

The Black Student Union Experience

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BSU Mission Statement:

The Castilleja BSU (Black Student Union) is open to all students who identify as Black and want to explore Black identity together. Castilleja BSU aims to create a safe space for young Pan African students to engage in discussions, build relationships between grades, give back to our community, and celebrate our culture. We plan to learn from successful Black women, host events regarding African Diaspora heritage, and commemorate Black history in an effort to build a support network. Our ultimate goal is for students to feel empowered and confident with their Black identity.

The BSU Experience:

The Castilleja BSU is a place where all students who identify as Black come together to celebrate Black culture and encourage Black empowerment. We usually meet once every week towards the end of the day and conduct check-ins, play games, hold discussions, and plan for school-wide events such as Black History Month. While the Castilleja environment can be draining for Black students, we heavily rely on the BSU as a safe space to voice concerns, connect with our Black peers across grade levels and recognize positive aspects of Black culture such as the arts. Our discussions range from events in our daily lives to the systemic barriers which disproportionately affect Black people and BIPOC in general.

Let's Get Real: How does Castilleja create an inclusive community for its Black/BIPOC students?

Student Engagement:

Aside from Castilleja's rigorous curriculum, strong sense of community, and empowerment of women leaders, there are many structural changes that can be made to better the Black experience, and BIPOC experience as a whole. Castilleja provides many opportunities for students to engage in DEI work, such as the annual trip to SDLC/POCC, off-campus DEI workshops and Brown Bag lunches, though many of these choices are not mandatory for all students, resulting in a small group of dedicated students engaging in DEI work. Despite this, starting in the 20-21 academic year, mandatory DEI workshops have been integrated into the curriculum for all employees and students through Affinity groups, advisory spaces, and the Wellness curriculum.

One of the special things about the Castilleja community is the student engagement/student representation of their interests. One clear example of this is the new Instagram account, BIPOCatCasti, which works to anonymously share experiences from BIPOC students, alums, employees, and parents within the Castilleja community. While this account highlights anecdotes of BIPOC students at Casti, and Black students have shared stories, it is not necessarily a platform that caters to and shares the Black experience; but we are including it as another resource.

Similarly, during the racial uproar following George Floyd's death, Senior artists sold prints of their artwork ensuring that all proceeds went to social justice initiatives in support of the BLM Movement. In the midst of the pandemic students have been very supportive of one another as well as educating others on social media platforms.

Curriculum:

While Castilleja's current curriculum teaches a majority of its history and classes from a eurocentric lens, Castilleja is actively revamping its curriculum to be antiracist, and students have played an active role in holding the school accountable in changes like these.

Additionally, diversity within the faculty is very low. While there are POC in the language, technology and administration departments, in core classes (Math, Science, History, and English) there are hardly any POC. Castilleja's administration has stated its belief that all students benefit from learning from a racially diverse faculty and that they are actively seeking to hire more people of color. Significant change is not yet evident. So as things stand, Castilleja's lack of faculty diversity hinders the student experience.

One exciting development on campus is the new role of Assistant Head of Curriculum and Community. The person who fulfills the role will be tasked with spearheading diversity, equity, and inclusion work on campus including supporting faculty and staff in their continued growth as antiracist educators. This position has the potential to increase transparency between administration and students concerning DEI work, push for a set framework around consequences for people that go against values of our community, and be an overall resource for all students on campus.

Castilleja Needs Black Voices:

This page is not meant to deter anyone from Castilleja, but to relay transparency to prospective families. Castilleja has much work to do, but it is important to recognize the student, employee and administrative dedication that is involved in this learning that is central to enacting change within the Castilleja community. You are needed. You are valued.