

JOURNAL OF  
STUDENT  
AFFAIRS  
2022-2023

30TH  
EDITION



## Table of Contents

MISSION STATEMENT AND GOALS .....	2
EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS AND READER BOARD .....	3
STATE OF THE PROGRAM .....	4
Dr. Carmen Rivera	
ADVISOR’S PERSPECTIVE .....	5
Dr. Oscar Felix	
EDITORIAL BOARD PERSPECTIVE .....	6
Maggie Burks, Michael Chapman, Yarethzia Ponce Gallegos, Sarahy Quintana Trejo, Mara Tinajero Daza, and Lalo Velazquez	
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	7
PAST LEADERSHIP.....	8
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE .....	10
SAHE 2022-2023 GRADUATES .....	11
<b><u>ARTICLES</u></b>	
<b>Grit, Fuel for Academic Success: A Longitudinal Study of a Pre-Medical Pipeline Program .....</b>	<b>12</b>
Humberto X. Baquerizo, Maria Soto-Greene, Sezai Ustun Aydin, Christopher Diaz	
<b>Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice: Meta-Study of Diversity Related Publications .....</b>	<b>24</b>
Ryan P. Barone, Dominique C. Crosby, and James H. Banning	
<b>Perceptions of the Campus Environment and the Impact on Students’ Enrollment Decision .....</b>	<b>35</b>
Kirstie Hunter	
<b>Examining Muslim Students’ Perceptions of Veiling at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) .....</b>	<b>52</b>
Shafiqah Ahmadi, Darnell Cole, Milie Majumder, Mabel Hernandez	
<b>Exploring the Self-Identified Mentoring Needs of Conditionally Admitted First-Year Students .....</b>	<b>63</b>
Dr. Sylvia Mendez, Dr. Andrea O’Reily Herrera, Dr. Ji Hyun Oh, Stephen Holmes, Dr. Sandy Oh, and Dr. Terainer Brown	
<b>Critical Consciousness: A Brief Review of Literature .....</b>	<b>75</b>
Matthew R. Shupp and Jan Arminio	
<b>The Emotional and Physical Implications of Teaching Diversity Courses for Women of Color Faculty .....</b>	<b>81</b>
Valerie J. Thompson	
<b>SNAP4Rams: Addressing Food Insecurity .....</b>	<b>97</b>
Shayna Lentz and Neomi Vin-Raviv	
<b>Chinese College Student Engagement .....</b>	<b>118</b>
Xia Xue and Dr. Gene W. Gloeckner	

## Colorado State University *Journal of Student Affairs*

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### **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Colorado State University *Journal of Student Affairs* is to develop and produce a scholarly publication which reflects current national and international education issues and the professional interests of student affairs practitioner-scholars.

### **Goals**

- The *Journal of Student Affairs* will promote scholarly work and perspectives from graduate students, student affairs practitioners, and community members, reflecting the importance of professional and academic research and writing in higher education.
- The Editorial Board of the *Journal of Student Affairs* will offer opportunities for students to develop editorial skills, engaging in critical thinking, and strengthening their writing skills while producing a professional publication.

## **Editorial Board Members 2022-2023**

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**Maggie Burks**, *Training and Development Co-Chair*

**Michael Chapman**, *Training and Development Co-Chair*

**Yarethzia Ponce Gallegos**, *Marketing and Communications Co-Chair*

**Noel Quiñones**, *Marketing and Communications Co-Chair*

**Sarahy Quintana Trejo**, *Technical Editing Chair*

**Mara Tinajero Daza**, *Coordination Editing Chair*

**Lalo Velazquez**, *Coordination Editing Chair*

## **Reader Board Members 2022-2023**

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**Darian Abernathy**

**Nallely Dominguez**

**Haley McAveney**

**Yulisa Muñoz-Tena**

**Hoai Vu**

## **State of the Student Affairs in Higher Education (SAHE) Program**

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So much has gone on since the last edition of the *Journal of Student Affairs* when we put the journal on pause because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our residential program was delivered remotely for an entire year and both our online and residential students and faculty did a great job navigating all changes and transitions. During that time, the field of student affairs also changed and is facing new (and some not so new) challenges. Our program, like so many others, saw a decline in applications for admission as well as a decreasing number of graduate assistantships being offered. Even in all of that, our students, faculty, and assistantship supervisors have been showing up and responding to the current context in ways that are humanizing and helping to make our program better.

One of the most exciting things to announce about the program is that we have made some significant changes to our curriculum. We took a look at our curriculum as it was, listened to what students were telling us about coursework and the portfolio, and looked at programs across the country to help guide our process. Our faculty then had a retreat to conceive of a new approach. The result was shifting our 45 credit program to a 33 credit program. The required classes that were removed were mostly connected to the portfolio and cognate courses. Many of those classes will still be offered as optional courses that students can elect to take. Additionally, the final culminating project has shifted from a competency based portfolio to a comprehensive paper that still focuses on the ACPA/NASPA competencies and also asks students to research issues central to student affairs in higher education. These changes go into effect fall of 2024 and currently enrolled students have given positive feedback about the changes.

Related to the challenges we have faced and as many folks know, the School of Education made the difficult decision to pause admissions to our residential program for the fall of 2023 because of complex budget challenges. The online program continues to be offered without change. The School of Education and the Division of Student Affairs are working to create a vibrant and fiscally sustainable residential program that reaffirms CSU's commitment to the scholar practitioner development of the SAHE program. The Dean of our college, Dean Youngblade, and the Vice President for Student Affairs, Dr. Hughes, have charged a task force to develop a plan for the program moving forward. Thank you to all of our students, alumni, faculty, staff, and friends of our program who continue to support us through all of these changes. The plan is to begin to admit students to our program again in the fall of 2024.

We remain committed to our program and will continue to work to make it flourish. Our 56 year legacy on campus and in the field will continue to be rooted in creating more transformative, equitable, and connected higher educational environments. This journal is one of things we will continue to invest in and believe in its contribution to our field. A special thanks and recognition go to the students and faculty advisors who brought it back this year! Thank you for your hard work!

Dr. Carmen Rivera  
Co-Chair of the Student Affairs in Higher Education (SAHE) Program

## Advisor's Perspective

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The Journal is back! After a two-year hiatus, the SAHE students brought back the respected Journal of Student Affairs, celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> year of publishing timely, informative, and relevant scholarly work. The SAHE Program is deeply indebted to the Journal Editorial Board for their commitment to preserve the Journal's mission of developing and producing an academic publication that intentionally engages in and promotes justice and excellence in educational scholarship that is grounded and informed by practice.

This year's SAHE Journal Editorial Board, without the benefit of the 29<sup>th</sup> edition board members' experience, worked diligently to reconstruct processes to produce the expected quality product of previous Journals. I am very proud of their diligence, resourcefulness, and commitment needed to bring back the Journal. Their work has paid off tremendously, approving nine compelling articles for this edition of the Journal. Despite all the assistantship and classroom obligations, the Journal Editorial Board gave up their time and talent to contribute to the profession they are about to embark on full-time.

The current challenges faced by the Student Affairs profession are complex and challenging, yet maintains student success deeply at the core of its mission. Adding new and relevant knowledge is a critical component to support students and those who serve them. This publication, the 30<sup>th</sup> edition, continues a tradition of improving our profession, and it's reflection of the character and commitment of this Journal Editorial Board. I could not be more proud!

Oscar Felix, PhD  
Journal Board Advisor

## Editorial Board Perspective

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At the conclusion of the 2021-2022 academic year, 1<sup>st</sup> year and newly admitted SAHE students engaged in conversations surrounding the restarting of the *Journal of Student Affairs*. The *Journal* had been on hiatus for the previous two academic years, largely because of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Eager to bring the *Journal* back, these 1<sup>st</sup> year students began to work diligently with 2021-22 Program Chair Dr. David McKelfresh and Dr. Oscar Felix to bring the *Journal* back for the 2022-23 school year. In the summer of 2022, 1<sup>st</sup> year students began to put out a call for students interested in being a part of the *Journal* and shortly the first editorial board meeting took place.

As a result of the *Journal* being on hiatus, the Editorial Board experienced several challenges in learning how the *Journal* previously worked. However, the board took these challenges as opportunities to rethink and reshape how the *Journal* could run such as changing the managing and associate editor roles into the current co-chair positions. Throughout the year, the Editorial Board worked diligently to let individuals know that we were back and ready to put out our 30<sup>th</sup> edition. Our marketing co-chairs worked tirelessly outreaching to various scholar-practitioners in hopes that they would consider submitting an article. Simultaneously, our technical editing chair and training and development co-chairs worked to assemble an editorial reader board that would support the *Journal* in providing edits and feedback to our authors. As we tackled various bumps and learning curves, we continued to work on the *Journal* to ensure that our 30<sup>th</sup> edition would come to life.

We are excited to share this 30<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Journal of Student Affairs* after all the hard work we committed to bring the *Journal* back. We are grateful for our authors in trusting us and going through this process alongside us. This iteration of the *Journal* contains articles related to student success for students from different backgrounds and communities, engagement on campus, and the ongoing development of campus resources supporting our marginalized communities. We are tremendously proud of all the work our authors have done, and thank the Reader Board for their support as well.

We are also excited to share that the *Journal* will be continuing for the next year at CSU. Yarethzia Ponce Gallegos, the 2022-2023 Marketing and Outreach Chair, and Sarahy Quintana Trejo, the 2022-2023 Technical Editing Chair, have agreed to be the Coordination Editing Chairs for the 31<sup>st</sup> Edition of the *Journal of Student Affairs*. We congratulate them and wish them good luck for what we know will be a great publication of the next edition of the *Journal*.

There are many individuals who helped make the return of the *Journal* possible, some of which we have listed below in our acknowledgements.

## Acknowledgments

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The Editorial Board thanks the following individuals for their contributions toward the return of the 2022-2023 *Journal of Student Affairs*:

- Dr. Carmen Rivera, Co-Chair of the SAHE Program, Professor, Student Affairs in Higher Education program for supporting the return of the *Journal of Student Affairs* and supporting the Editorial Board staff throughout the learning process.
- Dr. Oscar Felix, Professor, Student Affairs in Higher Education master's program for his role as an advisor. The editorial board thanks him for his guidance.
- Kelli Clark, Graduate Programs Coordinator, School of Education for her willingness and to answer our questions and provide us with support for the return of the *Journal*.
- Teresa Metzger, former *Journal* advisor who was supportive throughout and was helpful in answering questions we had about prior operations of the *Journal*.
- SAHE Faculty, for their encouragement and guidance to Editorial Board members throughout the learning process.
- Members of the Editorial Board for being willing to take leadership roles to bring the *Journal of Student Affairs* back from a two-year hiatus, and for dedicating countless hours to the preparation of the 30<sup>th</sup> Edition.
- Contributing Journal Reviewers for their dedication to advancing scholarship in student affairs and for the time they served while providing feedback. This *Journal* would not be possible without your help.
- The authors and contributors who submitted articles to the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual *Journal of Student Affairs*. Your research and dedication made the return of the journal possible.
- Shaun Geisert, Assistant Director of Web Development, Division of Student Affairs, for their support with technology and website updates.
- Joshua Gaylord, Graphic Designer, for bringing the editorial's cover and logo designs to life.



## **Past *Journal of Student Affairs* Student Leadership**

As we create the 30<sup>th</sup> edition of the Colorado State University *Journal of Student Affairs*, we acknowledge those who have laid the foundation for our success. We celebrate the past 30 years, and look forward to the following 30 years (and more) to come.

### MANAGING EDITORS

2019-2020	Amber Everett '20, Maria J. Matta Moreno '20, Tanisha Muquit '20, Sonia Garcia '20
2018-2019	Isabel Villalobos '19, Patrick Ramirez '19, Stephanie Cuevas '19, Genesis Gongora-Balam '19
2017-2018	Kristina Miller '18, Kayla A. Montanez '18, Benjamin Petrie '18, Patrick Ramirez '19
2016-2017	Benjamin Petrie '18, Kayla A. Tejada '18, Kristina Miller '18
2015-2016	Matthew Dempsey '16, LeRoy Ford '16, Kevin Ngo '16, Colin Watrin '16
2014-2015	Roberto Cruze '15, Henry Duong '15, Ashleigh A. Renteria '15, Tolulope A. Taiwo '15
2013-2014	Christopher R. Carter '14, Emma Hart '14, Maria R. Marinucci '14, Vanessa Santana '14
2012-2013	Jake N. Cohen '13, Olivia Des Chenes '13, Spencer Ellis '13, Joseph F. Kimes '13, Mallory Perkins '13
2011-2012	Alexis M. Hendrix '11, Anthony G. Pang '12, Marney E. Randle '12, Kristal D. Sawatzke '12
2010-2011	Tyler Cegler '11, Jennifer David '11, Helen Kang '11, Joseph Kowalczyk Jr. '11, Lisa LaPoint '11
2009-2010	Jordan Alexander '10, Kinsey Holloway '10, Joe Levy '10, Nicole Scheer '10
2008-2009	Kyle Carpenter '09, Jeff Rosenberry '09, David Vale '09
2007-2008	Travis Mears '08, Neal Oliver '08, Gretchen Streiff '08
2006-2007	Craig Beebe '07, Timothy Cherney '07, Yulisa Lin '07
2005-2006	Kristen Harrell '06 Brandon Ice '06
2004-2005	Marci Colb '05, Haley N. Richards '05
2003-2004	Ann Dawson '04
2002-2003	Lea Hanson '03
2001-2002	Jody Jessup '02
2000-2001	Chris Bryner '01
1999-2000	Greg Kish '00
1998-1999	Kirsten Peterson '99
1997-1998	Beth Yohe '98
1996-1997	Ray Gasser '97, Jocelyn Lowry '97
1995-1996	DeEtta Jones '96, Michael Karpinski '96
1994-1995	Jeremy Eaves '95, Alicia Vik '95
1993-1994	Mary Frank '94, Keith Robinder '94
1992-1993	Jodi Berman '93, Brad Lau '93
1991-1992	Marie E. Oamek '92

### FACULTY ADVISORS

2019-2020	Teresa Metzger, Assistant Director for Projects & Outreach in Housing and Dining Services, Adam-Jon Aparicio, Counseling Services, & Lea Hanson, SAHE Faculty
2014-2018	Teresa Metzger, Assistant Director for Projects & Outreach in Housing and Dining Services. & Karla Perez-Velez, Assistant Director for University Housing

- 2007-2013 Oscar Felix, Associate Vice President for Enrollment & Access/Diversity; Assistant Professor Faculty, Student Affairs in Higher Education, School of Education, College of Health and Human Sciences, Colorado State University Andrea Takemoto Reeve, former Director Academic Advancement Center; former Professor, Student Affairs in Higher Education, School of Education, College of Health and Human Sciences, Colorado State University
- 2004-2007 Jennifer Williams Molock, former Director of Black Student Services, Colorado State University
- 2003-2006 David A. McKelfresh, Executive Director of Assessment & Research; Program Chair for the SAHE Graduate Program, Colorado State University
- 2000-2003 Paul Shang, former Director of HELP/Success Center, Colorado State University
- 1996-2000 Martha Fosdick ('95), former Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs, Colorado State University
- 1991-1998 Keith M. Miser, former Vice President for Student Affairs, Colorado State University

## Historical Perspective

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I want to offer special congratulations to the current Editorial Board on the 30th anniversary of the Journal of Student Affairs creation. The Journal has been a strong complement to the SAHE Program for decades through the articles and research conducted by students, alums and faculty. My personal thanks to all who have contributed to its success. Special kudos go out to the late Dr. Keith Miser and Marie Oamek who had both the vision and determination to initiate the first edition of the Journal in 1992. I am pleased that Marie in her retirement has returned to Fort Collins and is willing to share a bit of the Journals' founding with us.

- Dr. Grant Sherwood  
SAHE Program Director 1990-2005

To the editorial board of the 30th Journal of Student Affairs, CONGRATULATIONS! On behalf of the editorial board of the first edition of the Journal, published in 1992, we are so pleased to see how firmly the Journal has been established in the Student Affairs in Higher Education program at Colorado State University, and especially to see the thoughtful growth the project has experienced over the years.

In 1991, Dr. Keith Miser, then VPSA at Colorado State and a strong supporter of the SAHE program, approached our SAHE Class of 1992 with the idea of producing a Journal. Enthusiastic and somewhat clueless about what such a project would entail, a small group of us took on the challenge. We were fortunate that year to have support and guidance from several of our faculty advisors, instructors and assistantship supervisors at the time, especially Keith Miser and Doug Gertner, who advised the Journal Board, and Grant Sherwood, Dave McKelfresh, Manny Cunard and Martha Fosdick, who supported the project with resources, encouragement and advice.

When the SAHE class of 1993 arrived at CSU, we eagerly approached the group and recruited their assistance. Many of the readers from that first year went on to edit the second edition of the Journal, which is hopefully a pattern which has continued. It has been fantastic to see the quality of the Journal improve, as well as the breadth of submissions now received and included.

The first edition of the Journal of Student Affairs consisted of articles by current students, alumni, faculty and supporters of the SAHE program. We typed our articles on borrowed Macintosh computers, arranged our page "layout" down the hallway of the Palmer Center, and "published" at a local copy shop. The very next year a color cover was added, and the innovations have continued ever since. Not only are the newest issues published completely electronically, providing access to interested parties all over the globe, but previous editions (including ours!) have been archived and made available.

Putting together the Journal each year is a prime example of the active, hands-on learning which is so central to the Student Affairs in Higher Education program at CSU. We were privileged to be involved at the beginning and are so very appreciative of all the SAHE students and advisors who have carried on this tradition of shared knowledge throughout the years.

Cheers to the first 30 years and on to the next 30 as well - we cannot wait to see what they will bring and look forward to expanding our knowledge and horizons by reading the Journal each year.

- Marie Oamek  
1992 Journal of Student Affairs Editor in Chief, on behalf of the 1992 Editorial Board

## **Student Affairs in Higher Education (SAHE) 2022-2023 Graduates**

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**Darian Abernathy**

**Carolina Avila**

**Maggie Burks**

**Kim Pannell**

**Noel Quiñones**

**Brianna Ridenour**

**Mara Tinajero Daza**

**Lalo Velazquez**

**Hoai Vu**

# Grit, Fuel for Academic Success: A Longitudinal Study of a Pre-Medical Pipeline Program

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 Rutgers New Jersey Medical School

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 Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine

## Abstract

*Despite overwhelming interest in grit and resilience within health professions, there is limited evidence on the influence of pipeline programs on internal qualities such as grit, perseverance, and resilience. Our study investigated the impact of Grit on academic success in a cohort of trainees who participated in a pre-medical pipeline program. A mixed-method design investigated the impact of academic enrichment programs to grit/resilience and educational attainment. The mean grit score was calculated by coding all responses to the Duckworth Grit-S questionnaire, consisting of two subsets: Consistencies of Interest and Perseverance of Effort. Participants included 176 traditional full-time college students (18-25 years of age) from 22 colleges/universities and 35 cities across the state of New Jersey. The pipeline program scholars scored an average of 3.9 of 5 on Duckworth's Short-Grit Scale, 4.2 of 5 on the Perseverance Subscale, and 3.6 of 5 on the Interest Subscale. There was an increase of motivational outcomes including problem solving (53% - 65%), self-direction (66% - 73%), support/encouragement (68% - 88%), confidence (60% - 71%), teamwork (59% - 67%), and sense of belonging (70% - 90%). The study highlights the benefit of the pipeline programs to foster grit and resilience. The findings form the basis for future research to test how grit and resilience can be fostered and nurtured in a college setting for students of color seeking careers in medicine.*

**Keywords:** URM, Pipeline Program, Student Success, Pre-Medical Journey, Grit, Resilience, College Students

## Introduction

Grit is a non-cognitive trait that has been associated with prediction of success. Duckworth (2007) coined the term grit to represent perseverance and passion towards achievement of long-term goals. Grit and other non-cognitive factors such as resilience, perseverance, and motivation have been associated with academic success among college students [Perkhounkova, et al. (2006); White & Sedlacek (1986), and Boyer & Sedlacek (1988)]. These non-cognitive factors are tied to students' motivation, ease of adjustment, student success, and wellness [Sedlacek (2017); Strayhorn (2013), and Wolters & Hussain (2014)]. Despite limited research on non-cognitive traits – such as grit as predictors of academic performance in college [Duckworth et.al. (2007); Sedlacek (2017), and Perna & Swail (2001)], there is little research on how these non-cognitive traits can affect students in pipeline programs of a diverse

population. Grit has an array of associations with adult success (e.g., academic achievement in college and career performance). Thus, there are clear benefits for understanding the role of grit in the youth educational experience (Clark, et al., 2020). Understanding the impact of such an indicator could change the way in which programs preparing STEM or pre-medical students for medical school are evaluated. It is important to understand the association of pipeline programs on student cognitive and non-cognitive factors.

There are, however, other attributes at the precollege phase that can also affect academic success, as measured by grade point average (GPA). These include high school rank, gender, ethnicity, parental education, parental marriage status, and self-perception of individual abilities (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006). These latter correlations suggest that academic achievement is not limited to the student's cognitive learning abilities. To have a more representative measure of academic achievement, it is essential to evaluate the student's non-cognitive factors and personality traits. These non-cognitive traits are recognized as essential and identifiable skills when seeking admission to the medical profession. The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Committee on Admissions developed a set of core competencies for students entering medical school; expressly, students should reflect on how they have fostered or developed the competencies of resilience and adaptability (AAMC, 2017).

Studies have reported a positive relationship between grit and the perseverance of effort by faculty-student interaction and co-curricular engagement (Bowman, et al., 2015). Pre-collegiate academic co-curricular engagement programs (pipeline program) are critical to closing the academic gap and increasing academic engagement by preparing students from underrepresented populations and low-income backgrounds for the rigors of both undergraduate and graduate education. These programs also fostered students' perseverance and passion for a long-term goal (grit) through an array of academic workshops, teamwork, and mentorship opportunities. Therefore, students devoting time to more significant cognitive endeavors, guided via pipeline programs, cultivates a culture of social support necessary to overcome personal challenges or a toll on students' mental wellness. This culture of social support is based on the Tardy (1985) social support model. There are four types of social support: emotional (love, trust, empathy), informational (advice), appraisal (offering evaluative feedback), and instrumental (helping behaviors). All of these social support benefits aligned with the structure of a pipeline program in the development of grit and academic resilience.

Despite decades of efforts and pipeline programs by various institutions to increase diversity efforts within the area of medicine, racial diversity and ethnic minorities continue to be largely under-represented (AAMC, 2018). To help diversify the healthcare workforce, we must address the shortage of qualified medical school applicants who are under-represented in medicine (URM). In accordance with the definition of "URM", as defined by the AAMC, the most significantly underrepresented groups in medicine relative to the general population are African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans, which are 12.4%, 18.7%, and 1.1% of the general population, respectively (Census, 2020). However, African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans make up only 5.0%, 5.8%, and 0.3% of physicians, respectively (AAMC, 2018). It is critical to close the gap between the relative amount of racial and ethnic minorities in medicine to support the development of a future healthcare workforce. Therefore, bolstering pipeline initiatives that foster resilience, perseverance, and motivation while providing social connectedness and engagement may prove efficacious in the context of improving diversity of the health professions workforce via pipeline programs.

## Methods

Rutgers New Jersey Medical School Institutional Review Board approved the study of “Grit on Pipeline Program”. The study enrolled 209 students from the Northeast Regional Alliance (NERA) MedPrep HCOP Academy Program at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. The subjects were enrolled during summer 2017, 2018 and 2020. NERA is a collaborative regional summer enrichment program that has created opportunities for historically marginalized students in health professions over the last 15 years. The program is open to first- and second-year college students who are New Jersey residents interested in attending medical school. Over three years, NERA provides coursework introduction to sciences, MCAT preparation, research opportunities and an innovation/entrepreneurial challenge relating to the social determinants of health. Through these various efforts, the NERA program challenges students to develop an array of academic, self-efficacy, teamwork, and role modeling skills needed for medical school.

The program had 209 participants. However, duplicate survey responses and responses submitted by students who previously participated in the pre-medical program were discarded to prevent skewing of the grit score. These students were already exposed to the benefits of the program with a full year to improve their grit and academic resilience. The survey was sent to 209 traditional full-time college students, 18-25 years of age. 176 participants (84%) responded to the post program survey. Participants came from 22 colleges/universities and 35 cities across the state of New Jersey.

The survey questionnaire consisted of three main components: Short Grit Scale, Demographics Information, and Co-curricular Activities Information. The Short Grit Scale, or Grit-S Scale, is a set of eight items that were developed by Dr. Angela Duckworth and her colleagues to measure grit, a personality trait combining perseverance (persistence in reaching long-term goals) and consistency (stability of pursuits over time). The mean grit score was calculated by coding all responses to the Duckworth Grit-S questionnaire of each participant. Its reliability and internal validity in measuring grit as a single personality trait were demonstrated by Duckworth through a battery of tests [Duckworth, et. al. (2007), and Duckworth & Quinn (2009)].

The Grit-S scale consists of two subscales: Consistencies of Interest and Perseverance of Effort. Consistencies of Interest measures an individual's likelihood of pursuing a specific goal over time. Using a 5-point Likert-type scale, participants self-reported a score ranging from 1 (Not at all like me) to 5 (Very much like me) for each item on the Grit-S questionnaire. Perseverance of Effort measures the determination of an individual to complete a goal through perseverance to overcome setbacks, failure, and adversity. Items 1, 3, 5 and 6 on the questionnaire are designed to gauge one's Consistency of Interest whereas items 2, 4, 7 and 8 are designed to gauge one's Perseverance of Effort.

### **Applied Metrics**

Participants were asked to assign the following for each item: *Very much like me*, *Mostly like me*, *Somewhat like me*, *Not much like me*, or *Not like me at all*.

The response for Consistency of Interest were assigned the following point values:

1 = *Very much like me*

2 = *Mostly like me*

3 = *Somewhat like me*

4 = *Not much like me*

5 = *Not like me at all*

The responses for Perseverance of Effort items were assigned the following point values:

5 = *Very much like me*

4 = *Mostly like me*

3 = *Somewhat like me*

2 = *Not much like me*

1 = *Not like me at all*

A descriptive analysis was performed on the data to extrapolate the mean grit score for the entire sample of 176 students (the NERA cohort) as well as the mean grit score for each individual summer cohort (2017, 2018, and 2020). A statistical analysis was performed to determine how participation in academic enrichment programs contributed to grit and how this is correlated to educational attainment. For data analysis, a Statistical Package for the Social Scientists (SPSS) was used to obtain descriptive statistics, frequencies, correlations, and linear regression.

## **Results**

The NERA Cohort for 2017, 2018, and 2020 had 209 students who participated in the summer program, 176 took the survey, and we continue to support 193 students. The 193 students represent 92% of our NERA Cohorts who are in communication since 2017. However, we have lost communication with 16 students, about 7% of the total cohort.

Table 1 shows a descriptive analysis of the participants, 58 (32.95%) males and 118 (67.05%) females, 78 (44.32%) lived on campus and 98 (55.68%) commuted. Student grade point averages (GPA) were collected as an indicator of academic success. Participants (n=169) with a GPA between 3.1 to 4.0 on a 4.0 GPA scale are 96.02%. The average GPA for the summer cohorts is between 3.4 to 3.6.

**Table 1: *Frequencies and Percentages for the Variables Describing the Sample***

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Gender		
Male	58	32.95
Female	118	67.04
Commuting Status		
Resident	78	44.31
Commuter	98	55.68
GPA		
1.6 to 2.0	0	0
2.0 to 2.5	0	0
2.6 to 3.0	7	3.97



3.0 to 3.5	82	46.59
3.6 to 4.0	87	49.31
<b>Cohort GPA</b>		
NERA 2017	3.45	
NERA 2018	3.52	
NERA 2019	3.61	

Table 2 shows the racial/ethnic identity of participants were Hispanic/Latino (45.45%), White/Caucasian (1.70%), Asian (8.52%), Middle Eastern/Arab American (8.52%), Black/African American (34.66%) and a small number who self-identify as multi-racial (1.14%).

**Table 2: Race and Ethnicity of the Participants**

<b>Race and Ethnicities</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Black / African American	61	34.65
Hispanic / Latino	80	45.45
Asian (East, South, West)	15	8.52
Middle Eastern / Arab American	15	8.52
White / Caucasian	3	1.7
Multiple Races / Ethnicities	2	1.13
Prefer Not to Respond	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Short Grit Scale (Grit-S)**

The Grit-S survey has been validated and it displays an acceptable internal consistency (ranging from 0.73 to 0.83) across the four Duckworth studies. The Consistency of Interest subscale showed adequate internal consistency (ranging from 0.73 to 0.79), while the subscale for Perseverance of Effort was lower (ranging from 0.60 to 0.78). Table 3 summarizes the descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha for the study's variables. As per Nunnally and Bernstein, (1994), a measure is moderately reliable if its alpha is 0.70 or higher. The Grit scale has a mean (3.9), SD (0.45), and a Cronbach's alpha (0.84), subsequently, the Perseverance subscale has a mean (4.2), SD (0.47), and a Cronbach's alpha (0.87), and the Interest subscale has a mean (3.6), SD (0.62) and a Cronbach's alpha (0.90). As in Duckworth's study (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009), a grit score value was assigned to this cohort, and the students' grit scores were split into interest and passion (Perseverance), to analyze how intertwined their grit score was for both subcategories (Table 3).

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach's Alpha for the Study Measures (N = 176)**

<b>NERA Cohort</b>	<b>Alpha</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
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Grit Scale	0.84	1 to 5	3.9	0.45
Perseverance Subscale	0.87	1 to 5	4.2	0.47
Interest Subscale	0.9	1 to 5	3.6	0.62

On the other hand, Perseverance of Effort, 85% of the participants shared that setbacks did not discourage them from their goals, 97% finished whatever they began, and 98% were diligent. For this category, it was found that the participants' average score was 4.2 with internal consistency (Alpha = 0.87) and a standard deviation (SD = 0.47), much higher than Interest Subscale (3.6).

The grit score of 3.9 means that the participants were grittier than most adults in Duckworth's grit studies (grit score 3.41), the Ivy Leaguers (grit score 3.46), Spelling Bee Contestants (grit score 3.50), and West Point Cadets (3.78) (Table 4).

**Table 4: Overview of the Grit in the Literature**

Study	N	Mean	SD
Adults, 25 and older, 2007	1525	3.65	0.73
Adults, 25 and older, 2007	690	3.41	0.67
Adults, ages 25-34, 2007	300	3.2	0.7
Ivy League Undergraduates, 2007	138	3.46	0.61
West Point Cadets, Class of 2008	1218	3.78	0.53
West Point Cadets, Class of 2010	1308	3.75	0.54
National Spelling Bee Finalists, 2007	175	3.5	0.67
Engineering Freshman, 2010	374	3.55	0.49
Academic Success of Black Males, 2014	140	4.08	0.88
Nursing Student Engagement, 2015	97	3.7	0.52
Student Pharmacists, 2017	705	3.7	0.5
Grit Impact on Student Success, 2017	205	3.54	0.61

The data in Table 5 show the positive effects that pipeline programs can have on students' outcomes as they continue on their academic journey. Students who participated in our program have found an array of career paths within the health profession, including advanced degree, and terminal doctoral degree. This enabled us to evaluate a holistic sample size to determine the strength of our program in fostering cognitive/non-cognitive factors, as well as the impacts of such a program may have on one's career.

**Table 5: NERA Program Cohorts of 2017, 2018, and 2020**

Degree Completion or Career Options (N=209)	N	%
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Currently Attending College	75	35.9
Completed Master's Degree	118	56.5
Master's Degree	14	6.7
Applying to Medical School	19	9.1
Working (Health Care)	18	8.6
Working (Other)	4	1.9
GAP Year / MCAT Study	10	4.8
MD Program	46	22.0
DO Program	6	2.9
Dental Program	1	0.5
Nursing Program	1	0.5
PT Programs	1	0.5
Completing a PhD	1	0.5
No Communication	16	7.7

### Discussion

This research adds to few studies that provide insights into predictors of students' academic success. A study that reviewed the literature on grit and resilience within the health profession considered fifty-eight articles retrieved from the PubMed database that were published from 2008-2016 and thirty-one peer-reviewed articles (Stoffel & Cain, 2018). Based on our review, there is no information on the effects of grit and resilience on pipeline programs. Research has shown that students who are involved in co-curricular activities are more likely to persist to graduation (Tinto, 1993). Yet, little research has been developed to understand how students' extent and type of involvement allow them to persist, persevere, and succeed. This research hypothesized that sustained commitment in co-curricular activities (i.e. pipeline programs) contributes to development of grit and correlates with future education attainment, such as Masters, Post baccalaureate, or Medical school. Astin's student development theory enabled the researcher to infer that the student's physical and psychological energy must be invested continuously to affect the quality and the quantity of the student's involvement (Astin, 1984). This characterization corresponds to and connects with the concept of Grit that Duckworth called perseverance and passion for long-term goals (Duckworth, et, al., 2007) Thus, this reinforced Astin's theory, the more time students spend in activities, the more knowledge they gain, and the more skills they will develop (Astin, 1984).

It is known that co-curricular involvement type of activities such as pipeline programs helped students persist and succeed academically. Students' cultivated soft skills like self-awareness, directedness, teamwork, leadership, networking opportunities, and a sense of belonging. These soft skills were also measured in the study, highlighting an increase of motivational outcomes including problem solving (53% - 65%), self-direction (66% - 73%), support/encouragement (68% - 88%), confidence (60% - 71%), teamwork (59% - 67%), and sense of belonging (70% - 90%). All of these soft-skills allowed students to foster grit, while continuing to support their interest and future educational attainment. Furthermore, the effectiveness of pipeline programs has been proven in previous studies. Notable examples include the Medical Education Resources Initiative for Teens in Baltimore, which resulted in 75% of their students completing graduate studies in healthcare (Mains, Wilcox, and Wright, 2016). Stanford Medical Youth Science Program in California with 81% of participants earning a college degree and 52% of participants transitioning to medical or graduate school (Winkleby, 2007). The

Health Science and Technology Academy in West Virginia was successful with 84% of African American students completing an undergraduate degree, and some of their students working as medical doctors and EMTs in their local hospital (McKendal, et. al., 2014). This study reinforced the previous studies showing 56.5% of participants earning a college degree, 6.7% completing a Master's Degree, 22% in medical school, 2.9% in a DO program, 8.6% working in the healthcare field, and 35.9% completing their undergraduate degree. During the program, students' strengths were identified via one-on-one conversations, leadership workshops, and reflection to create the academic plan that works for them and fulfills their personal goals. This self-awareness and identifiable strength influenced their learning and socialization since we are no longer focused on their "at-risk" factor. The focus is on their overall attributes and qualifications to be competitive applicants to medical school regardless of their socio-economic factors.

Furthermore, it is necessary to understand how the attributes of grit and resilience intersect with social connectedness, how students' social connectedness is enhanced or inhibited due to their participation in pipeline programs, and how the host institutions play a role in creating that sense of community and belonging. A study has found that social connectedness had a positive direct effect on student retention, which reinforces the importance of peer and faculty relationships and having a sense of belonging on campus (Allen, et.al., 2008). Institutions can enhance their pipeline experience, with intentional outcomes to foster resilience and grit through the lens of a student's cultural identity. Furthermore, Holt-Lunstad, et.al., 2010), conducted a large-scale meta-analysis spanning numerous academic fields, finding that the quality and quantity of individuals' social relationships enhance one's quality of life, well-being, and decrease mortality risk. The study also finds the functional aspects of social connectedness have two prongs: the existence of connections (theme as structure) and the functional measurement of those connections. All of these are supported by the positive wellbeing that is being fostered by the cognitive, social, and emotional capacities associated with pipeline programs that can be self-sustained through student's self-efficacy (Luthar, et.al., 2000). Furthermore, pipeline programs enhance the perception that the institution or program's social support, the value and care placed on the individual, and a sense of community, are unique attributes to foster and develop grit and resilience. Making long-term investments in students rather than short-term interventions allowed students to succeed academically. The longer students participate in academic enrichment programs, the more they will benefit from their experience.

This study demonstrated a pipeline program's assets and resources in promoting retention, graduation, and future degree attainment. It highlighted how students can foster grit and resilience based on their own experiences with a focus on strengths. This is in tandem to the construct of resilience, where emphasis is not only on student deficits but also on areas of strength. In turn, this enhances positives outcomes associated with internal locus of control (Luthar, et.al., 2000). Therefore, overcoming adversity or adapting to threats are opportunities to become self-aware and confident while managing the increasing demand to balance a personal and professional identity. This pipeline program reinforced the notion that if we can help students find their strengths by nurturing their grit and resilience into their daily activities through positive mindsets, academic resilience and supportive environments we could sustain their commitment to long-term goals. This supportive environment follows the social support model offering scholars emotional (love, trust, empathy), informational (advice), appraisal (offering evaluative feedback), and instrumental (helping behaviors) support (Tardy, 1985). Grit can be one of the learning tools and perspectives that could fuel the academic success of a pre-medical pipeline program by recognizing each student's strengths and allocating resources and opportunities that support their individual journey.

### **Limitations**

This study was based on a single pipeline program at an institution with a diverse population. Future research may consider understanding how grit and resilience is fostered and how social connectedness is developed in pipeline programs beyond those in the healthcare profession. Within this diverse population, there is a construct of cultural resilience, implying the focus on positive outcomes not just the negative ones, through their cultural identification. This cultural resilience is in the form of cultural practices that is reinforced through the individual and community shared values, beliefs, and culture that supports positive factors under stress (Ungar, 2013). Another limitation is the lack of a control group with similar demographic features but not attending any pipeline programs. Outcomes of the future studies with a control group can emphasize strengths of pipeline programs.

### **Conclusion**

Pipeline programs such as NERA support students' success. This is done, in part, by providing the institutional environment and infrastructure of support to develop resilience, perseverance, and persistence while motivating students to continue their pursuit of medical school or the health profession. This motivation may be partly explained from interacting with individuals that look like them from professional staff, physicians, clinicians, residents, and medical students, all supporting students' perseverance for the long journey ahead. Moreover, students indicated that the program boosted internal confidence, motivation, and optimism levels, illustrating that pipeline programs fostered grit and resilience alongside social connection, support, and mentorship. Pipeline programs can help reduce and close the achievement gap while increasing year-to-year persistence and retention. High levels of grit have been linked to resiliency and improved student outcomes. These findings highlight the need for more pre-medical pipeline programs that support students from underrepresented backgrounds. Our study is evidence that these future pipeline programs should consider non-cognitive factors such as grit.

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# Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice: Meta-Study of Diversity Related Publications

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## Abstract

*In this study, authors use a meta-study approach and qualitative document analysis to review published research from the Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice. From 2010 to 2020 a total of 28 papers met the inclusion criteria of original research focused on themes related to diversity, inclusion, social justice, equity, intersectionality, and multiculturalism. Findings reveal that most papers centered a more regressive focus on diversity rather than progressive concepts of social justice. Implications for the field of student affairs in higher education include the importance of clarity when using terms related to diversity and equity. Additionally, authors and book/journal editors should be clear and explicit about aspirations and values advancing understanding of equity and justice in higher education.*

*Keywords:* diversity, social justice, meta-study, qualitative

## Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice: Meta-Study of Diversity Related Publications

Tracing patterns of published scholarship in a journal over a period reveals the values and priorities of the editorial board and provides insight into the current research activity of a field. Given the renewed focus in higher education on concepts related to diversity, equity, and social justice, this paper uses a qualitative document analysis in combination with a meta-study approach to analyze a specific set of articles from the *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* (JSARP). Such an approach illuminates trends, gaps, and opportunities for further inquiry as the values of the field of higher education can be evaluated in part through published research. The JSARP has an important vision to:

Publish the most rigorous, relevant, and well-respected research and practice making a difference in student affairs practice. *JSARP* especially encourages manuscripts that are unconventional in nature and that engage in methodological and epistemological extensions that transcend the boundaries of traditional research inquiries. (p. 1)

In this study, we review published articles from 2010 when The NASPA Journal changed its name to JSARP through October 2020 for the inclusion or focus on diversity, inclusion, social justice, equity, intersectionality, and multiculturalism.

This diverse research team includes a doctoral student, an administrator with a part-time higher education faculty appointment, and a professor emeritus. One thread of relationships is that James was an instructor for Ryan when he was in a master's program. Other dynamics related to social identities and professional positions informed the work and author diversity was regularly named and explored in the process. Ryan identifies as a white, cis, heterosexual man with a learning disability, is a first-generation college student, and is in his 40s. James's identity categories include the same as Ryan's but is in his 80s and has a medical disability. Domonique identifies as a cis, Black woman, a first-generation doctoral student, and is in her 30s. All three researchers bring their experiences, identities, and associated perspectives on the world to this work, and it informed the research process and findings.

In this paper we offer a brief review of relevant literature, including defining key terms, we present a brief history of JSARP, and then overview of our data collection, findings, and implications for further exploration.

### **Discussion of Literature**

For this study, we have included the following definitions to assist the reader in understanding their use. The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has increasingly contributed to the understanding of diversity in higher education, including advancing concepts such as “inclusive excellence,” so we present their definition of diversity:

The variety created in any society (and within any individual) by the presence of different points of view and ways of making meaning which generally flow from the influence of different cultural and religious heritages, from the differences in how we socialize women and men, and from the differences that emerge from class, age, and developed ability. (n.d., p. xx)

Inclusion is defined by the AAC&U as:

The active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum, and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect—in ways that increase awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions. (n.d. p. xx)

A definition of social justice regularly advanced in higher education literature and cited by NASPA and ACPA (2015) comes from Adams, Bell, & Griffin (2007) (who request in-text citations use all three authors):

Social justice is defined as both a process and a goal that includes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to create learning environments that foster equitable participation of all groups and seeks to address issues of oppression, privilege, and power. (p. 30)

Equity in the context of higher education is succinctly defined and community cited as advanced by the AAC&U (n. d.) as, “The creation of opportunities for historically underserved populations to have equal access to and participate in educational programs that are capable of closing the achievement gaps in student success and completion” (p. xx). This definition unfortunately conflates equal (equality) with equity and advances access as the equity aspiration. We, therefore, prefer the more recent definition advanced by Barone and Mora that highlights the equitable distribution of resources, “equity is the

aspiration for justice resulting from the intentional distribution of capital in its myriad forms in the context of generations of state, system, and institutional oppression” (in press).

Intersectionality is often inappropriately used in higher education without a focus on multiple minoritized identities. Crenshaw (1989) advances intersectionality through the lens of the double discrimination of sexism and racism faced by Black women, therefore any use today must uplift this compounding oppression at the site of multiple minoritized identities. Finally, multiculturalism in education, which was more readily seen in higher education literature a few decades ago, is the aspiration that students from, “diverse racial, ethnic, language, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school” (Banks & Banks, 2001, p. 1). Being specific about how important diversity-related terms are defined offers an important foundation upon which a critique for the advancement of knowledge and awareness can be built.

### **Why These Words?**

Tracing the (de)evolution of the language of social justice (Harris et al., 2015; Stewart, 2017) is important for a field that espouses social justice and inclusion as a core professional competency (NASPA and ACPA, 2015). Specifically, NASPA and ACPA (2015) who coordinated to publish professional competency areas for student affairs educators assert that “student affairs educators may incorporate social justice and inclusion competencies into their practice through seeking to meet the needs of all groups, equitably distributing resources, raising social consciousness, and repairing past and current harms on-campus communities” (p. 30). NASPA and the College Student Educators International (ACPA) use this competency area to compel student affairs educators to make, or in the case of JSARP, write about change in the field. The field once focused solely on compositional diversity (Denson & Chang, 2009; Nelson Laird, et. al., 2005), but has gradually expanded this focus to cover inclusion, justice, and equity (Harris et al., 2015). Wilson et al. (2012) found in their study of 80 institutions that 59 included the word diversity in their mission statement. Today’s institutions have gone further than simply acknowledging diversity in their mission statement, but many also have specific diversity statements (LePeau et al., 2018; Santa-Ramirez et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2012;).

It is only natural for educators to produce research that focuses on these topics as they have become central to the field’s work. While there is a general agreement that these concepts are key, there is no consensus on definitions for these terms, or more importantly how to realize institutional transformation in the service of equity and justice (Stewart, 2017). Higher education has a long history of upholding white supremacy that can be traced back to its settler colonialist beginnings. Institutions were built using the labor of enslaved Black people and on land that was stolen from Native Americans (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Wilder, 2013). While the field espouses a focus on justice today, there remain many gatekeeping tactics in effect.

It is not only scholars like Stewart who are pointing out the inconsistencies between institutions’ espoused values and their actions, but the students also bring this to the forefront (Hypolite & Stewart, 2021). While students call for more transformational justice, student affairs educators reuse and redefine words with little action to match (Harris et al., 2015; Stewart, 2017). These words (diversity, equity, social justice, etc.) have become more than research topics but rather defining characteristics of the field.

As such, this paper takes a critical lens to some research produced over the past ten years from JSARP. The use of these words communicates values to current and prospective students and the field of higher education. Students enter the institution with their definitions and hopes for an institution’s actions

(Hypolite & Stewart, 2021). Chang's (2002) definitions of the discourse of preservation and discourse of transformation help categorize student's understandings of the values institutions hold depending on how they use these words which carries over to the articles written. Discourse of preservation leans on historical notions that having a diverse student body ultimately makes for better academic and social experiences (Chang, 2002). Critical race theorists call us to be wary of this type of discourse, often packaged as multiculturalism, as it does not have the students' best interest at its core (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Rather a focus on the benefits of having a diverse student body only becomes important to institutions when interest convergence leans more toward the institution than the students. (Nishi, 2020). Discourse of transformation pushes an institution to focus on creating environments that are particularly focused on meeting the needs of minoritized students (Chang, 2002). While this paper is not centered on institutions' use of these words to attract students, it is important to understand why these words are used so often as topics of research in JSARP. Institutions are made up of the same educators who write these articles and reinforce the importance of these words in the field.

It was only a few years ago that one of our field's organizations, NASPA, also used these words to express their commitment to equity, inclusion, and social justice. This statement was approved by NASPA Board of Directors in 2016 and like many others, the terms used are not defined here:

NASPA affirms the importance and centrality of the values of equity, inclusion, and social justice to student affairs professionals, both in their daily lives and in their work on behalf of and with students and other constituents...Additionally, NASPA strives to ensure that our membership, leadership, scholarship, and programming are reflective of these values, and through our standards of professional practice we hold our members and the Association accountable to these principles in our work on behalf of the profession. (p. 1)

Again, the use of these words showcases the field's dedication to using them and evoking emotion in those who read them. However, the continual use of terms without definition leaves it up to the reader's interpretation which often results in a mismatch of expectations. Furthermore, a lack of definition allows the field to continue making small changes as the language was not explicitly defined to be transformational or justice-oriented (Harris et al., 2015).

### **History of JSARP/NASPA Journal**

The NASPA Journal changed its name to the *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* in 2010. The decision to change the journal's name came after a year of research and surveying done by a work group under the leadership of Shaun Harper, currently a Provost Professor at the University of Southern California Rossier School of Education. As a result of said work, nine recommendations were made about the future of the *NASPA Journal*, one of which included changing the journal's name. While changing the name of a journal may seem small, this change helped clarify the journal's focus (Harper, 2008) and increase viability (K. Manning, personal communication, January 20, 2021). This change was deemed necessary as JSARP is one of the few journals higher education faculty can publish in and use towards their tenure with a focus on praxis and theory to practice (K. Manning, personal communication, January 20, 2021). Beyond the name change, the other recommendations were to help JSARP become more competitive and to clarify its purpose compared to other higher education journals. Recommendations also included creating a contract for Routledge to produce the journal, convening a group to clarify the journal's mission, and recruiting manuscripts creatively and more aggressively (Harper, 2008).

As the authors found multiple articles on the terms defined above, we were curious to know if this is the journal's focus. In an interview with the previous editor, Kathleen Manning (personal communication, January 20, 2021), she expressed that the journal isn't solely focused on social justice, but rather its focus lies with the field's focus at any given time. As mentioned above, the field is currently centering itself on these ideas and topics thus the research produced aligns as well. The editorial board took an implicit focus on these topics for articles while taking a more explicit approach to inclusion in the journal's authors and editors. Manning shared that the journal editors wanted to increase writers of color as well as include graduate students on the editorial board. As Stewart (2017) expressed about institutions not creating equity and justice, Manning feared the journal would fall into the traps of performative social justice.

Next, we present the framework and methodology for this bounded meta-study.

## **Methodology**

### **A Qualitative Meta-Study Framework**

A meta-study framework (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001) explores and synthesizes completed research from multiple studies to address a specific research question. The research question for the study was what are the concepts relating to social justice and how are these concepts being used in JSARP? Within this study of published articles, we analyze the articles for common themes relating to social justice using qualitative document analysis (QDA) (Altheide, et. al., 2008). In using qualitative document analysis and within the meta-study approach, we adopted the framework used successfully in several studies of published education research, including Banning and Kuk's (2011) study of student housing dissertations and the study of construction management dissertations (Glick et al., 2016).

## **Methods and Procedures**

### **Establishing the Study Group**

To formally establish our study, a query was run in the NASPA/Taylor and Francis Database. The data set was produced by searching the *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* from 2010 (the beginning of the journal) thru 2020 (as of October 1, 2020) for articles that included in the title one or more of the following concepts: Diversity, inclusion, social justice, equity, intersectionality and multiculturalism. These search terms located 44 articles. Fourteen were book/media reviews and were eliminated as distinct from peer-reviewed papers. An additional two articles were eliminated as they were not connected to our overall focus on diversity in higher education, therefore 28 papers were reviewed and coded for this analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative document analysis (QDA) served as the primary analytical approach within our meta-study framework. QDA is a form of qualitative content analysis that examines documents in both deductive and inductive approaches (Altheide, 1987). Within the QDA framework, template analysis (King, 1998) was used as the specific coding strategy. In this method, a priori (deductive) codes are used along with new codes produced through an inductive approach to the data.

### ***A Priori Descriptive Codes***

The a priori descriptive codes for our study were “year of publication,” the “concept in the title” that met the search criteria, and the “identity focus” of the study (some articles had a specific focus (African American, LGBTQ+, etc.). Articles that focused on more than one group were coded (multicultural). If the focus was on university personnel a (faculty/staff) code was recorded. Some focused on the students in general and were coded (all students). The “number of views” refers to the number of times the article was viewed as reported by the NASPA website. Institutional affiliation was also recorded and the number of times the article was “referenced” in related higher education dissertation research was also noted. Each article was also searched to fulfill the aims of the meta-study approach to highlight “theory,” “method,” and “topic” of research.”

### ***Inductive Coding***

Our thematic analyses of the JSARP articles used an inductive coding strategy. From each article, purpose and finding segments were combined to facilitate the development of inductive codes. The emergent codes assigned to the articles were “affirmative” and “transformative.” The background for these codes resides in the work of Banks (2002) and Fraser (2003).

Banks’ (2002) approach to classifying curricular reform and Fraser’s’ (2003) approach to parity participation informed our efforts to explore the use of concepts related to “diversity.” We coded each JSARP article in our study as “affirmative” or “transformative.” The affirmative code was informed by Banks (2002) concepts of “contribution approach” (focuses on heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements, for example, a campus Pow-Wow) and additive approach (content, concepts, and themes are added to the curriculum without changing its structure). In addition, the affirmative code was influenced directly by Frazier’s (2003) notion of affirmative strategies (end-state outcomes are improved but underlying social structures limiting participation are not addressed.) The code of “transformative” was informed also by Banks (2002) and Frazier (2003). The transformative code was informed by the “transformation approach” (the underlying structure is changed to enable the view of concepts, issues, and themes from the perspective of diverse ethnic and cultural groups) and the “Social Action Approach” (Action is taking on important social issues relating to ethnic and cultural groups) from the work of Banks (2002). In addition, the code of transformative was informed by Frazier’s (2003) concept of “transformation” (actions that seek to restructure underlying structures that prevent parity in participation). Using the above classification system of two codes, each article was assigned one of the two codes.

These categories support the organizing and distilling of the studies, but the categories of this nature are “fuzzy” and not “crisp” (Ragin, 2000) and some studies suggested a fit into more than one category. In the final classification of each study within one of the two inductive codes, the judgment was based on the researchers’ perceptions of “best fit.” To ensure trustworthiness of the inductive coding process, the strategies of peer debriefing and triangulation of researchers were used (Creswell, 2009).

### **Findings**

Notable findings from the analysis include that diversity was the most used concept for the studies reviewed, found nineteen times representing 68% of all papers reviewed. Social justice was the concept next most frequently found with four papers representing 14% of the articles reviewed, and all other concepts appears less than three times. The identity focus of the article was staff and/or faculty more frequently than students. Page views per article ranged from the fewest of 84 for a 2020 paper on intercultural effectiveness and leadership, and the most of 1776 for a 2012 paper on issues relating to

campus microclimates for LGBT faculty, staff, and students looking at the intersections of social identity and campus roles (notably the longer a paper has been published afford more opportunities for paper views). Authors of the 28 articles represent more than 40 different institutional affiliations, with the University of Minnesota as the most referenced author affiliation with six. Finally, few theoretical frameworks were easily identified as grounding the studies, through critical approaches and ecological modes were frequently used to address underlying social and environmental conditions related to the analysis.

Additionally, diversity as a concept was more frequently coded from 2015-2020 than from 2010-2014. Many in higher education deem diversity a more regressive view of equity and justice work thus, it's surprising the word appears more frequently in the last half of the last decade. Related, social justice is mostly seen in 2018 and beyond, perhaps reflecting increased popularity. Additionally, the papers reviewed here which employed quantitative analyses were weighted more heavily toward diversity as an organizing concept, whereas the only inclusion, social justice, and equity papers used qualitative methods.

The number of views each paper has received via the NASPA website offers an additional lens through which to view the publications, though it's important to note the most recently published papers should be expected to have fewer page views as they have been available for less time. Irrespective, the most coded concept of diversity realized the fewest page views on average, including the least viewed paper published in 2020 with only 84 views. Papers with the concepts of social justice and equity represent the least viewed papers. The most popular paper is one of the oldest, a 2012 publication coded as inclusion with a focus on LGBT faculty, staff, and students.

Overall, publication trends reveal the priorities of authors, editors, and readers and help shape conversations and actions in a discipline or functional area. The meta-study presented here illuminates the values of the authors and editorial boards of JSARP related to papers worthy of publication. Several limitations inherent in this research are presented next.

### **Limitations**

The choice to select only one higher education journal limits the application of these findings to the broader field of higher education with many other publication outlets. Applying the same meta-study methods employed in this study to a different journal may produce different results. The analysis here was limited to a review of the paper titles, abstracts, keywords, and at times a brief skim of the papers whereas a more comprehensive review of each paper may have revealed different coding structures than what is reported. Finally, the choice to examine page views as reported by the NAPSAs website may not reflect the broader impacts of these papers as the frequency of citations appearing in other work or impact factors may reveal different influences on the field of higher education.

### **Discussion**

The *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* seeks to, “publish the most rigorous, relevant, and well-respected research and practice making a difference in student affairs practice” (NASPA, n.d.). As it relates to the evolving scholarship of equity and justice, the meta-study offered here reveals room for improvement as JSARP aspires to realize this vision. For example, the most frequent concept coded in the publications reviewed during this decade-long period was diversity, a broad and nebulous concept that like much literature on student development theory is too often devoid of a critical reflection on race

and racism (Patton et al., 2015). The affirmative approach of diversity and multiculturalism produces palatable research that does little to upend an oppressive status quo in higher education. The historical foundation of student affairs theory upon which the field was built has many limitations, unrepresentative samples, author demographic homogeneity (white men), and an epistemological and methodological foundation rooted in post-positivist and constructivist research (Abes et al., 2019). Individual publications coalesce into a body of knowledge that informs practitioners, and careful attention should be given to the curation of this body by journal editors with special attention paid to the progressive or regressive nature of the scholarship. The editors of JSARP and other higher education journals might benefit from a critical reflection on the impact, not just stated aspirations, of the regressive publication decisions.

Perhaps one implication of the maintenance of the affirmative approach to diversity and multiculturalism is the inability to achieve the stated JSARP aspirations to make a difference in student affairs practice. For example, higher education continues to experience persistence gaps in graduation rates between racially minoritized students and their white peers, with gaps expanding through the COVID-19 pandemic (Fain, 2020). Published research related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice in JSARP could contribute to improving the oppressive institutional climates and cultures which maintain the conditions that facilitate these graduation gaps. Ideally published research creates feedback for practitioners to transform oppressive systems, comprehensively described by Freire (1972) as praxis. Improving published research for its ability to inform practice related to equity and racial justice should be one measure through which to evaluate the effectiveness of JSARP.

Additionally, the research presented here represents a blunting and conflation of terms. Concepts once presented as social justice increasingly fail to present a critical perspective of oppressive systems and institutions, representing a drift that functions to devolve an analysis from true justice to palatable and mainstream concepts of diversity and multiculturalism. Harris (1993) reminds readers that Critical Race Theory (CRT) helps us identify that a conflation of terms is a function of whiteness as property in so far as people in positions of power (such as journal editors) control the language used and published. Pérez Huber and Muñoz (2021) present a compelling explanation of how term conflation and the associated rhetoric of exclusion is an expansion of the CRT concept of the right to exclude others from reputation and status. These powerful factors are at play with every decision to accept, offer a revision and resubmit, or reject a submitted paper. Therefore, JSARP and other journal editors should devote substantial time to ensuring evolving definitional clarity surrounding contested terms such as equity and justice to help inform publication curation.

Finally, important critical questions to be asked stemming from this research include exploring who benefits from affirmative, and who benefits from transformative, research published in JSARP? How has the scholarship and work of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice become commodified, and which scholars, consultants, non-profits, organizations, and institutions monetize their efforts? Do new words and concepts such as inclusive excellence evolve and nuance equity and justice work (AAC&U, n. d. & ACPA, n. d.), or does it re-package existing concepts that functionally stall progressive efforts to transform higher education (Harris, et. al, 2015)? Speaking specifically to the role of JSARP, how are authors recruited and papers selected, and which papers are never published? What role does a journal such as JSARP play in shaping, rather than passively reflecting, the values and aspirations of higher education, and what is the related responsibility of the editors? Finally, how do we cultivate, recognize, and reward scholar-practitioners who are producing research that is innovative, provocative, and actionable to help achieve the liberatory outcomes and educational equity students and communities deserve?



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# Perceptions of the Campus Environment and its Impact on Students' Enrollment Decisions

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## Abstract

*Little literature exists relating students' perceptions of a campus during their campus visit to their decision to enroll at that campus. The purpose of this study was to fill this gap by exploring students' perceptions of Missouri State University's (MSU) campus environment and explore how those perceptions influenced their decision to enroll at MSU. This qualitative study was grounded by the Attribution Theory, which explores how external stimuli influences internal feelings. This study had one participant who met the sample criteria of enrolling at MSU in Spring 2021 and visiting MSU's campus no earlier than June 4, 2020. This study employed the photovoice method and utilized an accompanying Zoom interview. Research questions included:*

1. *What perceptions do prospective students make about MSU's physical campus environment?*
2. *What impact does prospective students' perception of MSU's physical campus have on their likelihood to enroll at MSU?*
- 3) *What impact do factors such as weather and time of year have on prospective students' campus visit experience? Findings included that students value seeing spaces related to their majors, seeing a variety of architecture and green spaces, and seeing spaces that allow them to picture themselves as involved members of campus. Seeing these features may indicate a student's higher likelihood to enroll.*

## Perception of the Campus Environment and its Impact on the Enrollment Decision

As students explore campus environments in search of a school that feels like home, they are not only influenced by the newly-constructed residence halls or parking garages, they are also influenced by the less obvious aspects of a campus, such as the presence of parking signs and well-kept campus green spaces. In addition, environmental factors such as the time of year and weather during the visit could also impact a student's perception about a campus (Simonsohn, 2010). Although research shows the connection between the campus visit and prospective students' enrollment decision, students' perception of the campus aesthetic during the campus visit has not been widely explored.

While campus visit programs cannot control how a student will perceive and react to every part of campus students interact with during the visit, it is beneficial for admissions staff to know what they can control and what changes should be made. Campus visit programs need to understand that students notice when effort is put into forming an aesthetic campus environment. According to Benton and Bennett (2001), "the effect that the time and energy used to create an image on campus may have on students is yet to be fully appreciated" (p. 175). Additionally, Scholl and Guwaldi (2015) discussed how prospective students take into consideration aspects of the campus environment such as the maintenance of its open, green spaces and the placement of parking facilities during their visit. When students are making their enrollment decision, they will likely weigh these aspects just as heavily as they will weigh renovations and campus additions. Because "the entire campus... must be perceived as a holistic learning space that provides a holistic learning experience" (Scholl & Gulwadi, 2015, p. 53), it is important for

campus visit programs to understand how they can modify and improve their campus visit programs to encourage this student perception.

While existing literature has illuminated the importance of the campus visit on college enrollment and the facilities that students desire on their campus, the majority of these studies were conducted during similar times of year and conducted within the past ten years. Further, there is virtually no research that explores the impact of time of year and weather during the campus visit on students' decision to enroll. Finally, of the research that has been completed, little to none is qualitative. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to describe how prospective Missouri State students perceived the campus environment during their campus visits and what impact those perceptions had on their decision to enroll. Another purpose of this study was to explore how uncontrollable factors such as weather and time of year impact students' decision to enroll at Missouri State University (MSU).

### **Review of Literature**

Included in this review of literature are findings of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed- method studies published in peer-reviewed journals in the last two decades related to the campus visit and impact of campus environment on college choice. Key terms used to execute the search included "campus aesthetic," "perception," "physical environment," "attractiveness," "campus visit," "green space," and "facility management." The following topics, which emerged from the literature, are discussed below: a) the campus environment during a campus visit and its impact on college choice; b) general characteristics of a desirable campus environment; and c) the importance of green space on a college campus. In addition, a critique of literature related to Attribution Theory is included to frame the study.

### **The Campus Environment during a Campus Visit and its Impact on College Choice**

This group of studies revolves around what pieces of the campus environment students see during a campus visit impact their college choice. Reynolds (2007) completed a quantitative study surveying 13,782 undergraduate students, hailing from 46 institutions among 27 states in the United States. This study examined what facilities and spaces students believed were the highest priority and biggest determinant in the college choice. Eckert (2012) completed a mixed- method study on 1,518 students from large public universities with similar Carnegie classifications in Ohio. Students completed a questionnaire describing perception of the physical environment, including signage, seating, smoking areas, and buildings; these results informed the creation of an instrument that assesses students' perceptions of the outdoor campus environment. The two studies provided trends showing what campus characteristics influence college choice: a) the overall quality of campus facilities, the location of the institution, and campus attractiveness were essential characteristics; b) the most important facilities to see during the visit are those related to students' majors and residential facilities; and c) students' possible rejection of an institution if it does not have a certain facility, or if that facility is not of adequate quality.

A limitation of Reynolds (2007) is that there was no literature review present. Literature reviews provide a valuable framework for studies and allow readers to get an understanding of what has already been discovered regarding the area of study. A limitation of Eckert (2012) is that the deployment of the questionnaire among the participating institutions were inconsistent in timing and deployment method. This study also reported a low response rate of 21.43%, though that was expected and out of the control of researchers' control. For further exploration, Reynolds (2007) encourages the replication of this study every few years to compare changes among demographics and among generations; its distance from the current generation of students is a limitation. Additionally, the impact of weather on the day of the visit on college choice is a topic raised in Reynolds (2007) that should be further explored.

## General Characteristics of a Desirable Campus Environment

This group of studies revolves around what general characteristics students prefer both socially and academically in their ideal campus environment. Zandvliet and Broekhuizen (2017) completed a mixed-method study that showed what characteristics of a learning environment best support student learning. Bennett and Benton (2001) completed a quantitative study consisting of 301 first-year undergraduate students' attributions of levels of individual success and stimulation toward the campus environment and architecture. Finally, Attaran and Celik (2015) completed a quantitative study which surveyed 162 undergraduates, nearly evenly male and female, at the same New England institution; this study determined a positive correlation between students' own environmental responsibility and their likelihood to pay for campus facilities making sustainable efforts. These studies show what campus characteristics students value and would, therefore, likely want to see during a campus visit. These characteristics include: a) windows with view of nature; b) decorated spaces that are not clinical in design; c) modern architecture because of its reflection of success, access, and integration of new technological advances; and d) implementation of sustainable efforts that match the demographic of the campus' student population.

The largest limitation of these studies is that two did not include any or included a very minimal demographic breakdown of the students surveyed. The lack of demographics reported in the Attaran and Celik (2015) and Bennett and Benton (2001) studies makes it difficult to generalize the findings or to replicate the studies. Another limitation is that Zandvliet and Broekhuizen (2017) used their study in designing a new high school space, so teacher responses may have altered the findings.

## The Importance of Green Space on a College Campus

This group of studies revolves around what types of green space students want on campus, the desired quality of each green space, and suggestions for maintaining and improving use, accessibility, and safety of campus green space. Speake et al. (2013) completed a qualitative study that surveyed 205 undergraduate and postgraduate students; a majority of the students were females within the ages of 21-25. Speake et al. (2013) did not specify any bias in findings as a result of a majority female perspective. Reese et al., (2020) completed a qualitative study, surveying 72 undergraduate students enrolled in the same 'Sustainable Communities' course at a university in the Pacific Northwest. Li et al., (2019) completed a quantitative study and surveyed 590 students studying at a Chinese university. Lastly, Felsten (2009) completed a quantitative study of 236 students; a majority were women, all of whom were enrolled in a psychology course on either the suburban or urban campus of the same Midwestern university. This study determined what characteristics of an environment students most desire that promote relaxation and restoration. The most prominent finding of these studies was that "students strongly agreed that green spaces are important for the image of the university and an essential component of the campus" (Speake et al., 2013, p. 28) Other relevant findings of these studies included: a) students use green space primarily for relaxation and socializing; b) green spaces closer to residential buildings and high traffic areas are more likely to be used; c) green spaces should be conveniently located and provide adequate seating; d) favorite spots on campus are based on aesthetic values and least favorites spots were not green spaces; e) campuses should balance their natural and built spaces; and f) students value the opportunity to interact with nature while on campus.

The most prominent limitation of these studies is that only students currently enrolled at their respective campuses were surveyed. Their opinions on campus green space could be biased based on negative or positive experiences that they associate with the space. Another limitation of the studies, particularly of Reese et al., (2020) and Li et al., (2019), is that the students completed the study in the latter part of the fall semester. Campus environments can look drastically different during the seasons, so perceptions may differ depending on the time of year.

## **Attribution Theory**

The theory used to frame the development of the current study is Attribution Theory (Weiner & Craighead, 1984). Attribution Theory (Weiner & Craighead, 1984) works to “identify the personal and situation determinants of causal understanding...[where] the principles...regarding the presence and absence of causes and effects are important sources of causal information to help determine the answers to ‘why’ questions” (p. 46). The current study will examine how students perceive their physical environment during a campus visit, what attributions they give to each aspect of the physical environment, and how those attributions impact their college choice.

The theory offers a critique of its own in saying that “the presence of some causes may result in other causes being discounted” (Weiner & Craighead, 1984, p. 46). While there will certainly be obvious causal information during the campus visit that impact college choice, there are also vastly many factors outside of the campus visit that will also impact college choice.

Additionally, much of the application of Attribution Theory has been tied to the psychology of achievement. However, Bennett and Benton (2001) believed the following:

[Attribution Theory] also may provide a framework for understanding students’ perceptions about campus buildings. Attribution Theory assumes that the internal behavior of an individual can be assessed from the observation of external behavior and that these external indicants are a reflection of the individual’s mind at the time of the observed event. (p. 162)

This encourages the use of Attribution Theory for further research surrounding perception of the physical environment of a campus.

## **Conclusion**

A great deal of quantitative data exists on the effect of the campus visit on the enrollment decision and on the campus facilities that students value most; this data informed the sample population and methods used for the current study. It is known that the campus visit has a major impact on the college choice. Further exploration can be used to highlight what facilities and spaces students want to see during their campus visits. Existing research also demonstrates the importance of green space on a college campus and green space’s impact on overall satisfaction with the physical environment. The current study aimed to address gaps in the research, including: a) the time of year of the research; b) the perception of non-green spaces; and c) the impact of weather on college choice. The current study also aimed to extend previous studies by including institutions in the Midwestern region of the U.S.

## **Procedures**

The goal of this study was to explore students’ perception of the campus aesthetic during their campus visit and its impact on their enrollment decision. This data will be used to further inform MSU’s Office of Admissions about the impact of their campus visit program and about any changes that may need to be made to the program. This purpose was accomplished by administering a photovoice study during the Spring 2021 semester to one MSU student.

This study used a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because of how it lends to “exploring a problem and developing a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon...in which you do not know the variables and need to explore” (Creswell, 2019, p. 16). In the instance of this study, MSU’s Office of Admissions has little data relating to prospective students’ perception of the campus visit process. This study provided them with valuable information from the mouths of students about what

was impactful during their visit and what may need to be improved on the campus or during the campus visit experience.

Additionally, prior research suggests studying this topic qualitatively, as much of the existing research is quantitative. Next, photovoice was selected as the primary protocol because of its strong ability to relay how users of a space respond to that space. Newman et al. (2009) note that photovoice “places cameras in the hands of ‘everyday’ people, to record life from their point of view, and potentially act as advocates for change in their communities” (p. 139). Agarwal et al. (2015) corroborate this benefit of photovoice and elaborate, saying the following:

[Photovoice allows] data that are rooted in the needs and interests of the people who are users of the research, [empowering] individuals to communicate about issues that impact their lives and concerns facing their community through photos and associated narratives, and can share their own perspectives as people affected by it. (p. 244)

The participant in this study was asked to use photos as a way to denote positive and negative stimuli that they noticed during their campus visit. Because of its ability to give voice to the “users of the research” (Agarwal et al., 2015, p. 244) and empower them to make changes they want to see in spaces they regularly use, it was an appropriate procedure. Inspiring change as needed was also one of the purposes of the study.

The following research questions were used to guide the collection and analysis of data in this study:

1. What perceptions do prospective students make about MSU’s physical campus environment?
2. What impact does prospective students’ perception of MSU’s physical campus have on their likelihood to enroll at MSU?
3. What impact do factors such as weather and time of year have on prospective students’ campus visit experience?

## **Participants**

Nonprobability, convenience sampling was used to identify individuals to participate in the study. At the beginning of the Spring 2021 semester, all participants were notified via email about the opportunity to participate in the study. The following sampling frame criteria was used to identify potential participants: students a) who are enrolled in Spring 2021 courses at MSU, a large, public, liberal arts institution in the mid-western region of the United States, b) who are in their first semester of attendance at this institution as either a transfer student or a first-time-new- in-college (FTNIC) student, and c) who attended a traditional (non-group) campus visit at that institution between June 4, 2020 and December 3, 2020, and d) who are at least 18 years of age at the time of participation. One student who expressed interest in participating was verified to meet the sampling criteria before being invited to participate in the study. Instructions for the photovoice project were written in a Microsoft Word document and sent via email, from which point the participant had 14 days to complete the project. From there, the participant participated in a semi-structured, individual interview to discuss their photos and captions. Prior to data collection, the participant was provided with a hard copy of the study’s IRB approval, which was approved in late Fall 2020. Written informed consent was solicited from the participant in an agreement to participate in the study. This consent was also solicited at the time they submitted the photovoice project and participated in the individual interview.



## Data Collection

A locally developed photovoice protocol, followed by a locally developed semi-structured interview protocol, were used to solicit participant responses. Both protocols were developed to collect data related to prospective students' perception of aspects of the physical campus environment that impacted their decision to enroll. The development of the Campus Visit Photovoice Protocol (CVPP) was guided by a previously completed photovoice study relating to the connection between student campus experiences and the development of green spaces on campus (Reese et al., 2019). The CVPP required the participant to photograph ten aspects of the physical campus environment that either positively or negatively impacted their decision to enroll; these ten photos may also consist of photos they took during their original campus visit. Once they took ten photos, they chose three photos that represented the most significant impact on their enrollment decision. They were asked to write a caption of at least two sentences describing why they chose each of the three photos and what their perception of that aspect of the physical campus environment was.

Following submission of the CVPP, the participant participated in individual, semi-structured interview, titled the Campus Visit Interview Protocol (CVIP) as a way for them to elaborate on their chosen photos and captions. A semi-structured interview approach was chosen because it lends to narration and gives further information that may not have been collected during the photovoice project (Creswell, 2019). The CVIP consisted of ten total questions, each of which related to one of the three research questions posed in this study. The participant answered questions pertaining to both research question one and research question two fully for the first photo before answering those same questions for the second photo, then the third photo. Then, questions pertaining to research question three were answered. The CVIP lasted approximately 30 minutes. The development of the questions for the CVIP was guided by the research questions that this study sought to answer. To enhance the credibility of the CVIP, it was pilot tested in November 2020 using a current MSU student who enrolled for the first time at this institution in Fall 2020 and who visited campus in the six months leading up to their enrollment. During the pilot test, feedback was solicited about the clarity and appropriateness of interview questions with regards to the purpose of the study, and interview questions were modified based on feedback, as appropriate. The CVIP was used to facilitate the interview using video-conferencing software and was recorded on the platform.

## Data Analysis

Following submission of the participant's CVPP, photos and captions were copied into a separate document in Microsoft Word. Following the individual interview, the researcher uploaded the audio file to a transcription service. To ensure the accuracy of each transcript, a line-by-line review was conducted by the researcher. Participant responses to each of the CVIP questions were copied into a separate document in Microsoft Word. The researcher then performed the coding, categorizing, and thematic development of both sets of data. Coding the data was used to "form descriptions and broad themes in the data" (Creswell, 2019, p. 243). Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method will be used to compare codes against one another until no new codes emerge from the data. Next, codes were categorized into themes that respond to the research questions. Themes were presented, explained, and accompanied by illustrative participant quotes with regard to each research questions. Participant photos, particularly those that are accompanied by an illustrative caption, were also be included.

## Limitations

One limitation of this study related to the sampling criteria of the participants. As mentioned earlier, a preliminary inquiry into the number of students who met all sampling criteria identified on page 11 was low. Participation in MSU's campus visit program during Fall 2020 was limited due to challenges presented by COVID-19. Thus, it was difficult to generalize the findings based on one participant who met the sampling criteria to the entire MSU prospective student population. This study could be replicated throughout multiple semesters so that the pool of students and the timing of the campus visit are expanded, therefore allowing for more generalized findings. Another limitation related to the sampling was that all interested participants were selected from the same university. Findings from this study will benefit MSU since the student participating in the study is enrolled at MSU; however, findings may not apply to schools that do not meet MSU's criteria (ex. institutions that are not large, are not public, are not located in the Midwest region of the United States, etc.). Further research is needed to explore the impact of the campus visit experience in a variety of regional locations in the United States.

## **Findings**

This study explored how students' perceptions of the campus aesthetic during their campus visit impacts their decision to enroll. Six themes related to the research questions of the study emerged. These themes provide insight into how students perceive campus during their visits, how these perceptions shape their enrollment decisions, and student reflections on their perceptions of campus now that they are enrolled and active members of campus. Each theme is discussed next.

### **RQ1: Prospective Students' Perception of the Physical Campus Environment**

#### ***Seeing Campus as a Vehicle for their Future***

Students perceive campus as a vehicle for their future. While the academic buildings, recreation spaces, outdoor facilities, etc. may not be the ultimate factor in deciding to enroll, seeing these aspects of the campus environment allows students to picture their lives on campus and beyond. This study's participant, who chose the pseudonym Mike, transferred to MSU and began classes in Spring 2021. Prior to enrolling at MSU, Mike attended a community college in his home state of Illinois. The first photo that Mike presented was of Professional Building (Figure 1), a building on the northwest corner of MSU's campus that primarily serves students in health sciences and pre-professional health programs. His caption (Figure 1) explains how seeing this building excited him for his courses. His ultimate career goal is to work as a speech pathologist. MSU offers that graduate program, and students typically complete an undergraduate degree in communication sciences and disorders before applying to that graduate program. This is the exact path that he plans to follow, so knowing that MSU offered both programs helped him picture himself here long-term. Additionally, seeing Professional Building, where he would be taking many of his undergraduate and graduate classes, made him that much more excited to begin studying at MSU. "I was excited because I had been taking all general education classes before that, so to see the building where a majority of my actual major classes would be was exciting for me."

## Figure 1

### *Photo of Professional Building*



*Note.* Mike presented his first photo of Professional Building with the caption: “This is Professional building on campus. This is where a lot of my classes will be held for my major. A big reason I decided to come to this school was because they have my major and masters program here, which is really nice because if I can get in here that means I will not have leave in two years.”

### *Making Assumptions about Campus Life*

By taking a campus tour, students may also make assumptions about campus life and involvement by way of its physical environment. The second photo Mike presented (Figure 2) was of the bear statue located just north of the student union. During Mike’s visit, this bear statue in particular was wearing clothes related to the campus tradition, homecoming.

I really enjoyed walking past this bear... At the time of my visit he had a football jersey on, which I thought was pretty cool. The person who was guiding my tour that day said that they will change what he is wearing every once in a while, which I think is pretty cool... When I first walked past the statue originally I thought, like, that’s pretty damn cool, because I love being outdoors and I love wildlife and stuff like that, so, like, any status of any kind of wildlife is freaking neat to me.

For Mike, this bear statue represented a few things. The fact that the statue is located near an open, grassy area of campus evoked his excitement for nature and wildlife. Additionally, he enjoyed knowing that the statues undergo a wardrobe change at different points throughout the year, especially for various athletic events. Seeing the football jersey on the statue while in the midst of football season represented an air of fun and involvement. Because Mike plans to be at MSU for several years pursuing his degrees, knowing that the campus has that playful energy was important.

## Figure 2

### *Photo of Bear Statue*



*Note.* Mike presented his second photo of the bear statue with the caption: “During my visit to campus, I really enjoyed walking past this bear and looking at this bear. At the time of my visit, he had a football jersey on which I thought was pretty cool. The person who was guiding my tour that day said that they will change what he is wearing every once in a while, which I think is pretty cool. I also enjoy looking at all the other bears that are around campus.”

## **RQ 2: Impact of Campus Visit on Enrollment**

### *Confirming the Decision to Enroll*

Many students understand the importance of coming for a campus visit in picturing themselves as a member of that community. For some, the campus visit is what ultimately makes them choose to attend that school. For others who have already confirmed that they intend to enroll before visiting, the campus visit is more of a solidification that they have made the right enrollment decision. At the time of Mike’s campus visit in Fall 2020, he had already enrolled in his Spring 2021 courses. He had made his decision to attend based on several personal factors, so his campus visit was more of a chance for him to confirm that he had made the right decision.

The area of campus that he spoke about most emphatically as part of this confirmation was the Foster Recreation Center (FRC). His third photo was of the western entrance into the FRC (Figure 3), and his caption (Figure 3) reflected his admiration for how nice the space is. In the time between Mike deciding that he intended to enroll at MSU and when he took his visit in Fall 2020, he was able to access the FRC a few times. Because his significant other was already a student at MSU, he was granted access through them. He recalled being initially very impressed at the FRC’s facilities and options for various fitness activities, especially in comparison to his prior institution. He commented that “it just made me happy to be able to see a really nice gym...and be able to use a lot of different equipment.” When asked about how his prior institution’s recreation facility compared, he stated they had recreation space, but the equipment was very limited where “if you got there at the wrong time, then there was people” on almost every machine. Because of how important maintaining an active lifestyle is to Mike, seeing this before and during his tour helped confirm that he had made the right decision to enroll.

### Figure 3

#### *Photo of Foster Recreation Center (FRC)*



*Note.* Mike presented his third photo of the FRC with the caption: “I really enjoy taking care of my body and working out so I spend a lot of time here at the gym. I also like this gym because it is one of the nicer gyms I have seen on a college campus.”

#### *Feeling Settled in a New Environment*

Mike also noted how coming for a campus visit was an important piece in helping him feel more settled when he began classes in Spring 2021. As mentioned above, Mike had been able to visit campus a few times when visiting his significant other before he went on his formal campus visit. He commented that because his purpose for these impromptu visits was not to explore MSU, he got only a cursory glance at the campus. So, coming for his campus visit affirmed that he had made the right decision to enroll. This more formal visit allowed him to see the buildings where he would actually be taking classes and see an overview of all the facilities and services to which he would have access. When asked if visiting helped him feel more settled when he began classes in the spring, he affirmed. The visit gave him “a little bit more of an idea of where everything was at, instead of coming here cold turkey.”

#### *Noticing Aesthetic Efforts*

Aesthetic efforts do not go unnoticed and may be another indication for a student that they made the right choice. Granted, not every single student finds the same style of architecture, the same landscape design, the same organization of buildings, etc. visually appealing. But the literature discussed earlier shows that when universities put effort in intentionally designing campus spaces and polishing their campus aesthetic, students take note. During Mike’s visit, he noted the style of architecture of the Historic Quad, a name for the cluster of original buildings on MSU’s campus that includes Hill Hall and Carrington Hall.

For me, statues and older buildings kind of go together... I have to go to Hill Hall every Thursday for class, and I walk by the bear [statue], and then I walk by Carrington [Hall] and the older buildings over there, and I love looking at sculptures and older buildings and stuff like that. I think that’s all really cool.

Mike’s admiration for the historic touches on a consistently modernizing campus is clear as he commented on this aspect of the campus aesthetic. Even though a student on the same tour may not have the same affinity for historic statues and architectural designs, that effort into maintaining MSU’s history was noticed and appreciated by at least one student.

In saying that aesthetic efforts do not go unnoticed, it must also be said that most institutions are likely putting in similar amounts of effort into the campus aesthetic as each other. Thus, students may not see a school's campus as wholly unique based on that alone, and the effort that they see likely is not the ultimate deciding factor on where they enroll. When asked the question "Did this particular aspect of campus (the bear statue and Historic Quad area) have any impact on your decision to enroll?" Mike responded "Probably not." He explained how several of the campuses that he had previously been on have similar features, and assumed that many others across the country do as well. So, while he thought "it was a nice thing to see when [he] got on campus," the effort put into creating an attractive campus aesthetic was not an ultimate deciding factor in his decision to enroll at MSU. Rather, it simply affirmed that he had made the right decision.

### **RQ 3: Weather's Impact on Campus Visit**

#### ***Providing a Realistic View into Regional Weather's Influence on Campus Life***

The time of year when students visit a campus and the weather on the day of the visit can have a large impact on their overall impression of the campus and its environment. However, these aspects of the campus visit may not necessarily be the deciding factor for whether or not a student ultimately enrolls, either. Rather, the time of year and weather on the day of the campus visit are aspects that students have likely already researched. It is a safe assumption that if a student is interested in a school outside of a region where they're familiar with the weather, they have done some cursory research into what the school's weather is. Thus, if students know that they do not feel comfortable living in a cold-weather area for their entire college experience, they likely will not invest time into visiting schools in cold-weather climates. Mike's experience regarding the time of year and weather of his campus visit helps affirm this assumption.

Mike is originally from Illinois, which is in close enough proximity to Missouri to have very comparable climates, with Missouri being a few degrees warmer on average. He said that he does not adjust well to change, so coming to a school with a similar climate as to what he was used to was something he desired. On the day of his campus visit in mid-fall 2020, he remembered it as a "nice and sunny day," and noted that it was very pleasant to be taking an all outdoor-tour during this weather. If he had visited later in the fall when it was much colder or in the summer, he said it would not have been nearly as pleasant to walk around campus. In reflecting on all of this, Mike said that as much as he enjoyed the weather on the day of his visit and the overall weather patterns of Missouri, it did not play a large role in his decision to enroll. It was simply an added benefit that the school he had already committed to had the weather that he desired.

More than the weather itself, what the weather represents may also be an attractive feature for students, even if it is not the ultimate deciding factor to enroll. When asked if the time of year of his visit impacted his overall campus visit experience, he emphatically stated that it had a positive impact.

For sure, I love fall. It's my favorite time of the year. Football, I love bow hunting and stuff like that, so I go hunting in the fall...I love the colors of the leaves. I like the slight breeze when it's a little bit chillier. I like to be able to wear jeans and a jacket, flannels, stuff like that, so having all of that be the time where I come down and actually make my official visit...was nice.

For Mike, taking his campus visit during a time of year he loves was a valuable way to see what life would be like on campus. The fall weather represented activities on-campus, such as football and

tailgating, and off-campus, such as hunting and exploring the area. This allowed Mike to better picture himself as a student enjoying what campus is actually like. He went on to mention that his decision to take his visit on a Saturday was a good one and that it also gave him a great perspective on what campus is actually like. Saturdays typically are not busy days on campus since students are not going to and from work and classes. Mike enjoyed this aspect of his campus visit, saying “I maybe saw, like, 30 [students] in total when I was walking around, which was cool because it kinda felt like you’re getting the campus to yourself.” Seeing campus in such an intimate setting showed a much more calm and realistic depiction of campus life than the other times he had visited during more high-traffic times.

## **Discussion**

### **Conclusions**

Although research shows the connection between the campus visit and prospective students’ enrollment decisions, students’ perceptions of the campus aesthetic during the campus visit has not been widely explored. The findings of this study show the importance of showing students facilities and spaces that are relevant to their academic interests, that represent what being a student is like, and that connect them to their personal interests during their campus visit. These findings can be used to inform MSU’s campus visit program, as well as the visit programs of other similar institutions.

#### ***RQ 1: Prospective Students’ Perception of the Physical Campus Environment***

Findings for RQ 1 include students seeing campus as a vehicle for their future during their campus visit. A primary goal for most students pursuing higher education is to earn a degree that will allow them to earn a job in their field of interest. So, it is important for them to know a) what building(s) their classes will primarily be located in, b) what the aesthetic and functionality of the building is, and c) how easily they can see themselves taking classes in that building. Mike affirmed this in his discussion of the first photo he presented of Professional Building, the building where the majority of his undergraduate and graduate classes would be held. This corroborates Reynolds’ (2007) findings that the “most influential [sights during the campus visit] in the decision process [were] facility in my major, library, and technology” (p. 78).

Additionally, after enrollment, these facilities were rated the most satisfactory, indicating that having a positive experience with a well-maintained facility housing a student’s major is important for both recruitment and retention of students. It may be tempting for institutions to want to show off newly renovated or modern spaces on campus or highlight spaces for the most popular majors. These sights may be enticing to prospective students, but ultimately, they need to see the academic spaces they will be in most often.

#### ***RQ 2: Impact of Campus Visit on Enrollment***

Findings for RQ 2 include that while students may appreciate the aesthetic efforts and overall character of campus architecture and its environment, these efforts likely are not a major reason why a student decides to enroll. Rather, these efforts may be an added benefit of the campus that helps students feel like they made the right decision to enroll. Mike’s main priority with MSU’s architecture was that the facilities he would use most often were well-maintained and easily accessible. Historic architecture and other character in the campus environment did not directly impact his decision to enroll at MSU. However, he relayed how much he enjoyed seeing these pieces of character in the campus environment and mentioned how he enjoys seeing them as he walks through campus each day. Bennett & Benton

(2001) found that their study's "participants attributed greater individual success... [including] higher GPA, a pleasant experience, and a successful future... to colleges with modern architecture than to colleges with traditional architecture. Participants also attributed a superior education to photographs depicting campuses with modern architecture" (p. 172). Mike's thoughts regarding MSU's traditional architecture do not align with Bennett & Benton's (2001) finding. However, it must be mentioned that Mike is only one of 20,000+ students enrolled at MSU, and that every student values different types of architecture. While Bennett & Benton's (2001) finding is a valuable generalization of prospective students' thoughts regarding architecture and should be used to help inform which sights are shown on a campus visit, it is important to remember that not every student will value the same architecture as the participants in their study.

### ***RQ 3: Weather's Impact on the Campus Visit***

Findings for RQ 3 include that weather may not necessarily impact a student's decision to enroll at an institution, but it is noticed and considered during the campus visit. For Mike, enrolling at a school where he was familiar with the weather and where the weather was desirable was something that excited him. However, it did not make the enrollment decision for him; he still would have considered schools with weather different than MSU's so long as it was still desirable. Simonsohn's (2010) findings state that "prospective students visiting the campus... showed a greater tendency to enroll in such university the cloudier the weather was during their visit...because cloudiness makes belonging to an academically challenging institution more appealing" (p. 279). Simonsohn's (2010) finding did not concur with this study's finding, given that Mike placed great value on the sunny, fall weather he experienced during his visit. Granted, Mike admitted that the weather would not have directly influenced his decision to enroll; rather, it was an added benefit that he was able to enjoy the type of weather he loves at the institution where he had already enrolled. It is certainly worth noting that both this study and Simonsohn's (2001) study acknowledge that weather is a trivial factor that can change at any given minute: "the fact a decision as important as which college to enroll in can be influenced by such trivial... factor as cloudcover on a single day, suggests that projection bias is likely to be a rather general phenomenon" (p. 279). Thus, it is difficult to say that weather on the day of the visit can be a significant predictor of whether or not a student will enroll. It is, perhaps, easier to say that the overall regional climate of the institution is more of a factor on where a student enrolls. Mike's discussion of the weather on the day of this visit certainly attests to this assertion.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study's primary implication for practice is for admissions offices when planning their campus visit programs. This study can inform the training of tour leaders, the creation of tour routes, and, potentially most importantly, the facilities and spaces showcased on the tour. Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that certain facilities and spaces on campus should be highlighted during campus visits: a) academic buildings relevant to prospective students; b) student service facilities such as recreation centers and student unions; and c) natural areas that highlight campus character. Both this study and previous literature (Bennett & Benton, 2001; Reynolds, 2007) delineate the importance of prospective students seeing the facilities that house their academic interests. It is also important that these facilities are well-maintained and easily accessible for all visitors. If possible, campus tours should also aim to give prospective students a view of the inside of the facility, potentially including a classroom or lab space.



Next, seeing student service facilities gives prospective students the unique view of what non-academic campus spaces look like. Students likely are not spending their entire day or entire time on campus solely in their academic building or residence hall. They are also exploring facilities such as the student union, the health center, the recreation center, the library, etc. It may not be possible for a tour to feature each and every student service facility available to students, but tour leaders should certainly aim to feature at least one of these facilities, preferably one that is proven to be most used by the students on that campus.

Finally, students appreciate knowing that campus is multi-faceted. There are spaces on campus that promote academia and whose architecture reflects that; there are spaces that are newly renovated to keep up with the modern needs and desires of students; there are spaces that serve as a place for students to relax and enjoy greenery and open-air. Campus tour leaders should aim to show a variety of these types of spaces to show students all that campus has to offer and help them begin to identify with a space on campus that they can call their own. This may include showing students a particularly historic space on campus (in this study, Carrington Hall), a green space where students frequently set up hammocks, and the newly-renovated dining center that attracts hundreds of students each day.

In saying that tour leaders should aim to feature as many sights on campus proven to be most desirable, it must also be said that personalization, when possible, is key. During the pandemic, MSU's campus visit program drastically decreased its tour registration capacity. While this change did not allow for as many visitors on a given day, it did allow for a greater amount of personalization on each tour. For example, if a tour leader had two families in their tour with one student being interested in a science field and the other in a business field, the tour leader could plan their route accordingly to feature those academic buildings. Additionally, if the tour leader knows that one student is interested in playing soccer, they may also be able to route the tour to pass by the soccer field and recreation center. Personalizing the tour experience for students is much easier when tour capacities are lower. Regardless of the registration numbers, though, tour leaders should aim to tailor each tour to the needs and desires of their visiting families.

The findings of this study can also be used for those who design campus facilities and green spaces. Previous literature shows students tend to value academic facilities that house their major, libraries, and accessible technology in various facilities most frequently. Ensuring that these facilities are well-maintained and easily accessible are critical, not only for recruitment of prospective students, but also for retention of current students. It is also proven in previous literature (Li et al., 2019; Reese et al., 2020; Speake et al., 2013) and corroborated in this study that outdoor and green spaces should be just as well-maintained and accessible. These spaces often provide students a space to relax, spend time with friends, and take a break from the academic part of their day. With access to this data, campus facility and outdoor planners should take it into consideration when planning new spaces and facilities and when updating current spaces and facilities.

### **Directions for Further Research**

Replication of this study is encouraged. There are a few limitations of this study that are cause for replication: a) this study was completed at a mid-size Midwestern university in the United States; b) findings were based on one participant, which decreases generalizability; c) the sample population was limited to students who visited MSU's campus during the COVID-19 pandemic, which offered a visit experience that was significantly different than those provided before the pandemic.

One of the goals of this study was to help fill the gap in literature regarding the perceptions of the campus environment and its impact on students' enrollment decisions, and it sought to accomplish this goal by drawing from similar, past studies. Several studies included in previous literature (Li et al., 2019; Reese et al., 2020; Reynolds, 2007) encouraged replications of studies similar to this one. Because this study was only able to conclude findings based on one participant's responses, it is important that this study be replicated to include more voices in the findings. As mentioned throughout the above sections, each student may value seeing slightly different parts of campus and its environment during their visits. Hearing from several voices allows for these nuances to become present and allows for more generalizable findings. Additionally, intentionally including characteristics to the sample population that encourages participation for underrepresented groups may be beneficial. The participant in this study did not claim to belong to an underrepresented group, so this aspect of the perceptions of the campus environment and its impact on students' enrollment decisions was not explored for this population. These students may or may not value different aspects of a campus environment, so exploring the similarities and differences could certainly further inform campus visit programs on best practices.

This study also focuses solely on students visiting MSU, a mid-size Midwestern university in the United States. Thus, this study's findings may be most helpful for other similar-sized, Midwestern institutions. By replicating this study in various other regions in the United States, it would allow for findings to be used for that particular region, as well as contribute to generalizable findings for all institutions. Lastly, this study would certainly benefit from being replicated in a time where campus visits are not modified due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many schools may maintain their current visit policies, such as decreased capacities and altered tour routes. For the schools who decide to revert back to their previous policies, their replication of this study in that environment will add to literature and generalizable findings.

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## Examining Muslim Students' Perceptions of Veiling at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

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### Abstract

*Using interview data from 10 Muslim college students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), this study highlights their perceptions regarding veiling and Muslim college student experiences in postsecondary institutions. In this study, we argue that higher education institutions must pay close attention to minoritized student populations on their campuses, such as Muslim students. Theoretically grounded in the Minoritized Religious and Spiritual Campus Climate (MRSCC) 's fourth and fifth dimensions (the informal and formal inter-religious interactions between individuals and groups, and the extent to which an institution's organizational and structural aspects facilitate or support religious and spiritual diversity), we discuss two salient findings: (a) experiences regarding veiling within racially and ethnically diverse HBCU campuses, and (b) gendered Islamophobia that participants encountered with regards to veiling. Some participants rejected the western notion of hijab as an oppressive element of their religion. Instead, they focused on the multiple meanings hijab holds as a symbol of religious identity, feminism, and empowerment. Others stated that part of campus interactions is one's personality and not necessarily the fact that one dons hijab. Thus, it is incumbent on institutions of higher education and student affairs professionals to engage students and student groups in informal and formal inter-religious interactions and examine the institution's organizational and structural aspects that could facilitate or support religious and spiritual diversity.*

*Keywords:* Muslim students, veiling, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, spirituality

### Examining Muslim Students' Perceptions of Veiling at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

On September 16, 2022, the Iranian government brutally murdered a 22-year-old woman named Mahsa Amini for not wearing hijab (religious headscarf) according to their standards. Amini's murder sparked global protest regarding Muslim women's rights to veil or not as they please. Many well-known western political figures have addressed her death, calling the Muslim world to "protect" Muslim women against oppressive regimes. Although well-meaning, western leaders and celebrities have selectively called out violence against Muslims who veil while largely remaining silent on other issues that also affect them. For example, Indian actress Priyanka Chopra called on her social media followers to join the movement for Iranian women, stating, "we must...be vocal so that [they] will no longer be forced to stay silent" (Chopra, n.d.). Although seemingly well-meaning, statements of condemnation by figures like Chopra

highlight the hypocrisy of addressing how Muslim women dress while ignoring gendered ways in which women are targets of anti-Muslim discrimination globally, such as Muslim women in India and elsewhere. Often formed through a white feminist lens, western society pushes an orientalist narrative where Muslim women are oppressed and require saving while ignoring the decades-long Muslim feminist and queer resistance against patriarchal regimes (Terman, 2017; Ahmed & Ali, 2021).

Western political leaders have arguably contributed to the global discourse surrounding Amini's death and veiling. However, the broader American academic community has remained silent about how this affects Muslim college students. Although Muslim students are targeted for their religious identity, most colleges and universities have ignored tangible ways they can implement support systems. Thus, this study addresses the following: (a) how does veiling shape Muslim college students' sense of belonging at HBCUs? and (b) what are the experiences and perspectives of Muslim students at HBCUs regarding veiling?

## **Literature Review**

### **Muslims and Muslim College Students**

In 2020, about 3.85 million Muslims lived in the United States, and Islam is projected to become the second-largest religious group in America by 2050 (Pew Research Center). This increase is due to two factors: Muslim families tend to have more children and an increase in immigrants from Muslim-majority countries (Pew Research Center). In addition, roughly 73% of immigrants have lived in the U.S. for over ten years, mostly coming from Asian and Middle East-North African countries (Pew Research Center).

Research indicates that being Muslim impacts college experiences (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Mutakabbir & Nurridin, 2016). For example, Muslims were more likely to engage in diversity-related initiatives on campus than their Jewish and Christian peers (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010). Furthermore, though Muslim college students were heavily involved in campus activities, students explained that they still felt like a "perpetual suspect" because they felt responsible for the violence that took place on September 11, 2001 (Ali, 2014). Most recently, Ahmadi et al. (2021) found that Muslim students experienced increased rates of hostility due to the 2016 Trump election.

### **HBCUs and Muslim Students**

There are over 100 accredited HBCUs in the United States, located in 19 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands (National Center for Education Statistics). Furthermore, HBCUs "were federally established [in 1964] to serve the educational needs of Black Americans...[and] became the principal means for providing postsecondary education to Black Americans" (Department of Education). Although HBCUs were initially created to serve Black students exclusively, pressures to increase minority enrollment of non-Black students intensified, eventually prompting the inclusion of the non-Black population (Closson & Henry, 2008). In 2019, non-Black students made up twenty-four percent (24%) of HBCU institutions nationwide (National Center for Education Statistics).

HBCUs have provided a nurturing and supportive environment for students of color (United Negro College Fund). In fact, a Gallup-Purdue poll noted that Black graduates from HBCUs were more likely to have felt supported post-college than their Black peers who graduated from predominantly white institutions (Seymour & Ray, 2015). Despite HBCUs' original purpose to emphasize racial and ethnic

diversity, they are largely dominated by Christian principles. Many HBCUs were founded by religious Christian missionary groups, such as Baptist, Congregational, and African Methodist Episcopal (AME) denominations (Gasman & Nguyen, 2015). Abelman (2013) also found that half of all HBCUs are church-affiliated, which is often reflected in the campus climate and poses a unique challenge for minority religious groups within these institutions.

### **Veiling**

Some followers of Islam believe that according to the Qur'an and hadith – the Islamic religious text and teachings – hijab is a religious practice of veiling that requires covering a woman's head, hair, and neck. However, different cultures shape how Muslims practice hijab (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003). In our study, we will use the terms “hijab” and “veiling” interchangeably.

Globally, the hijab became a symbol of visibility and identity for Muslims and Islam. Although hijab has been viewed negatively in western history, following the events on 9/11, veiling by hijab and burqa (attire covering head, body, and face) became increasingly viewed as "degrading," a symbol of extremism and oppression of women (Haddad, 2007). Furthermore, Muslims who veil were burdened with stereotypes framed by western socio-political agendas to monolithically stereotype veiling, which resulted in the systematic misrepresentation and misunderstanding of Muslim women navigating higher education institutions (Khosrojerdi, 2015; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003).

### **Bridging the Gaps**

Several studies provide a profound understanding of the Muslim college student experience in the U.S. However, limited research has examined the perspectives of veiling at HBCUs and how gendered Islamophobia has targeted Muslim women and Muslims, which our study addresses. According to Raja (2019), gendered Islamophobia consists of "the ways the state utilizes gendered forms of violence to oppress, monitor, punish, maim and control Muslim bodies" (p. 278-279). In higher education, this may include bias incidents, hate crimes, or simply questioning why Muslim women veil as a form of control. Muslims who veil are often viewed as submissive, uneducated, and oppressed; at the same time, they are perceived as "terrorist sympathizers, supporters and potential terrorists who pose a threat to the security of the state" (Raja, 2019, p. 279).

Furthermore, Rockenbach et al. (2017) highlighted the need for structural worldview diversity on college campuses since students of majority Christian groups had less favorable views about their Muslim peers than non-Muslim students who identified with religious minority groups. Therefore, this mixed-methods study centers on the perceptions regarding veiling at HBCUs, which have a historical legacy of Christianity. As such, we hope to offer a nuanced understanding of how Muslim individuals are situated in HBCUs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A study conducted by Riggers-Piehl and Lehman (2016) found that negative behaviors by peers, faculty, and staff were key factors in Christian, Jewish, and Muslim experiences that hindered their ability to exercise their religious faith on their college campuses. To further examine the relationships between religious/spiritual life, worldview diversity, and campus climate, researchers have begun to bring these topics to the focal point of their work in the past decade (Mayhew et al., 2016; Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2013; Mayhew & Rockenbach, 2014).

Notably, this ongoing work has contributed to a better understanding of Hurtado et al. (1999) effort on campus climate, which examined racial and ethnic diversity and was implemented in their studies by using four dimensions, determined as

1. the historical legacy of exclusion and inclusion,
2. compositional diversity,
3. psychological climate, such as perceptions and attitudes, and
4. behavioral climate, such as the formal and informal interactions between groups.

Mayhew et al. utilized this framework to examine students' worldviews, then developed the Campus Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey (CRSCS). Cole et al. (2020) expanded on these four dimensions of the CRSCS and added a fifth dimension to develop the Minoritized Religious and Spiritual Campus Climate (MRSCC) framework. MRSCC is composed of five dimensions that address Milem et al.'s (2005) structural and organizational dimension, referring to faculty and administrative support that students receive, curricula taught, resource allocation, and campus policies that govern students' religious and spiritual diversity. The five dimensions are as follows:

1. religious or faith-based institutions are likely to have a differential influence on students' experiences than non-religious or secular institutions
2. the amount of religious diversity within an institution
3. perceptions and attitudes regarding campus religious and spiritual climate
4. informal and formal inter-religious interactions between individuals and groups
5. the extent to which an institution's organizational and structural aspects facilitate or support religious and spiritual diversity, including norms, practices, and policies driven by institutional agents

There are parallels between racial/ethnic minority students and those identifying with a minority religion, such as Islam (Cole et al., 2020; Bowman & Smedley, 2013; Rockenbach et al., 2017). Thus, we are interested in examining how organizational and structural features that actively promote a positive religious and spiritual climate enhance the quality of Muslim students' college experiences.

## **Methods**

### **Study Design and Data Analysis**

This study used a subset of the data from our larger Muslim College Student (MCS) project, which was designed as a mixed-methods evaluation to examine the experiences of Muslim students across three different types of colleges and universities in the United States: California, HBCUs, and nationwide. Students participated in an interview, a survey, or both. This iteration of the larger MCS project examined the experiences of Muslim students attending HBCUs. We interviewed 52 participants in the fall of 2019 and spring of 2020; 25 of those individuals discussed their veiling experiences, and 10 of their voices are highlighted within this study. In an effort to maintain anonymity, participant names were pseudonymized.

We utilized a narrative methodology guided by semi-structured interviews. We recruited participants through email, social media, and over the phone. Once participants expressed interest, we verified their enrollment at an HBCU through their campus-affiliated email addresses. Then, we scheduled and conducted 45-minute interviews with each participant to learn more about their general identity, college experiences, whether specific laws and policies affect them, and their perceived sense of belonging and



matter on their college campuses. For those who veiled, we asked if they experienced misconceptions or discriminatory behaviors related to their veil, about others' opinions and responses to the veil, and how they felt the veil affected how others viewed or treated them on campus. Once participants completed the interviews, we transcribed the data, and cross-referenced transcriptions with interview audio to ensure authenticity and correctness. Our selected codes were initially researcher-derived, based on our theoretical framework. Subsequently, codes were adapted to encompass relevant participant terminology and language, as well. Accordingly, we utilized these codes for our thematic analysis in NVivo software.

### **Positionality**

We find it necessary to state our positionality as a racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse research team, which included an Afghan Muslim woman, Black Christian man, Bangladeshi Muslim woman, and Christian Latina woman, as we believe it informed our approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretations. As an Afghan Muslim woman, one of our researchers understood the experiences, expectations, religion, and cultural norms among Muslims. Two of our researchers had limited contact and exposure to Muslim women who veil and extensive contact with traditional minority groups. Lastly, another one of our researchers wears the hijab herself, and related to and valued the perceptions of our veiled participants. Notably, neither of our experiences were shared as a representation of our communities. However, we relied on our individual lived experiences within the social context of our identities to help us engage in deep, critical, and meaningful conversations regarding the experience of Muslims who veil while attending HBCUs.

### **Findings**

In this section, we focus on the experiences of 10 participants—9 who veil and 1 who does not veil—at their respective HBCUs. The following section highlights two relevant themes consistent across the data: (a) the veiling experience at HBCUs and (b) how gendered Islamophobia affects Muslims who veil.

#### **The Veiling Experience at HBCUs**

In the context of racially and ethnically diverse HBCU campuses, we were interested to know the overall campus climate and interactions students experienced regarding veiling. Zahra, a graduate student, mentions,

At my HBCU, people wearing headscarves and things like that is very normal, because even if women are not Muslim, it's very common to go on campus and see people wearing scarves. So it's not something that's foreign at all. I never felt like anybody treated me a certain type of way because I had a head scarf on or anything like that.

Zahra references the common African practice of wearing a headwrap or a headscarf, which is often driven by culture rather than religion. Since students at her institution are familiar with the practice of wearing a headscarf, Zahra's perspective highlights how HBCUs that value racially and ethnically diverse student populations can help to alleviate hypervisibility and stereotypes of Muslims who veil on their college campuses. Similarly, Star, an undergraduate, discusses the benefits of having a large African-American-Muslim community surrounding her,

I feel very comfortable on my campus. In the [College Town] area, there is a large Muslim community, there are also African Americans who are Muslim. But in general, there's a better understanding of Islam here than at my high school. So if anyone questions my hijab, they'll ask why but not in a confrontational way.

Two of our participants, Nano, a medical student, and Caylor, a third-year undergraduate and recent convert to Islam, also discuss being able to express themselves through their hijab and own modest fashion after beginning to wear it more regularly, stating that they are able to express themselves through their hijab and personal fashion style without fear of being judged or stereotyped, stating that they felt much respect from their peers for wearing the hijab, while being praised for their veiling and fashion choices. Across these examples, participants depict their campuses as open and diverse, positively influencing Muslims who veil to express themselves without fear of judgment. However, even though non-Muslim individuals were accepting and encouraging of the hijab and veiling in general, participants were still subject to curiosity regarding the veil, which participants generally believed was motivated by intrigue rather than preconceived discrimination. Zara, an undergraduate student, shares,

People ask why I choose to cover up [and] what the purpose of it is. I've had maybe one person ask if it was forced, but I think it was really out of curiosity rather than having a negative perception. And they actually straight up told me that [they're] just trying to learn and I understand you know, being attending a historically Black college, a lot of the students are aware of stereotypes and misconceptions about races and ethnicities and religion. So, a lot of students I study with are very sensitive about asking questions, and I think it's pretty positive.

In general, the diverse campus climate at HBCUs helps mitigate any negative interactions that Muslims who veil have with their peers. While we saw this sentiment rise frequently, many of our participants also express how they experience gendered Islamophobia. In the section below, we delve into the experiences of gendered Islamophobia.

### **Gendered Islamophobia**

While many Muslims who veiled feel comfortable on their college campus, some of the participants in this study faced stereotypes due to misconceptions held by the campus community. For instance, Shannel B, an undergraduate, recounts her experiences, stating,

Just in the first semester of the school year, I lived on campus, so I just had to assimilate with my roommates. They didn't know what I believed in. The first question is like, are you Muslim, like what's that thing on your head? That's the hardest part, but I've always had to tell them what I was. What the hijab was, what it represents, and things like that. But it was mainly harder when you were younger because people were just so naive and unaware and ignorant.

Even in college, misconceptions and stereotypes against Muslims often persist, continuing the burdensome role of repudiating rampant misconceptions and explaining why Muslim women veil. For example, our participants' experiences also revealed that monolithic categorization of Muslims often appeared to target Muslim women and Muslims wearing hijab. Fatima, a first-year undergraduate, expresses the effects of this monolithic categorization on campus because of their identity as a *hijabi* (person who wears the hijab) and as a woman, indicating,

I've had a lot of instances where I'll be in a group chat [where they will be talking about], music for example, and people go, "Oh, shut up and she don't listen to music because she's Muslim". I

listen to music. So I feel like people don't sometimes give me a chance to show interest in who I am, they just have a perception of how all Muslim women behave and act. And then that's kind of pushed upon me. I think a major thing for me is, I'm a really outspoken vocal person, so it's hard sometimes, right? When I feel like, people don't really look for my input, because they just assume I'm supposed to be shy, reserved, and modest for a woman. I'm like, I could be a Muslim woman and be loud and outspoken in saying whatever I want.

Similarly, another participant, Nano expressed,

They give the sense that I'm religious or, like conservative, or I do sometimes notice that people say a cuss word and then just apologize to me personally. And I'm like, why are you apologizing to me? So I do feel sometimes they have this imaginary boundary [up] because I am wearing my hijab, but at the same time, I feel like, you can still be yourself– I'm not here to judge you or, I wish that you continue to be just completely yourself and I am choosing to be myself.

Aicha, a graduate student, discusses the importance of her hijab, and her view on veiling as empowering for women despite the western misconception that it is an oppressive Islamic practice. She states,

Hijab is my way to show who I am. It's part of my identity as being a Muslim woman...[and] that I reject any kind of objectification of women. It's kind of a way for me to set my own rules against society that is very paternal and caters to male needs. So for me it's...[about being a] practicing Muslim, but also it's a rejection of being objectified as a woman... I'm [not] doing this [because] I'm forced or any kind of these stereotypes.

Fatima, Nano, and Aicha's encounters call attention to how stereotypes create a homogenous image, especially that of women and individuals who wear hijab. The notion that Muslims who veil—like Nano and Fatima—are shy, modest, do not listen to music, and cannot hear cuss words, are examples of the gendered Islamophobia that further encourage monolithic stereotypes targeted at Muslims who veil. In combating gendered Islamophobia, Aicha rejects the western notion of veiling as an oppressive element of her religion and illustrates that to her, hijab has multiple meanings of religious identity, feminism, and empowerment. Fatima, Nano, and Aicha exemplify the emotional burden it takes for Muslims women who veil to constantly battle the stereotypes that veiling is a symbol of antifeminist ideology—one that cannot align with mainstream western society (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003).

For institutions of higher education to mitigate the damaging effects of experiences similar to Fatima and Aicha's, initiatives promoting cooperation and religious diversity must be implemented (Cole, 2020). Conversely, if institutions do not actively provide support, Muslim students also begin encountering Islamophobic instances, which can mount to physically detrimental and even dangerous situations. For example, Rebecca, a graduate student, relates being targeted for their appearance as a hijabi,

Most people dislike [hijab] and sometimes their attitude was so hateful; many people advised me not to use the veil because it might get me in trouble. So when I moved to [my] HBCU...I figured okay, this is not a problem. [However] one day in the morning I was walking through the bus stop and there was a man sitting on the bus stop seat and as he saw my face, he tried to spit on me. Then people mostly told me better not to use that [hijab] because people hate you.

While the hate incident directed at Rebecca was off campus, it accentuates the immediate need for HBCUs to investigate how often racist, anti-Muslim events occur and how they affect the well-being

and physical safety of its Muslim students who veil. Incidents such as these threaten Muslim individuals' freedom of religion and expression and the right to fully express their identities for fear of being physically, emotionally, and verbally harassed. Shay, a non- veiling participant, and graduate student recounts how veiling was an obvious indicator of being Muslim. She believes her veiled "sisters in faith" were more likely to be targeted and harassed.

She said,

I've mentioned this before...I don't wear a hijab. People don't necessarily associate me with being Muslim unless you actually know me. So, in situations where it could be concerning, I feel like people target those that, quote, unquote, look Muslim. So even though I'm concerned, like if I was outside, even if I was in that space, I still would feel safer than some of my other sisters of faith that would wear hijab, because there's no way I'm actually recognized [as Muslim].

Shay brings up the myriad ways Muslim college students have been targeted and subjected to hate crimes simply for "looking Muslim." Given the 2019 FBI findings, which report Muslims as being the second largest minority religious group to report religiously- motivated hate crimes, institutions of higher education have largely neglected to address these concerns effectively (Ahmadi et al., 2021).

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

There are two critical discussion points specific to the experiences of Muslims who veil while attending HBCUs. First, the findings in this study support the continued need to examine the relationship between students' religious and spiritual life and campus climate to understand better and support Muslim students. For example, Muslims who veil in HBCUs may be more likely to experience lower cultural incongruity due to the shared cultural practice of wearing a headwrap or headscarf. While non-Muslim individuals accepted veiling in general, they were still curious about this practice. This finding, at least in terms of culturally related clothing, seems counter to prior research, highlighting the negative behaviors by peers, faculty, and staff that hinder students' ability to exercise their religious faith on college campuses (Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016). A sense of belonging seems more likely to emerge when cultural congruity exists in clothing and dress. However, there is still some burden of explaining the veiling practice to others within the campus community, which can negatively influence how Muslim women who veil feel less like they belong.

The second discussion point appears related to dimension four of MSRCC: the informal and formal inter-religious interactions between individuals and groups. Fatima best states this, saying, "it is hard sometimes, right? ... because they just assume I am supposed to be shy, reserved, and modest for a woman". There are numerous situations where Fatima, Nano, and some of our other participants indicated that their non-Muslim peers made assumptions about their conservative nature concerning their beliefs, behaviors, and willingness to engage in everyday social interactions. These assumptions often minimize and delimit how Muslims who veil contribute to this vital dimension of minoritized religious and spiritual campus climate. In sum, this study provides postsecondary institutions and student affairs professionals with insight to serve all students. They must pay close attention to minoritized student populations on their campuses, such as Muslim students. The findings of this study specifically connect with the Minoritized Religious and Spiritual Campus Climate Framework's (MRSCC) fourth and fifth dimensions. The fourth dimension addresses the informal and formal inter-religious interactions between individuals and groups. The fifth dimension focuses on how an institution's organizational and structural aspects facilitate or support religious and spiritual diversity, including the

norms, practices, and policies driven by institutional agents. Some participants rejected the western notion of hijab as an oppressive element of their religion. Instead, they focus on the multiple meanings the hijab holds as a symbol of religious identity, feminism, and empowerment. Others state that part of campus interactions is one's personality and not necessarily the fact that one wears a hijab.

Thus, it is incumbent on institutions of higher education and student affairs professionals to engage students and student groups in informal and formal inter-religious interactions and examine the institution's organizational and structural aspects that could facilitate or support religious and spiritual diversity.

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## Exploring the Self-Identified Mentoring Needs of Conditionally Admitted First-Year Students

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### Abstract

*The dynamics of student retention are changing rapidly and outpacing college and university resources. While a myriad of support services are offered across institutions, campuses rarely engage students in co-constructing programming that meets their self-identified needs. This study employs an instrumental case study design, grounded by the theory of marginality and mattering, to explore the self-identified mentoring needs of first-year students conditionally admitted to a university who are interested in participating in a new mentoring program. A cross-sectional survey captures student demographic information, university engagement activities, and that which participants hope to gain from the mentoring program. An inductive data analysis process revealed that students are interested in participating in the mentoring program because they are future-oriented and seek networking and skill-building opportunities. This study provides an “insider” perspective and guidance to institutions seeking to effectively mentor, engage, and support students for success in college and beyond. Implications are offered for student mentoring program designers and administrators, with key considerations for co-constructing programs.*

*Keywords:* student mentoring, mattering and marginality, instrumental case study

### Exploring the Self-Identified Mentoring Needs of Conditionally Admitted First-Year Students

The dynamics of student retention are changing rapidly and outpacing college and university resources suggesting institutions must transform to ensure student success (Thomas, 2021). Institutions have become increasingly dependent upon enrolling students who may be academically, financially, and socially unprepared for higher education (Fowles, 2014). While a myriad of support services are available, such as academic advising, tutoring, and mentoring (DeAngelo, 2014; Tinto, 2012), campuses rarely engage students in co-constructing programming that addresses their needs. Thus, this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) explores the self-identified mentoring needs of first-year students conditionally admitted to a university who are interested in participating in a new mentoring program



using the theory of marginality and mattering (Schlossberg, 1989). As students begin their college careers, they enter a period of transition. While some thrive in this new environment and find it exciting, others feel overwhelmed and lost if they experience inadequate academic and social integration (Tinto, 2012). Issues of marginality (a sense of not belonging) can plague students and cause them to depart college (Schlossberg, 1989). To counter this reality, a mentoring program was launched by the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion to increase the retention rate of students by responding to the self-identified mentoring needs of program participants. The research question for this study is: What are the ways in which conditionally admitted first-year college students describe their mentoring needs?

The mentoring program was designed to (1) establish cluster mentoring relationships between students and caring faculty and staff, (2) connect students with similar academic and social interests, and (3) offer students purposeful engagement opportunities on campus and in the local community. Emphasis was placed on addressing student academic social mentoring needs. A structured half-day orientation program was provided to train faculty and staff mentors on mentoring best practices. The orientation included a presentation on the need for mentoring at the university, the program's mission and expected outcomes, mentors' roles and responsibilities, cultural competency and implicit bias training, and a concluding student panel focused on their hopes and struggles at the university. Cluster mentoring was utilized in which three students with similar majors were paired with a faculty member from their discipline and a staff member. Mentoring matches were expected to participate in monthly email/web-conferencing/phone exchanges, quarterly in-person check-ins, campus/local cultural events each semester, and an annual program orientation and closing. Beyond the mentoring students received, they were also incentivized to participate through a gift card to the university bookstore. Mentors were recognized for their participation through personal recognition with their academic dean or supervisor and a letter of appreciation that could be included in their annual review evaluation and promotion and tenure documents.

### **Literature Review**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (Irwin et al., 2022), the retention rate was 82% for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking undergraduate students at four-year, degree-granting institutions in 2019-2020, while the six-year graduation rate was 47%. Morrow and Ackermann (2012) reported, "Approximately 35% of students depart a university because of academic reasons; the other 65% leave for non-academic reasons" (p. 483). These percentages highlight the opportunity for higher education institutions to interrupt the number of students who drop out by assisting them to successfully adjust to collegiate life (DeAngelo, 2014; Fowles, 2014; Thomas, 2021; Tinto, 2012). Tinto (2012) emphasized academic and social integration as critical in college retention and persistence. Students not assimilated into institutional and classroom cultures are more likely to struggle academically and leave higher education altogether.

Mentoring is heralded as a high-impact higher education practice (Kuh, 2008) that serves as a valuable resource for students to receive practical advice, guidance, and socialization opportunities that are difficult to acquire through informal means (Crisp et al., 2017; Fuentes et al., 2013; Johnson, 2007; Schreiner et al., 2011). Students participating in well-designed mentoring programs display lower attrition rates, higher grades, increased self-efficacy, better-defined academic and personal goals, and greater career motivation (Carrell & Sacerdote, 2017; Crisp et al., 2017; Johnson, 2007; Schreiner et al., 2011; Smith, 2007). Researchers have found that mentoring is particularly crucial for the persistence and success of students from minoritized backgrounds in academic disciplines where they are

underrepresented, as well as those who find it challenging to navigate the bureaucracy of higher education (Fuentes et al., 2013).

Successful mentoring programs establish clear expectations for the mentor-mentee relationship to ensure both parties attain mutual benefit from the partnership (Birkeland et al., 2019; Fuentes et al., 2013; Gershenfeld, 2014; Nora & Crisp, 2007; Smith, 2007). Student mentoring often includes elements of academic support, psychological/emotional care, goal setting, role modeling, and professional networking. Nora and Crisp (2007) stated that productive mentoring relationships include a “forward-looking approach.” It entails the mentor facilitating the development of a blueprint for mentee goal attainment through identifying mentees’ academic and career goals and providing specific strategies to meet those goals. Thus, mentoring programs can contribute positively to students becoming more future-oriented (Berardi et al., 2020). In research conducted by Luedke (2017), students shared that their mentors influenced how they viewed themselves and their abilities, which made them more hopeful about their future. To realize these positive benefits of mentoring, higher education institutions must distribute resources and reward those who engage in these efforts (Smith, 2007). For instance, institutional-based, culturally inclusive training is imperative for faculty and staff to ensure that they all mentor in culturally competent and humble ways. This would help avoid placing an undue burden on faculty and staff of color for the exclusive responsibility of mentoring, which often is the expectation and default (Brissett, 2020; Luedke, 2017; McCoy et al., 2020).

### Theoretical Framework

Nancy Schlossberg’s (1989) theory of marginality and mattering was employed as the study’s theoretical framework because it surmises that students are more likely to persist to graduation if they feel they belong on their college campus. Mattering is the feeling of being significant, important, and of value to others (Flett et al., 2019). Marginality occurs when one feels they do not fit into the campus environment; students often experience marginality for a short period, which dissipates once they are integrated into campus structures (e.g., within their major, in a student club, on an athletic team). If students experience marginality for an extended period, self-consciousness, depression, and hopelessness can result.

The concept of mattering includes five facets: *attention*, *importance*, *ego extension*, *dependence*, and *appreciation* (Schlossberg, 1989). *Attention* is the feeling that one is noticed, while *importance* engenders a belief that one is cared for. *Ego extension* involves the feeling that one is understood and receives empathy, and *dependence* is the perception of being needed and desired. Last, *appreciation* comprises the belief that one’s efforts are valued and respected. The theory was specifically used to consider how students’ mentoring needs may reveal feelings and experiences of marginality in the collegiate environment and areas where a co-constructed mentoring program may increase the likelihood of feeling like they matter on campus. The theoretical framework was employed purposefully in the survey design used to gather information on student mentoring needs, the data analysis process, and the data interpretations.

### Methodology

#### Research Design

An instrumental case study design (Stake, 1995), grounded by the theory of marginality and mattering (Schlossberg, 1989), was utilized to explore the self-identified mentoring needs of first-year students

conditionally admitted to a university who displayed interest in participating in a new mentoring program. Instrumental case studies are valuable when seeking insight regarding a specific concern that may be ambiguous to cursory observers (Stake, 1995). A cross-sectional survey (Fowler, 2013) was developed to gather demographic information on the program participants, as well as on their current engagement activities at the university and their self-identified mentoring needs. The research question for this study was: What are the ways in which conditionally admitted first-year college students describe their mentoring needs?

## **Research Site**

This study was conducted at a comprehensive regional university in the Rocky Mountain West. The Fall 2022 enrollment was approximately 12,000; the vast majority were in-state residents. The university is a selective institution categorized as a mixed residential-commuter campus. The student body includes nearly 30% students of color and an almost equal female-to-male ratio (no data is systematically captured for non-binary categories). Approximately 30% are eligible for Federal Pell Grants, and nearly 80% receive some form of financial aid. In 2022, the retention rate of students enrolled full-time was 69%, and the six-year graduation rate was 46%.

## **Data Collection**

All faculty teaching a required freshman seminar course designed for those admitted on a conditional basis (students who demonstrated promise in the university admission process, but their grade point average and/or ACT/SAT scores did not meet the minimum requirements) were invited to nominate students for the new mentoring program. The course focuses on enhancing college success skills, such as understanding one's learning style, developing effective study habits, and improving time management skills, as well as connecting with university academic resources and co-curricular activities. Approximately 60 nominations were submitted, and all were invited to apply to the program. Participants completed a survey with open-ended queries on demographics (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, first-generation status), major, employment information, hobbies, use of campus resources, connection to faculty and staff, and mentoring preferences (frequency of meetings, mode of communication, and shared background). Last, the survey requested a 200-word statement on what participants hoped to gain from the mentoring program.

## **Participants**

Fifteen students completed the mentoring program survey. Individual demographics, as self-described by the participants, are presented in Table 1, along with their pseudonyms. Four participants indicated they work approximately 15 hours per week, and almost all reported engaging in about 20 hours of hobbies per week. All students reported visiting academic advising; nine an academic support center; seven the recreation and wellness center; and nine attended at least one student life event. About half indicated feeling connected to a faculty or staff member. The majority were interested in meeting with their mentor more than once per month; most preferred in-person meetings rather than email, web-conferencing, or phone; and all but one desired to share a similar background with their mentors.

## **Table 1**

### *Survey Participant Demographics*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>First Generation</b>	<b>Major</b>
Ben	Male	African American	Heterosexual	No	Game Design
Brian	Male	White	--	Yes	Physiology
Bruno	Male	Hispanic	Gay	Yes	Undecided
Celia	Female	Latina	--	No	Dance
Coop	Male	White	--	No	Undecided
Geo	--	--	--	Yes	Criminal Justice
Jada	Female	African American	Heterosexual	No	Exercise Science
Joaquin	Male	Mexican	Straight	Yes	Psychology
Kaia	Female	White	Straight	No	Human Services
Karter	Male	--	--	Yes	Computer Science
Kate	Female	White	Straight	Yes	Psychology
Lisa	Female	White	Straight	Yes	Psychology
Paz	Female	African	--	Yes	Nursing
Rose	Female	African American	--	Yes	Criminal Justice
Simone	--	Asian	--	No	Psychology

*Note.* "--" = no response.

### **Reflexivity and Positionality**

Throughout the study, the research team engaged in individual and collective reflexivity by reflecting upon, bracketing out, and dialoguing about their experiences, values, and beliefs about student mentoring (Miles et al., 2019). In qualitative research, reflexivity is a crucial component of inquiry. It positions researchers to consider their bias and its potential impact on meaning-making and interpretations during data analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that researchers must disclose their positionality so readers are aware of the unique perspectives they bring to the study. The research team comprises five women of color and one White man trained in qualitative research methods within educational settings. Three are university professors, one is a university lecturer, and two are educational

professionals in the human services and military professions. Each is committed to increasing higher education access and opportunity for all students and has engaged in such efforts through research lines and service endeavors advocating for policies and practices to increase student retention and graduation rates. All participated in informal and formal mentoring relationships and pointed to tangible and intangible long-lasting benefits from these opportunities.

### **Data Analysis**

Silverman's (1993) thematic content analysis method was utilized to explore the self-identified mentoring needs captured in the survey. This technique followed an inductive approach to search for themes related to the research question. Using this method, the researchers coded the transcripts individually and then collectively refined the codes by clustering them into initial patterns by combining like codes and eliminating duplicative codes. In vivo codes—the participants' own words—were used. Common codes included a desire for connection, resume builder, skill improvement, and career preparation. The initial patterns in the data were refined into themes by grouping associated data and synthesizing the patterns, which allowed for the development of more precise themes that were viewed as representative of the totality of the data. Three themes emerged: (1) future-oriented, (2) networking, and (3) skill-building. Thus, students were found to be interested in participating in the mentoring program because they were future-oriented and seeking opportunities for networking and skill-building. Once the themes were established, the theory of marginality and mattering (Schlossberg, 1989) was used as a lens through which to make further interpretations of the data in the discussion.

### **Trustworthiness**

Multiple verification strategies ensured the findings were trustworthy by attending to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to address credibility, cross-case synthesis was utilized throughout the data analysis process to examine whether the themes were cases of similar or different perspectives of the participants (Miles et al., 2019). To achieve transferability, thick, rich descriptions were utilized with participant quotes. Dependability was safeguarded by following Silverman's (1993) thematic content analysis method of data analysis, as well as engaging in reflexivity and stating researcher positionality. Confirmability was established through the refinement of the themes by multiple researchers, which enabled multiple feedback loops on the data (Miles et al., 2019). The application of these verification strategies mediated the limitation of not conducting member checks with the participants, which could have provided a more complex and nuanced depiction of their mentoring needs.

## **Findings**

### **Future-Oriented**

Nearly all survey participants were interested in joining the mentoring program because they were focused on their future at the university and their future careers. This sentiment was noted by Celia, who shared:

I am very driven, and I have great intentions for my future, but I don't always stay focused on my goals . . . this program sounds like an amazing opportunity that will help me to succeed here at [the university] and in reaching my career goals.

She intimated that a mentor who could coach, guide, and hold her accountable would be integral to her future success. Some students maintained lofty opinions of the program's ability to mold them into "a successful human being," as described by Brian, or to "help me find myself," as stated by Simone. Others were more pragmatic about their participation—Kate simply noted, "This program would look good on a resume." Despite a plethora and diversity of beliefs about the program's potential, students clearly were forward-thinking in their desire to participate.

While most individuals had declared a major, a few displayed a keen interest in exploring majors and potential careers. Kaia said she "hoped to gain more knowledge about the outside world and options around what to expect as I enter a career." Geo and Lisa commented that the program's campus and community engagement opportunities would expand their thinking about how they could use their degrees in the future. Students' desire for the mentoring program to set them up "later down the line" had not been considered a program enticement, so the program designers began to rethink the initial one-year commitment expected of mentors as it became clear it may not meet students' long-term mentoring needs.

### **Networking**

Facilitating networking opportunities served as a prominent mentoring need of the participants. A few noted that they desired to connect with trusted, reputable sources who could provide feedback that they were on the "right track for success" at the university. Paz shared:

Most first-generation students do not really know if they are doing the right thing or making the right decisions in their college experiences, and so with this program, I hope to seek proper guidance. I hope to gain a support system from faculty and staff members.

Many indicated a sense of awareness that campus involvement is an integral factor for success in college, yet many felt a need for encouragement to be involved. A few noted a desire "to step out of my comfort zone." Rose said, "People know me as being shy and not speaking up for myself, I want to change that. I hope to meet new people and have self-confidence for myself." Bruno indicated that the appeal of expanding one's campus community and potentially "building long-lasting friendships" was an important feature of a mentoring program designed for cluster mentoring rather than dyadic mentoring with a sole faculty or staff member.

Virtually all participants indicated a desire to make more connections on campus and meet others with similar interests and goals. Karter commented, "With this program, I will be able to meet people who have the same background and experience as I do." Bruno said:

I hope I can build a good type of relationship with [my mentor]. Someone who I can relate to with similar problems that they may have faced in the past. Someone who I can feel like I can trust and be able to go to if I need advice, whether it might be with school or even personal problems.

The desire to be partnered with a mentor who is relatable and has overcome similar challenges was shared by many of the participants. This finding raised the program designers' attention to the importance of matching mentors and mentees beyond surface indicators such as gender and race/ethnicity and ensuring matching occurs on a deeper, individual level.

### **Skill-Building**

Participants also stated that they would benefit from developing various skills through their involvement in the mentoring program. For those interested in skill-building, most shared a desire to hone specific academic-related skills. Coop hoped “to develop my time management skills and improve my study habits.” Meanwhile, Joaquin described his disappointment in the realization that he should further develop his writing skills:

I learned in my first semester that my writing is not nearly as good as I thought it was, I would have always described myself as a really good writer, but a professor told me it was “one of my areas for improvement.”

While Joaquin conveyed this realization as “crushing,” he was fully committed to improvement in this academic area and was hopeful his mentor could support this need.

Other participants expressed a desire to cultivate and sharpen their leadership and group facilitation skills. Paz said, “I hope to gain leadership skills that will make me better able to manage the things around me and to be able to take control and charge of situations that require a fast-thinking leader.” She equated this desire as important to her life as a student but suggested it would be advantageous to sharpen these skills for her future career. At the initial inception of the mentoring program, skill-building was expected to be a natural by-product of the relationship but not thought of with intentionality. It was clear that the program designers would need to match mentees with mentors who possess the ability to foster and nurture specific skills to meet the self-identified mentoring needs of the students.

### **Discussion**

Exploring the self-identified mentoring needs of students conditionally admitted to the university and interested in participating in a new mentoring program proved enlightening. Students were interested in participating because they were future-oriented and seeking opportunities for personal and professional networking and academic and leadership skill-building, which aligns with the research of others (Crisp et al., 2017; Fuentes et al., 2013; Johnson, 2007; Schreiner et al., 2011). Moreover, their needs were couched in benefiting their future, both their academic experience at the university and in their future careers, as indicated as an important consideration by Berardi et al. (2020), Luedke (2017), and Nora and Crisp (2007).

While the program was developed with “best practices” in mind, such as the establishment of a program mission with expected outcomes, a committed group of passionate program designers, a training component to facilitate mentors’ awareness of their roles and responsibilities, a defined duration of the mentoring relationship, and pre-planned engagement activities (Birkeland et al., 2019; Brissett, 2020; Crisp et al., 2017; DeAngelo, 2014; Gershenfeld, 2014; Kuh, 2008; McCoy et al., 2020; Nora & Crisp, 2007; Smith, 2007), students’ self-identified mentoring needs likely would not have been met if they had not been captured prior to program rollout. If students’ mentoring needs were not met, it is unlikely retention rates among this group would be significantly higher than that of their peers who did not participate in the mentoring program, which was a long-term expected outcome of the program.

The theory of marginality and mattering (Schlossberg, 1989) was a valuable theoretical framework for exploring the self-identified mentoring needs of the survey participants, as it was clear some students were grappling with issues of marginality when they described their mentoring needs. Ben revealed, “This is my first semester at a big university alone, and I’m trying to feel confident and inspired to do

my best.” Jada shared that she hoped the program would “help my experience [at the university] be more pleasant . . . and get the knowledge on how to survive here.” These sentiments indicate that at least some had not yet found their place at the university and were struggling to integrate into the environment academically and socially.

Consequently, students interested in the mentoring program expressed a clear desire to experience mattering on campus and in the local community. Connecting to Schlossberg’s (1989) five facets in the theory of marginality and mattering, participants indicated a need for *attention* and to be *important*, as they sought mentors who would demonstrate care and empathy by investing time and energy in their success at the institution and beyond into their careers. Participants also shared an interest in *ego extension*, as the vast majority described a desire for a mentor who shares a similar background in order to be understood and accepted. Finally, students demonstrated a desire for *dependence* and *appreciation*, as the opportunity to give back through community service events on campus and in the local community appealed to them. Understanding the role of marginality and mattering in the student experience can provide a roadmap for institutions to identify ways to support students integrating academically and socially on campus. Mattering is central to well-being and can serve as a means of assessing whether students feel a sense of belonging (Flett et al., 2019; Schlossberg, 1989). As all students are different, understanding their unique backgrounds and circumstances is essential to creating a campus culture of mattering.

### **Implications for Practice**

Important implications can be drawn from this study by those designing and administering student mentoring programs. First, co-constructing mentoring programs that specifically address students’ self-identified mentoring needs ensures an asset-based design to the program rather than a deficit-based design. Mentoring program designers and administrators must be responsive to mentor-mentee matching preferences. Students in this study were seeking custom, tailored mentoring relationships in which they had mentors who could help them plan for the future, build a personal and professional network, and improve their academic and leadership skills. Mentors could only be appropriately selected when these needs were identified.

In addition, individual mentoring needs must drive program duration intentions. Students in this study were interested in developing long-term relationships with their mentors, so a one-year program commitment was unlikely to meet their needs. This change would necessitate mentors to commit to multi-year relationships, and program designers and administrators must be prepared to create an infrastructure and institutional support for funding that sustains long-term partnerships. Students also reported a desire to meet with their mentors more than once per month and preferred in-person meetings, which was unexpected. To ensure preferences are properly addressed, all parties must have clear expectations for meeting frequency and mode of contact.

### **Future Research**

Further inquiry is needed to understand whether co-constructed mentoring programs truly provide greater benefits to participants. This program is new, so no outcome or longitudinal data are available. Also, a focus is necessary on the ways in which student mentoring needs evolve and morph over time, particularly when those needs are met or unmet. An exploration could determine whether these self-identified mentoring needs are transferable to other student populations or are unique to this set of students. Furthermore, the mentoring needs transcended demographic indicators—diving into needs



across gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and first-generation status would be a rich area for exploration. Finally, future research should focus on ways to engage faculty and staff in formally mentoring students while increasing their ability to do so with cultural competency and humility.

### **Conclusion**

This instrumental case study (Stake, 1995), grounded by the theory of marginality and mattering (Schlossberg, 1989), offers a unique viewpoint of the self-identified mentoring needs of students conditionally admitted to a university. It highlights the importance of co-constructing programs that address the targeted population's specific needs, which will be increasingly required if institutions genuinely desire to improve student retention, graduation, and overall success rates (Thomas, 2021; Tinto, 2012). Despite the best efforts of faculty and staff to meet the needs of their students, institutions must query students on their mentoring needs rather than assume they know best what those needs are. This study provides an “insider” perspective and guidance to institutions seeking to effectively mentor, engage, and support students for success in college and beyond.

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# Critical Consciousness: A Brief Review of the Literature

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## Abstract

*This review of literature on critical consciousness provides an analysis on the topic and its relevance to our work as student affairs professionals. The review of literature begins by defining critical consciousness, examining how individuals – with a specific focus on white people – become critically conscious, the importance of acknowledging intersectionality’s impact related to social constructs, the role of white privilege in critical consciousness, and concludes with thought questions for the reader on how to enhance one’s own critical consciousness.*

## Introduction

Landreman et al. (2007) defined the concept of critical consciousness as a “developmental process that includes the understanding of self and identity in historical and socio-cultural-political contexts” (p. 277). They endorsed critical consciousness as a goal for social justice educators rather than multicultural competence because critical consciousness better promotes the application of skills and understanding toward social justice. In providing a basic framework of how this type of consciousness can be achieved, Freire (2000) differentiated between oppressor consciousness and oppressed consciousness. Whereas the oppressor consciousness “tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination” (p. 58), the oppressed consciousness “unveils the world of oppression and through the praxis commits themselves to its transformation” (p. 54) such that oppression “ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people” (p. 54). According to Freire, the oppressors can be converted through “comradeship with the oppressed” (p. 61). What is this “comradeship with the oppressed”? What evidence of it exists today? How might such comradeship serve as models to others?

One possible example of comradeship includes white people who choose to study or work at predominately Black institutions (PBI’s), Historically Black institutions (HBCUs), minority serving institutions (MSIs), and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Though limited, there has been some research about white students and employees at these institutions. Often referred to as “temporary minorities,” understanding the influence of being a temporary minority on critical consciousness is critical to increased social justice and inclusion (Strayhorn, 2010, p. 509).

Though not numerous, there are studies conducted as early as the 1970s that consider the experiences of the majority when they become the minority. Researchers examined the factors contributing to white students choosing to attend an HBCU and also provided a profile of those white students (Hall & Closson, 2005). According to Hall and Closson, white students who participated in their study and

attended an HBCU were more likely to be described as trying “to transcend race while perhaps still occasionally perpetuating a white-as-superior system” (p. 35). In 1972, Brown and Stein, in addition to exploring reasons for choosing an HBCU, described how white students handled acceptance or lack thereof from Black peers. The students reported changes in their white racial identities that included a new awareness of personal race and racial privileges.

Hall and Closson (2005) found that though white students were apprehensive at first and experienced some examples of social exclusion, they did not cite race as the cause of these negative experiences. In general, their experiences were “more positive than they expected” (p. 39). Closson and Henry (2008a) reported that white students found faculty exceedingly supportive and “expressed no hesitations in approaching faculty” (p. 527). Carter and Fountaine (2010) confirmed Closson and Henry’s (2008a) findings. Moreover, faculty who taught mandatory African American studies courses at HBCUs were “critical to participants’ classroom engagement and understanding of the cultural dynamics within an HBCU environment” (p. 55). Strayhorn (2010) too found that faculty-student interactions at HBCUs were positively associated with college satisfaction. Moreover, Strayhorn found that interaction with faculty contributed more to college satisfaction than did other variables such as academic major, gender, and institution selectivity. In an opinion piece, Henry and Closson (2010) suggested that attending an HBCU could assist white students in developing a “positive consciousness” (p. 17) and increased complexity in racial identity. However, one potential deterrent to white students gaining critical consciousness at HBCUs noted by Closson and Henry (2008) was that white students at HBCUs may not be learning about white privilege in the context of white culture. As we will discuss later, understanding the intersecting structures of how people exist within systems of the oppressor and the oppressed is pertinent to social justice. White students not experiencing this concept in the white community may limit the understanding of privilege.

Research on white faculty at HBCUs indicates that significant learning takes place for them. For example, white faculty gained profound new insights while teaching on HBCU campuses (Closson & Henry, 2008b). Though not particular to white faculty, Hubbard & Stage (2009) found that faculty from institutions with higher enrollments of African American students were less satisfied with their authority to make job related decisions and they were more likely to believe that minority faculty were treated unfairly. Yet, faculty at PBIs, more than faculty at other institutions, preferred to teach undergraduate students. However, because of the explicit mission of HBCUs of racial uplift, Hubbard and Stage (2009) recommended that experiences of faculty at HBCUs not be confounded with those at PBIs.

In this literature review, we do not use the term HBCU and PBI interchangeably. Predominantly Black Institutions are generally identified as such based upon demographic characteristics established via the government. Under Title III of the Higher Education Act of 1965, PBIs are identified by meeting certain criteria which includes enrollment of at least 1,000 undergraduate students of which at least 40 percent identify as Black. Likewise, 50 percent of the enrolled students must identify as low-income or first-generation college students (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). According to Hubbard and Stage (2009) PBIs do not necessarily address the needs of Black and African American students whereas HBCUs typically do. More likely, it is “geographic circumstances that have resulted in [PBIs] serving Black students” (p. 270). Regardless of whether the discussion is white students and employees at HBCUs or PBIs, the research on the experiences of white student affairs educators and administrators is virtually non-existent.

## **Intersectionality**

As introduced above, Freire (2000) differentiated oppressed from oppressor consciousness. Yet, it was his belief that the oppressed “commit themselves” to a praxis of transformation that “becomes a pedagogy of all people” (p. 54). In their study exploring critical consciousness, Landreman, et al. (2007), considered the “intersectionality of social identities and individuals’ social locations” (p. 276). According to Valentine (2008), Crenshaw (1995) helped to bring the concept of intersectionality to prominence. Crenshaw wrote that she had a “need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (p. 358). Hence, intersectionality requires that educators for social justice consider the intersecting structures of how people exist within systems of the oppressor and the oppressed (Dill, et al., 2007; Jones, 2009). This includes how these intersections of identity are lived simultaneously. Yet, it is important to recognize how systemic systems of oppression differ. For example, class oppression centers on perceptions of what people have done or failed to do, whereas race and gender oppression centers on perceptions of the meanings of categories of people (West & Fenstermaker, 1993).

Valentine (2008) emphasized the importance of space as a factor in how intersectionality influences experiences. Assuming that people are evolving, there is fluidity in the ways that identities are emphasized and deemphasized. Such fluidity occurs in spaces, hence “spaces and identities are co-implicated” (p. 19). In different spaces, different groups are dominant. These “dominant special orderings...define who is in place/out of place, who belongs and who does not” (Valentine, 2008, p. 19). Hence, context matters. How space is dominated and by whom can enhance or limit the viability of people experiencing the intersections of their identities, rather than a monolithic aspect of identity. Conversely, spaces can also influence people to disidentify with aspects of the self that are not dominant in that space.

### **How people become critically conscious.**

According to Landreman et al. (2007), there are two processes to developing critical consciousness. The first is raising awareness. This occurs through exposing oneself to people with backgrounds different from the self, experiencing a critical incident about differences, reflecting on the meaning of such critical incidents, and experiencing a profound new insight about the incident through reflection. Though expressed here linearly, Landreman et al. argued that raising awareness may not occur in this sequence, but that continued exposure to people different from the self is essential. Such sustained exposure leads to phase two. The elements of phase two are “engagement in social justice action and coalition building” and “establishing intergroup relationships” (Landreman, et al., 2007, p. 289). Landreman et al. pointed out that the elements that lead to critical consciousness comprise Kegan’s (1994) three domains of knowing: cognitive (shifting perspectives to reflect others’ worldview), interpersonal (maintaining comradeship with diverse others), and intrapersonal (integrating social identities into aspects of the self). In what ways do white PBI employees seek out such experiences? Do white higher education administrators identify or disidentify with their race or whiteness at PBIs? How do they identify and disidentify, where, and when? Phase two of Landreman et al.’s model of developing critical consciousness help make meaning of such critical incidents. For white people, the literature has been clear that this necessitates acknowledging white privilege.

## **White privilege and white guilt.**

The notion of white privilege was made prominent by McIntosh who defined it as “an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious” (1997, p. 292). McIntosh offered specific examples of white privilege indicating unearned societal privileges that benefit white people beyond what is commonly experienced by non-white people under the same social, political, or economic circumstances. More recently, she noted that “white people are amazingly ignorant” (2012, p.196) of their privilege and instead, “have felt they are ‘just normal’ not powerful” (p. 196). A person’s whiteness is assumed as a norm against which all others are measured and by which those “others” are assumed to be culturally and phenotypically deficient or lacking. It is the creation of this “otherness” that perpetuates white privilege. Other writers such as Johnson (2006) broadened the notion of unearned assets beyond race and gender to include (dis)ability, class, and sexual orientation. How do white administrators experience, negotiate, and recognize privilege and what relationship is there to critical consciousness?

Previous research has indicated that white guilt (a feeling response white people experience when they accept responsibility for white people causing harm to another racial group (Mallett & Swim, 2007)) is a prominent feeling for student affairs graduate students (Arminio, 2001) and people in general learning about white privilege and racism (Mallett & Swim, 2007; Swim & Miller, 1999). However, the role of white guilt in moving white people to change their behaviors, and unjust policies, practices, and systems is unclear. Some research indicates that white guilt prompts people to behave more justly (Arminio, 2001) and to act less defensively (Gunn & Wilson, 2011). Other research findings conclude that white guilt was a weak predictor of action (Leach et al., 2006); that anger (Leach, et al., 2006; Robbins, 2012), sympathy (Iyer et al., 2003), sense of responsibility (Mallett & Swim, 2007), dissonance (Robbins, 2012), or self-efficacy (Stewart et al, 2012) were stronger predictors of social justice action. Landreman et al.’s research did not mention white guilt and referred to acknowledging privilege as necessary when navigating relationships with diverse others, both those who share and do not share the same privilege.

## **Conclusion**

Although not exhaustive, this literature review provides a compelling rationale for one to examine their level and comfort with critical consciousness. The authors of this literature review challenge its readers to think thoughtfully, courageously, and creatively on how to lean into such important work. What questions need to be examined? What hard truths must we address in order to grow into a more socially just praxis?

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# The Emotional, Mental and Physical Implications of Teaching Diversity Courses for Women of Color Faculty

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## Abstract

*This general interpretative qualitative study will highlight the mental, physical, and emotional burden women of color faculty experience while teaching diversity and social justice courses. As historically white institutions (HWIs) continue focusing on narrow margins for promotion and tenure and fail to examine the environment these women of color teach, only a partial understanding of the lived reality can emerge. More directly, as these women of color have vastly different experiences than their white counterparts regarding a targeted form of racialized and gendered student resistance, highlighting their classroom experiences is vital. Understanding this phenomenon can better equip institutions to recruit and retain faculty women of color. The findings from this study were as follows: Women of color: Fatigue and stress of intersectional labor and raced and a gendered double bind. The study concludes with implications for practice as it aids institutions in better supporting women of color faculty who teach DEI courses.*

**Author Note:** *White will be written in lowercase within this paper unless I refer to historically White institutions.*

**Keywords:** women of color faculty, diversity, and social justice, emotional and physical implications of teaching, critical race feminism

## The Emotional and Physical Implications of Teaching Diversity Courses for Women of Color Faculty

Through politically charged critiques, higher education often receives the claim that it is too liberal or rather relies too much on exploring systemic inequity and oppression. One look at the Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside Higher Ed, or any news briefing on the state of higher education suggests that movement has been made to make higher education safer and more welcoming to its students, staff, and faculty. However, that perspective implies that the space has been cleansed- or at the very least no longer harmful; thus, absolved from its history of racialized, gendered, and classist harm against people who were not white cisgender men who owned land. In truth, according to O'Brien (2020), "academe continues to be one of the most colonized, patriarchal, elitist, racist, and homophobic institutions in contemporary society" (p.97). It would prove then if the space continues to act within accordance with its initial creation regardless of its metamorphosis due to legal shifts, then anyone who does not institutionally fit will risk emotional, physical, and spiritual harm (Collins, 1986; hooks, 1991; Louis et al., 2016; Mosley, 1980; O'Brien, 2020; West, 2017; Young & Hines, 2018).

## Research Problem

Faculty working within HWIs can experience many challenges, especially if they are from a minoritized population. Various scholars have examined the outsider phenomena among Black women academics (Collins, 2002a; Croom & Patton, 2011; Edwards & Thompson, 2017; Henderson et al., 2010; Hendrix, 2011; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Patton & Catching, 2009; Wilder et al., 2013). Others have expanded the concept to include how other women of color faculty also situate a unique outsider within standpoint and how that impacts them in their roles (Anzaldúa, 2022; Corneille et al., 2019; Duncan, 2014; Hernandez et al., 2015; Mertz, 2011; Ogletree & Diaz Beltran, 2021; Rios & Stewart, 2015). Thus, through this standpoint, the academy can be seen through how it often is a site of violence and oppression for women of color faculty (Grahame, 2004; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). This sentiment is especially true if they teach diversity and social justice courses and are grounded within a critical framework such as critical race theory. In fact, through a raced and gendered intersection, it becomes a common occurrence for them to experience extreme student pushback in the form of challenging their competency and authority (Bavishi et al., 2010; Pittman, 2010) teaching ability (Grahame, 2004), or treating them according to a racist stereotype and/or trope (Chung et al., 2018). Beyond this exemplifying student entitlement that signifies a hostile environment, it also underscores how treatment of women of color faculty often posits racist and sexist treatment at the hands of their students. This also has implications regarding how these women are evaluated in the classroom (Bavishi et al., 2010; Lazos, 2012; Pittman, 2010; Smith, 2004).

However, this analysis of treatment must be examined at the systemic level, as these women enter predominately white spaces that center a white male hegemonic paradigmatic perspective. Nevertheless, these women persist, regardless of how this effort impacts their mental and emotional well-being. Although there have been numerous studies that have shared the experiences of women of color faculty within historically White institutions (Chancellor, 2019; Patton & Catching, 2009; Pittman, 2010; Sandler & Hall, 1986; Young & Hines, 2018), and others that have detailed their experiences teaching diversity and social justice courses (Chung et al., 2018; Grahame, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Lazenby, 2020; Smith, 2005a), there is a lack of studies that explore the emotional, mental, and physical implications of teaching diversity and social justice courses for these women.

### **Research Question**

1. What are the emotional, mental, and physical implications of teaching diversity and social justice courses for women of color faculty?

### **Conceptual Framework**

As this study aims to highlight the mental, physical, and emotional burden that women of color faculty members experience while teaching diversity courses, it was imperative to identify a framework that could be grounded in their intersections as women and as people of color. Resistant towards frameworks that would only offer an additive approach to their intersections as women and as people of color, Critical Race Feminism (CRF) proved helpful for this type of analysis. Additionally, applying the theoretical framework of Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) was valuable. It created an opportunity to fully contextualize the stress and fatigue of being a woman of color working in a predominantly white space.

### **Critical Race Feminism**

Critical Race Feminism (CRF) has links to Critical Legal Studies (CLS), Critical Race Theory (CRT), and feminist theory. The term first originated in the works of Richard Delgado, the founding father of

Critical Race Theory (Wing, 1997). Critical Race Theory draws from the law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women's studies broadly. According to Solorzano et al. (2000), CRT is grounded within these five elements, "a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, b) the challenge to dominant ideology, c) the commitment to social justice, d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and e) the transdisciplinary perspective" (p.63). Although CRT could be a valuable approach to highlight the lived realities of people of color, numerous scholars have indicated that it has limitations concerning race, gender, and class (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Hilal, 1998; Wing, 1997).

Thus, critical race feminism was born as a framework as it intentionally examines the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in legal studies, underscoring the broad experiences of women of color. According to Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010), the framework's usefulness focuses on the issues women of color experience. Critical race feminism is a theoretical lens that contextualizes the experiences of women of color as they differ from men of color and white women. As a framework, it equips an understanding of the multiple forms of discrimination. Such as race, class, gender, and sex impact women of color within a system of white male patriarchy and oppression. Thus, CRF as a framework can fully provide a nuanced understanding of how women of color faculty experience racialized and gendered classroom violence. Hilal (1998) underscores the usefulness of the framework as she asserts, "...critical race feminism evinces that race and gender interact in a multiplicative fashion to influence both the identity of and discrimination against women of color" (p.367).

### **Racial Battle Fatigue**

For minoritized students of color, HWIs can be sites where the experience of racism, discrimination, and marginalization of their humanity can feel almost embedded within the institution's functioning (Franklin, 2019; Franklin et al., 2014; Gorski, 2019). Although there have been legal victories that have diversified the institutional makeup, the environment can still be a traumatic space for these students as the institutions are environmental mirrors of the outside world (Hurtado, 1992; Kendi, 2012; Smith et al., 2011; Solorzano et al., 2000). The Smith et al. (2007) study highlighted racial battle fatigue as a theoretical framework to understand how Black men dealt with racialized trauma on their campuses. Specifically, Smith et al. (2007) defined racial battle fatigue within the experiences of Black males as "...the social- psychological stress responses (e.g., frustration; anger; exhaustion; physical avoidance; psychological or emotional withdrawal; escapism; acceptance of racist attributions; resistance; verbally, nonverbally, or physically fighting back; and coping strategies.." (p.552). Essentially, this framework fully contextualized the traumas that Black male college students often experienced. Other researchers have expanded the framework to include examining the challenges that students of color experience (Franklin, 2019; Franklin et al., 2014; Hernández & Villodas, 2020; Smith, 2005b), the experiences of Black women faculty and administrators (Chancellor, 2019; Corbin et al., 2018; Quaye et al., 2020; Smith, 2004), and the experiences of women of color faculty or teachers of color (Arnold et al., 2016; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Ultimately, racial battle fatigue offers a unique insight into the socio-emotional stress response of people of color as it highlights not just the initial experience of racism but also what transpires within the emotional and physical reality of the individual.

### **Operationalizing the Framework**

As this study aims to explore the emotional, mental, and physical burden that teaching diversity and social justice courses place on women of color faculty, critical race feminism and racial battle fatigue

proved beneficial. Research questions were created using this framework, and a sampling protocol was selected, which aligned with the conceptual framework. Then, after the interviews were conducted, a-priori codes were entered into Dedoose from the conceptual framework. Lastly, to be in complete alignment with the conceptual framework, findings were presented that followed the organization of the model.

## **Literature Review**

### **Women of Color Faculty: Intersectional Traumas-Raced & Gendered**

The experience of being a woman of color within academia is often complicated by the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality (O'Brien, 2020). The metaphorical shield of their advanced degrees provides no reprieve from the harm at the hands of their white colleagues and/or white administration and their white students (Croom & Patton, 2011; O'Brien, 2020; Patton & Catching, 2009; Walters, 2018; Young & Hines, 2018). In truth, the offense is often so interconnected to a raced, gendered, or classed experience that pinpointing the onset of the slight often becomes too difficult to ascertain. The concept of intersectionality offers a unique framework to understand the intersectional traumas that women of color experience. Coined by legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991) and built upon the theorizing of several Black women activists and scholars (Collins, 1986, 2002a; hooks, 2000; Truth, 2020), intersectionality is a framework that examines structural inequality. The framework provides a lens to understand how people experience multiple forms of marginalization and inequality. According to Wijeyesinghe and Jones (2019), "intersectionality attends to identity by placing it within a macro-level analysis that ties individual experience to a person's membership in social groups, during a particular social and historical period, and within larger, interlocking systems of advantage and access" (p. 11). Thus, as women of color faculty share their truths that posit a counternarrative account that opposes white hegemonic perspectives, their stories offer something vastly different. It provides a unique insight regarding their intersections as women of color and how often those stories are weighed through violence and attack on their personhood.

For many women of color faculty, this type of violence is not simply hyperbole. Many women of color faculty experience a barrage of attacks against them in the form of hateful emails (O'Brien, 2020), or belittling their course content and the presumption of their incompetence as women of color faculty (Castañeda et al., 2020; Hoff, 2020; Porter et al., 2020). For these women, these attacks often surface within course evaluations and can manifest through death threats and attacks on their lives (Hoff, 2020; Young & Hines, 2018). Critique for faculty is typical and a part of the process; however, for women of color faculty, the experience is magnified. Regarding these types of attacks on Black women faculty, Young and Hines (2018) share that this experience is akin to spirit murdering and connects it to the violence that Black women face in terms of police-sanctioned violence and trauma. For these women, it exposes them to a unique form of violence that can feel almost inescapable. However, although these instances signal a troubling environment that should prompt the administration to swift action, the blame or responsibility is often viewed differently (Porter et al., 2020). For Black women professors, these violations are attributed to their pedagogical shortcomings or inability to control their classrooms or students (Young & Hines, 2018). For other women of color faculty, these traumas take the form of microaggressions or macroaggressions where their value is questioned through the perspective that they were only chosen through affirmative action, or through a diversity cluster hire, and a devaluing of their scholarship (Castañeda et al., 2020; Croom & Patton, 2011). According to Sue et al. (2007), racial microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities,

whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of color” (p. 271).

However, it is not only racial microaggressions that women of color faculty experience; their experiences must be viewed through gendered microaggressions as well. The concept of gendered microaggressions includes areas such as sexual orientation, sexual objectification, assumptions of inferiority, and presumed inferiority that targets their intellect as women (Capodilupo et al., 2010; Sue, 2010). Women of color experience microaggressions differently through the lens of race, ethnicity, and sexuality (Sue et al., 2008), which is traumatizing to their well-being.

### **Methodology**

Considering both the research problem and the research question, conducting a qualitative study was the best fit for this inquiry. As this study aimed to explore the mental, physical, and emotional burden of teaching diversity courses, a general qualitative interpretative approach was the preferred research design (Kahlke, 2014). Qualitative research begins with the belief that knowledge is socially constructed and uses interpretative frameworks/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of the phenomenon. In addition to the knowledge being socially constructed, the concept of constructivism is a central tenet of basic qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), qualitative researchers are interested in, “1) how people interpret their experiences, 2) how they construct their worlds, and 3) what meaning they attribute to those experiences”(p.24). Therefore, the value is not only in the experience but rather in how the participant interprets, understands, and makes meaning of that experience. General qualitative studies can often be viewed as fluid or boundaryless, as they are not guided by philosophical assumptions dictating a structure. This does not mean they lack rigor or are not methodologically sound (Caelli et al., 2003).

There are two subcategories of general qualitative inquiry: descriptive and interpretive approaches. Descriptive qualitative studies encourage the researcher to remain close to the data to limit inference from the researcher, while interpretative studies take a different stance. Researchers utilizing a general interpretive approach develop research questions from practice and provide evidence to be used in the practice setting (Kahlke, 2014). As this study aimed to understand how women of color faculty interpreted their experiences teaching diversity courses and how that impacted their emotional, mental, and physical well-being, an interpretative qualitative approach was selected.

### **Sampling Method and Participants**

This study utilized both purposeful sampling and snowball sampling. Purposeful sampling is guided by the researcher’s goal regarding what they want to discover and understand about the phenomenon. As a strategy to ensure that the sample was purposeful, I utilized criterion-based sampling, which required me to identify the qualifications of the participants to ensure that they met specific sampling criteria. Participants for this study identified as follows: 1) A person of color, identified as a cis-gender woman, currently served or had served as a full-time faculty member of a PWI/HWI, and lastly, currently teach or have taught a course in diversity or social justice course at a PWI/HWI.

## **Sources of Data & Treatment of Data**

The data from this study consisted of 1-hr interviews, field notes, participant written reflections, and a demographic survey. The audio files from the interview were kept in a password-protected computer to ensure the identity of the participants was kept secure. OtterAi was used to transcribe the interviews, the transcripts were cleaned, and all identifiable information regarding the participants was redacted. The transcripts, field notes, and demographic data will be put in Dedoose, online software, then themed and coded.

### **Researcher Positionality**

As this study explored the experiences of women of color faculty, I needed to be aware of my researcher positionality as a woman of color instructor responsible for teaching diversity and social justice courses. Therefore, I completed the same written reflection as the participants, which offered an understanding of my opinions before the interviews. I also journaled throughout the process to keep track of developing thoughts regarding the study. These materials were then shared with a peer debriefer who could challenge my insight (Mertens, 2019) to ensure that I was not leading the study but that I kept an open mind.

### **Data Analysis and Results**

The findings from this study contribute to the literature regarding the experiences of women of color faculty and the trauma which they often experience within their roles (Anzaldúa, 2022; Castañeda et al., 2020; Croom & Patton, 2011; Hoff, 2020; Porter et al., 2020; Rios & Stewart, 2015; Wilson, 2012; Young & Hines, 2018). For women of color faculty, how they are read by their students, colleagues, and administrators is through a raced and gendered knowing and existence (Azhar & McCutcheon, 2022; Calafell, 2012; Ford, 2011; Pittman, 2010). The data from this study, which were the interview transcripts, participant written reflections, demographic questionnaire, and field notes, were uploaded in Dedoose. Then, apriori codes from the conceptual framework were input into Dedoose, creating parent codes. This effort was guided by (Saldaña, 2015, 2021) and is referenced as theoretical coding. These codes were taken directly from the elements of critical race feminism and racial battle fatigue. Additional codes emerged from the data consistent with qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mertens, 2019). After the data was analyzed, 39 codes emerged that were collapsed into smaller themes. Two main themes emerged as findings for this study. The themes were: Women of color: Fatigue and stress of intersectional labor and raced and a gendered double bind.

### **Women of Color: The fatigue and stress of intersectional labor**

For women of color who are responsible for teaching diversity and social justice courses, it can be extremely taxing to their well-being. Unlike other courses, diversity and social justice courses can require more from them as professors due to their content and student resistance (Dunn et al., 2014; Pohan & Mathison, 1998; Watt, 2007). For all the women of color faculty who taught these courses, it exposed them to a unique form of fatigue that connected to their identities. Furthermore, the findings suggest that feeling emotionally and physically exhausted from the work was unrelated to being new instructors or having numerous years of teaching experience. Signaling that it was less about their newness as instructors than about who they were and how they showed up in class as women of color. For these women, there was no protection from feeling taxed and burdened within their role.

As women of color and as faculty, they would also feel an immense burden and emotional taxation when moments of police-sanctioned violence occurred while teaching their diversity and social justice courses. In one such example, Breonna, a Black woman professor, shared that she would go into her classrooms willing to shift the class schedule to accommodate students' emotions. She acknowledged that although it was emotionally draining and taxing to her psyche as a Black woman, it would have been disingenuous not to address it. However, she acknowledged that her non-colleagues of color failed to address it, and many operated as if it did not matter or, at the very least, did not need to be addressed in class. Regarding this experience, she shared,

And I say that because shortly after George Floyd, like all that was happening, I had a student who lost her scholarship because she didn't agree with the coach about his opinion [about George Floyd]. And then it supposedly was a whole bunch of other stuff. So I was in the middle of doing that. I'm processing that event, teaching this course, and trying to process with that. And then I get an email saying, Hey, would you like to do an interview on how great it is to be at [the university]? I was like, no, ma'am.

Although it frustrated her that her colleague's seemed so impervious to the harsh reality of racism and violence, she knew she could not be so disaffected. Regardless of how the emotional labor impacted her as a Black woman, it seemed her colleagues and administrators could not see her pain.

In another example, Faylon, a Latina professor, who participated in the study, identified the experience of teaching these courses as emotionally taxing and violent, primarily when she was not supported as a woman of color. Regarding this experience and how teaching diversity and social justice courses was challenging, she offered the following,

...I'm like, great, another space where I'm being consumed, where you want me to bare my wounds with people who are not going to understand it, who really don't have an interest in understanding it. And, you know, and again, ultimately, you're consuming, you're taking from me, but this space isn't for me, the space isn't going to heal me, it doesn't support me, it doesn't drive me, it's not going to nourish me, it does nothing for me, other than create another space for more violence to occur...

This quote indicates the emotional labor of the work and how it can be traumatizing. For Faylon, as a woman of color who held the responsibility of teaching diversity and social justice courses, required a certain level of openness from her that was unearned by academia. This differed from her other colleagues who taught the class and who were not folk of color, as they did not see the violence that often ensues when teaching these courses. She asserts that the difference in classroom toxicity with student-professor interactions is due to her intersections as a Latina and woman of color. Her gender identity as a woman and person of color could not be separated from how she experienced classroom trauma and aggression.

However, for some participants, the presumption of violence and the fear of possible retaliation from teaching these courses can feel terrifying. Faylon shared a story of a colleague and fellow woman of color who was nervous that the emotional violence she encountered in the classroom would transition into physical violence due to her teaching this subject matter. Although Faylon initially aimed to commiserate over the challenges of being a woman of color faculty teaching at an HWI, she immediately noticed this would be a different conversation. Faylon shared,



She [a woman of color faculty member] comes to my office, my first time meeting her. And she, before I could say anything, she burst out into tears. Because she was teaching a diversity course at the undergrad level. And she was experiencing, you know, some violence; there was a student who was challenging her and calling her out in the class, like openly, being confrontational with her in her seminar course, undergrad, and so she's like crying. And she tells me, you know, I'm so scared that I'm going to be followed, that he's gonna follow me to my car, or he's gonna follow me home to my children, like the stress the anxiety, I never even got a chance to vent with her was going on because she had to teach, right? But that's when I was like, okay, like this isn't just me being consumed in these ways, right? The university is interested in doing this work and having us do this labor, but they're really not taking into account. You know, the position that we're being placed in?

Faylon's story and her reflection highlight the precarious challenges that women of color faculty encounter. Although their abilities are needed to teach these courses, the university is often unprepared to support them through their intersections.

Similarly, for another participant, there was a certain level of fatigue and exhaustion when dealing with disgruntled students who demonstrated their irritation within these courses. For Ivory, who identified as a Latina professor, responding to an angry student made her feel anxious and exhausted. Regarding this experience, Ivory stated,

...I had to like write this carefully crafted email lest the student go and pop off to my dean or something like she popped off on me in class. And, you know, so cover my ass. That took me, like, an hour to write. And I had to ensure I used careful language to cover my ass. And I'm just like, my white colleagues don't ever have to do this. They don't have to do this. I'm out here saving the world every single day, trying my best by these like rich white students. I'm fucking tired. I'm tired. I'm so tired. I'm so done. And it sucks.

For Ivory, it was draining to teach the course. She felt she needed to walk on metaphorical eggshells to do her job. This connects to current literature regarding the experiences of women of color faculty and expands what we know as researchers. The findings suggest that feelings of exhaustion and fatigue for women of color faculty must be connected to their intersection as women and as people of color. Enabling a viewpoint of an intersectional race and gendered stress, fatigue, and exhaustion for women of color teaching diversity and social justice courses.

### **Women of color: Raced & gendered double bind**

As faculty working within HWIs, their experiences were often framed through their experiences as women and people of color. Breonna, who identified as a Black woman, acknowledged that when issues of campus racism and violence occurred, she was expected to set aside her feelings and handle them as if her identity and the weight of the racialized concern did not matter. She found this extremely troubling as it felt as though the priority became putting out the metaphorical fire. Regarding this situation, she states,

... It's one of those pieces that you have to set aside. Yeah. How do you feel to help us put out fires, right? Anytime something blows up. What should we do? What should we do? And I'm like, or how do we fix it? Like when we had the racial slur wrote on the board during free speech, the students saw it, and there was a whole big old to do. Immediately it was well, how do

we fix it? What do we do? And I'm like, okay, so I'm gonna stop to figure out how to make sure to help them make sure the students are okay. But I'm like, that word was for me? They literally wrote nigger on the board like was that towards me, you know?

For Breonna, although she recognized the moment's importance, the campus operated as if she would be impervious to the harm of racism and outward violence. On a larger scale, Breonna's statement highlights the double bind—being a Black woman and a faculty member often face while working within an HWI. The findings from this area suggest that their experiences as women of color and as faculty frame how they experience classroom traumas and conceptualize student resistance as sites of racialized violence. This finding aligns with previous scholars regarding the outsider within phenomena that many women of color experience within the academy (Anzaldúa, 2022; Croom & Patton, 2011; Hernandez et al., 2015; Ogletree & Diaz Beltran, 2021; Patton & Catching, 2009).

In addition to helping them name the hostility they encounter while teaching diversity and social justice courses, this standpoint also helps them see how their students can weaponize their identities. In one such example, Faylon, who identified as a Latina professor, shared the following experience which transpired while teaching her diversity course,

...Had a student, in particular, who would use every assignment as a tool to aggress me. For example, she submitted an assignment on colloquiums in which all she did was list the most vile, vulgar racist terms they could think of—no context, no explanation, no reflection. She had a fierce case of white fragility and leaned heavily on using white woman tears. I knew what she was doing, and I knew why she was doing it. I didn't take the bait and chose self-preservation. She then trashed my teaching eval ("Dr. Faylon hates men, hates white people, indoctrination, etc., etc.) and attempted to meet with my department head and dean to get this course canceled.

Although Faylon could specifically name this student's action as violence and a classic case of white fragility, this student still felt emboldened to take her issues to the department leadership. Her university leadership expected her to handle this student as just another disgruntled student and not someone who was an active participant in gendered racism and overt hostility against a Latina who is also her professor. Faylon did not indicate that her leadership knew how to handle this issue, which eventually prompted her to leave her institution as they could not support her needs as a Latina professor.

The implications of Faylon and Breonna's story indicate that regardless of the strength of their critique or rationale for grading, their white students can discredit their opinion based on the professor's race or gender. This differs from having valid critiques that can improve a course; these critiques become personal and targeted for them as women of color. This is especially true when teaching diversity and social justice courses for these women, as they become the subject and the reference point when discussing diversity.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

Historically White institutions can be treacherous places for women of color faculty. As these institutions often are spaces where the toxicity of racism, sexism, and misogynoir can grow, teaching diversity and social justice courses as women of color faculty is dangerous to their well-being. The findings from this study underscore the previous literature regarding the realities for women of color faculty within academia (Croom & Patton, 2011; Grahame, 2004; Patton & Catching, 2009; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Turner & González, 2011). Especially as it relates to demonstrating the oftentimes toxic climate of many

historically white campuses. The findings suggest that while discussing politically charged topics related to diversity and social justice, outside toxicity and hostility towards these areas are carried over into the classroom—making these women targets of racialized and gendered aggression.

## **Recommendations**

Higher education is broken, and it should not be the responsibility of these women of color faculty to fix a system that often fails to protect them and their well-being. The faculty member's title does not protect them from the harm they experience both inside and outside the classroom. Beyond institutions aiming to diversify their professorate, they must make a concerted effort to address the institutional climate and how that impacts the well-being of women of color faculty. Higher education must care not only for the well-being of students of color but also the well-being of the women of color faculty. Especially teaching diversity and social justice courses.

As this study contributes to the vast literature which exposes the dark and insidious reality of many historically White institutions, higher education must not operate as if this information is new. Women of color, regardless of the subject matter that they teach, will face challenges that are tied to their race and gender (Azhar & McCutcheon, 2022; Calafell, 2012; Corneille et al., 2019; Crenshaw, 1991; Ford, 2011; O'Brien, 2020; Pittman, 2010); however, this study shares a deeper understanding of the impact of teaching diversity and social justice courses. As these courses are aimed at aiding students to understand and appreciate the value of diversity, they are essentially teaching students to care about their humanity as women of color. In truth, their intersectional selves as women of color is weaponized and challenged by their students as they teach these courses.

Although all participants shared a passion and affinity for teaching these courses, they grappled with the reality that women of color, and people of color in general, often receive the responsibility to teach these courses. Which from their perspective is not right, nor is it fair as expanding student's understanding about diversity is everyone's responsibility. However, if they were to teach the courses, the participants challenged institutions to care for them as women and people of color and the emotional and physical labor of their efforts. Institutions must recognize that women of color faculty do not teach these courses as disembodied individuals; in fact, students gain additional insight through their intersections as women and as people of color. Students, staff, faculty, and administrators benefit from having women of color teach these courses; however, they should not expect mistreatment simply by existing within a white dominated space.

Lastly, although this study was aimed to explore the emotional mental, and physical implications of teaching diversity and social justice courses for women of color faculty, it is important to underscore that women of color are not a monolith. For example, Black women have a unique history as it relates to enslavement, forced labor and a racialized and gendered servitude relating to care (Collins, 2002a, 2002b; Hill Collins, 1994). Although there were similarities in terms of how they experienced classroom traumas and aggression there must be nuance in terms of how we frame the recommendations for them. This study should serve as a foundation to conduct additional inquiry regarding the specifics- emotional, mental, and physical implications of teaching these courses for these women.

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# SNAP4Rams Programing: Addressing Food Insecurity Among Students at Colorado State University

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## Abstract

*The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the primary federal benefit program to address Food Insecurity (FI) in the U.S., however data demonstrated that SNAP participation rate in university settings is underutilized. This article describes a project that evaluates the utilization of SNAP programming by students at Colorado State University (CSU) a public, land-grant university. During the fall semester of 2021 recruitment emails were sent to 583 students, who applied for SNAP benefits through the SNAP4Rams program. The online survey was created in Qualtrics and included 30 questions with six main sections which covered awareness and utilization of campus-based food resources, personal beliefs about FI, experience of the SNAP application process, outcomes, and demographics. In total 73 surveys were completed (15% response rate). The majority of respondents (90%) stated that they either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that CSU SNAP navigators were helpful. Similar results were observed when applicants were asked if SNAP4Rams navigators were knowledgeable about SNAP policy and procedures and if they felt respected and heard by the navigator. In addition, the study found that the majority of respondents reported that the outcome was worth the investment in time (96%), with 82% having received benefits. The average allotment amount was \$218.55 per month (SD 68.45), per individual. When examining students’ characteristics most respondents identified as first-generation students (51%) and received financial aid (94%). There is limited data evaluating SNAP programming in a university setting. Developing a data gathering and reporting process is necessary to examine the short and longer-term impact of SNAP4Rams programming on students at CSU.*

*Keywords:* food insecurity, SNAP program, educational policy, higher education, postsecondary education

## Author Note

**Acknowledgements:** Thank you to all SNAP applicants who participated in this study. Additional thanks to SNAP4Rams navigators, Jennie Baran and Maddie Breza, as well as campus partners from Rams Against Hunger for their input during the construction of the survey used for this study.

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### **SNAP4Rams Programing: Addressing Food Insecurity Among Students at Colorado State University**

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food Insecurity (FI) is defined by limited or uncertain access to nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways due to limited financial resources (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2021). Recent systematic reviews have found that rates of FI on campuses are higher than the national average (13%), with the prevalence ranging from 33% to 43% (Bruening et al., 2017; Nazmi et al., 2019; Nikolaus et al., 2020). Studies have found that experiences of FI are associated with student outcomes including mental health and academic performance (Bruening et al., 2016; Coleman, 2019; Farahbakhsh et al., 2017; Hickey et al., 2019; Payne-Sturges et al., 2018).

Freudenberg et al. (2019) in their review have identified five economic factors that contribute for higher rates of FI among college students that include: a “growing population of low-income college students, high college costs and insufficient financial aid, more financial hardship among many low and moderate-income families, a weak labor market for part-time workers and declining per capita college resources” (Freudenberg et al., 2019, p. 1)

One strategy includes improving access to services such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment.

#### **Overview of SNAP**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is main federal benefit program to address FI. For example in 2019 SNAP reached more than 35.7 million people and provided more than \$60.4 billion in total benefits (Tiehen, 2020). SNAP, administered by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), provides supplemental income to purchase groceries for eligible, low-income individuals and families (For a broader review of SNAP, see Bartfeld et al., 2016). The stated purpose of the program is to “permit low income households to obtain a more nutritious diet ... by increasing their purchasing power” (Cronquist, 2021, p. 1).

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) works to achieve this goal by allotting SNAP benefits monthly via an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which can be used at authorized, retail and food outlets. Benefit amounts are determined at a state and county level based on household composition and finances (Cronquist, 2021). These allotments serve as a supplement to a grocery budget, but not the budget in its entirety. Instead, FNS calculates allotments based on the differential between income and assets to average food cost and consumption (Schanzenbach, 2019).

Recent research describes SNAP success in reducing FI (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2020; Gregory & Smith, 2019; Gundersen et al., 2017; Keith-Jennings et al., 2019; Swann, 2017). It has been demonstrated that SNAP boosts the economy by acting in both a stabilizing and multiplying capacity (Canning & Stacy, 2019; Schanzenbach, 2019). During economic recession SNAP spending increases. Therefore, SNAP

acts as a crucial safety net for recipients during economic downturns (Jones, 2021; Schanzenbach, 2019). In their report, Canning and Stacy (2019) contend that should the federal government expend an additional \$ 1 billion in SNAP per month, the result would be a \$0.3 billion net increase in food spending. Not only does the purchasing power and consumption of the SNAP recipient increase, but so does the availability of jobs and income for a variety of economic sectors (Canning & Stacy, 2019).

### **Overview of SNAP in University Settings**

Despite the potential benefits of SNAP in reducing FI for low-income college students (Freudenberg et al., 2019; GAO, 2018), data demonstrates that SNAP participation is underutilized. Between 2015-2019 data from 411 colleges and universities indicates that only 18% of food insecure student receive SNAP (Baker-Smith et al., 2020). Rates of participation collected in Fall 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, did not increase (The Hope Center, 2021a).

A potential cause for low participation rates includes complicated and restrictive exemption rules (GAO, 2018). Under Title VII, Section 273.5 of the Food and Agriculture Act (1977) college students are restricted from SNAP eligibility if they do not meet certain exemptions. Many college students find it difficult to meet requirements beyond financial need (Broton et al., 2018; El Zein et al., 2019) - i.e., they may meet gross income levels and asset tests, but not additional exemptions. Even those students that do meet exemptions participate at low rates. A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report (2018) found that 57% of eligible, low-income college students at risk for FI did not receive SNAP benefits. More recent studies report equally low or lower rates of participation for SNAP eligible students (Baker-Smith et al., 2020; The Hope Center, 2021a). Contributors to this discrepancy include a lack of information, intimidation caused by a cumbersome application process, and stigma (Bianco et al., 2016; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; The Hope Center, 2021a).

Suggestions to address these barriers at an institutional level include: University wide education and enrollment campaigns to destigmatize the use of benefits and increase awareness (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Freudenberg et al., 2019; The Hope Center, 2021a), assessment of basic need security at time of enrollment and financial aid receipt (Freudenberg et al., 2019; The Hope Center, 2021a, 2021b; Wooten et al., 2019), better training for student-facing faculty and staff (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Freudenberg et al., 2019) One-stop assistance/ single-points of contact, (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; The Hope Center, 2021), on-campus enrollment/application navigators (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Freudenberg et al., 2019), enhanced data collection (Bianco et al., 2016; The Hope Center, 2021a), and targeted outreach to most marginalized populations (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; The Hope Center, 2021a; Willis, 2019).

### **Overview of SNAP4Rams Program**

Colorado State University (CSU) students are not exempt from the above statistics. When examining data at the national level, in 2018, Colorado's participation rate was significantly lower than the national rate for all eligible people (79% vs. 82%, respectively) (Cunningham, 2021). Data from FNS' state activity report for 2019 indicates that Colorado ranks 28th in participating individuals (Food and Nutrition Service, 2021 [FNS], Table 23). Recent data collected from 3,326 students at CSU found that 29% of students experienced FI within the last 30 days, while less than 10% of respondents utilized SNAP benefits (The Hope Center, 2021b). What is more, CSU specific reports indicate that the rate of FI is disproportionately experienced by marginalized student populations (American College Health

Association, 2020; The Hope Center, 2021b). To address the discrepancy in the percentage of eligible students to actual SNAP participation rate, the Student Case Management & Referral Coordination Office (SCM) at CSU established SNAP4Rams in spring 2020. SNAP4Rams programming works to actively reduce barriers to participation through the following means: a) assist in the navigation of the SNAP application and process; b) reduce stigma on campus through information sharing and myth busting; and c) institutionalize benefit assistance as a third leg of financial aid at an institutional level.

Although SCM has been collecting data since September 2020, they have never completed a SNAP4Rams program evaluation. In addition, few studies have evaluated SNAP programming, such as SNAP4Rams, utilization in university setting (Esaryk et al., 2022). In response to this gap in the literature, the present study describes a project that evaluates the utilization of SNAP programming by students at CSU, a public, land grant, institution.

Specifically, the following research questions guided this project:

1. what were SNAP applicants' personal experiences with SNAP services at the campus level and at the county level?
2. What campus resources are SNAP applicants' aware of and utilizing?

Understanding the needs and experiences of SNAP program participants will help identify factors that led to low student enrollment in SNAP programs (Freudenberg et al., 2019; GAO, 2018) and will inform further programs and initiatives that increase enrollment.

## **Methods**

### **Study Design**

We addressed our research question using a descriptive study that utilized a cross-sectional design. We used an online survey to collect quantitative and qualitative data from students who have engaged in services provided through SNAP4Rams programming at CSU.

### **Sample and Recruitment**

SNAP4Rams programming is under the auspices of the Student Case Management & Referral Coordination Office (SCM) at CSU. Therefore, the survey was administered via email by SCM staff. This sample included individuals who at the time of interaction were either undergraduate or graduate students at CSU. They would have applied for SNAP benefits or submitted changes or renewals to their SNAP applications with the assistance of a SNAP4Rams navigator between September 1, 2020, and August 31, 2021; given it takes approximately 30- days to be processed in the system. The total sample size was 583.

Data were collected during the period of September 28 through October 15, 2021. Students were invited to complete a survey via email. The email included an invitation outlining the aims of the study, the anonymity of participation, contact details of researchers and a live link to the host survey platform (Qualtrics, Provo, UT). Participation was voluntary and without incentives. CSU's Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved all study procedures.

## **Survey Design**

The research team developed a 30-item, self-report instrument that included questions regarding awareness and utilization of campus-based food resources, outcome, and experience in applying for SNAP (both with SNAP4Rams navigators and county staff) and individual demographic characteristics. It was developed through a collaboration with members of the SCM team. The team assessed each item for importance, relevance, clarity, and time to complete. The SCM recommendations informed modifications, the final survey took less than 10 minutes to complete.

### ***SNAP Applicants' Personal Experience Regarding the SNAP Application Process***

Respondents were asked to rate their experience both with SNAP4Rams navigators and with county staff regarding application process. The five questions focused on items related to effectiveness of the application process, as well as respectfulness and knowledge of SNAP4Rams navigators and county staff. In addition, two questions were designed to ascertain participants perception regarding the SNAP and benefit receipt. All seven questions utilized a 5- point Likert scale with one being *strongly agree* and five being *strongly disagree*.

### ***Outcome of SNAP application***

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they received benefits. Respondents who answered in the affirmative (application was approved) were asked to provide more information specific to outcome and effectiveness of the program in reducing FI. For example, the dollar amount allotted each month to supplement income and if that dollar amount was sufficient to last an entire month (Mabli et al., 2013). Respondents were asked to indicate the reason for SNAP eligibility. Finally, respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with SNAP (Rydell et al., 2017). Respondents who did not receive benefits (application was denied) were asked to identify barriers to approval (missed my interview, above the income limit, not considered an eligible student, did not submit the required verifications).

### ***SNAP Applicants' Awareness and Utilization of Campus-based Food Resources***

Participants were asked to provide information about their knowledge and utilization of campus-based food resources. Items were adapted from the California State University Study of Basic Needs (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2017) to reflect services offered at CSU. If resources were not being utilized, options to indicate why were provided. Response options reflect barriers caused by logistic restraints (transportation, time), prohibitive eligibility standards or services, and hesitancy rooted in stigma. Analysis excluded respondents who declined to answer.

### **SNAP applicants' Demographic Characteristics**

The survey also included demographic questions regarding gender, age, ethnic/racial identity, financial aid receipt, student status, and transfer status. Our choice of demographic variables to collect guided by the need to balance aspects of literature review, while also maintaining a short survey that would not overwhelm respondents.

### ***Open Ended Response***

SNAP4Rams participants were given the option to provide insight into ways that CSU should further support hunger and FI for students.

## Data Analysis Procedure

The sample for this study contained CSU students who had submitted a SNAP application with the assistance of a SNAP4Rams navigator between September 1, 2020, and August 31, 2021. In total 583 individuals were invited via e-mail to complete the online survey between September 28, 2021 - October 15, 2021. Two reminders were distributed. Of those six emails bounced back, 88 surveys were started, and 73 surveys were completed. A response rate of 15.09% was collected. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28; IBM Corp, 2021). Responses for the open-ended question were coded using content analysis methods, consisting of recording emerging themes in respondents' answers and group analysis of the findings to ensure a collective understanding of the authors interpretations.

## Results

### Description of Program Participants

Table 1 presents a description of the sample. Of the 73 respondents the majority were White (57%), and female (68%) and the mean age of respondents was 24.01 years (SD = 7.96). When examining student characteristics most respondents held either Junior or Senior class standing (75%), were not transfer students (78%), identified as first-generation students (51%) and received financial aid (94%).

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of SNAP4Rams Applicants by (N=68).*

Variable	(n, %)
Age in years (Mean, SD)	24.01 (7.96)
<b>Gender of Participant</b>	
Male	17 (25)
Female	46 (67.6)
Non-Binary/third gender	5 (7.4)
<b>Race of Participant</b>	
White	38 (56.7)
Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin	13 (19.4)
Black or African American	3 (4.5)
Asian	3 (4.5)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1 (1.5)

Multicultural	9 (13.4)
<b>Class Standing</b>	
Sophomore	5 (7.7)
Junior	26 (40)
Senior	23 (35.4)
Graduate program	11 (16.9)
<b>Transfer Status</b>	
Yes, community college	12 (17.9)
Yes, four-year college or university	3 (4.5)
No	52 (77.6)
<b>Financial Aid Receipt</b>	
Yes	63 (95.5)
No	3 (4.5)
<b>Financial Aid Type *</b>	
FAFSA loans	48 (24.5)
Pell/Other grants	42 (21.4)
Work study award	42 (21.4)
Private loans	15 (7.6)
<b>First Generation Student</b>	
Yes	33 (49.3)
No	34 (50.7)

*Note.* \* Respondents had ability to choose more than one option for the item. Those percentages do not add to 100.0%.

### Quantitative Findings

Table 2 summarizes SNAP4Rams applicants' awareness and utilization of CSU campus food security resources, as well as barriers to resource utilization. Rams Against Hunger (RAH) was the most frequently utilized and visible food-specific resource, with 38% of respondents having used and 20%



currently using the on-campus food pantry. RAH was the most common referral source for SNAP4Rams (34%), followed by friends/roommates (23%) and the Office of Financial Aid (12%).

The most common barrier to resource utilization was lack of knowledge. While 29% of respondents report already utilizing a variety of campus resources, 18% of survey respondents reported that they have not even heard of the programs. Other commonly reported barriers to resource utilization include eligibility restrictions (13%) and time limitations (13%). A large proportion of respondents indicated they would be interested in using their benefits at an on-campus market if available in the future (88%).

**Table 2**

*SNAP4Rams Applicants Awareness and Utilization of CSU Campus Food Security Resources*

(N=73).

Variable	(n, %)
<b>SNAP4Rams referral source *</b>	
Rams Against Hunger	34 (33.66)
Friend/roommate	23 (22.77)
Office of Financial Aid	12 (11.88)
Other university staff member	6 (5.94)
Faculty	5 (4.95)
Student Case Management	5 (4.95)
Other (email, presentation)	5 (4.95)
CSU social media	4 (3.96)
Academic advisor	4 (3.96)
Canvas	2 (1.98)
Discovered online independently	1 (0.99)
<b>Rams against hunger food pantry</b>	
Never Heard of it	5 (6.8)
Heard of it, but never used it	25 (34.2)
Used it in the past	28 (38.4)
Currently use it	15 (20.5)

**Rams against hunger pocket pantry**

Never Heard of it	24 (33.3)
Heard of it, but never used it	28 (38.9)
Used it in the past	12 (16.7)
Currently use it	8 (11.1)

**Rams against hunger meal swipe program**

Never Heard of it	20 (28.2)
Heard of it, but never used it	27 (38)
Used it in the past	8 (11.3)
Currently use it	11 (22.5)

**Barriers to utilize resources \***

I already use one or more of the above programs	29 (28.43)
I have not heard of the programs	18 (17.65)
I am not eligible for programs	13 (12.75)
I do not have time to access these resources	13 (12.75)
I do not need assistance	12 (11.76)
Other (accessibility, application process)	4 (3.92)
It is embarrassing to have to use these resources	3 (2.94)
I do not have transportation	3 (2.94)
Services provided are not student friendly	1 (.98)
Eligibility for services is prohibitive	1 (.98)

**If available in the future, would you buy groceries at an on-campus market that accepted EBT?**

Yes	49 (87.5)
No	4 (4.1)
Maybe	3 (5.4)

*Note:* \* Respondents had ability to choose more than one option for the item. Those percentages do not add to 100.0%, the numbers in parentheses indicate row percentages.

Table 3 describes SNAP4Rams applicants' personal experience and satisfaction regarding the SNAP application process (regardless of outcome). Most respondents (90%) either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that SNAP4Rams navigators were helpful. Similar results were observed when applicants were asked if navigators were knowledgeable about SNAP policy and procedures and if they felt respected and heard by the campus navigator. However, satisfaction with the county process varied. Sixty-four percent of respondents "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the county process was clear and easy to understand and 67% felt respected and heard by county personnel.

**Table 3**

*SNAP4Rams Applicants Personal Experiences Regarding SNAP process (N=68).*

<b>Statement</b>	<b>(n, %)</b>
<b>CSU SNAP navigator was helpful</b>	
Strongly Agree	40 (58.8)
Agree	21 (30.9)
Neither agree nor disagree	4 (5.9)
Disagree	2 (2.9)
<b>I felt respected and heard by the CSU SNAP navigator</b>	
Strongly Agree	40 (58.8)
Agree	23 (33.8)
Neither agree nor disagree	4 (5.9)
Disagree	1 (1.5)
<b>I felt the SNAP4rams navigator was knowledgeable about SNAP policy and procedures</b>	
Strongly Agree (60.3)	41
Agree (32.4)	22
Neither agree nor disagree	5 (7.4)
<b>The County benefit process was clear and easy to understand</b>	
Strongly Agree	17 (25)
Agree	27 (39.7)
Neither agree nor disagree	7 (10.3)

Disagree	12 (17.6)
Strongly disagree	5 (7.4)
<b>I felt respected and heard by County personnel</b>	
Strongly Agree	19 (28.4)
Agree	26 (38.8)
Neither agree nor disagree	11 (16.4)
Disagree	9 (13.4)
Strongly disagree	2 (3.0)
<b>Prior to applying with SNAP4Rams I had negative personal beliefs about public benefits/"food stamps"</b>	
Strongly Agree	7 (10.3)
Agree	12 (17.6)
Neither agree nor disagree	15 (22.1)
Disagree	21 (30.9)
Strongly disagree	13 (19.1)
<b>After applying with SNAP4Rams my personal beliefs improved about public benefits/"food stamps"</b>	
Strongly Agree	26 (35.6)
Agree	26 (35.6)
Neither agree nor disagree	16 (23.2)
Disagree	1 (1.4)

Table 4 focuses on SNAP4Rams applicants' outcomes. An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that the outcome was worth the investment in time (96%), with 82% having received benefits. The average allotment amount was \$218.55 per month (SD 68.45), per individual. Additionally, a majority reported that the debit card was easy to use (96%) and was helpful in buying both nutritious foods (87%) and foods of choice (89%).

**Table 4**

*SNAP4Rams Applicants' Outcomes (N=68).*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>(n, %)</b>
<b>SNAP4Rams applicants' outcome</b>	
Application was approved	56 (82.4)
Application was denied	3 (4.4)
Application is still pending	6 (8.8)
Don't know	2 (2.9)
Decline to respond	1 (1.5)
<b>Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) monthly (dollar, Mean, SD) <sup>b</sup></b>	218.55 (68.45)
<b>How many weeks do your SNAP benefits usually last? <sup>b</sup></b>	
1 week or less	1 (1.9)
2 weeks	5 (9.3)
3 weeks	19 (29.6)

4 weeks	17 (31.5)
More than 4 weeks	8 (14.8)
Don't know	7 (13)
<b>Was the outcome worth the investment in time?</b>	
Yes	54
(96.4)	
Decline to respond	2
(3.6)	
<b>Program debit card was easy to use <sup>b</sup></b>	
Strongly Agree	39
(69.6)	
Agree	15
(26.8)	
Neither agree nor disagree	2
(3.6)	
<b>Program was helpful in buying healthful/nutritious foods <sup>b</sup></b>	
Strongly Agree	42
(75)	
Agree	7
(12.5)	
Neither agree nor disagree	6
(10.7)	
Disagree	1
(1.8)	
<b>Program was helpful in buying my foods of choice <sup>b</sup></b>	
Strongly Agree	37 (66.1)
Agree	13 (23.2)
Neither agree nor disagree	5 (8.9)
Disagree	1 (1.8)
<b>Program allowed household to meet my grocery needs<sup>b</sup></b>	
Strongly Agree	39 (69.6)
Agree	10 (17.9)
Neither agree nor disagree	5 (8.9)
Disagree	2 (3.6)

Note: <sup>a</sup> Respondents had ability to choose more than one option for the item. Those percentages do not add to 100.0%, the numbers in parentheses indicate row percentages.

<sup>b</sup> Question was limited to 56 SNAP4Rams applicants who received the SNAP benefits

## Qualitative Findings

### *Appreciation for SNAP4Rams Programming*

Among the 42 SNAP4Rams applicants who responded to the open question, there was a strong appreciation for programming overall. Whether the SNAP4Rams program assisted in students'

navigation of the SNAP application and process or provided access to institutional resources at large, the program was largely seen as a positive for students who struggled with FI.

I think you all are doing a WONDERFULL job!!! My whole life/anxiety levels changed when I got food assistance. Thank you so much. I did TRY to sign up on the Colorado benefits website but i couldn't figure it out. Having a CSU representative helped me get the process completed. Before i saw the sign on campus i had given up. So, thank you CSU for being there for the students in need. (SNAP4Rams applicant #23)

A few SNAP4Rams applicants stated that the program helped to reduce their concerns regarding food. For example participant said, “I hope that more people would use it because it is SO helpful. It's so nice to have my food expenses paid for and not have to worry about feeding myself.” (SNAP4Rams applicant #27).

### ***Motivation to Participate***

Participants indicated that household FI was a strong motivation for participation. Several participants indicated that they did not have enough money each month to cover all their expenses, including the cost of food. Low wages and unemployment were commonly cited as drivers of FI. In addition, participants indicated concerns related to the cost of living specific to the Fort Collins, Colorado area. Some respondents even pinpointed root causes of FI that plague systems of higher education.

Increase student pay, for both undergraduate and graduate students, and reduce student costs. The fees at this university are higher than at any other university I've attended or worked at. Parking is also cost prohibitive... The combination of low pay and high costs ultimately create food insecurity, as food is a more flexible expense than the other necessities and thus often gets reduced either in quality, quantity, or both to make ends meet. (SNAP4Rams applicant #5).

This applicant goes on to cite COVID-19 as having exacerbated the issue “as free food at events has become less available”. Another participant suggested that SNAP eligibility restrictions be adjusted to accommodate students working less hours due to COVID restrictions (SNAP4Rams applicant #39).

### ***Barriers to SNAP enrollment***

**Stigma.** A common view amongst the respondents was that stigma and fear of embarrassment are barriers to SNAP enrollment. For example, one participant stated, “Make it less embarrassing...show first year students how to use the food pantry and sign up for snap if needed” (SNAP4Rams applicant #38), while another said, “There should be more awareness of the different programs. Some students might be embarrassed about seeking out the information, so CSU should market it more right when school starts” (SNAP4Rams applicant #37).

**Awareness and Outreach.** Another recurrent theme amongst respondents was a sense that not enough was being done to a) highlight the issue of FI on campus and b) advertise SNAP4Rams as an option available to students. As it relates to FI itself, one respondent stated: “I think it’s essential even to recognize how many students face insecurity. There should be more awareness, training, and understanding. There should be workshops to help folxs ease feeling anxiety when thinking about applying or receiving food stamps” (SNAP4Rams applicant #2).

There was a clear sense among respondents that more needs to be done to promote SNAP4Rams. With one SNAP4Rams applicant stating, “I think a lot of students would benefit from and appreciate the program if they knew about it” (SNAP4Rams applicant #24) and another reporting:

I had no idea I qualified for these benefits. When I heard about the program, I was skeptical that I'd be approved, but I decided to try anyway. I think information about eligibility should be more widely available. The money I'm getting from SNAP every month is so helpful, and I'm sure more students could benefit from it if they knew they were eligible! (SNAP4Rams applicant #17).

**Accessibility.** Similar to concerns around outreach and awareness, was a recurrent theme of accessibility, with one respondent stating, “Make this information more public, accessible, and inclusive” (SNAP4Rams applicant #29). Accessibility concerns surfaced mainly in relation to an on-campus location that accepts Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) dollars. For example, one respondent stated that they “would have loved for EBT to be accepted at on-campus vending machines and the lobby shop because sometimes [they] would be so hungry but didn't have time to get to the store on my bike for a snack.” (SNAP4Rams applicant #22). This sentiment aligns with responses to the survey question, that if available in the future, 88% of respondents would buy groceries at an on-campus market that accepted EBT.

Reviewed together, the above themes highlight consensus amongst participants that more must be done to increase awareness of both SNAP4Rams programming, as well as FI itself.

### Discussion

In alignment with SNAP4Rams programming goals, this study aimed to assess barriers in utilization to increase SNAP enrollment of low-income students. This study found that while SNAP applicants expressed strong support and appreciation for the program (Rydell et al.2018), they still experienced barriers to participation and enrollment. The study results are in alignment with previous research wherein lack of knowledge and awareness of the programs (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019; Freudenberg, 2019; GAO, 2018; Hope Center, 2021a), restrictive eligibility (Esaruk et al., 2022; GAO, 2018; Food and Agriculture Act,1977), lack of time (Brotton et al., 2018; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019; Gaines et al., 2014; Peterson & Freidus, 2020) and embarrassment or stigma related to accessing services (Crutchfield et al., 2020; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019; El Zein, 2019; Peterson & Freidus, 2020) are formidable barriers to utilization of on-campus resources. Some respondents highlight just how lacking awareness and understanding of SNAP4Rams programming is in that it is often confused with other on-campus resources that aim to address FI.

Report findings indicate a disjointed experience in working with SNAP4Rams navigators’ verses county Staff. While the majority of SNAP4Rams applicants were satisfied with process at the university level, respondents were less satisfied with the county process. Previous studies highlight long wait times (Dickinson, 2021), bureaucratic errors and misinformation (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019; Dickinson, 2021; GAO, 2018), intimidation caused by a cumbersome application process, stigma (Bianco et al., 2016; Brotton & Goldrick- Rab, 2018; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019; Dickinson, 2021; Hope Center, 2021a, GAO, 2018) and poor treatment from Department of Human Services offices as barriers to SNAP utilization by students (Dickinson, 2021).

In response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) public health emergency, FNS approved Colorado's request for emergency allotments in March of 2020. This meant that during the time of this study, SNAP recipients were to receive maximum, monthly, allotments of at least \$204 (Sept. 2020-Dec. 2020) - \$234 (January 2021 – August 2021) per individual (FNS, 2022). Seven SNAP4Rams applicants (21%) reported a number below the SNAP minimum monthly allotment of \$204 per individual for the timeframe of the study. Furthermore only 25 SNAP applicants (46%) indicated that SNAP benefits lasted four weeks or more, and 13% indicated they did not know how long their benefits lasted. Previous research reports low financial literacy among college students (Goyal et al., 2021; Goyal & Kumar, 2021). There are significant gender and racial/ethnic differences in financial literacy, with women and minority students having lower financial literacy and wellness (Arellano et al., 2018; West & Worthington, 2018). Financial education and support in universities offers the potential to increase financial wellness. Delivery modes for financial education range from formal classes to workshops and group presentations, online platforms, and peer coaching or counseling (Montalto et al., 2019; Yin Yin et al., 2022).

### **Limitations**

There are several notable limitations for this study. First, the cross-sectional survey design limits the ability to assess causation and directionality of relationships (Grimes & Schulz, 2002). The study aimed to evaluate SNAP4Rams applicants at CSU, as such only a specific population of students in a single academic institution was included in the study. While all SNAP4Rams applicants were approached, there is potential for self-selection bias, with those who did receive SNAP benefits perhaps more likely to agree to participate in the survey. Therefore, this small study sample is not representative of or generalizable to other SNAP programs in the state or country. Lastly, the questionnaire was a self-reported measure which could have resulted in recall and other forms of self-report biases (Grimes & Schulz, 2002) or the limited scope of questions may not have been fully representative of the SNAP4Rams applicants experience and ultimately influenced the study results.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

**Research.** Future, longitudinal research is necessary to examine the longer-term impact of SNAP programming on college campuses. For example, its' effectiveness in reducing FI, its' impact on quality of life (stress and anxiety reduction) and academic or learning outcomes. Additional research must also address COVID-19 program and policy changes related to student eligibility exemptions (expected family contribution and work-study) and max-benefit allotments (Food and Nutrition Services, 2021b). This is especially relevant considering previous research and literature which provides insight into fluctuations in SNAP utilization and impact during economic downturns (Canning & Stacy, 2019; Jones, 2021; Keith-Jennings et al., 2019; Schanzenbach, 2019; Tiehen, 2020). There are few comparable studies specific to SNAP programming at other institutions and those found are limited in the following ways: a) they are cross-sectional in nature and b) the focus is primarily on barriers to utilization verses outcome on FI, academics, and wellbeing (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019; Dickinson, 2021). Therefore, longitudinal research specific to approval rates, allotments, reduction in FI and academic outcomes are necessary.

Previous research indicates demographic discrepancies not only along the experience of FI itself (Broton et al., 2018; Bruening et al., 2018; El Zein et al., 2018; Gaines et al., 2014; Laska et al., 2021; McArthur et al., 2018; Owens et al., 2020; Peterson & Freidus, 2020, Willis, 2019), but also with regard to knowledge and utilization of on-campus resources aimed at addressing FI (Crutchfield & Maguire,



2019; Hope Center, 2020; Hope Center, 2021a; Hope Center, 2021b). Similar to work being done within the California State University System (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019), future research should examine the influence of demographic variables on SNAP program utilization for college students, as well as knowledge of and satisfaction with on-campus resources. Results may assist in more targeted and equitable service provision to students most at risk for FI.

**Policy and Practice.** This study has highlighted the difference in levels of satisfaction with SNAP4Rams navigators' versus county staff. Campus programming must take a two-pronged approach to address this discrepancy. Navigators should be mindful in setting realistic expectations for county process and provide tools and knowledge to be successful working with a system that is not always hospitable to student needs. Consistent with research conducted at University of California campuses, campus navigators should continue to educate students and staff on basic eligibility requirements and application processes to avoid misunderstandings around student eligibility (Esaryk et al., 2022). Additionally, campus navigators should enhance partnerships with county staff to address the discrepancy in experience between university and county levels and identify the most common bureaucratic barriers to approval (Bramlett, 2019; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019; Dickinson, 2021; Esaryk et al., 2022; Freudenberg et al., 2019; GAO, 2018). Solutions include bringing county staff directly to campus to complete interviews at time of application and advocating for consistent eligibility standards and procedures across county offices (Esaryk et al., 2022).

At campus levels, navigators should increase awareness and decrease stigma through university-wide enrollment and education campaigns at time of admittance (Baker-Smith et al., 2018; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019; Duniyak, 2018; Freudenberg et al., 2019; Hope Center, 2021a). Study results exemplify the need for "one-stop" shops or single points of contact where navigators are available for on-site assistance (Bramlett, 2019; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019; Hope Center, 2021a). Single points of contact to reduce confusion misinformation and improve access to services and are an important long term practice strategy. Campus staff should also take note of the gap in understanding in allotment benefits and budgeting timeframes to better support financial education. Navigators could work with both the Department of Human Services SNAP-Ed and campus partners to provide resources on how to buy and prepare health foods on a budget (Colorado Department of Human Services, 2022). Additionally, training for student-facing faculty and staff can assist them in better recognizing the signs of FI and provide them with tools to make appropriate referrals (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019; Freudenberg, 2019; Wright et al., 2020). This is key as students often feel compelled to share their struggle with FI only when it begins to negatively impact their academics (Wright et al., 2020). Additional efforts at accessibility include adding on-campus vendors that accept EBT dollars. Lastly, campus navigators should engage in targeted outreach to the most marginalized student populations, who are often at greater risk of experiencing FI (Broton et al., 2018; El Zein et al., 2018; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2019; GAO, 2018; Laska et al., 2021; Owens et al., 2020; Peterson & Freidus, 2020, Willis, 2019). This aligns with study results that indicate a disproportionate rate of utilization by underrepresented student groups in relation to overall CSU enrollment (The Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness, 2021).

SNAP navigators and campus representatives can work with county and state personnel as well as community partners should advocate for policies more conducive to supporting students. For example, advocating for changes to restrictive and outdated eligibility measures set forth by the Food and Agriculture Act (1977). Examples of possible changes include permanent expansion of eligibility to low-income, independent or Pell Grant eligible students (College Student Hunger Act, 2019) or the inclusion of college courses to meet the "training" and "work" eligibility exemptions (Freudenberg et

al., 2019). Until that time, SNAP navigators can advocate for the inclusion of benefit information and screening at time of financial aid receipt (California Department of Social Services, 2015). This is integral in combatting persistent increases in cost of attendance, coupled with the diminishing purchasing power of financial aid (Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

FI is a systemic issue, not that of the individual. Therefore, on campus SNAP programming must address disparities in access to healthy foods as a means of “leveling” the field of opportunity for students and promoting academic success and equity for marginalized student populations. Programming must aim to mitigate the role of income and wealth as a purveyor of educational success. By aiding students in accessing supplemental grocery income, SNAP can serve as a tool to avoid the possibility of debt without a diploma.

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# Chinese College Student Engagement

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## Abstract

*A considerable evidential body indicates that student engagement influences students' college persistence and academic achievement. However, research on student engagement has traditionally focused on Caucasian students. When the effects of student engagement have been examined in other ethnic and racial groups, findings have suggested that the effects are not universal. The present paper first provides an overview of student engagement and, for Caucasians, the relationship of student engagement to students' academic success and college persistence. This overview is followed by a review of evidence concerning the effects of college student engagement on non-Caucasian college students. The central focus of this review is on college student engagement of Chinese, cultural differences in the expectations and measurements of student engagement in China. Therefore, the present paper aims to increase our understanding the association between college student engagement and Chinese culture, and thereby, promotes a view of Chinese college student engagement that reduces the likelihood of perpetuating conceptions of Chinese college student engagement based on faculty, biased, or ethnocentric assumptions.*

*Key words:* student engagement, school success, NEES, Chinese college students

## Introduction

Higher education institutions, as primary sites for cultivating talents, are significant to students' development. Higher education institutions provide students with an environment for learning and create educational programs and activities to engage students and to foster learning. These rather obvious statements, however, do not entail the assumption that the mere fact of being in a higher education institution ensures that all students will succeed. Instead, students, as the prominent participants in the education process, are another major factor deciding learning outcomes. Extensive research documented individual differences in college. These individual differences in college, in turn, determine student school success.

"The time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities" is defined as student engagement by Kuh (2003, p. 25; 2009b, p.683). On the one hand, students engage by committing time and energy to educationally purposeful activities, which lead to optimal educational outcomes. On the other hand, higher education institutions provide resources, create conditions, and engage students to foster learning. Therefore, according to Kuh, engagement is generated by the interactive dynamics between students and higher education institutions.

According to Kuh (2009b), student engagement was primarily built on time on task, quality of effort, involvement, social and academic integration, and seven principles for good practice in undergraduate

education. Educational psychologist, Tyler, pioneering service studies (Merwin, 1969) conducted to investigate the relationship between time on schoolwork and its effects on learning, provided the foundation for a program of research that continues to influence contemporary theories and research. Pace (1980) further explored Tyler's time on task to develop the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). Pace (1990) suggested that students, as active participants in the education process, learn more when they invest time and energy into effective educational activities, such as studying, participating in educational programs, interacting with peers and faculty, and applying knowledge to practical situations. This was termed as quality of effort. In other words, students determine how much they commit to various school resources and academic opportunities, and their quality of efforts directly influences their success. Thus, if students want to grow and achieve more in academics, they need to devote their time and efforts to education-related activities.

Student involvement, proposed by Astin (1984), also laid a theoretical foundation for the conceptualization of student engagement. According to Astin (1984),

student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. Thus, a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to study, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. (p.297)

In other words, a less involved student spends less time on study, academic activities, or student organizations. They typically are also not proactive in interaction with their teachers or peers. In Astin's view, involved students show their efforts and time in study and exhibit passion, interest, and motivation in learning. Therefore, optimal student involvement is viewed as a combination of variables in the levels of behavior and emotion. Stating "effectiveness of any educational practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase involvement" (p. 298), Astin (1984) underscored the vital role of the institutions to implement effective policies or practice to promote student involvement.

Another theoretical ground for student engagement is Tinto's social and academic integration. Tinto (1993) explained students' voluntary departure from higher education institutions from the perspectives of social and intellectual experiences within the institution. According to Tinto, more than 75% of college dropouts resulted from individuals' isolation or incongruence in the social and intellectual levels with the institution. When students integrate into the social and academic life of the institution, they are more likely to persist and graduate. Conversely, a less integrative student will have a higher probability of withdrawing. The perception of viewing voluntary student departure as partially attributed to institutional influence sheds light on the significance of establishing social interaction between faculty and students.

Seven principles of good practice to achieve effective learning outcomes, concluded by Chickering and Gamson (1987), further emphasized the importance the interaction between faculty and students. They also informed the development of student engagement theory. The seven principles synthesized from 50 years of educational research are: student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, providing prompt feedback, emphasizing time on task, communicating high expectations, and respecting diverse talents and ways of learning. In addition, the effective approaches to carry out these seven principles were also discussed, such as freshmen seminars on important topics taught by senior faculty, group learnings created by course instructors, active learning driven by structured exercises, peer evaluations, internships, independent study, contract learning, and computer-assisted learning.



In sum, evolving over seventy years, the construct of student engagement drew on the essences of time on task, quality of effort, involvement, social and academic integration, as well as seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. In 1998, supported by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts and built on CSEQ, a survey instrument (National Survey of Student Engagement, NSSE) was drafted to measure the scale of college student engagement by a team consisting of Alexander Astin, Gary Barnes, Arthur Chickering, Peter Ewell, John Gardner, George Kuh, Richard Light, and Ted Marchese and with input from C. Robert Pace. According to McCormick and McClenney (2012), National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

sought to enrich the impoverished national discourse about college quality by shifting the conversation away from reputation, resources, and the preparation of entering students in favor of the student experience, especially activities and behaviors empirically linked to teaching and learning. (p. 309)

### **Relations of Student Engagement to the Success of College Students**

NSSE, collecting student responses to 42 survey items, measures students' engagement from five benchmarks: level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student–faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. Level of academic challenge (LAC) examines the expectations of faculty, colleges or universities on student efforts and school work. Active and collaborative learning (ACL) looks at the extent that students engage with learning and collaborate with peers, such as asking questions in class, and working on group projects. Student-faculty interaction (SFI) measures the frequency and quality of contact between students and teachers, for example, how often students discuss and work with faculty outside of classroom. Enriching educational experiences (EEE) contains a range of educational activities, including participation in high-impact practices, internships, research projects, and studying abroad. Supportive campus environment (SCE) is a broad collection of campus support that students perceive.

Even though NSSE does not measure student school performance from the five dimensions directly, the data that NSSE provides can be used to improve undergraduate experience (Kuh, 2009b). Student engagement contributes to student success, which according to Kuh et al. (2007), includes academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competences, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance. To determine the relation between student engagement and student success, a significant body of research knowledge regarding student engagement has been conducted, particularly in North America. Many of the studies have focused on two key outcomes: academic achievement, and college persistence. Most of the early research on student engagement has focused on Caucasian students.

For example, Ullah and Wilson (2007) used three-year data collected through National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) at Midwestern Public University to examine the association between undergraduate students' academic achievement and students' involvement in learning, and relationships with faculty and with peers. In this study, academic achievement was defined by the students' cumulative grade point average (GPA). A total of 2160 students, including freshmen and seniors, at Midwestern Public University were selected from 2003-2005. Five predictors, age of the students, ACT scores, asking questions or contribution in class discussion, students' relationship with faculty, and interaction term of students' relationships with peers and gender were used to determine students' academic achievement. Using linear multiple regression analysis, the model was shown to be significant ( $F(5, 1697) = 39.75, p = 0.00$ ), and it accounted for 10% of the total variance in academic achievement.

In addition to students' ACT scores, which had a significant effect on student academic achievement ( $\beta = 0.05, t = 10.67, p < 0.05$ ), students' relationship with faculty ( $\beta = 0.06, t = 4.66, p < 0.05$ ), and students' active involvement with learning measured by NSSE, such as asking questions or contributing to class discussion ( $\beta = 0.06, t = 3.35, p < 0.05$ ), were also found to have strong positive effects.

Instead of basing on one institution, a landmark study using large multi-institution data sets was conducted by Kuh et al. (2008). The study examined the NSSE data set between 2000 and 2003 of 6193 freshmen from 18 baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities in the US. One primary research purpose was to determine if engagement during the first year of college significantly impacted the first-year grade average point (GPA) and the chances of returning for the second year of college, controlling the effects of student background, pre-college experiences, prior academic achievement, and other first-year experiences. Student engagement in this study was represented by three measures from NSSE: time spent studying, time spent in co-curricular activities, and a global measure of engagement in effective educational practices made up of responses to 19 other NSSE items, such as student interaction with faculty, experiences with diverse others, and involvement in opportunities for active and collaborative learning. Using logistic regression, the results indicated that students' demographic characteristics, pre-college experiences, and prior academic achievement made up 29% of the variance in first-year grades, however, adding student engagement measures increased additional 13% ( $R^2 = .13, p < .001$ ). Additionally, student engagement in educationally purposeful activities alone was found to have a small but statistically significant effect on first-year grades ( $\beta = .04, p < .001$ ). Finally, the findings also indicated that student engagement in educationally purposeful activities during the first year of college had a positive statistically significant effect on persistence between the first and second year of college ( $\beta = .15, p < .001$ ).

With special regard to persistence in college, Hughes and Pace (2003) explored if freshman responses to NSSE were related to the retention or withdrawal at Humboldt State University. 169 freshmen responded to the survey and the researchers concluded that students who withdrew from their institution usually had lower level of engagement, such as never making a class presentation, nor working with a classmate on class assignments than those who finished their second year.

Similarly, Shinde (2010), using NSSE survey data, examined the relationship between student engagement and fall-to-fall retention of first-year students at Tennessee Technological University (TTU). Performing the analysis of binary logistic regression, social engagement, such as attending an art exhibit, gallery, play, dance, or other theater performance, or participating in physical fitness activities, providing the support you need to thrive socially, and attending campus events and activities, was found to be statistically significant in predicting freshmen retention at TTU ( $\beta = 2.9, p < .002$ ). Besides, overall satisfaction ( $\beta = 2.1, p < .005$ ) was found to be significant in statistics to predict freshmen retention at TTU.

In sum, this brief review suggests student engagement is positively associated with academic achievement and college persistence. To put it another way, students who are engaged, such as asking questions or contributing to class discussion, establishing interactions with faculty, spending time studying, spending time in co-curricular activities, applying theories, and completing homework, are very likely to have high GPAs. Besides, the likelihood to persist in college is also greater for engaged students. Despite the fact that many of these findings have been replicated repeatedly, there are serious questions about the extent to which they can be generalized to other ethnicities. The findings are based on research most clearly relevant to the ethnic majority group in the United States, Caucasians. Concerns over the generalizability of the findings led to several investigations conducted to determine

whether the effects of student engagement were similar or different for college students from different racial and ethnic groups.

### **Student Engagement, Ethnicity, and Academic Achievement**

When the effects of student engagement are generalized to college students of different ethnicities, one of the most controversial areas concerns educational outcomes; in an early investigation of the associations among student engagement, ethnicity, and achievement of the college student, Greene et al. (2008) collected data from 3143 native American, Asian American, African-American, White, and Hispanic students attending two-year colleges. This study aimed to determine whether students from various racial and ethnic groups differ in the amount of time and energy they invest in educationally purposeful activities.

The results suggested that African American students reported higher levels of engagement than White students on the class assignments factor ( $d = 0.14$ ), academic preparation factor ( $d = 0.19$ ), and mental activities factor ( $d = 0.18$ ). Hispanic students did not differ significantly from White students on the class assignments or academic preparation factor but did report higher levels of engagement on the mental activities factor ( $d = 0.17$ ). Asian American students reported higher levels of engagement than White students on the class assignments factor ( $d = 0.26$ ) and the mental activities factor ( $d = 0.21$ ). Even though the effect sizes were small, there were statistically significant differences. However, regarding the academic outcomes, African American students had lower course grades ( $d^6 = 0.15$ ) and were less likely than White students to pass courses (OR = 0.73). Hispanic students had lower course grades ( $d = -0.08$ ) but were as likely as White students to pass courses. Asian American students were less likely than White students to pass courses (OR = 0.68).

Similar findings were also found by Sotnam & Gabriel (2012). Analyzing variance, African American students scored higher than other racial groups in student efforts ( $F(1, 1391) = 7.10, p = .008$ ). On the contrary, their academic challenges were also higher. Consistent with these findings, Kuh (2003) stated:

The good news from NSSE is that the results suggest that that students of color engage in effective educational practices to a comparable degree. However, despite putting forth about the same amount of or more effort, African American students report lower grades. White students generally get the highest grades, followed by Asian and multi-racial students and Latino and Native American students. Why students of color get lower grades for comparable academic effort isn't clear, given that GPA is positively related to all five benchmark scores and nearly all of the effective educational practices represented on the NSSE survey. (p. 27)

Apart from the gap between academic efforts and learning outcomes, Cole (2010b) examined the impact of student-faculty interactions, a subscale of student engagement, on the college GPA of 2073 students of color, including African American, Asian American, and Latino/Latina. The study identified three types of student-faculty interactions based on the contact nature, course-related faculty contact, advice and criticism from faculty, and establishing a mentoring relationship with faculty. All three distinctions of student-faculty interaction were significantly correlated with students' GPA, yet student-faculty interactions were not significantly related to Latino/a students' GPA when the race/ ethnicity variable was disaggregated. Moreover, the African American students' GPAs were negatively correlated with course-related faculty contact, which means that when students from African American ethnicity contact faculty regarding coursework, more contact yielded lower GPAs.

These conflicting findings led Cole (2007, 2010a, 2010b) to argue that "for students of color, racism or feelings of racial tension can play a significant role in the type, nature, and quality of student-faculty interactions and thus result in differential educational gains by race." (p. 251; p.10; p. 139)

In addition to learning outcomes, persistence in college is another area where differences also lie in among different ethnicities in the US. For instance, Kuh et al. (2008) concluded that despite the fact that African American students at the lowest level of engagement in educationally purposeful activities were less likely to persist than their white counterparts, however, they became more likely to return for a second year when their student engagement reached the average amount. Regarding the population of Asian American students, Hu and McCormick (2012) found that they were the least engaged student population on campus. Using the five benchmarks of NSSE as the basis for cluster analysis and bypassing the factor analysis approach, the study summed seven-category typology based on the scores of students on the five engagement benchmarks. The seven-type typology were academics, unconventional, disengaged, collegiates, maximizers, grinds, and conventionals. However, accounting for 8.2% of the total sample, Asians were found to be overrepresented among the disengaged (11.3%) and underrepresented among both collegiates and academics (6.7% each). In another study examining one benchmark of NSSE, student-faculty interaction, Cole and Griffin (2013) asserted that: "Despite the low quality, and low frequency, sometimes negative interactions Asian American students have with faculty, research has found that they are still likely to persist, perform well academically, and succeed in college" (p.581).

These findings not only contrast with findings discussed earlier, but also raise questions about student engagement's relevance to different ethnic groups. The large sample size of Greene et al.'s study, coupled with the diverse range of ethnicities represented in the sample, added credence to these landmark findings and provided the impetus for the additional theoretical and empirical examinations of student engagement—ethnicity—student success links. Attempting to explain the outcome gap between White students and students of color, Kuh (2009a) provided three plausible explanations. First, some of these disappointing findings may be due to learning productivity of individual student. For example, some students could optimally convert the amount of time and energy into desired outcomes, while some students could not. Second, the implementation of an educational practice varies considerably. Even within a single campus, such as internships, student-faculty research, student teaching takes different forms, durations, and structures. Some of them are effective in fostering student engagement, and some of them may affect students negatively. Finally, Kuh stated NSSE, as the most widely used measure of student engagement, is a short questionnaire, and cannot capture all student behaviors and institutional conditions that influence student engagement.

Regardless of the validity of the Kuh's (2009a) explanations, this review indicates the relationships among student engagement, ethnicity, academic achievement, and college persistence are not straightforward. Instead, the effects of engagement may function differently in the overall social, political, and cultural context in which students are embedded. For instance, the effects of student engagement may depend on ethnicity, family background, university culture and policies, and staff support. Consistent with this view, Kahu (2013) proposed a sociocultural model may also explain the conflicting findings regarding ethnic differences in the effects of student engagement.

In the Kahu (2013) model, student engagement was placed in the wider social context, incorporating the sociocultural perspective. These structural and psychosocial variables, such as student family background and support, institution policies and culture, in turn determined student engagement. According to Kahu (2013), "Rather than position the macro influences as simply the first link in the

chain, the entire process of student engagement is embedded within these wider social, political and cultural discourses” (p. 768). In this framework, for example, these structural influences, such as students and family, affect students’ motivation, identify, and self-efficacy, which determine how students engage. How students engage, in turn, influences their skills and learning achievement. For example, students from different ethnic backgrounds have different family support and values, different motivations. Students attending different institutions have different policies and values, different staff support. These general variables influence how student engage academically and socially. In essence, Kahu provided a framework to examine the relationship among student engagement, learning outcomes, college persistence, satisfaction, and personal growth in a context.

### **Research on Chinese College Student Engagement**

The preceding literature review indicates that, although student engagement may be generalized to various ethnic groups, those effects are not necessarily linked to the same outcomes for students from non-Caucasian ethnic groups. This leads to the possibility that the idea of a single "ideal" student engagement may be misleading, and second, the association between student engagement and academic achievement is more complex than early research suggested. Nuances in student engagement disproportionately influence students from different ethnicities. Interpreting the effects of student engagement for different ethnic groups is further compounded by researchers' tendency to group ethnicities across different cultures and heritages. This is evident in research on Asian-American students. Despite the findings that Asian-American students are relatively low in engagement, the effects may differ for students with Chinese, Indian, and Korean backgrounds. Researchers, however, tend to classify these students into a single, undifferentiated Asian group despite vast differences in cultures and histories. For instance, in the study of Ing and Victorino (2016), it was concluded that the East Indian/Pakistani subgroup had higher classroom engagement than the Chinese, Korean, Filipino, and Thai subgroups. However, running Tukey's post hoc comparisons, the researchers found a significant difference in terms of SAT scores. Chinese, East Indian, Pakistani, and Korean students have significantly higher SAT scores than Filipino, Thai, and Vietnamese students.

Shcheglova (2018) conducted a cross-cultural analysis of students' academic engagement from Russian, Chinese, Japanese, American, and British universities. The analysis of variance showed qualitative differences in the level of academic engagement. Compared with students of Russian and American, Japanese and Chinese students demonstrated less academic engagement. However, Japanese students scored slightly higher than Chinese students, with a mean difference of -0.0647. To account for the difference in academic engagement between Chinese and Japanese students, the researcher utilized the Power Distance Index, which scored Japan in the medium rank while China in the high to explain the cross-cultural differences between social hierarchies (parent–child, teacher–student). In the end, the researcher summarized the differences from the perspectives of the organization of the educational process as well as the cultural traditions of these countries.

Findings such as these suggest that student engagement differs even among Asians from different countries. If this supposition is correct, then unambiguous interpretations of the effects of engagement on "Asian" Americans are likely impossible; that is, the previously cited studies of the effects of engagement on students from different ethnic backgrounds, at least for Asian Americans, confound "ethnicity" (i.e., Asian) with historical background, country of origin. As a preliminary attempt to clarify the effects of engagement, this section focuses on a specific Asian group, Chinese, and, more precisely, the engagement ideologies and the engagement of Chinese students and the impacts of these ideologies and practices on student engagement.

## Understanding Chinese student engagement: Philosophical Underpinnings

Influenced by Confucian ideology, Chinese culture emphasizes harmonious but hierarchical relationships. According to Bond and Hwang (1986), the relationships in Chinese culture are structured hierarchically. Consequently, the efficacy of a person is defined by his or her relationships with others; moreover, society's harmonious and orderly nature is maintained only because each individual within society's hierarchy fulfills the requirements and responsibilities associated with his or her role. Specifically, under the influence of Confucianism, in a Chinese school, teachers are obliged to fulfill their roles by disciplining and training their students.

Chinese teachers believe that they are also responsible for ‘cultivating students’ and promoting development in non-academic areas. Chinese teachers regard teaching and learning as being more holistic than their Western counterparts, and see themselves as ‘moral educators’ who help students to understand their roles in society. (Rao & Chan, 2010, p. 10)

In Chinese characters, *guan* (literally, "to govern") represents the concept. Students are obliged to respect their teachers and fulfill their roles as well. Even this simplified presentation of Chinese culture should suggest that it is hardly surprising that, when Chinese student engagement is assessed on commonly used measures, Chinese students scored the least scholarly engagement than students from other countries (Shcheglova, 2018). Additionally, regarding student and faculty interaction, Ross et al. (2011) found that Tsinghua undergraduates reported much less student-faculty interaction compared with their peers in the United States.

Despite the tendency to characterize the Chinese students as disengaged on the global engagement measures, in attempting to explain these results, researchers, first, argued that NEES, focusing mainly on measuring behavioral engagement, such as participation in class discussions, preparation of drafts prior to submitting assignments, did not capture the social and cultural differences of the survey respondents were rooted in (Hagel et al., 2012; Kahu 2013; Yin & Wang 2016). For example, the subscales of NSSE, student–faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment, only measure on the level of the behaviors. To measure and understand the interaction between Chinese students and their teachers, the collectivistic nature of Chinese society must be considered. As the traditional Chinese conception that the family is society's fundamental unit and teachers are seen as parents; maintaining respect to teachers is the central obligation of students. The interaction between teachers and students may seem passive, but the underlying ideology is the respect for teachers. In addition to the narrowness and cultural insensitivity of NSSE instrument, Christie et al. (2008) also argued that learning is emotional, and the emotional commitment and interaction between students and the learning identity and environment are significant. For example, Li (2002) used *hao xue xin*, which means heart and mind for wanting to learn in English, to describe the characteristics of Chinese learners.

Cluster analyses of these data showed that Chinese learners view learning as a process of moral striving called self-perfection. The Chinese model stresses seeking knowledge and cultivating a passion for lifelong learning, fostering diligence, enduring hardship, persistence, concentration, ‘studying hard’ regardless of obstacles, and feeling ‘shame-guilt’ for lack of desire to learn". (p.248)

In contrast, western culture has been preoccupied with individualism, stressing freedom, individual choice, self-expression, and uniqueness. For example, American students are encouraged to see the world by themselves and tell the rest of the class about what they know. However, Chinese culture is

centered on role responsibility and filial piety (Chan & Leong, 1994). Students learn to respect their elders and traditions, and they do not challenge their teachers. In addition, students are discouraged from displaying of dissatisfaction and aggression. Obedience and obligations are cultivated, and school success is especially emphasized (Kelley & Tseng, 1992). These interpretations led Hagel et al. (2012) to conclude that "without conducting research from different ideological perspectives, it is unlikely that student engagement and the contribution it makes to important outcomes such as learning, progression and retention can be fully understood."(p.484)

### **Research on Chinese College Student Engagement**

Underpinned by the distinctive philosophies of Confucianism, Chinese students have consistently been found to be academically disengaged based on the measures that were developed from Western culture. Instead of measuring student engagement with NSSE, Lu et al. (2013) used the Xi'an Jiaotong University Undergraduate Experience Survey, based on the SERU-I (Student Experience in Research University-International) by University of California Berkeley. The SERU-I survey includes three sections. Section A is concentrated on the core items, consisting of academic involvement/engagement, student life, learning objectives, and individual characteristics, while concerning global skills and cognition; section B comprises items on techniques. The uniqueness of the SERU-I is Section C, which is designed specifically for Asian countries/universities. Section A and section B were directly adapted to the study, but researchers added contents to Section C to create Xi'an Jiaotong University Undergraduate Experience Survey. The results indicated that

the level of undergraduates' academic involvement/engagement is high. Students engage frequently in extracurricular activities as well as understanding and analysis activities. They sometimes take on heavy-load learning tasks and they perform a certain level of engagement in teacher-student relationship, critical thinking, and academic challenge. The phenomenon of 'lack of engagement' hardly exists. (p. 285)

The gist of the previous section is straightforward: researchers may have mischaracterized Chinese students as disengaged when, in fact, analyses of Chinese philosophies and beliefs indicate that Chinese students is quite different from disengaged. Language and measurements issues, for instance, reliance of questionnaires designed to tap only western researchers' conception of student engagement-may lead to the perception of Chinese students as less involved and less engaged. Clearly, if the arguments in the foregoing section are accepted, failure to understand the history and values of traditional Chinese culture have led to an ethnocentric view of cultural differences in student engagement.

### **Conclusion**

The present paper is intended to analyze the relevance of student engagement to Chinese college students and determine whether the engagement has the same effects for Chinese college students as it does for students from Caucasian families. The relationships between student engagement and academic achievement, student engagement and college persistence, were the specific focuses of this paper. First, early research indicated that student engagement has the same effects on Caucasian students, and second because subsequent research yielded inconsistent effects of student engagement on students from ethnic minority backgrounds. The inconsistency of these effects leads to questions concerning the social, and ethnic generality of student engagement theory. More precisely, theorists and researchers have asked, does the meaning of student engagement differ because of the social and cultural contexts in which the

student is embedded. If the answer to this question is negative, it makes little sense to continue assessing student engagement from a "one size fits all" perspective.

To reiterate, it is considered that the more a student engages, the better his learning outcomes are; in brief, student engagement has typically been associated with positive academic effects. Whether the same can be said of students from ethnic minorities in different countries and cultures, specifically Chinese college students remain controversial. For instance, Caucasian students' academic achievement seems to benefit from engagement. By contrast, some research indicates that Asian American students and students from other ethnic minorities in the United States do not benefit from engagement equally as Caucasian students. These conflicting results, and questions concerning the engagement, are especially evident when the same instrument is used in Mainland China.

In China, the interaction between faculty and students alienates western societies. For instance, although the literal translation of *guan* is "to govern," this translation does not fully capture the meaning of these concepts. The result of misconceptions and oversimplifications of student engagement, particularly by researchers influenced by the western beliefs that individual development "should" be toward self-direction, individualism, and self-expression and that Chinese students are disengaged. However, the holistic nature of Chinese culture, embedded nature of student development within the school and of the school within a larger school. The implications of these cultural differences for both conceptualizations of ideal student engagement and the measurement of student engagement are profound.

The framework proposed by Kahu (2013) indicates that a complete understanding of the effects of student engagement on academic achievement and college persistence is unlikely unless researchers assess differences in cultural traditions and social structures. The sociocultural views of student engagement emphasize the fit of the effects of student engagement to the larger cultural context in which students are embedded. However, considering the unique challenges in generalizing student engagement in China, more research is needed so that more meaningful and more valid findings could be yielded.

These unique challenges, including the 55 ethnic minorities residing mainly on or near national borders or geographically underdeveloped regions, may further complicate comparisons of the effects of student engagement in China. Specifically, even if research such as that suggested above conducted, the 56 ethnicities could affect student engagement in ways that are difficult to discern and in ways that have not obvious parallels in other countries. In a society that has traditionally constituted by 56 ethnic groups, and each ethnic minority has its unique cultures and characteristics. Furthermore, most students from ethnic minorities are first generation in college, and how these students engage in college and how different their engagements are interesting, but underexplored areas for future research.



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