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The Justin and Darrienne Christian Center  
for Diversity and Inclusion comes alive.

by Sarah McAdams

The newest addition to DePauw's campus is the Justin and Darrienne Christian Center for Diversity and Inclusion, which opened last fall. It houses both the Association of African American Students and the Dorothy Brown Cultural Resource Center.



Additionally, the center encompasses International Student Services, DACA and Undocumented Student Support, Multicultural Student Services and LGBTQIA+ Services. The Women's Center also fits beneath the center's umbrella.

### Rooms with Many Uses

The center offers a plethora of great spaces for students, faculty and staff members. All rooms, with the exception of two media lounges, Flewellen West Media Lounge and Jason Asbury and David Smith East Media Lounge, can be reserved through e-services.

These include a multi-purpose room, barber shop, Bennett Library, boardroom, dining room, group collaboration space, ADA-accessible kitchen, Lawrence E. and Judith A. Young Atrium/Young Community Room, a multi-purpose basketball court with a gas fire pit and a salon.

The center also has a safe room, the use of which is coordinated through Campus Living and Community Development and Public Safety.

Jazmine Kerr '21 is very happy with the new spaces that the center offers. "The clean and pleasant atmosphere provides a calming environment to do



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many of the things I have to do to get through the day," she says. "I even had a haircut in the barber shop."

"The media rooms and the kitchen are my favorite spaces," Kerr says. "The CDI has been the location for meetings and events my organizations and I have hosted, as well as just being a great study and cooking space for me."

Senior Sophia Lan concurs. She also recommends the kitchen, which is equipped with two of everything. "When the International Student Association needs to host dinner, we host it there," she says. "There is nowhere else besides the CDI that provides such a large space – kitchen and dining room – so I really appreciate it. It helps build a warm, family-oriented atmosphere, and that fits ISA's identity as well."

### A Safe and Inclusive Space

Lan recognizes the efforts it took to make the building happen. She says the center is a safe and inclusive space where she can hang out with friends and study. And it's a great addition to her DePauw experience. The center seeks to foster a sense of belonging through education, celebration and





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advocacy to enhance the overall experience of students who identify as women, international, LGBTQIA+, Undocumented and students of color. It strengthens DePauw's dedication to respecting and valuing difference by creating an equitable space that engages the entire campus. DePauw students, faculty and staff

members come from an array of cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. International students represent 40 different nations, making up about 10 percent of the student body. Domestic students of color make up nearly 20 percent of the student body and multicultural faculty members compose about 19 percent of DePauw's faculty.

## Increasing Student Retention

Matt Abtahi, the center's assistant director, says he and Program Directors Alesha Bowman, Aliza Frame and Sarah Ryan are working to increase retention of their student populations. "We think about this in regard to academic success of the folks we're hoping call this space



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"Let us allow this beautiful Diversity and Inclusion Center to remind us of the lessons of Dr. King, Charlayne Hunter-Gault, fellow alums Percy Julian and Kenneth Hogate. Let us be hopeful that we each have the strength to take a position against injustice when life presents us with our opportunity. DePauw University is taking its own stand here today. It is the 124th Monon Bell Classic. We are a better institution today than we have ever been in the 124-year history of this game."

—JUSTIN CHRISTIAN '95 AT THE DEDICATION OF THE CENTER FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION.

their home," he says. Nineteen student groups affiliate with the center. The Brotherhood, a men-of-color initiative, holds monthly meetings often geared toward academic or professional engagement. Abtahi hopes the center can bolster what the Brotherhood already is doing by providing social engagement opportunities to build a stronger community.

## Space to Be Authentic

"We know that, when students feel a stronger sense of belonging on campus and are better able to be authentic in spaces where they're learning, their learning will flourish," Abtahi says. "Our challenge is how do we get students to feel this way about the campus at large and not just about a few pockets here and there."

The center's staff members hold themselves accountable to the center's mission of educating, advocating and celebrating. "With this three-tiered approach, we are hopeful that



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our students can come to DePauw, experience the center, experience their identity as well as others' identity, know how to articulate themselves and how to take up space or not when they're advocating for others," says Abtahi.

He admits those are challenging soft skills to master. "However, our hope is that through a continuous engagement process, students will eventually get there," he says.

"There is a lot of potential to be successful, and I think if students are really willing to engage in unpacking their own stories and unpacking the history of how they've learned what they've learned, we'll have a lot of really cool moments on campus as we become a stronger community."



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Sarah McAdams earned her M.A. in teaching English as a Second Language at the University of New Mexico.

Currently, she is Internal Communications Manager at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana.

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