UMOJA HOUSE WILL OPEN THIS FALL AT KALAMAZOO COLLEGE

Umoja, which means unity in the Swahili language, is the name of a newly designated housing unit at Kalamazoo College. It will be available to African and African American students with the opening of fall quarter, September 26.

The Umoja House was established to provide a supportive environment where African and African American students can have space for themselves on a predominantly white campus.

When President Bryan announced the creation of the Umoja House, he said, “I believe that approval of the proposal responds to a very real student need, acknowledges the promise for enhanced, student-driven intercultural programming, and contributes to an environment to which more underrepresented students can be recruited and within which more can be successfully retained.”

According to Vaughn Maatman, associate dean for residential life, students presented the proposal in winter 1993. “We went through a very careful decision-making process about the house,” he says, noting that many GLCA schools have long provided similar kinds of housing for their students.

Maatman, who will serve as an advisor with Jeanne Baraka-Love, director of multicultural affairs, and others, adds: “I’m absolutely in favor of it. I’ve been
with this since the beginning and I think it will create a positive environment—a place where these students can find support within a predominantly white campus and its challenges. It can also be a real spark for multicultural programs.”

Those who apply for residency in Umoja House must be in good standing with the Black Student Organization. Says Peter Gathje, assistant professor of religion and associate chaplain, “One of the purposes of the house is to give African American students a place where they can gather so they really have time, space, and energy to develop programs of outreach to the larger community.

“This can be a place where students offer support to one another and informally brainstorm, rather than simply at BSO meetings.”

In truth, the Umoja House will not be a separate dwelling, but will be located on the first floor of Trowbridge Hall. “Trowbridge can be a staging ground where we can see how things go,” Maatman says. “If we see commitment, we will move the Umoja House to a freestanding house, and the next group of students that wants a house can move in. We’ve already received a request from a group of Asian students.”

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