

# #BBUM goes viral on Twitter

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By Sam Gringlas ([/people/gringlas/Sam Gringlas](/people/gringlas/Sam%20Gringlas)), Daily Staff Reporter  
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University students took to Twitter in droves Tuesday afternoon to share their experiences as Black students in Ann Arbor and bring attention to issues of race and diversity on campus using the hashtag #BBUM.

“Being Black at the University of Michigan has many shades and many levels to what someone might want to speak on it. It can go from someone being the only Black person in their class to someone with no problems at all.”  
-LSA senior Eric Gavin

The campaign, initiated by the University’s Black Student Union, has built up over the past few days before trending nationally on Twitter Tuesday. The hashtag gained momentum after the student organization distributed an e-mail to community members and other campus groups encouraging them to participate in the online conversation.

LSA senior Tyrell Collier, BSU’s president, said the #BBUM campaign was planned to raise awareness of the experiences of Black students and for the BSU to collect subjective data it can couple with University statistics to address pressing issues Black students face.

Collier said BSU encouraged students to tweet both negative and positive experiences, though the tweets have been predominantly negative, which he expected.

He said the issue is especially pressing on campus because while the University frequently discusses ways to increase diversity, many communities have yet to witness tangible results.

“I would like to see the lives of Black students valued more,” Collier said.

By 10 p.m., over 10,000 tweets included the hashtag from Ann Arbor and beyond.

“I don’t think this is a problem specific to the University, I think it’s an experience that Black students at predominantly White universities across the nation are facing,” he said of the far-reaching responses.

Black enrollment at the University has fallen precipitously over the past decade largely due to Proposal 2, an amendment to the state constitution that bans affirmative action policies that was passed by Michigan voters in 2006. The proposal, formally named the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative, bars the University from considering race in its admissions process.

Immediately after the passage of the proposal, University President Mary Sue Coleman gave a dramatic address (<https://www.michigandaily.com/content/coleman-u-still-dedicated-diversity>) on the Diag promising to maintain the University’s commitment to diversity. However, the institution has been unable to stanch the decline in minority enrollment through alternative outreach policies in the wake of the affirmative action ban.

In Fall 2006, Black students made up around seven percent (<http://ro.umich.edu/report/06fa836u.pdf>) of the undergraduate population. In Fall 2013, the University reported that Black undergraduate enrollment had fallen to 4.65 percent (<http://www.ro.umich.edu/enrollment/ethnicity.php>). Hispanic enrollment as a percentage of the overall undergraduate body also declined over the same period.

At a search forum (<http://www.michigandaily.com/news/presidential-search-advisory-committee-gathers-input-faculty-and-students?page=0,0>) for the next University president in September, the Presidential Search Advisory Committee — which includes the University’s Board of Regents — heard from a number of students about diversity issues. Several student speakers at the event said many minorities feel they lack a voice on campus and occasionally experience bias incidents with both students and instructors.

Collier said the University has not yet contacted BSU about Tuesday's campaign. University spokesman Rick Fitzgerald stressed that the University's next step will be to listen to the students and their experiences on campus.

"I think at this point the listening is the most important part and how we might respond is the next step and we haven't gotten there yet," Fitzgerald said.

He said the University is aware of students' concerns and recognizes that there is always room for improvement in any organization.

However, the University's social media team responded to the campaign via Twitter Tuesday afternoon: "Thanks for engaging in this conversation. We're listening, and will be sure all of your voices are heard. #BBUM"

E. Royster Harper, the University's vice president for student life, created a Twitter account late Tuesday to address the issue.

"Got on Twitter to hear and support your voices. Proud of our students. More later," Harper wrote.

LSA senior Eric Gavin, BSU's public relations chair, said several recent campus events spurred the organization to plan a campaign, including a recent controversy involving Theta Xi fraternity members who branded a party with racialized images and words (<http://www.michigandaily.com/article/racist-party-plans-cause-controversy-and-investigation-0>).

BSU also timed its Twitter campaign to correspond with a forum this evening hosted by the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies, the Black Student Union, We are Michigan and Students of Color of Rackham.

BSU hopes to not only engage members of its organization but also Black campus leaders from an array of groups, Gavin said. However, leaders didn't believe the student organization would receive national attention for its efforts.

"I definitely could not have foreseen the national attention we have garnered in such a short amount of time," Gavin said. "We felt it necessary to push for an initiative that would bring more awareness to these issues and to the larger Black community."

Though traditional methods such as campus demonstrations play a role in raising awareness, Gavin said BSU decided social media could serve as an additional method for sparking dialogue.

"It kept it open ended and that's why it so successful," Gavin said. "The hashtag leaves for open ended interpretation so people can say what they feel instead of imposing somebody's thoughts on them."

So far, students have voiced an array of perspectives.

"Being Black at the University of Michigan has many shades and many levels to what someone might want to speak on it," Gavin said. "It can go from someone being the only Black person in their class to someone with no problems at all. It's a spectrum, but we want people to be aware of everyone's different ideas on the issue of being Black at the University of Michigan."

Renowned journalist Michele Norris, the creator of the Race Card Project — a nationwide initiative that gathers perspectives on race and aims to foster dialogue on the subject — partnered with the University during last winter's theme semester on race, and will give the 2013 Winter Commencement address.

In a form similar to BSU's campaign, Norris used Twitter to broaden the reach of the Race Card Project because she said even though the social media platform only allots users only 140 characters, it's a powerful way to stimulate uncomfortable conversations.

"I used to say the most productive conversations are the private ones, but Twitter made me rethink that," Norris said.

Norris noted that the University did not "take cover" once the dialogue took off, but rather embraced the campaign and encouraged students to take part in the conversation, which is not always the norm for large institutions.

"This is an honest conversation," she said. "They wanted to see an honest conversation and that's what this is, as uncomfortable as this may be for people to read about this."

She said diversity has been an issue on every college campus she has visited, and after reading the tweets from Tuesday's discussion at Michigan, it is likely the topic isn't going to subside once the Twitter debate dies down.

"It really was not just people talking about their own experiences, but it turned into an actual dialogue," she said. "People were talking to each other and perhaps even learning from each other, and more importantly listening to each other."

Norris added that she will likely address the issue in her commencement address next month.

By asking students to share their experiences as Black students on campus, BSU is hoping to not only bring light to challenges, but also to call other student leaders to action.

“We want to get the awareness out so we can begin to move forward and actually do tangible things,” Gavin said.

—*Daily News Editors Alicia Adamczyk and Peter Shahin contributed reporting.*

*This story has been updated with comment from University spokesman Rick Fitzgerald, journalist Michele Norris and an updated account of the Twitter response.*

*Read some of the #BBUM tweets here:*

View as slideshow

 **#BBUM**  
@THEBSU

**#BBUM** is a social media campaign, initiated to raise awareness about the Black experience at @UMich.

12:56 PM - Nov 19, 2013

7 28 people are talking about this

 **Jeremy A. Cook**  
@cjeremya

That first class when black culture becomes the topic and you suddenly become the voice of all black people **#BBUM**

2:11 PM - Nov 19, 2013

1 See Jeremy A. Cook's other Tweets

 **Dreams and Drive**  
\_EncantaLaVida

**#BBUM** no my admission wasn't based on Affirmative Action & me taking your friend's "spot". I earned MY spot

 4 YEARS AGO

 **Martin Margiela**  
@ImChris93

Part of **#bbum** means dealing with egos of privileged whites and egos of self esteemed blacks. Everyone needs to humble themselves.

 4 YEARS AGO

 **Hey Auntie** 🐾🐾  
@Desiniquieee

**#BBUM** having the mentality that despite obstacles I face will make it & graduate Ross at the top of my class WITH a master's in 5 years.

2:11 PM - Nov 19, 2013

See Hey Auntie 🐾🐾's other Tweets



**Greeze Hankerson Jr.**  
@DeeGreezy

#BBUM is my mom calling me worried about my safety because I wrote an opinion piece about my identity.

2:01 PM - Nov 19, 2013

11 See Greeze Hankerson Jr.'s other Tweets



**The WebSlinger**  
@SCTheWebSlinger

immediately assumed that I'm from Detroit #BBUM.

4:10 PM - Nov 19, 2013

See The WebSlinger's other Tweets



**Wakanda West**  
@TheCarter87

#BBUM has just about covered my entire experience at UM. From undergrad to grad.

4:10 PM - Nov 19, 2013

See Wakanda West's other Tweets



**Dezha**  
@Dezha\_Marshae

Assuming that because I'm black I don't deserve to be here and am a result of affirmative action, which is not even in place right now #BBUM

 4 YEARS AGO



**Gabrielle**  
@\_\_gabriellej

Being a black student and they AUTOMATICALLY assume you had to go to summer bridge. #BBUM

3:56 PM - Nov 19, 2013

1 See Gabrielle's other Tweets



**DocJ\_\_**  
@DocJ\_\_

When every room you stand in on campus 9x out of 10 your the

When every room you stand in on campus except for the year the only one that is black #BBUM

4:04 PM - Nov 19, 2013

See .'s other Tweets



**University of Michigan**

@UMich

Thanks for engaging in this conversation. We're listening, and will be sure all of your voices are heard. #BBUM

5:39 PM - Nov 19, 2013

45 131 people are talking about this

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**Mimi Joi** · University of Michigan Class of 2016

its real.

Like · Reply · 1 · 4y



**Jamie D. Hawley**

I am so proud of these students and I support them 100%.

Like · Reply · 10 · 4y



**Doris Horne** · Detroit, Michigan

This is how you use today's technology for a positive purpose. #BBUM i applaud you. Many have seen and responded..the ripple has begun.

Like · Reply · 4y



**Paul Drayer** · University of Michigan

All of us folks at BWUM need to follow suit and demand equal funding for the white student union and emergency scholarships for all of the needy white students. Then again maybe I should just be thankful for the existing student union, the many scholarships that are available, and the great education offered at UM.

Like · Reply · 4y

Facebook Comments Plugin

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