Resource map for students of color at SUNY Maritime College

SUNY Maritime is a historically white college (75% “non-minority” as of 2016) 4-year technical college on the outskirts of one of the most diverse cities in the U.S. Despite its location in the Bronx, Maritime has a reputation of recruiting white students from the Long Island suburbs. Following the murder of George Floyd, an unarmed black man at the hands of the Minneapolis police force, Maritime students of color and allies banded together to push for a more inclusive environment for students of color. In response, the President of SUNY Maritime College, Admiral Michael Alfultis, created a racial justice taskforce, LEADing Change in Fall 2020, to study issues of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) at Maritime and make recommendations leading to “meaningful institutional change toward a more diverse and inclusive campus climate.”

One part of this task force’s work has been to identify resources for students of color. The overwhelming finding of the task force is that resources for students of color at Maritime are informal and ad-hoc. This forces students of color seeking support to identify motivated faculty and staff in order to access resources. This leads to inequitable distribution of support for students of color, oftentimes leaving them with the impression that support for students of color is not a priority for Maritime College leadership.

Nevertheless, students who manage to identify knowledgeable faculty and staff do connect to available support. However, since access to resources depends on motivated staff members, the work of directing students of color to resources often falls on the shoulders of racialized people themselves as they are the people most motivated to assist students of color. This creates further inequity among faculty and staff as these racialized employees often have professional responsibilities unrelated to JEDI. These motivated faculty and staff thus have to balance unrelated responsibilities with JEDI work, a burden not shared by white employees who oftentimes do not even acknowledge that Maritime can be an unwelcome place for students of color.

One goal of the LEADing Change taskforce is to identify existing support for students of color and to make recommendations of how to increase this support to make Maritime a more welcoming community. Currently, there are two existing organizations for students of color seeking support: The Culture Club and the Organization of Black Maritime Graduates.
The mission of Maritime’s Culture Club is to “To provide a forum for broadening the scope of cultural awareness within the campus community” (SUNY Maritime College Culture Club Constitution, 2020-2021). While not specifically serving students of color, the Culture Club is associated with events to promote inclusion for Black students on campus and hosts an annual dinner for the whole college community at the end of Black History Month. In addition, the Club provides social support for Maritime students of color by hosting regular, informal get togethers. Any decision of the Club, however, is subject to veto and reversal by the College President or Dean of Students if, in their judgment, the decision negatively impacts the image of Maritime College.

The Organization of Black Maritime Graduates (OBMG) seeks to increase equity in the maritime and engineering industries for minority graduates of Maritime College (Our Mission, OBMG). To that end, it recruits and mentors students of color through awarding scholarships and facilitating networking opportunities. Since 1995, OBMG has given out 213 scholarships totaling more than $250,000 to minority students (Our History, OBMG). This year alone, they awarded 18 scholarships. OBMG also supports the activities of the Culture Club and sends out a periodic newsletter. Obmg.org has tremendous resources for students and graduates of color including: membership information, links to partner organizations, and a curated set of media coverage of people of color in the maritime industry and related organizations.