

Cultural groups exist at UNC as unifying outlets for minorities, yet they face the questions of how far to extend their missions on campus.

# multi-DIMENSIONAL

## Outreach, Education Define Organizations

By ELIZABETH BREYER  
Staff Writer

A UNC-Chapel Hill student who enters the Great Hall of the Student Union at various times during the year can be transported to another part of the globe, courtesy of campus cultural groups.

Traditional foods beckon invitingly from tables as dancers spin on stage, accompanied by the exotic costumes and music from other countries. What isn't as apparent is the work these groups do to promote their culture when not in costume.

Although the majority of their time and resources are spent on the dramatic nights of cultural celebration, groups also bring in minority speakers, institute diverse educational programs and travel into the community to volunteer.

Groups frequently stage one-time events such as festival nights to open their doors to the community and to allow any interested individual to become a part of their culture, if only briefly.

These featured events are often highly visible on campus and attract a large following that might not attend more frequent meetings.

"Noche Latina is such a big community event and a really important fund-raiser," said Alyssa Boyer, a member of the Carolina Hispanic Association's Executive Council.

Then there are the smaller cultural groups that lack the resources to maintain numerous programs. For them, staging cultural nights that attract the student body with food, dancing and costumes is not only fun, but also a way to familiarize new people with their traditions.

"We have Vietnamese Night planned and are trying to make it an annual event — it shows culture, traditional and contemporary, and is open to everyone," said Vietnamese Student Association member Luann Tang.

CHisPA also hosts a cultural fair, Noche Latina, designed to educate the community, and Sangam annually stages a event called Namaste with informational booths and cultural performances.

But Sangam Vice President Mehul Raval said it was critical to expand cultural interaction by planning programs that also delve into the academic realm. "I think a more service- or academically oriented program is still giving back to the

ethnic community), but is doing it in a unique way different than just a song or dance," he said.

This desire culminated in the creation of the Mahatma Gandhi Fellowship, which provides \$3,000 for South Asian study to any full-time returning student at UNC-CH, Duke University or N.C. State University.

"The subject is unlimited — you can go anywhere in the world to address anything as long as it relates to South Asia," Shah said. Sangam also plans to increase the fellowship, eventually turning it into an endowment. Raval said the group was attempting to raise \$125,000, which would provide \$6,000 in annual interest that would be used to award fellowships.

But this type of program is still rare on campus. "If our council finds out about any scholarships, we let everyone in the group know, but we don't offer any of our own," said CHisPA Secretary Eleina Hurd.

Even though academic scholarship programs are not yet common, groups still find ways to spread their message. Weekly BSM-sponsored roundtable talks about minority issues at the Sonja H. Stone Black Cultural Center, bringing in intellectuals, politicians and other minority members.

The Asian American Center for Development, an umbrella organization for campus Asian groups, also attempts to enrich the academic life of the University through cultural education. "We held an Asian Faculty Reception to promote enrollment in Asian classes, a fair to showcase classes for Asian and non-Asian students to see what's offered, check out the syllabus and talk to the professors," said Asian-American Center for

Development Director Neil Kataria.

Another main focus of these groups' activity has been helping members of their culture who live in the local area. A popular type of outreach program reaches children from local schools, partnering them with UNC buddies.

For example, the BSM works with a family resource center in Carrboro. "We tutor and mentor teens and middle school students, trying to let them know there are people who look like them in college and that they have options," said Joycelyn Curry, BSM off-campus coordinator.

Many BSM members address educational outreach through a program sponsored by the BCC, said Jokena Smith, head of the BSM cultural diversity committee. "A lot of our members are very active with the BCC's 'Communitiversity' program, which focuses on teaching kids to read and teaching them about black history," she said.

Sangam also meets its young neighbors

through an after-school outreach program. "We take students from here there to give them information on South Asia, the basic food, climate, clothes, culture and information to get them intrigued about that part of the world," Shah said.

He said this outreach program combined fun and games with cultural education. "We dress kids up in traditional outfits and take pictures, teach them traditional dances with music or bring South Asian food to munch on," he said.

CHisPA also organizes a prominent buddy program, known as CHisPA Chicos. First-through fifth-graders of Hispanic heritage apply for a UNC partner, who spends a minimum of two hours a week one-on-one with them.

"Some kids who come here are in complete culture shock. I have seen my little buddy grow so much — she wouldn't talk to me at first, in Spanish or English, and now she is just the most animated kid. It's been really amazing," Boyer said.

The Asian center is also involved in a campaign to encourage students and nearby residents of Asian heritage to return their Census 2000 forms.

Part of CHisPA's volunteer work includes visiting hospitals to translate Spanish and hosting charlas, or chat sessions open to students and community members who want to improve their Spanish.

But not every campus group can plan elaborate ways to provide opportunities outside the scope of their meetings because they are limited by resources and the size of their membership.

Kajal Desai, president of the Hindu Students Association, also said her group did not have the resources necessary for continued outreach.

"As of now, our group is really small," she said. "We don't really have a solid enough base to expand too far into the community."

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DTH FILE PHOTOS

Students perform a Vietnamese dance at the annual event Journey into Asia (above), which is sponsored by the Asian Students Association. Dancers compete at the Aaj Ka Dhamaka cultural competition held at the Carolina Theatre to raise funds for the UNC Mahatma Gandhi Fellowship (below). Both events serve to celebrate culture with food and entertainment, while also educating the community about campus minority groups.

## Groups Balance Identity With Inclusion

By KAREY WUTKOWSKI  
Staff Writer

On a predominantly and historically white campus, many of UNC's minority students turn to cultural groups for interaction with people of similar backgrounds.

But most cultural groups bear the task of both targeting a particular ethnic group and emanating an image of a more broad-based appeal.

Matthew Shaw, the co-public relations coordinator for the Black Student Movement, said that while the BSM made efforts to reach out to nonblack students, the group's main focus was getting black students involved in the group. "The BSM was founded to promote minority issues," he said. "It's an outlet for expressing black ideals of culture, and it's a means for black students to get together."

Sangam, the South Asian awareness organization, also extols its primary goal as promoting the issues of the minority student population it represents. "We try to establish a network among South Asians," said Sangam President Susan Kansagra.

The membership of the group is primarily South Asian, Kansagra said, with about 5 percent of membership belonging to another ethnicity.

But she said the group's main purpose was to foster South Asian understanding. "We try to educate the campus and communicate South Asian issues and culture," Kansagra said.

Neera Makwana, a member of Carolina Hispanic Association's Executive Council, said CHisPA was also geared to promoting the minority group it targeted but that its membership was not primarily Hispanic.

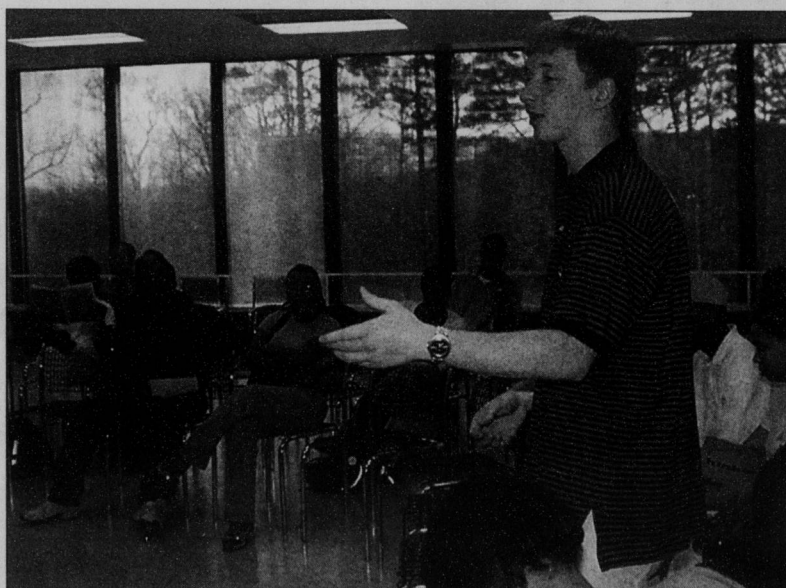
One way the group acquired its diverse membership was by offering activities that would attract a variety of students, Makwana said. "An example is salsa dancing," she said. "So many people love to do that. It's one tie to emphasize between all different people."

Shaw said the BSM also promoted racial diversity through the broad appeal of its subgroups, such as the dance troupes and gospel choir. "Gospel choir is our largest subgroup," he said. "A lot of nonblack people come just because they like gospel music."

Shaw said having nonblack students in the BSM was essential to its cause of promoting black issues.

"It's a moot point to express culture inwardly," he said. "You're then limited as to how far you can go."

As a two-year member of the BSM, Student Body



DTH/MARGARET SOUTHERN

Student Body President-elect Brad Matthews speaks at a Black Student Movement meeting. BSM officials say the group reaches out to include nonblack members of the campus community.

President-elect Brad Matthews said he took the time to attend a couple of meetings and found his membership to be a growing experience. "It gave me a new perspective when I was quite often the only white person in the room," he said. "I would recommend to anyone to just go to a meeting and find out what they're about."

Another group that boasted of providing a diverse environment was Masala, an umbrella organization for numerous minority groups on campus.

"We include everybody," said Masala's President Jennifer Ekeleme. "We don't target one group. When people get in one group, they tend to not try to venture out of that group. With Masala, you work with everybody of different cultural groups."

Still, some students said they felt detached from the

subculture of minority groups that exist on campus. Junior Michael Blas, a white student, said his impression was that cultural groups seemed exclusive.

"I think one reason people don't go to meetings is because the people are different culturally," he said. "They don't get into it because they can't relate."

Makwana said this perceived barrier was a problem for cultural groups despite efforts to appeal to the general student body. "It can be intimidating when you feel the majority of people in the group is of one background," she said.

"People tend to draw to people of their own kind."

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### POLITICAL

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group should be politically involved, said Sangam President Susan Kansagra.

"I think we've come a long way since then. We put in this political committee, and now (the movement) is building."

Many members of the group formerly opposed to political involvement have changed their minds after issues arose that interested them, she said.

Kansagra said the group would move toward a more political agenda, working to become more informed about issues.

"Eventually Sangam will become more politically active, but you can't be politically active until you are politically aware," she said.

Neil Kataria, the president of the Asian-American Center for Development, an umbrella group for Asian groups on campus, recognizes that the voice of his group might not be as loud as others', but still insists that the needs of Asian students be heard.

"Does there need to be a freestanding Asian American Center? I don't think so, but there need to be more resources," Kataria said.

Some of those new resources that Asian groups are working to acquire are more classes that cover Asian-American history and language and more Asian-American professors.

The individual Asian groups cannot bring about major change on their own, but the center allows them to combine their efforts, Kataria said.

A Hindi-Urdu combined minor was approved in September and will be added to the curriculum next year, said Sangam Vice President Mehul Raval.

Group members surveyed students and gathered registration statistics before they got approval for the plan from the curriculum in Asian Studies.

"That was a great step in the right direction. It shows that the administration is willing to listen," Kataria said.

Other minority groups choose to be selectively involved in political or social

issues, dealing with specific incidents as they occur, instead of maintaining a constant political presence.

Members of the Vietnamese Student Association recently had to decide whether to make a political statement against former Republican presidential candidate John McCain. "McCain made a racist slur against the Vietnamese. He was talking about his experiences in (the Vietnam) war, and called us 'gooks.' To other people it doesn't seem really hurtful, but it's a big deal to us," said VSA Co-president Hien Tran.

VSA members decided against taking action because McCain eventually recanted his statement under pressure from other national minority groups.

Despite being somewhat involved, the group remains essentially social, Tran said. "If we needed to go further, we would. (We take action) whenever something comes up that needs attention," said VSA Co-president Danny Williams.

Williams said the organization didn't want to lose focus of the group's main purpose — to inform people about Vietnamese culture.

CHisPA, a smaller cultural organization, also chooses to get involved when the opportunity arises.

There was an anti-Hispanic movement by the Klu Klux Klan in Siler City, but the group decided not to get involved. "(The KKK members) wanted us to go there, and I personally didn't want to add to the fire," Makwana said.

Still the group said they would like to become more politically involved in the future, Makwana said.

And other groups chose to completely stay out of the political spotlight and focus solely on promoting awareness.

Masala President Jennifer Ekeleme said that although the group was not currently politically involved, it might choose to be in the future.

"Our main focus is to educate the campus about minority issues on campus," Ekeleme said. "Were trying to serve as a basis for everybody getting together. It's more of an open climate."