



Jason Lowery transferred from Portland State University early in his academic career because the school did not offer a black studies major. He returned to rally support for the major with his twin brother, Cane.



Professor Darrell Millner helped write the proposal to bring a black studies major to Portland State. He thinks the major reflects changing demographics at PSU and a resurgence of student activism. PHOTOS BY DAVID PLECHL/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

# PSU Students Seek Black Studies Major

**Twin brothers are activists on a mission**

BY DAVID PLECHL  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

When Cane Lowery was a freshman at Portland State University, he gave up on the school because it didn't have what he was looking for - a black studies major.

"I went to Tennessee State because they have an accredited black studies program," Cane said. "I wanted to go to a school that had a progressive attitude."

Cane and his twin brother, Jason, intended on graduating from Tennessee, but decided the real challenge was to bring to Portland State its own accredited black studies program.

"I decided I couldn't leave PSU hanging like that," Cane said. "So I decided to come back."

Cane and Jason are now seniors. Cane is the president of PSU's Black Cultural Affairs Board and Jason is the Multicultural Coordinator.

Upon their return, the brothers met with administrators and faculty to iron out logistics. They gauged student support and collected over 7,000 signatures in favor of the major.

"PSU has a mission of diver-



Cane Lowery is the president of the Black Cultural Affairs Board at PSU and has been active in organizing support for a black studies major at the school.

sity," Jason said. "It's very important that we diversify the educational system as well."

While PSU does have black studies curriculum, the school has never offered a black studies major. If the students are successful in launching the program, the school would be the first state-sponsored university in Oregon to offer such a major.

The goal, they say, is to meet the demands of an increasingly diverse student body and ensure that black studies and black history have a firm place in Portland's academic world.

"When I started learning about black history it surprised me in a positive way," Cane said.

He and his brother's discovery of a black world beyond the stereo-

typical media images of hip-hop idols and professional athletes struck a profound nerve.

"When you don't have a sense of who you are, you are in a state of chaos," Cane said.

So far, the proposal has passed the school's curriculum committee and must go before the faculty senate. If approved, it moves on to the Oregon University System board, which can give the final go-ahead or axe the proposal and send the students packing.

But the Lowerys are optimistic.

"We have a tight proposal," said Jason, who counts overall student support as vital in getting the proposal this far.

The faculty senate will vote yes

or no Monday, Feb. 3. Students have scheduled a day of action on the same day to show their support and rally behind the cause that appears to be gaining momentum.

"This is not a push solely by black students, but by all students on this campus," Cane said.

The proposal is not asking for additional resources.

"It won't make huge changes in the curriculum, it will just mean an accredited course," Jason said.

Darrell Millner, a professor of black history and black film history at PSU, helped write the proposal with department chair Kofi Agorsah but gives most of the credit to the students.

"If the students had not pushed it, it would not be to the point it's at now," he said.

Millner said the actual idea for the major has been floating around the school for the last 15 years, but this is the first time a proposal has been written and submitted.

Millner said the support from students represents the changing nature of the state's demographics and a reemergence of social activism.

"Students are looking around and seeing some things they want to change," he said. "As demographics change, universities need to change to keep up with them."

Millner said that most universities with black studies major are

located within major black population centers. Portland's African American population remains relatively small so the opportunity to have the major is particularly unique.

He also insists that black studies are not only for blacks. He said students of varying ethnic backgrounds have just as much or more to gain.

For example, he said few students realize that of the first 12 presidents, nine were slaveholders while serving in the White House.

"If you've left that out of the equation, you've limited your ability to understand the history and these events," Millner said.

## Students of Color Host Conference

Agenda to examine issues that impact communities

The Oregon Students of Color Coalition will sponsor a conference examining issues that impact communities of color at its second annual conference Friday, Feb. 7 through Sunday, Feb. 9 at Oregon State University in Corvallis.

The goal of the coalition is to strengthen communities through shared experiences and expertise on a variety of issues and challenges, promoting an inclusive anti-racist agenda. The coalition's vision is to increase students of color power through education, organizing and action.

Themes for this year's conference include the exploration of environmental racism, the prison industrial complex, issues for women,

gay and international communities of color, labor justice for communities of color and reproductive rights for communities of color.

Over 200 students of color from across Oregon are expected to ex-

plore these issues with organizers, trainers and educators from across the country.

For more information regarding registration and programming, visit [www.orstudents.org/oscc](http://www.orstudents.org/oscc)

## New Villa Plans

The Housing Authority of Portland will host a public design workshop for the New Columbia redevelopment on Saturday, Feb. 8, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the Columbia Villa Community Room located at 8920 N. Woolsey Ave.

From 9 a.m. to 11:15 a.m., the workshop will feature discussions of design issues including housing prototypes, proposed street layouts and the location and size of parks. Breakout sessions from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. will explore park and tree preservation and block and lot layout. HAP will also seek public comment on environmental issues to aid in the completion of its environmental review process.

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