as a staff led space with graduate student support to address concerns on lack of belonging/community and loneliness. Our goal was to continue work on reducing stigma around mental health concerns. The initial group had representation from our student group of Mental Health Ambassadors. In a natural progression, we shifted the space to peer-led with the support of graduate students and staff. This is our first move to utilize peer educator leadership in a drop in space. We continue to promote student agency and empowerment to build community and mental health support.

The Collective

- The Collective: A Space for Womxn of Color Community Connection is a group to create a space for existing and entering womxn of color at NC State to form a community, break silos, and deepen relationships through facilitated dialogue centered on truth-telling and testimonios.

A photograph of three students walking on a brick path. On the left, a young woman with long brown hair, wearing a red top and white shorts, carries a black quilted bag. In the center, a young woman with dark hair, wearing a patterned top and black pants, walks towards the camera. On the right, a young man with short dark hair, wearing a blue and white plaid shirt and khaki shorts, carries a black backpack and looks towards the woman in the center. In the background, there is a large, multi-story brick building with many windows, and a tall antenna tower is visible against a clear blue sky. Green trees and bushes are scattered around the path.

Current Drop-in Spaces

- The Collective
- Flourish
- Engineering Destress Lab
- Black and Boundaried
- Quit the Nic
- Define Your Happiness Hour
- Howl for Healing
- The Nature Experience
- Start the Convo
- Pack Park
- Pack Recovery
- International Tea Time
- Boba with Lindsey

Lessons Learned

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Modifying Structure to Meet Identified Population's Needs

- Targeting high-risk and marginalized populations
- Including speakers and activities for groups that prefer more structure
 - Engineering Distress Lab: Focusing on networking and structured conversations to promote resilience
 - Flourish: Utilizing educational components to appeal to high-achieving students
 - The Collective: Utilizing guest speakers and activities for connection and healing.
- Flexibility with marketing

Utilizing Student Support

- Staff to peer-led focus
- Mental Health Ambassadorship (MHA) program
 - a. 30+ student leaders supporting campus outreach
 - b. MHAs complete the NASPA Certified Peer Educator Training
 - c. Weekly meetings w/ emphasis on supplemental trainings
 - i. MHA outreach committees: Graduate students, Suicide Prevention, DEI, Alcohol & Other Drugs

Lessons Learned Cont'd

Marketing

- Marketing and Communications (Promotion)
- Engagement can be inconsistent due to “drop in” structure
- Differentiation from counseling/therapy groups
 - Opportunity for collaboration and referral
- Stigma/Shame

Adjusting to a new virtual component

- Offering spaces virtually
- Creating experiential kits
- Mindfulness of student's in virtual environment and 'Zoom Fatigue'
 - a. Bi-weekly meeting format
 - b. Non-committal registration process

The background image shows a group of students at an outdoor event. On the left, a young woman with dark curly hair, wearing a red visor and a red tank top, is looking towards the right. Next to her is another young woman with short dark hair, wearing a black tank top. In the center-right, a young man with glasses and a white headband is looking towards the right. To his right, another young man with glasses is partially visible. They are standing in front of a large, light-colored stone monument with classical architectural details. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day. A semi-transparent green rectangular box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the main title text.

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Racial Identity Support, Trauma, & Healing

Purpose

Provide safe spaces to examine the impact of **identity-based trauma** on mental health, relationships, and identity. These spaces lead with a discussion-based, **empowerment** focused psychoeducational approach to support community and belonging within BIPOC student groups.



The Collective

Development

- Born out the Womxn of Color Retreat
 - Partnership with Women's Center
- Need expressed by students for opportunity, at a PWI, to safely:
 - Build community
 - Discuss concerns specific to their identities
 - Deconstruct the WOC monolith myth
 - Safe space to engage in collecting healing and growth
 - Champion mental wellness and combat stigma



The Collective

Lessons Learned

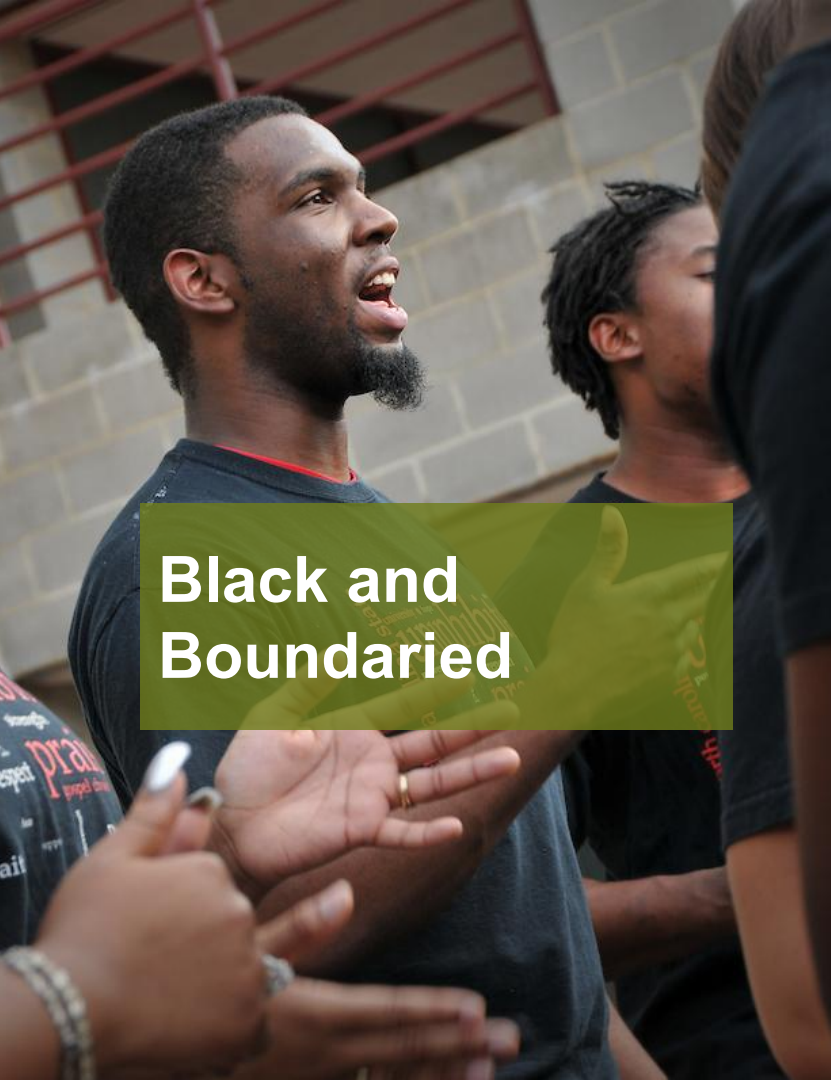
- This space is desperately needed
- Collaboration and partnership are key to successful programming
- Meeting students where they are
 - Feel part of the process
 - Understand that they are not alone
 - Love having input on running of space
- Hangout style (non structured) spaces that allow the conversation to go wherever they are going are most enjoyed



The Collective

Lessons Learned Cont'd

- Themed/Topic Based Gatherings
 - Especially “taboo” topics
- Guest speakers
 - Content experts
- Students were more willing to connect to supports and resources.
- Name changed
 - Better meets purpose of the space
 - Further the vision of fully inclusive involvement by all BIPOC folks who identify as women, GNC, Femme, and Trans



Black and Boundaried

Development

Created in response to highly publicized deaths of Black and Brown folx as a result of white supremacist ideology and systems that uphold those beliefs

- Safe space to engage in collective community healing
- Introduction to Race-Based Traumatic Stress (RBTS)
 - Identifying/naming impact (short-term/long-term),
 - Exploring coping strategies,
 - Normalizing 'acts of resistance'
- Unpacking the collective navigation of the culture, systems and experiences of Black students at PWIs



Black and Boundaried

Lessons Learned

- Space desperately needed
 - Met immediate need for students in a time of trauma, social unrest and uncertainty.
- Collaboration and partnership are key to successful programming.
- Meeting students where they are
 - Feel part of the process
 - Understand that they are not alone



Black and Boundaried

Lessons Learned

- Topic-specific conversations that build on ongoing discussions.
 - Supports ego strengthening, deepening sense of belonging and community building
- Group check-ins/check-outs
 - Offers a chance to name how they are showing up in the space and what they are taking away
- Journal prompts
 - Encouraged to aid students in tracking and processing thoughts/experiences

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Questions?