Past, Present, & Future: A History of BIPOC Student Support & Student-Led Protests at UVM

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BIPOC Support at UVM

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Logan Melo
Maria Nava
Today's Presentation

Positionality and Limitations
Population Focus
Approach
Findings
Timeline of Events
Recommendations
Positionality//Limitations

• Logan is an immigrant from Brazil who attended a predominately white and criminal justice focused institution for his undergraduate degree; these two things created a very unique campus environment that was oftentimes lingering with racism. As the first person in his family to go to school in the United States, he was often left to figure things out on his own throughout his undergraduate years and know what it is like to be left without institutional support.

• Maria is first-generation US born from a Mexican immigrant family. As a first-generation college student who attended a predominately white private small liberal arts college in Vermont and studied in a predominately white field, she has first-hand seen the importance of support systems, structures, and people. Maria has always attributed her success to the many pillars of support that she had in her life, including family, friends, staff and faculty, and sees the importance of institutions doing more for their students.

• Nelizabeth is a first-generation Mexican American. Being a First-generation and the firstborn to Mexican immigrant parents, she understands the importance of having a support system at higher education institutions. Nelizabeth has experienced taking gap years, attending a community college in Manchester, CT, and becoming a transfer student in a public land-grant research predominantly white university at Storrs, CT. Nelizabeth has credited the support in student affairs programs, faculty, friends, student organizations, cultural centers, and family for her success as an undergraduate student.

• While we, Logan, Maria, and Nelizabeth, consider ourselves to be a part of the BIPOC community, it is important to acknowledge that our experiences are limited to the Latinx community. Black and Indigenous folks in the United States have been historically oppressed and racialized with higher severity, which we all could not understand from personal experience. We want to hold space for the complexity of identity and experience within the BIPOC Community.
Population

BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) Students at UVM

Our goal is to look at how BIPOC students at UVM have been supported (or not) throughout the years, which includes looking at the historical context and using current student perspectives to shape our project.
Students of Color make up at UVM:
- 11% of the undergraduate population
- ~15% of the Master's and Doctoral student population
- 36% of the Medical Students

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<td>17</td>
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Graph taken from Catamount Data for Fall 2021 by Institutional Research
Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity:
Degree Level = All/College = All/Student Type = All/Sex = All/Time = All

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<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>11,233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Enrolled

Graph taken from Catamount Data for Fall 2021 by Institutional Research
Undergraduate Student Enrollment at UVM

Graph taken from Catamount Data by Institutional Research
Approach

• Interviews
  • 2 current students, 1 alumnx, 2 full time staff, 1 faculty/staff all of whom identify as BIPOC
  • Limitation: We were not able to encompass the full range of the BIPOC identity within our 6 interviews.
  • These interviews gave lots of context and insight for some of the things that we found in our other research

• Research and Archive Dive
  • Videos and articles from the past Waterman Takeovers
  • Catamount Data
Themes from our Interviews

To ensure the privacy and anonymity of our interviewees we will not play the voice recordings, but will read you some impactful quotes.
Theme 1

University Leadership needs to hire folks who identify as BIPOC and support them once they are here. Representation matters, even if it is only the first step.

• “And the story that they're telling themselves and the administration is these people are leaving for really great opportunities. We should be grateful for them. Uh, excuse me. They're fleeing from here and the indication is that they're getting really great opportunities because they are so great. You ought to be mourning their loss and asking yourself what you did wrong. “ - Staff 3

• “Institutionally, no. Um, I think I've been here long enough to experienced, different areas at UVM and to know what it's like to be supported a little bit more. I have felt supported by other BIPOC staff and white staff that have sought to understand be actively anti-racist and be about the work. So there has been enough of a village here at UVM that supports me but I don't feel supported institutionally or even understanding of what we do here.” -Staff 2
Theme 2

Students don't feel heard or supported and are disillusioned by the system.

• “It just happens that I go to UVM, I could've gone to any college and had a very similar experience because it is just all white school. Like that's what it is.” - Student 1

• When asked if they had anything to say to the leadership/administration of UVM, this student said, "I’d tell them to read my emails." This person tried to get involved and vocalize concerns and did not feel heard and understood by the people who have the power to change things. "Often it feels like folks go to work just to create harm and make BIPOC students feel undervalued." - Alum 1

• “I don't have anything to say just because I already know how higher-ed works. Step, step, step, crush, crush, crush. So, I really wouldn't have anything else to say, because I would know that this cycle would just continue. It would be like, thank you for your concerns. Let's just send this email and act like we care about our students and move on.” - Student 2
Theme 3

DEI should be everyone’s business, not just the work of identity spaces and the DEI committee to carry that for the university.

• "We don't have a holistic way on campus honestly, of how we support BIPOC students...We're not making progress honestly, and even if you look at our numbers of our percentage of undergraduate students that are students of color like, it really hasn't changed. For significant amount of time, certainly not, since I've been here. So the answer is we're not doing better." - Staff 1

• “After years of working in university-wide advocacy and talking to board members about this stuff and trying to convince the president to do things differently, like really putting myself on the line in a large-scale way, I began to realize that people wanted to hear from me because I had a tendency to not be radical.” -Staff 3

• “Every single space in this university has to be about that [anti-racist] work if things are going to shift culturally and be a place where BIPOC staff, students, and faculty can belong.” -Staff 2
Timeline of Events

Through Pictures
Students of Color in Waterman takeover 1988
Students of Color in Waterman takeover 1988

• Background: The takeover happened after a series of meetings between the Black Student Union, Asian American Student Union, and University administrations. Student groups were advocating for the university to hire more people of color.

• What is going on here: In this image, students of color had been occupying Waterman for three days after giving the President a list of demands. These demands included hiring more faculty of color, admitting more students of color, administration creating a mandatory racial awareness course for first-year students, and for a creation of a committee of students of color that would work with the administration to oversee the agreements implantation.

• Relevancy: This is where it all began.
Summer Enrichment Scholars Program (SESP) 1989
• Background: The SESP is a free summer program offered to incoming UVM first-year students of color, first-generation students, and/or students from limited income backgrounds. This program is implemented by the Mosaic Center and serves as an opportunity to help students adjust to the new environment of UVM. Unsure if this is the first SESP, but this is definitely one of the early ones.

• What is going on here: This image includes many of the first-year students of color at UVM in 1989. Many of these students participated in the second Waterman Takeover of 1991.

• Relevancy: Many of these students led the charge in the 1991 Takeover.
Breakdown of BIPOC Faculty in 1990

### Total All Faculty by Rank and Ethnicity

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<th>Rank</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Sub-Total</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Pac Isl</th>
<th>Nat Am</th>
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<td>273</td>
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<td>Assistant Professor</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
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**Percentages**

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ALANA means "African-American (Black), Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American".

Data Source: Office of Institutional Studies, Fall 1990 Snapshot

Prepared by AA/EO/DP - 07/22/91 (SNP1000A.PRN)
Breakdown of BIPOC Faculty in 1990

• Background: These documents show the faculty breakdown by demographics in 1990. “ALANA” stands for African American (Black), Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, & Native American.

• What is going on here: These documents show how much the university was still lacking in diversity after the first Waterman takeover where students demanded more BIPOC recruitment. Only 5% of all faculty members were ALANA and most of those were research associates or assistant professors; in all other categories, over 95% of the faculty were white. Out of 1114 faculty members, only 53 were ALANA.
### Breakdown of BIPOC Staff in 1990

#### UNGRADGED

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#### TOTAL, GRADED STAFF

| % | 100 | 97 | 3 | <1 | <1 | 4.17 |

#### OTHER STAFF

| % | 100 | 69 | 31 | 20 | 29 | 0 |

#### TOTAL ALL STAFF

| % | 100 | 96 | 4 | 1 | 1.5 | 0.5 |

---

1. INCLUDES THE PROVOST, VICE PROVOSTS, DEANS, ASSOCIATE DEANS, ASSISTANT DEANS.
2. INCLUDES VISITING DOCS, VISITING ASSOCIATES AND VISITING SCHOLARS.
Breakdown of BIPOC Staff in 1990

• Background: Part of the previous document.
• What is going on here: Here it shows the number of staff members there were ALANA; out of 2057, only 86 of them were ALANA and the rest were all white. This is 4% of all staff members.
• Relevancy: These two documents showcase the lack of diversity at UVM and that the University was still very much lacking after the 1988 Waterman Agreement where they promised to increase BIPOC recruitment.
TAKEOVER

Today, 22 students, at 12:00 noon, occupied the Presidents row in the Waterman building. They are in the process of formulating a series of demands to present to the University administration and board of trustees. They made a statement at 2:30 in which they expressed solidarity with all oppressed people, and spoke specifically about racism on campus and the as yet ignored Waterman agreements. The University has consistently denied and in fact obstructed attempts at creating a campus that is respectful to all human beings.

We as students, are asking you to support this action by:

- Helping to leaflet the campus
- Petitioning other students for their support
- Possibly joining a hunger strike
- Joining the all night vigil inside of Waterman

Today is the anniversary of the week long occupation which led to the signing of the Waterman agreements in 1988. The Waterman agreements called for an increase in recruitment of faculty and students of color, and an honest and concerted effort at education that would help to rid the campus and community of blatant and covert racism. The Student Senate this year, after President David’s refusal to resign these agreements, voted unanimously to support the complete implementation of the Waterman agreements by this year.

Come to the Student Support Meeting 8:00 TONIGHT
INFRONT OF PRESIDENTS ROW
(right down the hall from the registrars office)
Flyer for 1991 Protest

• Background: Students of color were still upset because the agreement from the ‘88 takeover was not being fulfilled. The University promised to double the number of students of color by 1992, between 1989-1990 that number went from 445 to 458 students. By 1991, UVM hired 21 faculty & staff members of color, but lost 14. The University President met with the board of trustees regarding the agreement without consulting the newly created student committee. Students were also upset about the treatment of Maude Lightburn, an African American employee at UVM who submitted a formal charge of racial discrimination against UVM after being fired in 1990.

• What is going on here: This flyer came the day of 1991 takeover to spread awareness of the protest taking place and inviting others to come out and show support for the students and their cause.

• Relevancy: This shows how much planning went into the takeover. This flyer is for a protest happening eight hours after the takeover began; it is clear that the students involved put a lot of effort into planning.
Grievances for '91 Takeover

This is a list of some grievances that we feel have not adequately or legitimately been addressed:

1. Black men rounded up on campus after the rape of a white woman.
2. AASU (Asian American Student Union) members beaten up. When security arrived at the scene, they directed their attention to Asian students first, allowing the white attackers to escape.
3. Latino Students being harassed by the writing of racial slurs on residence hall walls.
4. Professors using the word "nigger" in their classes without any justification. The word being used totally out of context, or without any explanation of context.
5. Analogies being used by a professor, "Jessie Jackson passes a bucket of chicken to get his votes."
6. Vermont State police form that has the distinct racial discriminatory category of Hispanic/Non-Hispanic.

We are students of color united around one main issue: the liberation of our people. We have a common oppressor, for as people of color we have systematically been denied access to justice, freedom, and equality. 500 years ago the United States was founded upon the genocide of one race; and the enslavement of another, 200 years ago the University of Vermont was founded using these same means.

Today at the University of Vermont they no longer use such openly oppressive measures, and have become much more sophisticated in the mechanics of repression. They have attempted to blind us of the chains that enslave our minds. We realize the efficacy of education, and therefore it has remained our constant weapon in the struggle for liberation. We must constantly struggle for the control of our bodies and minds, the battleground for this struggle being education. For only through true education will our people be liberated.

However every attempt at true education has been thwarted. Both in 1969 and 1988 students of color have placed an unwarranted trust in the University's commitment to cultural diversity. Having sacrificed time, energy, and personal security in hope of creating real change.

We students of color have exhausted all vehicles allowed us by the administration, and once again find ourselves forced to use the only strategy which truly empowers us and enables us to uphold ideals the very university claims to be committed to.

Self determination for all people
Grievances for '91 Takeover

• Background: This document was created because students were feeling unheard after putting in much effort to reach out to administration; students were also feeling targeted on campus and the many grievances listed here showcase racism from university partners and the harassment of BIPOC students.

• What is going on here: This document includes a list of grievances that students gave as reasoning for the '91 takeover. They stated that the university denied them justice, freedom, and equality and that the university was not doing enough to provide an education that allowed for the liberation of people of color. The document finishes off by stating the students have placed “unwarranted trust” in the “Universities Commitment” to cultural diversity and have been greatly disappointed after sacrificing “time, energy, and national security” to get their voices heard.

• Relevancy: This provides a great deal of context as to what led up to the '91 takeover.
Waterman Takeover of 1991

- **Background:** Students were fed up. The University President who signed the ’88 agreement, Lattie Coor, resigned in 1989 and was succeed by George Davis. Davis pledged to sign the Waterman Agreement by 1991 but changed his mind in the spring of that year; he refused to sign the agreement created and to affirm his intent to uphold what the students had fought for.

- **What is going on here:** This image shows the student support coming from outside Waterman. There were 22 students locked inside participating in the takeover, but hundreds of students gathered outside every day in protest as well.

- **Relevancy:** This shows the sheer number of students who were out there in support, it was not just a handful of BIPOC students, it was a large community of people.
UVM President George Davis Climbs into his office to negotiate with students in 1991

- Background: President Davis met with students for two days to negotiate their demands and refused to continue meeting after the third day. A Board of Trustees unanimous resolution came out in May of 1991; the board stated their “firm support” of Davis’ decision to cease negotiations with anyone “unauthorized” occupying the University’s property. The board stated that they “will not develop policies, procedures, and programs in an atmosphere of coercion and duress”.

- What is going on here: Students had boarded up the entrance and for the first two days President Davis had to use a ladder to get into his office and negotiate with students. After those two days, the president refused to meet with the students, and they stayed in Waterman. After 20 days of occupation, the protest was broken up by police, and students were arrested.

- Relevancy: It shows that the students were willing to stay and fight for their cause, but the institution simply refused to listen.
First two minutes show an insider view of what the arrests looked like. You see police break into the room that the students were in. It looks like they have weapons pointed at the students.

Here you see students being dragged away by police.
Main Street Blockage in 2018
Main Street Blockage in 2018

• Background: Students blocked off rush-hour traffic at Main St. in an attempt to get their voices heard.

• What is going on here: This image is of students blocking off the road where they stood for hours to get the attention of the University President at the time, Tom Sullivan. From what we have heard by word of mouth, the President never gave students a satisfying answer. Students took over Waterman four days after this.

• Relevancy: This shows that students are still fighting to be heard and have to resort to drastic measures to get the attention of administration.
Waterman Takeover
2018

Waterman Takeover 2018

• Background: In February of 2018, a student activist group took over Waterman for a third time; 250 students hung banners, solicited signatures from administrators on a list of demands, and hosted teach-ins until the building closed and they were asked to leave under the threat of arrest. This happened after a series of racially charged events. A BLM flag was stolen on campus, a criminal case involving a former student accused of making racial threats was thrown out of court citing “lack of evidence”, signs defending white privilege were posted in the Mosaic Center on MLK’s birthday.

• What is going on here: This image showcases what Waterman looked like after students had put up their banners. It is in black & white and gives off the energy of the previous takeovers. During this 10-hour takeover, students pressed deans to sign a commitment that included “mandatory diversity training for all faculty, and an increase in hiring and retention rates of faculty of color”. The dean of the College of Education and Social Services at the time, Scott Thomas, did not sign the commitment. When asked why he would not sign, he stated that signing on to that document “would open the door for any group and any agenda to pressure their way into my office with demands and petitions that completely obviate our carefully thought out, if oftentimes slow and frustrating processes that ensure transparent deliberation and thoughtful, responsible action.” – With his lack of signature, he told students that he and other deans “released a series of commitments that included incorporating diversity and equity criteria in the annual evaluation of faculty” which he saw as a big step forward.

• Relevancy: It shows that the spirit of protest is very much alive at UVM and that BIPOC students are still fighting to be heard. It also provides much context for what the atmosphere of the university is currently like. The comments from the previous dean of CESS how administrators can stand firm in their decisions even when students are blatantly telling them that it is not enough.
• Actively listening to BIPOC students and hearing what their needs are. Then creating action plans that carry out that body of work to push beyond the performative.
• Provide more support to affinity spaces/identity centers and make them more accessible to students.
• Make supporting BIPOC students everyone’s business and create an emphasis on anti-racism everywhere on campus.
Sources

- https://vimeo.com/158595077
- The pictures without links listed on their slides were all given to us by an anonymous source