

## ***Black History Month Spotlight: Aja Humphries***

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Image Credit: Katia Jackson

Image Caption: Photo of Aja Humphries

As Director of Student Activities, Aja Humphries has created spaces at Harold Washington College for students to shine.

Finding your circle can be difficult, especially for those of marginalized identities. Safe environments for students to flourish are essential to the community college experience. “I definitely want to have opportunities for students to shine,” said Humphries. “Especially the ones who are shy and have some anxiety with making new friends and talking to new people.”

Humphries has made it her mission alongside SGA to develop a central place for both introverted and extroverted students to “live through their college experiences in a positive way.” Through her collaboration with the Assistant Director of the Wellness Center, Janea Vinson, the Black Culture Renaissance was born.

During the pandemic days of 2020 and 2021, Humphries and Vinson posed the question: “What is a way that we can put our students on spotlight?” Instead of going the traditional route of hiring an outside speaker or faculty member to lead a discussion, they decided, “Let’s recruit students, like for submissions so then they can express to the college, their idea about what Black culture or Black history means to them during Black History Month.”

While the Black Culture Renaissance showcase exists, clubs such as the Black Student Union that could serve as an outlet for Black students year-round are inactive. After a brief resurgence of the Black Student Union in 2021, changes in membership due to students graduating made it difficult to keep the club afloat.

The overall problem can be linked to a decrease in Black student enrollment at Harold. “The college as a whole, you know, they understand it’s a problem. They’re like, we are losing our Black students, I think as an institution.” Humphries states.

Humphries poses solutions to this issue in the form of intentional questioning and surveys to find out why the Black student population is leaving and not completing their studies here at the college. “I think that all of those things have a direct impact on what could be the Black Student Union.” With Humphries and Vinson hard at work to get the club reactivated, and the annual Black Culture Renaissance showcase, there will continue to be space and opportunity for Black students at Harold Washington College.