

Report of Grant Activity: Experiential learning for the WCU Urban Teacher Track

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Our Innovation in Diversity grant money was used to fund two outings: 1) A Black history tour in Philadelphia’s Old City followed by an early dinner at a Black owned, black cuisine restaurant; and 2) a Mural Arts Tour followed by dim sum in Chinatown.

These outing were intended to promote a greater understanding of social identities, inequities, multiculturalism, inclusion, and social justice for students, faculty and in the Urban Teacher Track as well as alumni currently teaching in urban schools. These experiences were designed to further the cross-cultural competence training that ran through WCU’s new [Urban Teacher Track](#) that began in Fall of 2022. The Urban Teacher Track is a series of courses for Early Grades, Middle Grades and dual major students who have an openness to teaching in urban, racially, economically, linguistically, culturally marginalized communities and for engaging with issues of equity, social justice, and racial justice in education.

Students were encouraged to use public transportation to the tours. Some did this and most others carpoled.

I think it’s fair to say that we as a group were delighted by the Black history tour. I saw one student a few days later and he told me “I can’t stop telling everybody about that.” (See chart below)

The meal at the Black owned/Black cuisine restaurant was a jubilant debrief. With about half of the group being African American, the discussion often turned to students’ home cooking.

Responses to a survey regarding the Black history tour and Black cuisine restaurant (N=9)	Not at all	Somewhat	Very much
To what extent did the Black History Tour and dinner increase opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue and/or learning among students and faculty?		1	8
To what extend did these experiences provide educational opportunities for you to have a greater understanding of social identities, inequities, multiculturalism, inclusion, and social justice?			9
To what extend did these experiences create and enhance opportunities to build self-awareness, knowledge, and skills to interact effectively with aspects of diversity, inclusion, culture, and global differences?			9

Here are some comments from the survey on the Black history tour and restaurant:

Great time to interact with professors we don’t really get to see while at WCU. - Quarteniiy Williams

Having the walking tour was like when you put pencil to paper- the knowledge and experience embeds deeper into your mind- there was a full body presence that asked of my focus. The restaurant felt like a step forward in learning and understanding more and being present and experiencing culture that I am not as familiar with and that it was present day after the history walk offered further perspective. (Name not listed)

I think the tour provided a context for the rich history and lineage of Black Americans situated in Philadelphia. Most of our historical understanding of Philadelphia is based on our "Founding Fathers" with little attention to contributions, leadership, and legacy of Black Americans. – Dr. Daris McInnis (Faculty, Literacy Dept.)

This initial outing diverged slightly from the original plan insofar as we did not go to North Philadelphia to Tierra Columbiana Latinx restaurant and Taller Puertoriqueno Latinx art center.. On the suggestion Daris McInnis and Tiffany Bennett we decided to go to Cray Taste, the Black cuisine restaurant. We made this change because it fit better with the content of the tour and it was in walking distance of the tour’s location.

In the spring our second outing involved a Mural Arts walking followed by dim sum in Chinatown. Philadelphia has over 4,000 murals making it, arguably, the mural capital of the world. The tour included discussion of history of oppressed groups in Philadelphia, their struggles for justice and the community involvement in the creation of the murals.

One dimension of these field trips is an experience of cultural difference. Dim Sum (Chinese brunch--literally “drink tea”) uses a format wholly different than at most restaurants in the US. Patrons sit at large, round tables, sometimes with people from a different group, while the wait-staff rolls carts, each with different dishes, from table to table offering those items. Often wait-staff do not speak English, so those of us who do not speak Mandarin communicate with non-spoken gestures. A diner says “thank you” by tapping a cupped hand on the table. The food at dim sum is different than other Chinese food so it will likely be new for many students. Before we entered the restaurant I briefed the group on how dim sum works, recounted my confusion the first time I participated and talked about the practice of cultural humility.

Here’s one student’s comment about the mural arts tour:

This helped me tune in to the environment I was in-- the city and how it is... more than that; that this is where People LIVE. Why is our society lens viewing the city in an objectifying manner or "less than" when we think of people who are living in the city. Neighborhoods were mentioned, how there are communities that work together to beautify and stand up for the buildings and streets that are home. I appreciate having this reminder and want to keep understanding and rewriting the narrative that cultural experiences are paths of life and that is the make up of our world.

I’m not sure why but I didn’t get much of a response to my survey following the Mural Arts / Dim Sum trip. Here are the results from the survey (I’m not sure why I the number of respondents is low!)

Responses to a survey regarding the Mural Arts Tour and dim sum in Chinatown (N=5)	Not at all	Somewhat	Very much
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To what extent did the Mural Arts Tour and dim sum / brunch increase opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue and/or learning among students and faculty?			7
To what extent did these experiences provide educational opportunities for you to have a greater understanding of social identities, inequities, multiculturalism, inclusion, and social justice?			7
To what extent did these experiences create and enhance opportunities to build self-awareness, knowledge, and skills to interact effectively with aspects of diversity, inclusion, culture, and global differences?			7

The one aspect of the tours that was disappointing was the lack of alumni participation. One of my goals for the Urban Teacher Track is to build relationships across education students who are in the early stages of their work, those who are student teachers and those alumni working in Urban Schools. There are many reasons I want to connect to alumni but two of the most important are to gain wisdom about what has worked for them as early career teachers and to gain information about what schools can support them if they are employed there. While there were three alumni who signed up for the Black history tour all cancelled at the last minute. Alas, first year teachers are very busy.

Thank you for supporting this work. It was great success.