RESIDENCE HALL COULD FEATURE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURE

COLUMBUS -- The Office of Residence and Dining Halls at The Ohio State University is developing a proposal for an Afrikan American Living Learning Center within the undergraduate residence halls on the Columbus campus.

"The center would be open to all students interested in and committed to learning about African-American history, culture, politics and experiences," explains Rebecca Parker, associate director of the Office of Residence and Dining Halls.

"Faculty and staff would work with students living in the center to plan and implement workshops, lectures, discussions, community experiences and social activities," Parker says.

Preliminary conversations are underway between the Department of Black Studies and the Office of Residence Life, a unit of Residence and Dining Halls, for co-sponsorship of the program.

Similar residence hall programs exist involving Taylor Tower, 50 Curl Drive, with the University Honors Center and Mack and Canfield halls, 236 W. 11th Ave., with the Council on Academic Excellence for Women. There are also programs encompassing interests in agriculture, human ecology, engineering, business and cooperative living.

- more -
Parker will chair a steering committee composed of student members of ACTION (Afrikans Committed To Improving Our Nation) and staff members from Residence and Dining Halls to develop the proposal for the new living learning center.

A proposal outlining the structure and operation of the Afrikan American Living Learning Center will be presented to Russell Spillman, vice president for student affairs, and University President E. Gordon Gee within the next several weeks, she says.

Parker hopes the steering committee will be able to recommend a pilot for such a center next autumn with full implementation of the center by autumn 1993.

"Discussions within Residence and Dining Halls regarding this new center have been very positive," says William H. Hall, director of Residence and Dining Halls. "I'm confident that the proposal being developed will extend significantly our opportunities to provide educational programming and enriching social experiences outside the classroom."

In a meeting earlier this week with African-American students, faculty and staff, President Gee said he was very interested in the concept of an Afrikan American Living Learning Center. "I would welcome a proposal from the residence hall staff," he said.

Contact: Rebecca Parker, (614) 292-3930, or William H. Hall, (614) 292-4251.
Cultural living center in the works

By Stacey Silver and Sue Sowa
Lantern staff writer

A committee composed of Residence and Dining Halls staff members and student members of Afrikans Committed to Improving Our Nation are developing a proposal for an Afrikans-American Cultural Living Learning Center pilot program to be implemented Fall Quarter 1992, said William H. Hall, director of Residence and Dining Halls.

The proposal will be presented to OSU President E. Gordon Gee and Russell Spillman, vice president of Student Affairs, within the next several weeks.

Implementation of a permanent program is hoped for Fall Quarter 1993.

Rebecca Parker, associate director of the Office of Residence and Dining Halls, is chairing a committee whose goal is to come up with a program that ACTION and the Office of Residence and Dining Halls both agree on. Parker met with some members of ACTION last Friday to discuss the proposal.

Hall said, "We want to make sure we're heading collectively in the directions we all want to go in."

Hall said he feels the committee is currently moving in the right direction and the living environment will be open to all OSU students.

Parker is proposing that one floor in Lincoln Tower be set aside for the pilot program, Hall said.

He said the space allowed for the program will depend on student demand. He said he did not anticipate an entire residence hall being needed.

"I would like to start off small so I can refine the program," Parker said. She said she will rely on student input on how the program is going.

The cost of implementing the program will initially be low, Hall said. The program will consist of students who will otherwise be placed elsewhere on campus, so there will be no need for finding new space, he said.

The initial cost of implementing the program will be for advertising and marketing the program; Hall said. Those funds will be reallocated from other areas within the Office of Residence and Dining Halls.

President Gee said in a meeting earlier this week with African-American students, faculty and staff that he was very interested in the concept of the Afrikans-American Living Learning Center and would welcome the proposal.

Parker has been working on this idea for about one year so when the ACTION demands came forward, she said she felt as if her homework was done.

The pilot program is basically looking at a smaller version of how a larger program would operate.

The pilot program would start with one co-ed floor to receive positive and negative feedback from both genders.

Parker said when she attended Capital University in the 70's, she lived in a residence hall for three years that had a similar idea.

"This idea is not a new concept, it was a concept that was born in the 70's and worked out very well," Parker said.

Latina Lewis, a sophomore from Columbus and a member of the steering committee to propose the idea, said the center would be a good learning experience for students.

"I think the Living Learning Center is a very good idea because we don't get enough information about the African culture," Lewis said.

Lewis and other students helping with the center passed out questionnaires and petitions and asked people what they thought of the idea.

Lewis said they received positive and negative feedback.

Parker said the center will give students the opportunity to discuss issues in an intellectual environment and not in a classroom.

"Students come to the university because they are pursuing an education. That education can be received inside and outside of the classroom," Parker said.
African American center could open soon

By Katherine Lubanovic
Lantern staff writer

The Office of Residence and Dining Halls’ proposal for an African American Living-Learning Center may open as soon as Fall Quarter 1992 said Becky Parker, associate director of Residence and Dining Halls.

The African American Living-Learning Center would be located in Lincoln Tower, Parker said. The size of the center would accommodate the number of interested students.

The proposal for the African American Living-Learning Center is focused on the African American culture, everyday experiences and political issues, Parker said. There may be workshops, speakers, and social programming in the living environment, just as there is for any residence hall.

The program, which is headed by Residence and Dining Halls, has been in the proposal stage for over two years, Parker said. The Department of Black Studies has offered to co-sponsor the project with the Residence and Dining Halls.

Afrikans Committed to Improving our Nation spoke of the proposal in its requests to the university and OSU President, E. Gordon Gee, Parker said.

Other universities across the country have tried similar living-learning centers in their housing. Stanford University was successful; Youngstown State University wasn’t as successful.

Jack Fahey, director of Housing Services at Youngstown State University, said because campus housing is limited, there is no need for special-interest housing.

Housing services tried to create an international living-learning system with student minority groups, but there wasn’t enough support within the minority groups to promote a successful housing plan, Fahey said.

J. Mitchell, interim assistant of Student Affairs and interim housing director of Viking Hall at Cleveland State University, said students involved with on-campus housing have such diverse cultural backgrounds that isolating one group would be impractical. Having a multi-cultural residence hall would allow students to experience many different cultures, Mitchell said.

ACTION call for dorm remains a controversy

By Caroline Alexander
Lantern staff writer

The proposal from ACTION for creating an African American Residence Hall on campus has remained controversial.

Bill Hall, director of Residence and Dining Halls, said if the program is instituted, it will be open for all students, not only African American students.

According to Hall, surveys conducted have shown that some students might be more interested than others, but the university is not about to segregate residence halls.

“We’re not saying that all African-American students must live there. If we institute a program, it will be open for all students,” Hall said.

The African American Living-Learning Center is not about segregation, but education, said Rebecca Parker, associate director of Residence and Dining Halls.

“This program is not about segregation. It is about creating opportunities to live and understand the culture of African Americans,” said Parker. “I think some people have misunderstood the concept. Segregation is a concept I feel very strongly about, and I would not support a center that was run exclusively by race.”

Parker said the African American Living-Learning Center will work the same as the Women’s Living-Learning Center. The women’s center holds different workshops, lectures, speeches, and discussion topics about women in education, careers and health.

The proposal for a pilot program, which would establish one floor of Lincoln Tower for the center, should be submitted to the university by July 10, Parker said. Further information will not be available until after that date.
AFRIKAN AMERICAN LIVING-LEARNING CENTER TO OPEN AS PILOT

COLUMBUS -- A pilot project to operate an Afrikan American Living-Learning center in The Ohio State University's residence halls has been approved, and 46 undergraduates will move into the center in September when autumn quarter classes begin.

President E. Gordon Gee and Russell Spillman, vice president for student affairs, recently approved the proposal by the Office of Residence and Dining Halls. The 16th floor of Lincoln Tower, 1800 Cannon Drive, will house the center.

Participants in the pilot project were chosen from among those who asked to be considered in a survey sent to some 7,000 returning and new residence hall students. Residents of the center this year will include both African Americans and whites. Like other residents of Lincoln Tower, the students will live in eight-person suites, with each suite containing four bedrooms, four study rooms, a communal living room and a communal bathroom.

The center is open to all students interested in learning about African American history, culture, politics and experiences, said Rebecca Parker, associate director of the Office of Residence and Dining Halls. Faculty and staff will work with the students living in the center to produce workshops,
lectures, discussion, community experiences and social activities.

Parker said several events are already planned for fall, including an orientation and open house during the university's Welcome Week. Other projects involve coordinated programs with the Frank W. Hale Jr. Black Cultural Center and the University Mentoring Program, as well as a series of faculty seminars and the use of African American art in the decor. Still to be planned are field trips and several discussion series.

Parker said she is in the process of assembling an advisory board of about 10 students, faculty and staff members for the center. "The advisory board will help us monitor the progress and ensure integrity in the process."

She said the students and staff will work in conjunction with existing campus events such as United Black World Week and the African American Heritage festival, and with existing programs such as those offered by the Black Cultural Center and the Mentoring Program.

Establishment of an African American residence hall was one of the demands submitted to Gee last spring by A.C.T.I.O.N. (Afrikans Committed To Improving Our Nation). "The Office of Residence and Dining Halls was already working on a proposal for an Afrikan American Living-Learning Center," Parker said. "A.C.T.I.O.N. gave extra visibility to the process, and several of its members contributed significantly to the design of the proposal, but we had already decided that offering this experience would expand the opportunities for educational programming and enriching social experiences within the residence hall system."

Similar living-learning centers exist in Ohio State's residence hall system. There are centers affiliated with the University Honors Center and the Council on Academic Excellence for Women, as well as programs for students interested in agriculture, human ecology, engineering, business and cooperative living.

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Contact: Rebecca Parker, (614) 292-3930.
Living-learning center granted to ACTION

By Stas Georgiadis
Laternn staff writer

The African American Living-Learning center is a reality. OSU President E. Gordon Gee and Russell Spillman, vice president for Student Affairs, approved the center as a pilot program proposed by the Office of Residence and Dining Halls this quarter.

The center was one of the demands Africans Committed to Improving Our Nation submitted to Gee Spring Quarter.

"The Office of Residence and Dining Halls was already working on a proposal for the African American Living-Learning center," said Rebecca Parker, associate director of Residence and Dining Halls.

"ACTION gave extra visibility to the process and several of its members contributed significantly to the design of the proposal," Parker said.

"We're definitely encouraged that the pilot program has come this year," said Greg Carr, a graduate student in Black Studies and a member of ACTION.

The center will be located on the 16th floor of Lincoln House, located in Lincoln Tower. The 48 students who will be living in the center this fall include both African-Americans and whites, Parker said. The center is open to all students interested in learning about African-American history, culture, politics and experiences.

Parker said so far there are no other known minority groups living in the center. She said there might be minorities living in the center, but because students have the right not to include their heritage on the application to the university, the center is unsure what minorities will be represented.

The 16th floor of Lincoln House was chosen because it kept disruptions in renewal contracts at a minimum, Parker said.

"I was interested in working with a staff member who had some experience with African-American student groups. Chris Washington is the hall director in Lincoln House and he came to us with significant experience from Western Illinois," Parker said.

Washington could not be reached for comment.

Surveys were sent to more than 2,000 students who have signed renewal contracts to live in the residence halls again and to the almost 5,000 students who will be living in the residence halls for the first time, most of whom are freshmen.

The surveys had several ways in which to respond, Parker said.

"We only took the 'yes it's a good idea and yes I want to live in it' group. Then we called all of those people to fill the floor because even with that group of people, you have to do a certain amount of explaining," Parker said.

Some students who responded with that reply were not selected because of priorities they chose in their application to the residence halls, Parker said.

Parker said the center is similar to other living-learning centers already offered by Ohio State. Other centers are affiliated with the University Honors Center and the Council on Academic Excellence for Women as well as students interested in agriculture, human ecology, engineering and business.

The faculty and staff will work with the students living in the African American Living-Learning center to create workshops, lectures and social activities, Parker said.

Programs that have been planned for Fall Quarter include an open house during the university's Welcome Week and programs with the Frank W. Hale Jr. Black Cultural Center and the University Mentoring Program. A series of faculty seminars is also planned, a university press release stated.

Field trips and several discussion series have yet to be planned.

Carr said he looks forward to Minority Affairs eventually helping with the program along with Black Studies. As of now, the Office of Minority Affairs has nothing to do with the center, said David Williams II, director of Minority Affairs.

Parker said she is in the process of assembling a 10 member advisory board that will include students, faculty and staff to monitor the progress and integrity of the program.

"Once people see that this is beneficial to all people, I think it's really going to catch on," Carr said.
OSU to have Afrikan American living center

By Tim Doulin
Dispatch Higher Education Reporter

A racially mixed group of students has been selected to live in the African American Living-Learning Center this fall at Ohio State University.

The center is a pilot program established, partly, in response to demands by a group of black students, faculty and staff who last spring protested conditions for minorities on campus.

The center, on the 10th floor of Lincoln Tower, will serve as living quarters for the students and will feature programming emphasizing black history, culture and politics.

Forty-six undergraduate students will live in the center in the coming school year. Residents will include both black and white students.

"The idea is for all students to have a chance, to learn about the African-American culture, so we want it to be open to everyone," said Russell J. Spillman, vice president for student affairs.

Although there was a push for the dormitories found only enough students interested in the center to fill one floor, a university official said.

"Greg Carr, an OSU graduate student and a member of Afrikans Committed to Improving Our Nation, doesn't blame students for being shy about embracing the center. "They don't know that much about it. Once the center gets exposure, I think more people will be interested in living there," Carr said.

"Last spring, Afrikans Committed to Improving Our Nation, a group composed primarily of students, demanded the university establish an 'all-African student dormitory.'"

The university, however, said it is illegal to design dormitories by race.

The group is pleased with the center and does not believe it should be racially exclusive, Carr said.

"That should not be the goal. We all have to live together," Carr said.

"We felt it was important to create an environment where blacks could be comfortable. For white students who are interested in being more culturally aware, it is important, too. They can see that black people don't bite when they are around white people. We want to knock down some of those barriers that exist."

Living-learning centers are not new to OSU. The residence hall system has similar centers for honors students and students interested in agriculture, human ecology, engineering and business.

Other colleges and universities have similar black living-learning centers. OSU had been trying with the idea for two years, said Rebecca Parker, associate director of the Office of Residence and Dining Halls.

"This one will not run different from any other of our living-learning centers. What differentiates it from others is its center," Parker said.

Workshops, lectures, discussions and social activities at the center will be developed by residents, with the help of faculty and staff. The center also will work with traditional campuswide events such as United Black World Week and the African American Heritage Festival.

"I think a great deal of learning in college takes place outside the classroom," Parker said. "The living-learning centers afford a structured and concentrated way for that to happen."

Parker said the program will be assessed at the end of the school year.
Lincoln floor fosters African culture

By Chun-Ju Chen
Lantern staff writer

The floor in Lincoln Tower that Marcy Meyer lives on looks pretty much like any floor in any dorm, except maybe for the African-American art work that hangs in the hallway and the various African flags that decorate the door of each suite.

Meyer is one of 46 OSU students residing in the Afrikan-American Living Learning Center, which is on the 16th floor of Lincoln Tower.

"My history class for American history was always from a white perspective, and I wanted to know about the black perspective," said Meyer, a freshman and one of the three white students who live at the center.

The Afrikan-American Living Learning Center was approved Summer Quarter as a pilot program by OSU President E. Gordon Gee and Russell Spillman, vice president for Student Affairs. The center was one of the demands Afrikans Committed To Improving Our Nation (ACTION) submitted to Gee Spring Quarter.

The idea for there to be an Afrikan-American Living Learning Center has been played with for a couple of years, and the efforts by ACTION really put it forward, said Becky Parker, associate director of Residence and Dining Halls.

The center, with a focus on African-American programming, aims to provide students with an on-campus housing option where they can learn more about African-American culture, history and politics through life experience, Parker said.

"I basically chose to live on this floor because I want to learn more about my culture," said Chinnyere Stinson, a junior from Dayton.

The center will offer a series of programs on culture, history and relationship, Parker said.

The center will offer a series of programs on culture, history and relationship, Parker said. This fall, for example, a program on rape prevention in the African-American community will be presented. For the history series, the center is looking for a faculty member to discuss the origin of the Afro-centric world view, she said. A tour related to African-American art and culture also is planned.

Students who live in the center are asked to attend at least two programs per quarter, Parker said.

They also have the responsibility to respect the differences among people, she said.

Natasha Island, a freshman from Dayton who resides at the center, said people on the floor have a lot in common.

To fill the center, surveys were sent to renewal students in residence halls and to new incoming students asking them if they were interested in living in the center this fall, Parker said.

Those who expressed interest were called, and their commitment to live in the center was explored.

Almost every student called was able to live in the center, she said.

There is still a small waiting list, however.

"Anybody who is interested in being a part of a learning experience that focuses on African-American experience, African-American politics, culture, history was welcome and free to live in the center," Parker said.

The idea of the center is subject to changes depending on the evaluation of the first year, she said.

See related story on page three

Natasha Island, 18, a pre-med student from Dayton, and Eric Ramsey, 18, an education student from Harrisburg, Pa., help each other study at the Afrikan-American Living Learning Center in Lincoln Tower.
New dorm holds opening reception

By Ramona Evans
Lantern staff writer

Residence and Dining Halls marked the official opening of the Afrikan-American Living Learning Center with a reception Wednesday evening.

The Afrikan-American Living Learning Center, located on the 16th floor of Lincoln Tower, has been the dream of many African-American students and faculty, who felt the need to learn more about their culture and history in a positive living environment. The center has African artwork and literature displayed on the floor.

Residence and Dining Halls has a policy of encouraging cultural and racial acceptance, but there is still a critical lack of respect for not only African-American culture, but of all minority groups. This center picks up, where they left off.

Becky Parker, the associate director of Residence and Dining Halls, officially opened the reception. She began her speech by saying, "I am here not only because of my position, but for my people." The center has been a project that she has worked on for years, but was unable to complete until she received the support of the group, Afrikan Committed To Improving Our Nation. The group emerged last spring to promote equality for African students at Ohio State.

In a list of demands they submitted to President E. Gordon Gee, they stated that they wanted an Afrikan-American dorm that would encourage more extensive knowledge of African culture and history. This demand resulted in plans for a pilot center that would be available for all interested students to reside in beginning Autumn Quarter 1992.

Latina Lewis, a third-year computer science major, represented the ACTION committee that worked with Residence and Dining Hall to complete the pilot center. She said she hopes that the center is successful and positive for the campus community.

During the opening reception, the public was invited to enjoy refreshments, music and artwork. The students living on the floor welcomed the guests into their suites and the lounge area to mingle and enjoy the cultural aspects of the center. For the African-American community of Ohio State, this is truly the realization of a dream.
Dorm life at Ohio State University was, for senior Aya Fubara, "deficient in certain aspects." Most notably, she says, "what I felt was lacking most were experiences that had to do with me. The same was true with everything—TV, classes."

Fubara is black. She acknowledges that the transition from the comforts of home to a college dormitory full of strangers is tough for just about everyone. But for black students trying to settle into a predominantly white institution, where comments about different tastes in music and hair styles sometimes are enough to cause trouble, dorm life can produce genuine culture shock. "I'm sure Hispanics feel the same way, as do Asians and Native Americans," Fubara says.

Improved dorm life for black students was one of 22 demands a group called Afrikans Committed to Improving Our Nation, or ACTION, made to the OSU administration in May. President Gordon Gee responded by appointing committees to review issues raised by ACTION, and during the summer, Gee and Russell Spillman, vice president for student affairs, approved a proposal for a pilot African American Living-Learning Center on the 16th floor of Lincoln Tower this school year. By autumn 1993, the office of residence and dining halls expects to implement the center fully.

Forty-six undergraduates have been assigned to live in the pilot project, including a few white students, says Rebecca Parker, associate director of residence and dining halls. Her staff surveyed 7,000 students in June and July, both first-year and returning students, to determine interest in the living-learning center. "It is an interest that we checked out," Parker says: those asking to be considered for the project got a follow-up phone call to confirm their dorm assignments.

Students of all ethnic backgrounds are welcome to live in the center, but the pilot will be populated primarily by black students, and the programming focus is on African-American history, culture, politics and relationships. Parker says she and her staff had been researching the concept for such a center for two years before ACTION submitted its demands. "I do believe it was ACTION's initiatives that quickened the pace," she says.

ACTION formed in late April during a night of emotional discussion and consciousness-raising at the Frank W. Hale Jr. Black Cultural Center. The gathering was called after a jury found four Los Angeles police officers not guilty of using excessive force against Rodney King. The same day, Columbus safety director Ron Poole ruled that white patrolman Mike Exline would be "fired" in connection with force used against black OSC wrestler Oleatha Waugh, and then allow her to earn his job back after a year at a desk job. Participants at the Hale Center gathering, after a few psychology graduate students said their department lacked tenure, black faculty members also marched to confront a special Columbus meeting of the national psychology accreditation board to call for more tenure full-time black faculty members in OSU's psychology department.

"Things just reached a boiling point," recalls Greg Carr, a former OSU graduate student and spokesman for ACTION who moved to Philadelphia in September to pursue a Ph.D. in black studies at Temple University. ACTION compiled the list of demands a day after the march to the psychology department. On May 1, ACTION held a rally at which an American flag was burned. "It showed we were serious," Carr says.

The group drafted a letter to Gee, the board of trustees, Gov. George Voinovich and Ohio's senators. "The aftermath of the Rodney King and Oleatha Waugh verdicts has afforded African people at OSU the opportunity to reiterate their positions on various issues concerning African faculty, staff and students," ACTION wrote. The demands followed, seeking black student recruitment and retention, financial support, faculty and staff equity, a black studies requirement within the general curriculum, a policy against racial harassment, an improved residential and social environment and a quick response from Gee.

The unity and force behind the demands captured Gee's attention. He responded to each demand in writing and on May 18, spent five hours at the Hale Center talking and listening to hundreds of black students, faculty and staff. At that meeting, "a lot of students got to get stuff off their chest, but they also got commitments," Carr says.

He calls the establishment of the center "a victory for students. It's a victory for all of us." Another milestone, according to
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Carr was the May placement of a sign officially naming the Frank W. Hale Jr. Black Cultural Center on West 12th Avenue: the building, formerly Bradford Commons, had been used as a black cultural center for three years.

OSU spokesman Steve Sterrett says the sign, and, to a larger degree, the living-learning center, are the only concrete results so far of ACTION’s spring protest. “There are things in motion,” Sterrett says. Gee issued an interim report on July 27, detailing committee discussions and recommendations concerning other ACTION initiatives. Many will take time and money to implement, Sterrett explains.

ACTION’s demands weren’t the first of their kind to reach an OSU president’s desk, but Carr says the group’s organization and commitment reflect the fact that politically active black students have been training undergraduates to get more involved for several years. The quick creation of the pilot living-learning center “gave the students a sense of the possibilities,” says Carr, who has been an activist during his five years as a graduate student at Ohio State. “We’re not naive. We know this thing is going to be a protracted struggle. We need a sense of the possible.”

Carr says the living-learning center is not really innovative, but he says such centers have been effective for retaining black students at other universities. “Obviously, retaining students is the most important thing, once you get them here,” he says.

In autumn quarter 1991, 2,390 black undergraduate students were enrolled at Ohio State’s Columbus campus, making up 5.6 percent of the total undergraduate population of 40,875 on the campus. Black activists and OSU administrators alike would like to see that percentage increase. Fostering a more comfortable dorm environment for black students, Carr says, could help.

Carr says her department sponsors many programs on cultural diversity. “We expect the staff to pay attention to diversity and cultural sensitivity,” she says. Fubara acknowledges the university’s awareness programs in dorms, but notes, “That’s a week in a whole school year. Even when dorms try to do something, it’s so superficial.”

Fubara, now a senior living off campus, was a resident adviser in a dorm last year. In charge of developing programming for students living on her floor, “I had a chance to impact everyone I lived with.” she says. Once, she made a traditional Nigerian meal for the students, exposing them to dishes from her home country. Some of the students didn’t like the idea of eating food they didn’t recognize. “I said, ‘That’s how I feel in the cafeteria,’” she recalls.

Fubara had signed a lease for an apartment before the living-learning center pilot project was announced in August. She looks forward to the center’s creation, and says she hopes that as a graduate student next year, she might be able to join the living-learning center staff. This year, Fubara says, “Even though I won’t live there, I’m going to be visiting quite often.”

The point of a living-learning center, Parker says, is to continue to focus on learning outside the traditional classroom. “Living-learning centers aren’t new at OSU—others are connected to the University Honors Center, the Council on Academic Excellence for Women and programs for students interested in agriculture, human ecology, engineering, business and cooperative living.”

At the African American Living-Learning Center, Parker says, students will have the chance to study and experience African-American culture, history and politics in a number of ways. Structured programs each quarter are planned, and Parker says she hopes residents of the center will develop their own activities as well.

Three possible program topics are history, including the transition from Africa to American life: a cultural series devoted to African-American arts such as music, theatre and dance; and relationships, including male-female relationships among blacks and relationships that cross racial lines. Presentation of the programs hasn’t been decided, but probably will be a combination of lectures, seminars, films, discussion groups and performances. Projects will be coordinated with the Hale Center and the University Mentoring Program.

Some critics have suggested the residence life staff is promoting segregation by opening a living-learning center that focuses on blacks. “I feel very strongly we are not.” Parker says. “African-American students do not have to opt for this, and other students may opt for it.”

Parker also says ACTION’S demands were misunderstood last spring. An all-black dorm “was never their concept,” she says. An all-black dorm also wouldn’t be supported at OSU: says Gee in his letter to ACTION, “It is neither legal nor justifiable to make residence hall decisions by race.” ACTION’S initiative concerning residence life did read, “We demand the creation of an all-African student dormitory.” Carr explains, “It was really an undefined idea” that Parker helped clarify.

Some white students who responded to Parker’s survey said the African-American center is a good idea and one they support, but also said they weren’t ready to live in such a center, Parker says. Most minority students have no alternative to living in a predominantly white setting, she notes. “Having centers like this does provide some element of familiarity, like home—a sort of a comfort zone.” For the majority of students, they have that anyway because it’s a majority white institution.

There’s no extra cost for residents who opt for living-learning centers. Parker says—just the cost of regular dorm dwelling. The center doesn’t cost a lot extra for OSU, either, she says. “We build living-learning centers into the budget.” Staff and programming are part of all residence halls anyway. “At this point, the only requirement for living there is interest,” Parker says. But because the center is there for intellectual as well as social benefits, she says residents will be expected to participate in activities.

The project will be evaluated quarterly and students living in the center will be interviewed during that process. Parker says, “By the end of the academic year, officials want to decide on a proposal for full implementation of the center for the fall of 1993. What they come up with, she says, could be in a different building, and could be larger or smaller, depending on interest and participation.

Carr considers 46 participants an encouraging number. He predicts the center will gain popularity as word travels among students that it’s a comfortable place to live.

“Basically, our concern stems from the fact that dorms have a very alienating environment for black students,” Carr says. The cultural differences can be “so fundamental that nobody ever thinks about them.” He explains some black students are questioned by whites about how frequently they wash their hair or are criticized for their taste in music, their communication style or their pro or con views on interracial dating. Dorm living for freshmen, he notes, often is the first time these young people live outside their ethnic group. “A lot of times, when the cultures clash, it’s the black student who’s misunderstood,” he says.

The living-learning center can function as an alternative to High Street on weekend evenings and as a hospitality-free place for members of different ethnic backgrounds to meet, according to Carr. “Once you’re in a position where you don’t have to justify your existence with every breath, the barriers come down,” he says.

Carr anticipates friction early this academic year from white students who will ask why there’s no white dorm on campus. “A, we don’t want a black dorm,” Carr says in response to expected complaints. “And B, what do you think all these dorms are?”

Emily Caldwell is a former editorial intern for Columbus Monthly.
Students find life focused
New living centers at OSU key on specific interests

By Tim Doulin
Dispatch Higher Education Reporter

When it comes right down to it, the goal of Vera Massaquoi and the 45 other students in Ohio State University's African-American Living Learning Center is a simple one. "I am here to get an education just like any other student," said Massaquoi, a black freshman from Cleveland.

Born largely in response to demands by a group of black students and faculty staff members who last spring protested conditions for minorities on campus, the center serves as living quarters and features programs emphasizing black history, culture and politics.

The center is housed on the 10th floor of Lincoln Tower and is open to all students on campus. Current residents are 45 blacks, two whites and one Nigerian.

The center is the newest of what the university calls "academic special-interest programs" offered in campus dormitories. Among them are a center for international and American students and an all-female residence hall with a focus on women's issues.

When you have an institution the size of Ohio State, students who come here need to seek out their peers with similar interests and who they can associate with," said Saundra K. Schuster, assistant dean of student life.

"These centers make a warm and homelike place for students. It takes the size to a manageable environment for them as they feel like they are in a much smaller institution.

Charles Barfield, a freshman from Cincinnati who lives in the African-American center, knows what it is like to be the only black student in a classroom.

"It makes you feel a little uneasy," Barfield said. "It makes you feel alone and alienated. Others can not relate to what you are feeling."

Paintings of black artists hang from the walls of the center, and the camaraderie among the students has created a "family atmosphere," Barfield said.

The emphasis on black culture is an important component.

"I have been studying about my people for a long time. I think it is vital in developing self-esteem," Barfield said.

Massaquoi, a political science major who plans to go to law school and someday practice criminal or corporate law, decided to live at the center primarily to learn more about black culture.

Although she wasn't on campus last spring when many of the black protest rallies were held, Massaquoi appreciates the importance of the center. Students are pulling for one another to do well in the classroom, she said.

"Everyone wants to do everything to make the center work," she said. "It is important to everyone — not just blacks, but everyone who wants to learn about another culture or their own culture."

Also new this fall is the Wellness Living Learning Center, on the 12th floor of Merrill Tower, where students have contracted to live in a smoke- and alcohol-free environment.

That center is part of a national trend among college students toward healthier choices, said Randi Love, program coordinator for student health promotion at OSU.

"Alcohol is still the problem it has always been. But since the 1970s, college students have been moving away from the use of hard drugs and, more recently, we have seen an interest in fitness and better health," Love said.

"I have heard many students say the dorms are not conducive to studying and the environment is not what they would like it to be because of substance abuse."

Students of legal drinking age are allowed to drink alcohol in OSU dorms. Some rooms and suites have been designated smoke-free.

The Wellness Center plans to offer programs on acquaintance rape, nutrition and other issues. Most of the 46 students who live there are under 21.

Some said they didn't realize what they were getting into. Greg Hinke, a freshman from Dayton, describes himself as the "gaines pigs" in the pilot program.

"Most people put down that they wanted to live in a smoke- and alcohol-free environment. Nobody expected this," Hinke said.

"I don't mind it. I just don't follow everything that they say. They can't make you."

Students are on an honor system not to drink and smoke on the floor, and, preferably, not to come home drunk from off-campus bars.

Students may transfer to another dorm, although none has.

"It is working out pretty good. There is nothing wrong with it," said Brian Strub, a freshman from Boardman, Ohio. "It is going to help out during exam time. It's not as rowdy as on other floors."
Center ends successful year; improvements are still needed

By Leslie A. Waddell
Lantern staff writer

While the African-American Living and Learning Center is approaching the end of its pilot year, university officials and residents of the center think it has been successful, but is still in need of some improvements to achieve its mission.

"A lot of quality improvements can happen here," said Chris Washington, hall director for Lincoln House, the home of the center.

The center has done well for a first-year program, said Rebecca Parker, associate director of residence and dining halls. It will continue next year and possibly expand if there is higher student interest, she said.

Currently, the center occupies the 16th floor of Lincoln Tower.

Out of the 46 students residing on the floor, 44 are African-American, one is white and one is an African student from Zimbabwe.

Residency for next year is open to any student interested in living in an environment committed to teaching African-American culture and history.

Research for this type of floor had been done for several years, however, its implementation was forwarded by the emergence of Africans Committed To Improving Our Nation last spring, Parker said.

Ryan Wright, a junior from Dayton and the resident adviser of the center, said a lot has been accomplished in the first year. The residents have had the opportunity to learn more African-American history and culture and receive the social benefits of living in a predominately African-American community.

"For the most part, the freshman students are satisfied because they know nothing different. They have always had a black roommate, and are comfortable here," Wright said.

"The upper class students would like to see more programming," Wright said.

Programs this year have covered a range of topics focusing on the history of Africa, the study of blacks in transition from Africa to America and the history of African-Americans, Wright said.

More programs in African-American experience and history are planned for next year. In addition, a component of community service may be added to the center so that students become involved in the greater African-American community on campus and in Columbus, Parker said.

"I think it provided a good environment because you always had a place that felt like home," said Eve Howell, a freshman from Cleveland. "The floor met my expectations because I now feel comfortable at Ohio State."

Todd Clair, a freshman from Columbus, thought he benefitted most from the strong sense of friendship and community that developed among residents.

Other students were less satisfied with their experience in the center.

"Initially, my expectations of the floor were to gain cultural awareness and knowledge of African-American history, but I don't think that the creators of the floor instituted the programming," said Randy Lobban, a freshman from New York.

"I expected more of an educational learning experience from the floor, but what I really got was social," said another resident who asked not to be identified.

Dana Bruce, a sophomore from Princeton, N.J., said the flaws within the program were insignificant when compared to having the living center at a time when supporters of multiculturalism are challenging the existence of African-American based institutions on campus.

"People on campus may question the validity, but as an African-American, it is important to have an environment conducive to living, learning and being in the Afro-centric perspective," Bruce said.

Parker and Wright said student response will be instrumental to the changes in the program next year. Building a successful living and learning center is a gradual process involving trial and error, Parker said.

"People need to keep in mind that this is a pilot program. The first year may not have met expectations, but we're still striving," Wright said.