

From: [Campus Climate Proposal form](#)
To: [Libby Peterek](#); [Carrie Olson](#)
Subject: New submission from Campus Climate Proposals
Date: Thursday, April 21, 2016 9:32:07 PM

First name:

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Group name (if applicable):

Birds of Paradise Blogs

What is your affiliation with UW-Madison? For group submissions, please respond for main contact.

- Student (including undergraduate, graduate, professional)

Describe the concept. If already in use here or elsewhere, please indicate this.

We propose that UW-Madison funds a new online publication, under WUD Publications, that gives all diverse and minority students a voice. This online publication, Birds of Paradise Blogs, aims to cater to the entire student population of UW-Madison by amplifying the voices of students who understand the trials and triumphs of being different from the 'status quo'. These student bloggers will be diverse in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, socioeconomic status, ability, experience, etc. Birds of Paradise Blogs would aim to stand up for all students on campus, while giving each blogger the platform to establish their own unique voice. The blog is named for the gorgeous Birds of Paradise that inhabit the island of Papua New Guinea. The 39 distinct species are among the most beautiful creatures on earth, and a phenomenal example of adaptation due to circumstance. Diverse students, like Birds of Paradise, are constantly forced to alter aspects of their life in order to make themselves more acceptable to society. Birds of Paradise Blogs recognizes these efforts, and aims to create a space where the stories of students who have been forced to change themselves have a chance to shine.

This concept is based off an original online publication through Oberlin College, but is also infused with the additional importance of having it focus primarily on minority students. Oberlin Blogs is a blog site, run by Oberlin staff member Ma'ayan Plaut, that features blogs of current Oberlin students. There are around 20-25 students who write their own blog posts under the topics of 'About Oberlin', 'Learning & Academics', 'Student Life & Community', 'Living Here', and 'Applying'. There is at least one new student post per week.

We want our publication to be minority-driven, minority-created, and minority-focused. We want to give minorities a safe space to be creative, document their feelings, and express their experience of campus life.

Main Idea

A set of 15-25 student bloggers who will publish at least two blog posts a month about their life here at UW-Madison. Each student blogger will come up with a central theme for their blog, an idea or concept that they want to base all of their blog posts on. The theme should tie into what makes each blogger a minority on campus.

We believe this proposal will help white students on campus see that minority students are just like them, experiencing the same trials of every college student. However, it will also show disparities between college experiences, which will be eye-opening to many members of the campus community.

Eventually, Birds of Paradise Blogs would like to accept submissions from all minority students that pertain to a central theme that changes each month. Submissions can be in nearly any media format in order to encourage participation. This publication will be dynamic, reflecting student voice by our ability to accept and post a variety of media formats such as blogs, gifs, cartoons, audio recordings, poetry, short fiction, photography, etc.

This component of the proposal is what will really open up Birds of Paradise to the entire multicultural community of UW-Madison. Once again, these submissions don't have to be explicitly tied to the students' experience as a minority on campus; they just have to reflect the student's authentic experience pertaining to the monthly theme.

How would this affect cultural change on campus?

This proposal will affect cultural change on campus through a twofold approach:

This publication will first and foremost be for minority students. It will be created to give some minorities students a well-paying job, to give others a platform to authentically document their college experience, and to give all minority students on campus a safe space to be themselves. Honesty, open thought, and expression are all fundamental when working to bridge our differences. Today's campus climate hinders that expression for minorities. This absence of a powerful, genuine minority voice may be part of what has led to the emboldened expression of racism and bias at UW-Madison. Currently, there are few outlets on campus for minority students to speak out against injustices without being faced with some form of backlash. The two major papers on campus have no set spaces for racial/ethnic minority students to share their personal stories. That in itself is shocking. It is confusing and discouraging that nothing has been done about the discrepancy. Social media, such as Facebook or Yik Yak, is always an option, and many students take advantage of those platforms. But it is more advantageous to collect the thoughts and ideas of students, who currently see social media as the only outlet for their anger and frustration, and aggregate them in a common location that is easily discovered and shareable to other students. Birds of Paradise is an outlet, a collector of these stories of hurt and anguish, but also stories of triumph and celebration, in the lives of minority students. Social media is largely driven by reactionary responses, many done anonymously or hidden behind a fake profile. Birds of Paradise would help to lead and set a course for increased understanding of cultural differences through thoughtful, authored posts. Diversity centers on campus, such as the MSC or the CCE, are great resources, but minority students often feel disconnected from them. Because there are only a few internship or student job positions available within these organizations, minority students feel a lack of community, viewing these organizations as solely resource centers. Students will come and attend a few events here and there, but don't get that specific feeling of belonging. By publishing their viewpoint, Birds of Paradise offers any minority student intellectual validation and a safe space on campus to come and work through any conflicting emotions or tension they might have about UW-Madison, while also allowing them a place to celebrate their accomplishments in the company of other supportive minorities.

Focusing on minority students benefits white students on campus as well as in terms of cultural change. Returning to the use of social media, often times the most inflammatory and unapologetic posts are shared more frequently than the smaller, soft-spoken posts. While this might seem fine to some, it allows white students to judge the minority population based on a single post they might have seen online, and continuously perpetuate harmful stereotypes about certain minority groups and anger. However, Birds of Paradise aims to demolish this way of thought. White students won't be able to come to this site and just read one bold post; they will have to sift through personal blogs, think-pieces about racism on campus, and personal milestones in minority students' lives. These posts will represent the multi-dimensional experience of minority students. We hope that by reading this publication, white students will be able to recognize that minority students are just like them, while at the same time realizing the disparities that exist between their experiences. If white students can view minority students as equals, cultural change on campus will shift in enormously beneficial ways.

While Birds of Paradise Blogs might initially have a racial/ethnic minority majority of student bloggers, it is also seeking out and accepting all different sorts of 'minority' students, whether it be socioeconomic, political, nationality, experience, etc. A hurdle to overcome will be getting white students to read these blogs, but we believe by opening the variety of bloggers to all different types of minorities, white students

will be more attracted and comfortable reading the blogs. If white students can pick out a couple commonalities between themselves and bloggers, we believe that they'd be more inclined to read.

For new ideas, how would you propose piloting this idea to see if it would work? If the idea is already in use at UW-Madison, how would you propose expanding or altering this program for greater impact?

We believe that Birds of Paradise is a proposal that cannot wait stagnant in a pilot program for any period of time. As evidenced by enormous amounts of data, testimonies, and shows of support from Oberlin Blogs, student blogs are incredibly beneficial on campus. Therefore, we believe implementing a minority-based version must and will be able to be completed quickly. Below is an estimate of the timeline for Birds of Paradise:

Timeline

May/Summer 2016

Blogging network is set up

Outreach to new freshmen bloggers via Student Job Center, class Facebook page, etc.

Outreach to upperclassmen bloggers via multicultural organizations, Student Job Center, class Facebook pages, personal connections, etc.

Outreach the following groups has already been completed:

Thai Student Association

Working Class Student Union

Nepali Student Association

LGBT Campus Center

Muslim Student Association

GUTS CE (For international students)

Black Student Union

Once the proposal is approved, we will go through a more intensive form of recruitment, utilizing the outlets previously listed.

An office space is located and furnished accordingly

Online writing training resources are created and distributed to all student bloggers in hopes that they will be able to post before school starts

September 2016

Brochures and flyers created to distribute around campus and raise awareness

Additional training sessions in writing given to bloggers

Continued publicization of Birds of Paradise through various medias

As one can see, most work will need to be done during the summer leading up to the 2016-2017 school year. We are passionate about this program, and are willing to work during the summer to ensure that Birds of Paradise is nothing short of perfection, ready and able to be fully in use during the 2016-2017 school year.

What resources would be needed to implement your suggestion?

Hourly student pay for 4 students working 10-20 hours a week.

A starting budget to pay for food, website/technological necessities, blogger 'bonding activities', writing training sessions, etc.

Medium-sized office space located in either the SAC or Red Gym. Because this office will need to be a working center for publication as well as a safe space to gather and think it will need to be large enough to accommodate 15-20 people at maximum capacity.

Advertisement of publication on all UW-Madison sites concerning diversity and culture, as well as coverage on UW-Madison's main web page.

Of course, we are open to negotiations or alterations on all resources.

If this proposal was developed in partnership with any other organizations, please list them below.

Birds of Paradise Blogs would like to be created as another WUD Publication. WUD Publications provides leadership opportunities in publishing along with the celebration and promotion of reading and writing on campus. There are currently 9 WUD Publications in circulation, and range in topics from music to science/technology. There is no publication that specifically focuses on minorities and diversity, and Birds of Paradise Blogs would like to change that. However, there are costs and expenses associated with the creation of Birds of Paradise Blogs that are outlined below.

We propose that while Birds of Paradise Blogs become another WUD Publication, it have another office either within the Red Gym or the SAC. We believe that Birds of Paradise Blogs needs office space because of the sheer size of bloggers that we are hoping to achieve, as well as the amount of work that needs to be done by the executive board in a single space. Because Birds of Paradise Blogs would be funded by a source other than the Wisconsin Union, it would be considered an "out of house" publication. Therefore, we propose that we create an office space within the Red Gym for student bloggers and the managing staff of Birds of Paradise Blogs to be able to congregate in a single, comfortable place. This office space, serving as the main hub for Birds of Paradise Blogs, would also serve as a meeting place for the partnerships that Birds of Paradise Blogs will pursue with other multicultural and diverse student orgs on campus.

While the editors-in-chief of other WUD Publications, as well as their writing staff, are unpaid, we believe that this cannot be the case for Birds of Paradise Blogs. The student bloggers are attempting to take on an enormous task: educating an entire college campus on the trials and tribulations of being a minority in terms of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender/sexuality, nationality, language, experience/ability, etc. For so long, minorities have been doing this work pro bono, educating because they are forced to, educating because they are seen as representatives of entire minority groups. We firmly believe that this cannot go on any longer. We need to show students that educating their peers is not something they should be doing for free. First and foremost, we are at college to get an education, not to give one free of charge. By paying each blogger a student hourly wage of no more than 5 hours/week, it will show students that their voices are seriously valued and needed. Furthermore, we believe that the University needs to acknowledge the importance of creative work. An article in the Badger Herald recently pointed out the funding disparities between STEM and humanities fields, noting that the National Science Foundation gave science and engineering programs around \$500 million for research, in comparison to a measly \$26 million for non-science and engineering programs (Badger Herald). Creative thought is decreasing in value in modern day society, and we believe that UW-Madison should not follow suite. We need to recognize the importance and value of writing and humanities by compensating our bloggers. We believe that we need to pay our management staff a student hourly wage for the same reason. These students will be given the task of editing and maintaining Birds of Paradise Blogs, and will also be bloggers themselves. It's important for the University to recognize and compensate the work of these students, who are willingly taking on a complex and sensitive humanities-based job.

Please use this space for any additional information about your proposal that you wish to share:

Supporters of Proposal

Ma'ayan Plaut - Manager of Social Strategy and Projects in the Office of Communications at Oberlin College

Ma'ayan runs Oberlin Blogs, and has indicated her willingness to help with strategy, content, and the 'human' pieces of creating Birds of Paradise. Before heading Oberlin Blogs, Ma'ayan actually wrote for them during her time as an undergraduate at Oberlin College. She is well versed and advanced in her understandings of both blogging and running a blog website.

John Lucas - Executive Director of University Communications at University of Wisconsin-Madison & Nate Moll - Social Media Specialist on the Editorial Team of University Communications at University of Wisconsin-Madison

John and Nate are supportive of Birds of Paradise Blogs and are happy to be a technical and content resource for the online publication. Although they cannot commit to actually building out the blog network, John and Nate will be open and available to answer any technical questions that may pop up as Birds of Paradise Blogs is created.

_____ of WUD Publications

_____ has expressed willingness to help Birds of Paradise Blogs go through the proposal process at WUD Publications with the hope of getting it passed and put into motion by the end of this academic year. She is a supporter of the blog and will help get the blog set up within the WUD Publication structure in preparation for its pilot year of 2016-17.

_____ WUD Publications

_____ WUD Publications _____

_____ is very willing to make this proposal come to life. She is dedicated and ready to work over the summer to ensure that this blog is ready to use by the next year.

2014 Data from Oberlin Blogs (link)

There were 54,509 visitors from 126 countries visiting 199,671 pages of Oberlin Blogs

15,422 sessions were from visitors who came to the blogs between 9-200 times, with 3,795 of those sessions coming from people who visited the blogs over 200 times in the past year

13,384 sessions lasted over three minutes (which is the average it takes to read a blog post), with 1,393 sessions lasting over a half hour

27% of the sessions happened via a mobile device

10,676 sessions began because of Facebook, 1,514 sessions began because of Twitter, and 607 sessions began because of Tumblr

As you can tell from these statistics, Oberlin Blogs is popular. Visitors didn't just click on the site briefly; they actively engaged with the blogs over an extended period of time. Oberlin Blogs also received a great deal of attention from social media sites Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. It is safe to assume that these statistics would be transferrable to UW-Madison, as we have a large percentage of college students who like to utilize social media as well.