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Black Student Union conference covers culture

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In an effort to increase awareness and understanding about African American history and culture, the Black Student Union held their second annual Student Leadership Conference this weekend.

The free event, which the group has been planning since last summer, took place Saturday in accordance with the organization's 40th anniversary.

The conference featured speakers in five workshops that showcased this year's theme, "An Awakening: Redefining an Unclaimed Legacy in a Period of Complacency."

According to group members, the objective

of this year's event was to acknowledge current issues that the African American community faces in order to enable changes in those areas.

"The theme of the First Annual Student Leadership Conference was 'Forever Forward,' so we need to know the problems in order to do that," said Ekua Mends-Aidoo, BSU president.

The workshops featured topics such as the Black church's role in the upbringing of community youth, Black consciousness, ascribed definitions of African-American "male" and "female," the prison industrial system and money management.

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Prachi Bawaskar / The Spectrum

The BSU passed out documents to all students before the workshops began to discuss issues pertaining to African American culture.

✕ Some issues discussed grim, but many encouraging

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The key speaker of the event, James Hampton Jr., summed up the objective of the conference as an attempt to "bring about a change."

Hampton, a Cornell University Graduate, has been engaged in Ancient African studies for the past forty years.

"I wanted to expose people to Africa, as it has been kept out of the education system," Hampton said.

He hopes to deter young African-Americans away from the slave mentality and teach them to appreciate their rich history.

"I want to inject positive into the young because I feel many don't have an identity," he said. "They have a lack of self-knowledge and no one wants to identify with slavery. I believe that their self-esteem will be high after learning 'who they are.'"

Hampton discussed how some

young African-Americans have no idea about their own culture and the greatness it holds.

"Africans have been here for thousands of years, we were the first people on Earth," Hampton said. "A whole group has been eliminated from the education curriculum."

The discussion about "Black Consciousness" and the other discussion workshops helped people to question and discuss the needs of the Black community.

"Consciousness is needed to understand the present state of things and to stop the way of things are now. Awareness gets us to reform," said TuWanner Cleveland, a graduate social work student.

Some issues discussed were grim, but many of the conversations encouraged positive outlooks for African-Americans.

One of the largest workshops was concerning the different

definitions of an African-American man versus an African-American woman.

"It was important to have addressed how the media marginalizes minorities," said Erica Myrttil, junior political science major. "There is a very direct correlation between the media and how African-Americans are perceived. It was very informative and I liked hearing the different perspectives."

The workshops discussing the effects of the Black church and on the Black consciousness helped close the day event.

"I enjoyed the workshops, and it was well organized, and the speakers were very knowledgeable," said Ashley Reed, a political science major. "I feel proud and I hope this will be a traditional that will continue here at UB."

According to Mends-Aidoo, the BSU held the event because they wanted to provide a pool of information so that the commu-

nity may use the new resources to conquer present problems they face.

"As a people, we need to know how things work, recognize things in the community that need a push, educate members of the community and then, take a course of action," Mends-Aidoo said.

The BSU feels that by holding conferences and educational programs they are accomplishing their task.

"I have an interest in diversity and an interest to understand different ethnic groups," said George Pratt, BSU member. "Being Black and being an international student, I feel it is important to attend things like this. It was an opportunity to mingle and to learn."

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