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Ethnic Student Organization Leaders' Perceptions of Institutional Diversity Efforts at a Predominantly White Faith-Based University

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ABSTRACT

Although student organizations have the potential to significantly contribute to the diversity efforts of predominantly White institutions (PWI), colleges continue to undermine the value of these organizations (Kuk & Banning, 2010). Ethnic student organizations, specifically the students who lead them, can play a crucial role in promoting diversity and inclusion on college campuses yet few studies examine their role in institutional diversity efforts. This study explores the perceptions of student leaders of ethnic or minority student organizations enrolled in a four year predominantly White, Christian university to better understand how they perceive their university's diversity efforts and their own role within these efforts. The study asks the following research questions: (1) How do student leaders of ethnic student organizations perceive institutional diversity efforts at a faith-based, predominantly White university? (2) How do student leaders of ethnic student organizations perceive their role in institutional diversity efforts at a faith-based, predominantly White university? Using a phenomenological approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine ethnic student organization leaders at a faith-based PWI. Findings reveal that ethnic student organization leaders hold mixed perceptions of institutional diversity efforts. Some participants are optimistic about the university's efforts while others are either unaware of the university's diversity efforts or believe the university is not doing enough to create a more diverse and inclusive campus. Student leaders' perceptions are frequently impacted by a challenging campus

climate, which often includes experiences of marginality or "otherness." Furthermore, ethnic student organization leaders perceive their role as helpful and salient to promoting diversity and inclusion on their campus.

Ethnic Student Organization Leaders' Perceptions of Institutional Diversity Efforts at a

Predominantly White Faith-Based University

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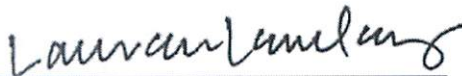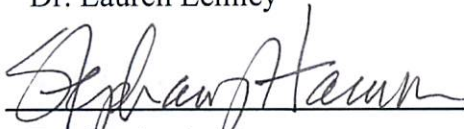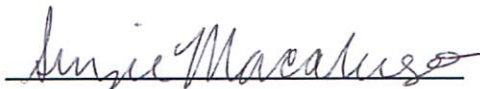
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During my time as a student leader of an ethnic/minority student organization at the predominantly White, Christian university examined in this study, I sometimes wondered whether the university was aware of our efforts as leaders. We often found ourselves struggling for funds to host events and when we did host events, there were very few, if any, White/Anglo-American students, faculty, or staff present. This prompted several of us to question the value the university placed on our existence and work. Was diversity important to the university? Did they care how much work we put into cultural events? Why were there so few faculty and staff members at our events? And what was the university actually doing to improve diversity on campus? These were some of the questions we often pondered. Besides the Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs (then called the Office of Multicultural Enrichment), we had very little, if any, interaction with university administration to hear their first-hand perspective of what roles they expected student leaders to inhabit. Although we understood that the university administration could not meet with leaders of all student organizations, we felt it important that they were at least visible and accessible to us because of the significance of the mission we were trying to accomplish. We assumed that diversity was important to the university but as time progressed, we began to question the institution's commitment to diversity beyond slow structural changes. Initially, we assumed that we were an essential component of the university's diversity efforts but in reality, we did not know

what exactly the administration's plan was to promote diversity and inclusion, or whether we were in fact a part of that plan.

Curious to understand what other student leaders' thoughts were on institutional diversity efforts and their role in these efforts, I conducted an undergraduate research project attempting to answer this question: How do student leaders increase awareness of diversity on campus? Participant's responses to certain questions yielded some interesting findings. One question I asked was: How do student leaders increase awareness of diversity on campus? Participant's responses revealed that they believed they increased awareness of diversity on campus by integrating the purpose of their organization into their role as student leaders, meaning that if the goal of their organization was to provide a safe haven for a certain racial or ethnic students, they perceived their role as leaders to be safe havens for the members in their organizations. Second, they believed they served as advocates for racially and ethnically underrepresented students on campus. Finally, student leaders believed their role was to build relationships with students, faculty, and staff across campus. Although my pilot study was limited theoretically and methodologically, it influenced my interest in the current project and provided some context for my research. In this study, my goal is to further understanding of ethnic student organization leaders' perceptions of diversity efforts on predominantly White, Christian college campuses and to explore student leaders' perceptions of their roles in institutional diversity initiatives.

Institutional History

The university examined in this study is a Christian university and has a complicated history with racial and ethnic diversity. According to one account, racially

underrepresented students made up less than 10 percent of the student population at this university in the 1990's, while in 2016, approximately 14 percent of the student population was Hispanic/Latino, 8 percent Black/African-American, 1 percent were Asian, 4.5 percent were bi/multi-ethnic, 0.4 percent were American Indian or Alaska Native, and 67 percent were White/Caucasian ("Abilene Christian University," n.d.). The first Black students were granted admission in 1962, approximately fifty years after the founding of the college.

A number of events likely prompted the university's enrollment of Black students. First, the 1960's Civil Rights Movement, which began the campaign to end racial and ethnic discrimination, was underway and more pressure was placed on educational institutions to diversify (U.S. Department of Education, 1999; Chang, 2005; Wolfe & Freeman, 2013). Second, according to a paper by one of the university's former presidents, the university needed funding for one of their buildings, and in order to acquire funding for the building they had to comply with regulations laid out in the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963. The president writes that the Act required that the institution "be totally non-discriminatory in its admissions policies" to which "the college quickly complied, received the grant, and was fully integrated for the first time in its history" (Money, 2005, p. 2). Third, in the 1990's two anonymous donors gave funds to the university to initiate and support efforts to increase diversity at the institution. The funds helped increase scholarships and recruitment funding for racially and ethnically underrepresented students. Finally, in 1999 a former president of the university issued a public apology on behalf of the university for the institution's previous discriminatory policies and practices. The president described the university's practices as "sin" and

asked for the forgiveness of Black/African American church members in the college's faith tradition. The president pledged to increase the enrollment numbers of Black/African-American students. Although the president received some negative feedback, he writes that the overwhelming response was positive. Since then, the university has made efforts to become more racially and ethnically diverse. As previously stated, the number of racially and ethnically underrepresented students has increased significantly over the years. Currently, approximately 28-30 percent of the student population comprises of racially/ethnically underrepresented students.

The university's diversity efforts have not always been clearly articulated by the institution. Currently, there is a strategic plan on the university's website which states the university's diversity goals. One of the institutions goals is to "promote a relational university;" to accomplish this goal, the university states that some of their objectives are:

> To appoint a Diversity Task Force to create a diversity plan that considers organizational structure and best practices . . . provide education and training for students, faculty and staff so the understanding of racial, ethnic, gender and cultural diversity grows on campus and . . . continues to ensure a ethnically diverse students to correlate with the overall student population . . . [and] expand diversity by increasing the proportion of racially and ethnically diverse faculty and staff at all levels ("Strategic plan 2016-21," 2016, p. 8).

Besides the goals stated in the institutions strategic plan, the university has an Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) to help foster diversity on campus. The mission of the OMA is "to support the overall success and persistence of ethnic and historically underrepresented students" ("About OMA," n.d., para 11). The OMA provides support

and resources for racially/ethnically underrepresented students and ethnic or minority student organizations. The OMA also coordinates events that "enhance intercultural understanding and appreciation" and serves "as an ombudsman for ethnic minority students" ("About OMA," n.d., para 3, 4, and 8).

Even with a significant increase in the number of racially and ethnically underrepresented students on college campuses, issues pertaining to diversity and inclusion persist, especially at predominantly White institutions (PWI) (Caplan & Ford, 2014; Karkouti, 2016; Museus, 2008; Tatum, 1999). At the university examined in this study, for instance, although enrollment rates for Hispanic, Black, Asian, bi/multi-ethnic and other underrepresented students have increased, retention and completion rates have remained lower for all of the aforementioned racial or ethnic categories than for their White peers. In 2015 the retention rate for White students was approximately 80 percent but only 68 percent for all racial/ethnic minorities combined (McCarthy, personal communication, March 23, 2017).[1] This disparity is not unique to the university examined in this study but is similar to retention and graduation trends across the United States (Musu-Gillette, Robinson, McFarland, KewalRamani, Zhang, & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2016). Other disparities in persistence and graduation rates also point to a significant problem with diversity and inclusion in higher education.

Importance of Diversity in Higher Education

Diversity is crucial for higher education. Diverse learning environments positively impact students' active thinking and intellectual engagement, citizenship and racial/cultural engagement (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Milem, Chang &

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[1] This information was provided by the university's Office of Student Services and Retention

Antonio, 2005), civic mindedness (Cole & Zhou, 2014), problem solving, critical thinking, and writing skills (Gurin, et al., 2002), and increase cross racial interactions which yield positive results such as openness to diversity and increased self-confidence (Chang, Denson, Saenz, & Misa, 2006). Additionally, in a brief filed on behalf of the University of Michigan, General Motors argues that diversity "can maintain America's competitiveness in the increasingly diverse and interconnected world economy" (Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003, p. 2). Unfortunately, colleges across the United States continue to struggle with racial and ethnic diversity and multiculturalism.

While many colleges have increased the number of racially and ethnically underrepresented students on their campuses, research indicates that the dominant campus cultures of PWIs continue to create significant challenges for these students (Bourke, 2010; Scheller, n.d.; Van Dyke & Tester, 2014; Wright, Good, & Lampley, 2011). The "chilly climate" (Sandler, 2005) on these campuses often cause feelings of marginalization and exclusion for racially and ethnically underrepresented students and limit their access to social networks and faculty or staff mentorship enjoyed by their White/Anglo-American peers (Gonzales, 2003; Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000; Museus, 2008; Wei, Ku, & Liao, 2011). These feelings of isolation contribute to remarkable disparities between racially and ethnically underrepresented students and their White peers, evidenced by racially and ethnically underrepresented students' lower GPAs (National Center for Education Statistics, "Profile of First-Time Bachelor's Degree Recipients," 2012), lower degree attainment (National Center for Education Statistics, "Status and Trends," 2016c; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010), lower rates of satisfaction with the college experience (Museus, 2008), and high attrition rates (Guiffrida & Douthit,

2010; O'Keeffe, 2013). In addition, these feelings of isolation cause underrepresented students to hold less positive perceptions of the campus spiritual climate at faith-based institutions (Paredes-Collins, 2013). In response to these disparities, institutions of higher education across the United States have undertaken various efforts to promote diverse and inclusive learning environments.

<div align="center">**Institutional Diversity Efforts**</div>

Institutions of higher education employ various strategies to promote diversity on their campuses. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) summarize institutional efforts into three categories. First, structural diversity, also known as "the numerical representation of diverse groups" (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Peterson, & Allen, 1999, p. 19), refers to the enrolment and presence of students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds within the institution. Structural diversity is essential as it increases potential for positive cross-racial interactions within the student body and increases satisfaction with diversity (Paredes-Collins, 2013), however, some scholars argue that the mere presence of diverse peers does not guarantee that students will gain meaningful experiences from their peers or socialize across race (Asquith, Bristow, Schneider, Nahavandi, & Amyx, 2011; Gurin, et al., 2002). Thus, there is a need for other approaches to creating inclusive environments. Second, informal interactional diversity focuses on the "frequency and quality of intergroup interaction[s]" as a way to promote meaningful diversity (Gurin, et al., 2002, p. 333). Informal interactional diversity refers to cross-racial interactions that occur among peers outside the classroom in informal settings such as residence halls and at social activities. Third, classroom diversity involves learning about and having experiences with diverse peers in class. Gurin, et al.,

(2002) contend that the effect racial/ethnic diversity has on educational outcomes comes from cross-racial interactions inside and outside the classroom, suggesting that institutional diversity efforts ought to move beyond structural efforts. Doan (2015) agrees, adding that institutional diversity includes factors such as campus culture which can be demonstrated through a more diverse faculty and staff. Unfortunately, as Milem, Chang and Antonio (2005) found, campus leaders tend to focus on structural or compositional diversity efforts at the detriment of the other approaches. Rather, campus leaders should approach diversity multidimensionally if they want to create a truly diverse and inclusive campus atmosphere. One strategy that institutions can use to improve campus diversity is to utilize ethnic student organizations.

Ethnic Student Organizations

In recent years, more colleges have turned to ethnic or minority student organizations in an effort to recruit and retain diverse students (Negy & Lunt, 2008). Many Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Native American/Alaska Native students join ethnic student organizations to alleviate feelings of exclusion on predominantly White campuses. Ethnic student organization (ESO) "refers to a student organization established for the explicit purpose of promoting the cultural heritage, interests, and unity of a single ethnic group" (Negy & Lunt, 2008, p. 179). ESOs exist to provide safe spaces for racially and ethnically underrepresented students to connect with students who look like them and to informally educate other interested students about different cultures (Doan, 2015). A number of scholars argue that ESOs are detrimental to students because they further segregate and alienate racially and ethnically underrepresented students (D'Souza, 1991; Harper & Hurtado, 2007;

Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), increase students' awareness of racial and ethnic tension on campus (Rooney, 1984; Trevino, 1992), can hinder Black/African-American student's academic achievement (Flemming, 1984; Guiffrida, 2004), and are overall not related to the retention of Black/African-American students or their academic achievements (Mayo, Marguia, & Padilla, 1995). However, the majority of scholars advocate for the value and necessity of ESOs for several reasons.

ESOs create a sense of belonging for racially and ethnically underrepresented students (Museus, 2008), provide a venue for student's racial identity development and expression and integration to the university (Doan, 2015; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Tatum, 1999), increase students awareness and understanding of issues facing their own communities (Inkelas, 2004), and allow students to connect to a larger campus community and establish connections with Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino faculty members (Guiffrida, 2003, 2004; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Persen, & Allen, 1999; Museus 2008). Additionally, ESOs and Latino studies programs are positively associated with altruistic career choices, socializing across race, community leadership, engagement in volunteer work, agency for affecting change, and perceptions of and conversations about inequality up to six years after students graduate from college (Bowman, Park, & Denson, 2015; Cooper, Howard-Hamilton & Cuyjet, 2011). Moreover, as Museus (2008) concluded after examining the role of ESOs in helping African American and Asian American students' adjustment at a PWI, these organizations "serve as sources of cultural familiarity, vehicles for cultural expression and advocacy, and venues for cultural validation" (p. 576). Essentially, ESOs are crucial for the adjustment and integration of racially underrepresented students at PWIs

(Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). In addition to all the benefits ESOs accrue for racially/ethnically underrepresented students these organizations also benefit the university because they host cultural events that enrich the campus, facilitate important conversations inside and outside the classroom, and bring esteem to the intuitions at which they exist. Yet even with their significant contributions to diversity and inclusion on many campuses, colleges continue to underestimate the value of student organizations and exclude them from institutional diversity initiatives.

The Role of Student Organizations in Diversity in Higher Education

Kuk and Banning (2010) write that colleges have initiated various recruitment and retention initiatives and programs, created curriculum, and provided multicultural competency training for faculty, staff, and student leaders to foster campus diversity but have often overlooked the role student organizations can play in these efforts. Kuk and Banning propose a typology, adapted from Banks' (2002) work on multicultural curriculum reform, called student organizations and institutional diversity efforts to explain the different types of relationships that exist between student organization and institutional diversity efforts. The typology suggests that there are six types of relationships that exist between student organizations and institutional diversity efforts.

First, a *negative relationship* refers to goals and behaviors on the part of a student organization that hinder institutional efforts to recruit and retain diverse students. This relationship may be willful negative, which occurs through conscious and motivated organizational values, policies, or behaviors that are harmful to institutional diversity goals, or negligent negative, which refers to unconscious and/or unmotivated harmful behaviors, values, and policies that hinder diversity efforts. Second, a *null relationship* is

when an organization does not take any steps to support the university's multicultural goals. Third, a *contributions relationship* is when a student organization hosts or supports multicultural events and invites special speakers for events and other multicultural initiatives. Fourth, an *additive relationship* is when a student organization undertakes efforts or activities to align more with the university's goals. The additive relationship stimulates positive changes but does not significantly alter the university's current structure. Fifth, a *transformational relationship* is when an organization takes deliberate steps to change their policies or behaviors in order to become more supportive of the institutions diversity objectives. The transformational relationship focuses on changing paradigms and assumptions as opposed to merely adding cultural events to the campus. Sixth, a *social action* relationship, which is the most positive relationship, is when a student organization actively supports the university's diversity goals by recognizing and solving multicultural issues on campus. In this relationship, student organizations take steps to reach other organizations across campus and off-campus to further the university's diversity objectives and initiatives in an effort to affect change in the lives of vulnerable communities. ESOs tend to be actively involved with issues of diversity and inclusion on White college campuses, thus they likely have a *transformational* or *social action relationship* with institutional diversity efforts. As a result, they are particularly relevant to a study on institutional diversity efforts at a PWI yet very little research explores their role in promoting diversity on college campuses.

Statement of Problem

According Kuk and Banning (2010) although the importance of student organizations is well known, colleges often overlook them in their efforts to promote

diversity and inclusion, which is interesting, considering that these organizations can advance the institutions diversity goals. Even more surprising is the extent to which colleges neglect ethnic or minority student organizations in their diversity efforts. This is surprising because these organizations actively work to promote multiculturalism on many predominantly White campuses. While conducting research for this study no studies were found that specifically examined the role of ESOs in institutional diversity efforts. Although several recent studies explore college students' perceptions of institutional diversity and diversity initiatives (Campbell-Whatley, Lee, Toms, & Wang, 2012; Miles, Hu, & Dotson, 2013; Rose-Redwood, 2010) no studies that examined ESO leaders' perceptions of institutional diversity or diversity efforts at Evangelical, predominantly White colleges were found. Little research has explored the climate for diversity at faith-based schools (Paredes-Collins, 2013). This is significant because one of the few scholars to examine diversity at religious schools, Paredes-Collins (2013), found that racially and ethnically underrepresented students at faith-based colleges hold less positive perceptions of the spiritual climate on campus than their White counterparts. Paredes-Collins and Collins (2011) assert that "the intersection of race and spirituality at evangelical colleges is an understudied and under-theorized area of research" (p. 95). Understanding students' perceptions of institutional diversity is important because students are often unaware of their university's diversity efforts. In a study of four public and private universities titled "Voice of Diversity: What students of diverse races/ethnicities and both sexes tell us about their college experiences and their perceptions about their institutions' progress toward diversity," Caplan and Ford (2014) found that a significant number of participants were not aware of their university's

diversity policies or efforts against racism and/or sexism. However, participants in the study were aware of student organizations' efforts against sexism and racism on campus. Additionally, understanding racially and ethnically underrepresented students' perceptions of diversity and inclusion is crucial if colleges are to effectively create opportunities for cross-racial interactions and improve the campus racial and spiritual climate (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen as cited in Karkouti, 2016). Moreover, it is crucial to understand ESO leaders' perceptions of institutional diversity and institutional diversity efforts because they play a unique role on predominantly White college campuses. ESO leaders are often the most visible and accessible leaders to racially and ethnically underrepresented students at PWIs and they are sometimes the only connection between underrepresented students and the university, yet very little research focuses on them. This study sought to fill gaps in the literature and help provide insight into racially and ethnically underrepresented student's perceptions of diversity at faith-based PWIs.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of ESO student leaders at a faith-based PWI regarding diversity and inclusion and how these students perceive their role in promoting diversity on campus. As previously stated, little, if any, research explores ESO leaders' perceptions of institutional diversity efforts. Furthermore, the study sought to help university administrators better understand ESO student leader's experiences and identify ways in which they can improve their efforts toward diversity and inclusion.

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How do student leaders of ethnic student organizations perceive institutional diversity efforts at a faith-based PWI?

RQ2: How do student leaders of ethnic student organizations perceive their role in institutional diversity efforts at a faith-based PWI?

Significance of Study

The study is significant for a number of reasons. First, the study contributes to the limited research on the experiences of ESO student leaders on predominantly White campuses. Second, many Black/African-American, Latino, and Native American/Alaska Native students attend PWIs but do not graduate within six years of enrollment (Caplan & Ford, 2014). Between 2012-2013, only 11 percent of bachelor's degrees were conferred upon Black and Hispanic students, compared to 69 percent awarded to White/Caucasian students; these increased by 1 and 4 percent for Black and Hispanic students, respectively, and 7 percent for White students between 2002-2003 and 2012-2013 (National Center for Education Statistics, "Indicator 22: Degrees awarded," 2016b). At the university examined in this study, enrollment has hit a record high of approximately 4,500 students with an increasing enrollment of Black, Latino, Asian, and other ethnically underrepresented students. Yet retention rates are lower for underrepresented students compared to their White counterparts. Although retention rates improved from 65 percent to 68 percent for racially/ethnically underrepresented students between 2011 and 2015, they remained lower than for White students, which increased from 78 percent and 80 percent in the same time period (McCarthy, personal

communication, March 23, 2017). Some research suggests that these disparities are a result of factors beyond racially and ethnically underrepresented students' financial difficulties or pre-enrollment disadvantages, such as low GPA scores (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Guillory, 2009; Hunn, 2014; Hurtado, 1994; Museus, 2008; O'Keefe, 2013; Wei, Ku, & Liao, 2011). These studies indicate that the climate at PWIs often causes students to feel disconnected from the university, which is detrimental for students' persistence and graduation rates. This study helps expose the climate at these institutions, which could help faith-based universities identify problem areas and aid them as they work to improve the campus climate and increase satisfaction, retention, and graduation rates. ESOs are vital to retain racially and ethnically underrepresented students and if PWIs can more effectively partner with ESO leaders, underrepresented student's satisfaction with the college experience and completion rates could improve significantly. Engaging and supporting ESOs could provide colleges important resources that can help them in their efforts to create more diverse and inclusive communities.

Finally, few studies have examined the relationship between spirituality and campus climate for diversity at faith-based institutions. Many Christian colleges, such as those in the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU), seek to help students grow spiritually and to prepare them for service and leadership in a diverse world, therefore they need to expose their students to diverse environments. Besides it being "the right thing to do" (Hwang, 2013, p. A38), Fenwick (2014) suggests that Christian institutions should be at the forefront of diversity and inclusion efforts if they are to fulfill their mission and produce graduates who are ready to engage in a globalized world. Yet

many lag behind non-faith based universities in terms of enrollment numbers and fostering diverse campus cultures (Fenwick, 2014; Paredes-Collins, 2009, 2013; Scheller, n.d.). Sam Barkat, a board member of the CCCU, cautioned that if Christian colleges do not prioritize racial and ethnic reconciliation and diversity, they will remain on "the outside fringes" ("Board meets, evaluates priorities for council," 2010, para 10). Thus, faith-based colleges have a practical and spiritual incentive to examine and improve multiculturalism on their campuses. This study sought to address gaps in the literature by exploring how the campus climate at faith-based PWIs affects racially/ethnically underrepresented students' college experience and spiritual development.

Phenomenological Perspective

Phenomenology, "the study of how we experience," is the methodological approach used in this study to understand ESO leaders' experience with campus diversity and their perceptions of institutional diversity efforts (Smith, 2016, "phenomenology and ontology, epistemology, logic, ethics" section, para. 58). Phenomenology advocates for the study of individuals' experiences "because human behavior is determined by the phenomena of experience, rather than objective physically described reality that is external to the individual" (Sloan & Bowe, 2012, p. 1292). As Creswell (2013) explains, the purpose of this approach is to understand how individuals experience a phenomenon in order to describe the universal essence of the experience. A researcher using this approach first identifies a phenomenon to be studied, for example grief or aging, then she gathers data from people who have experience with the phenomenon, and finally the researcher "develops a composite description of the essence of the experience" for those who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). This approach is helpful

in explaining how a group of people experience something. For instance, in their phenomenological study, Bedwell, McGowan, and Lavender (2014) sought to understand which factors affect midwives' confidence in intrapartum care. After reading participant's diaries and conducting semi-structured interviews, the researchers learned that several factors including the midwives' colleagues, perceived autonomy, and conflict, impact midwives' confidence. The phenomenological study allowed the researchers to better understand how midwives experience confidence in their work. This method is suitable for this study because it is "committed to descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses" and allows the researcher to ask *how* and *what* questions in order to understand the essence of individuals' experience (Moustakas, 1994, "Applications to Human Science Research" section, para 4). The goal of this study is to understand how ESO leaders experience diversity on a faith-based predominantly White campus and how they perceive institutional diversity efforts and their role in those efforts, thus phenomenology serves as an ideal framework. This methodological approach privileges ESO student leaders' experiences and narratives.

Creswell adds that the phenomenological researcher does not deny her experience with a phenomenon, but rather "brackets herself out of the study" by discussing her own experiences with the phenomenon and putting them aside so that she can focus on the study participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013, p. 78). As a former ESO leader, I attempted to bracket myself out of the current study and approach it with an open mind. A phenomenological study is invaluable because it can have theoretical as well as practical implications for diversity at faith-based PWIs.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have examined students' perceptions of campus climate and institutional commitment to diversity but none were found that focused specifically on the perceptions of student leaders of ESOs at Evangelical PWIs. Additionally, although studies have explored students' perceptions of diversity at PWIs, most have utilized quantitative research methods (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of student leaders of ESOs regarding institutional diversity efforts at a faith-based predominantly White university. Additionally, the study sought to understand how ESO leaders perceive their role in the institution's efforts. In order to gain an understanding of student leaders perceptions of institutional diversity efforts, we need to understand racially and ethnically underrepresented students' experiences at PWIs and how they view themselves in relation to the university and its mission. Thus, to understand ESO leaders' experiences and perceptions, this chapter begins with a discussion of racially and ethnically underrepresented students' experiences on predominantly White college campuses through a discussion of campus climate and diversity at faith-based colleges. Following that, I propose a theoretical or conceptual framework using racial battle fatigue, standpoint theory, and organizational identification theory. The goal of the framework is to help understanding of ESO leaders' experiences at PWIs, which in turn helps understanding of ESO leaders' perceptions of institutional diversity efforts. A conceptual framework is a visual or written product that "explains

18

either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key concepts or variables – and the presumed relationships among them" (Miles & Huberman, as cited in Maxwell 2005, p. 33). Jabareen (2009) explains that one of the main features of conceptual or theoretical frameworks is that they provide "an interpretative approach to social reality" (p. 51). The theoretical framework in this study sought to provide context and a way of understanding ESO leaders' perceptions of diversity and diversity efforts at a faith-based PWI.

Campus Climate

In her seminal work titled "Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the Cafeteria?" Tatum (1999) writes the following:

That life is stressful for Black students and other student of color on predominantly White campuses should not come as a surprise, but it often does. White students and faculty frequently underestimate the power and presence of the overt and covert manifestations of racism on campus, and students of color often come to predominantly White campuses expecting more civility than they find. Whether it is the loneliness of being routinely overlooked as a lab partner in science courses, the irritation of being continually asked by curious classmates about Black hairstyles, the discomfort of being singled out by a professor to give "the Black perspective'' in class discussion, the pain of racist graffiti scrawled on dormitory room doors, the insult of racist jokes circulate through campus e-mail, or the injury inflicted by racial epithets (and sometimes beer bottles) hurled from a passing car, Black students on predominantly White college campuses must cope with ongoing affronts to their racial identity (p. 77-78).

What Tatum describes illustrates the experiences many Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and Native American students undergo at PWIs. Students who have been historically underrepresented in higher education report feelings of exclusion and isolation (Flemming, 1984; Gonzales, 2002), hostility (Keller as cited in Karkouti, 2016), difficulty forming strong relationships with White faculty (Mayo, Marguia, & Padilla, 1995), isolating instances of racism and microaggressions from the campus and surrounding community (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Robertson, Bravo, & Chaney, 2016), and stress from having to work harder than their White peers to prove their intellectual competence (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Robertson, Bravo, & Chaney, 2016). All of these experiences impact how racially/ethnically underrepresented students perceive their university and have implications for retention, persistence and students' wellbeing (Caplan & Ford, 2014; Doan, 2015; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, & Yonai, 2014).

In higher education literature, campus climate is defined as "the current perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institution and its members" (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999, p. iii). Smith (2009) writes that studying the campus climate allows us to examine a campuses culture and values and gain insight into how people are treated and how they view diversity on campus. Hurtado, Milem, Clatyton-Pedersen, and Allen (1999) emphasize that it is important to understand how certain individuals and groups perceive the campus as this affects student's transition to college and educational outcomes. Several scholars, including Worthington (2008), Rankin and Reason (2005), and Harper and Hurtado (2007) report that racially

and ethnically underrepresented students tend to perceive the campus climate less positively than their White/Anglo-American peers.

According to Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (1999) the way in which an individual perceives the racial climate or environment in an organization can be influenced by several factors. In addition to structural diversity, perceptions of exclusion from an institutions traditions or culture, cross-racial interactions and intergroup relations, and racial or ethnic peoples' representation in the curriculum, affect people's perceptions of the camps climate (as cited in Paredes-Collins, 2013). Smith's (2009) dimensions of diversity framework supports Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen and Allen's assertion.

Smith's (2009) diversity framework involves four dimensions: (1) access and success, which refers to the number of undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at a college and student's graduation rates, persistence, and pursuit of advanced degrees, (2) campus climate, meaning the "type and quality of social interactions among students, faculty, and staff, as well as individual and group perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity" (Perez, 2013, p. 21), (3) educational and scholarly mission, which is whether courses with diverse content are available, and (4) and institutional viability and totality, which includes a number of factors such as structural diversity efforts, an examination of the institutions history related to diversity issues and incidents, strategies used to foster diversity, the centrality of diversity in the university's mission and planning process, monitoring progress on diversity efforts, perceptions of the institutions commitment, and the engagement of the governing board on matters of diversity. An examination of perceptions of institutional diversity ought to take all of the dimensions of diversity into

account. Scholars need to explore student's experiences in the classroom, their perception

of structural diversity, feelings about university events and traditions, and relationships

with university personnel, amongst other things. This study sought to examine student

leaders' perceptions of institutional diversity by exploring the ways they perceived

different aspects of the campus.

Faith-based institutions are not immune to the aforementioned challenges

experienced by racially/ethnically underrepresented students at PWIs. While a significant

amount of research has examined the climate for diversity on college campuses, Paredes-

Collins (2013) states that not much has been conducted at faith-based institutions.

Additionally, few studies have examined how the climate for diversity at faith-based

colleges impacts racially/ethnically underrepresented students' spiritual development.

The following section discusses diversity at faith-based colleges.

Diversity at Faith-Based Colleges

There are approximately 4,762 degree-granting institutions in the U.S (National

Center for Education Statistics, "Educational institutions," 2016a). Out of these,

approximately 838 are 4-year colleges with some kind of religious affiliation (Baker,

personal communication, March 23, 2017)[1]. Religious affiliation is "based on [colleges']

historical relationships or self descriptors" (Muntz & Crabtree, 2006, p. 17). The private,

faith-based university examined in this study is a member of the Council for Christian

Colleges and Universities (CCCU), an organization that consists of 115 colleges and

universities mostly in North America. In a 2009 study examining institutional priority for

diversity at Christian colleges, Paredes-Collins argues that few schools in the CCCU have

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[1] This information was compiled using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

set clear goals related to diversity and multiculturalism and most do not prioritize diversity enough to dedicate resources, policies, and practices to create inclusive campus environments. This is not unique to schools within the CCCU, many Christian colleges struggle to diversify their institutions for a number of reasons (Abadeer, 2009). Fubara, Gardner, and Wolff (2011) suggest that Christian colleges struggle to embrace diversity because "American Evangelical Christianity carries with its core biblical and spiritual values a secondary cultural context that esteems a White, middle-class, conservative, Republican ethic" which excludes many who do not hold the same values (p. 119). This could help explain why racially and ethnically underrepresented students perceive the campus racial climate at PWIs less positively than their White peers (Harper & Hurtado, 2007) and why they view the campus spiritual climate less positively (Paredes-Collins, 2013). There have been renewed efforts by Christian colleges, including those in the CCCU, to recruit more diverse students, however, Perez (2013) contends that many Evangelical Christian institutions' diversity efforts focus on access and success, i.e. structural or compositional diversity. According to Perez (2013), many Evangelical colleges do not focus on campus climate and neglect the educational and scholarly mission and the dimension of institutional viability and vitality included in Smith's (2009) diversity framework mentioned earlier.

The culture at evangelical PWIs can be unwelcoming, even hostile, to racially and ethnically underrepresented students who often desire more understanding and inclusive learning environments. For instance, in the year 2016 alone, at least three blackface videos were recorded and posted on social media by White/Anglo-American students at Christian colleges. At Xavier University in Cincinnati, a student posted a photo of herself

in blackface with the caption "who needs white when black lives matter." The next day, at the same university, a skeleton wearing a traditional West African dashiki had a noose hung around its neck and was displayed in a dorm window with a "Trump: Make America Great Again" flag beside it (Urbanski, 2016; Corbett, 2016). At the university examined in this study, a Blackface video was posted by two White/Anglo-American freshmen on social media (Edwards, 2016). In the same year, racist messages were posted on social media during Black History Month at the university, and a racist parking ticket was placed on an African American student's car in 2015. These incidents undoubtedly affected and continue to affect the campus racial climate at the university. These incidents also help explain why ESOs and other safe spaces exist. They also demonstrate the necessity to explore student's perceptions of diversity at a faith-based PWI, especially because racially and ethnically underrepresented students at religious-affiliated universities report less positive perceptions of the campus spiritual climate than their White counterparts. Considering that one of the goals of faith-based PWIs is to cultivate spiritual growth in their students, having a significant portion of the student body that is targeted and marginalized can be harmful to these institutions.

Evidently, racially and ethnically underrepresented students at secular and faith-based institutions face many difficulties. Participants in this study face many of the same challenges because they are racially and ethnically underrepresented students attending a predominantly White, Christian university. This study suggests that ESO leaders' experiences and statuses as marginalized individuals influences how ESO leaders perceive institutional diversity efforts and their role in these efforts. In the following

section, I explain the theoretical framework guiding the study using theories that examine marginalized individuals' experiences, views, and identification with organizations.

Theoretical Framework

Racial battle fatigue, standpoint theory, and organizational identification theory work together to create a theoretical framework that helps understanding of ESO leaders' perceptions of institutional diversity efforts and ESO leaders' perceptions of their role in those efforts. Because of their marginalized statuses, ESO leaders may experience racial battle fatigue. Racial battle fatigue refers to psychological, physiological, or behavioral responses to constant overt or covert slights to underrepresented individuals' racial or ethnic identity. This study posits that ESO leaders' negative experiences inform their standpoint or view of the campus and impact their sense of identification or belonging to the university, which in turn impacts their perceptions of institutional diversity. Thus, perception results from experience, standpoint, and organizational identification. The following section elaborates on the study's theoretical framework. The section begins with a discussion of racial battle fatigue theory, followed by standpoint theory, and finally organizational identification theory. Following is an explanation of how these theories work together to create a framework that shapes the study.

Racial Battle Fatigue

Racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2004) is a critical framework through which to understand the experiences of Black/Afro-American and other racially/ethnically underrepresented individuals who operate in White/Anglo-American spaces. Smith explains that racial battle fatigue "is a response to the distressing mental/emotional conditions that result from facing racism daily" (Smith, 2004, p. 180). Racial battle

fatigue can result from blatant racist acts or racial microaggressions, which Sue (2010) (as cited in Husband, 2016, p. 94-95) defines as intentional or unintentional "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities . . . that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color." Racial battle fatigue can manifest in psychological (e.g. frustration), physiological (e.g. high blood pressure), and behavioral (e.g. poor school performance) responses. Hotchins and Dancy (2015), for instance, found that Black male leaders of predominantly White organizations at PWIs experienced significant stress that sometimes manifested in psychological, physiological, and biological responses ranging from anger and discouragement to depression and sleeplessness. One student in their study reported not wanting to get out of bed in the morning because of the stress he experienced from trying to lead an organization with majority White students. Students in the study reported being questioned or challenged often and experiencing awkward interactions where racist statements or jokes were uttered. Fries-Britt and Turner (2001) also found that Black students' confidence in their own academic abilities was degraded because of the stereotypes they experienced on campus. Similarly, Caplan and Ford (2014) conducted research on four college campuses to understand students' perceptions of their university. One of the most significant findings from their study showed that racism and sexism were often expressed through micro-aggressive behaviors, which caused "confusion, sadness, self-doubt, anxiety . . . drains on [the targets'] energy and attention" (p. 40).

Experiences of prejudice and discrimination can cause racially and ethnically underrepresented student's significant stress. While stress is not unique to racially underrepresented college students, race-related stress can have a wide range of effects.

For Black/African American students and other students, race-related stress could exacerbate maladjustment to the university environment and affect students' academic health, performance and persistence (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Franklin, Smith, Hung, 2014; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). In a study examining the experiences of Black/African American faculty teaching at a predominantly White university, Smith likens the development of racial battle fatigue in racially and ethnically underrepresented people to the development of combat fatigue in military personnel. He contends that racial battle fatigue occurs even when Black and other people of color are not being directly attacked. Smith (2004) poses that race-related stressors cause ethnically underrepresented people, particularly Black faculty in his study, stress, which manifests in physiological and psychological symptoms including, tension headaches, backaches, rapid breathing from anxiety, extreme fatigue, constant anxiety and worrying, emotional withdrawal, and loss of confidence in oneself and one's colleagues, department, college, or community, and a host of other issues. Similarly, Smith, Mustaffa, Jones, Curry, and Allen (2016) found that for Black male students attending an elite historically White Research I university, being stereotyped and under constant surveillance and control caused depression, frustration, resentment, hopelessness, shock, and fear among other things.

In the study conducted by Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) mentioned earlier, the researchers found that while Black student leaders experienced racial battle fatigue, which caused feelings of depression and disengagement, the student leaders viewed their experiences as beneficial to help them become better leaders and develop resilience. Thus, while racial battle fatigue can be challenging, it can help us understand what

motivates racially and ethnically underrepresented student leaders to persist in hostile or unwelcoming environments.

Student Leader's Standpoint

Standpoint theory traces its origin to the work of German philosopher Georg Hegel's examination of the relationship between master and slave (Griffin, 2003). Hegel suggested that a person's knowledge of themselves, others, and society stems from the group to which they belong. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' work, called the *proletarian standpoint,* further developed Hegel's work, and argued that impoverished workers are "society's *ideal knowers*" (Griffin, 2003, p. 477). Building this foundation, standpoint theorists since have asserted that "knowledge stems from social position" and that social inquiry ought to begin from the lives of marginalized groups because they possess knowledge that those privileged in society do not (Borland, "standpoint theory" section, n.d., para. 1; Harding, 2009). Meaning that because of their experiences, women, racially and ethnically underrepresented groups, and LGBTQ and disability communities, for example, have special knowledge that those who occupy dominant social positions, such as White males, do not. This framework posits that the viewpoints of the marginalized produce less partial and less distorted perspectives because people in unprivileged positions do not have a reason to defend the prevailing system as social inequality does not benefit them (Rollin, 2009). This does not mean that oppressed groups have an objective view of society, but that their views are less biased than those who occupy dominant social positions (Griffin, 2003; Harding, 2009). Standpoint theorists argue that starting from the perspective of oppressed or exploited groups

produces knowledge that is "embodied, self-critical, and coherent" (Borland, "standpoint theory" section, n.d., para. 4).

It is important to note that a standpoint is achieved rather than automatic (Harding, 2009). One's standpoint is "earned through critical reflection on power relations and through engaging in the struggle to construct an oppositional stance" (Wood, 2005, p. 61), meaning that it emerges when an individual identifies and challenges unjust societal values and relationships (Wood, 2009; Crasnow, 2008). Thus, in addition to occupying a marginalized social location, one must be conscious and intentional to possess a standpoint. Because of their racial or ethnic identity and roles as leaders, ESO leaders are more likely to identify and confront institutional values and power relations on predominantly White campuses, which makes their viewpoints about diversity and inclusion invaluable.

ESO student leaders possess what Du Bois (1903/1994) termed a "double consciousness" and occupy what Collins (2009) calls an outsider-within social location. In *The Souls of Black Folk* W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/1994) defined a double-consciousness as this "peculiar sensation . . . this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others . . . [a] two-ness – [being] an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (p. 2). Double-consciousness is the sense that one's identity is divided into multiple facets, giving those with a double-consciousness, ESO leaders in this case, a unique outlook and making them especially perceptive of issues relating to race and inclusion at PWIs. In *Sister Outsider* Lorde (2007) aptly states: "to survive, those of us for whom oppression is as American as apple

pie have always had to be watchers, to become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection" (p. 114). These "watchers" occupy an outsider-within social location. Outsiders-within exist in the system but often do not feel belonging in the system. For example, a Black female professor at a PWI can be an outsider-within – although she is part of the university because of her position, her status as a racially underrepresented woman makes her an outsider. Outsiders-within are vital to conversations about race and ethnicity on predominantly White campuses because they possess a "double consciousness" – they are familiar with the language and manners of the dominant culture yet they sometimes hide from the gaze of the dominant group by retreating to counter-spaces such as ESOs, where they express their cultural identity and frustrations with the dominant culture. ESO leaders simultaneously adjust to the dominant campus cultures at PWIs by participating in events and rituals of the university like going to campus events or leading organizations on campus, while frequently retreating to their own safe/counter spaces, ESOs, where they express their cultural identity and "construct independent self-definitions" (Collins, 2009, p.111). These counter-spaces often provide them the courage and tools needed to navigate the challenging and sometimes hostile White campus. Griffin (2003) writes that standpoint theorists similarly contend that while they do not inherit the earth, the meek i.e. marginalized groups, need to figure out what makes it turn in order to survive. This unique standpoint privileges ESO student leaders with special knowledge on issues of diversity and inclusion at PWIs.

Organizational Identification Theory

George Cheney and Philip Tompkins developed organizational identification theory in the 1980s (Scott, 2009). According to Cheney (1983) organizational identification is more a process than a state; Cheney explains that it is "an active process by which individuals link themselves to elements in the social scene" (p. 342). Organizational identification theory (OIT), "attempts to address how employees' self concepts shape and are shaped by the attachments they make in the workplace" (Scott, 2009, p. 716). OIT proposes that organizational identification occurs when employees view the organizations identity positively and "integrate it into their self concept" (Shin, Hur, & Kang, 2016, p. 3). Identification can be an individual's feeling of oneness or belonging to an organization or it can occur when individuals make decisions based on what they believe to be in the best interest of the organization or view the organizations success as their own (Mael & Ashford, 1992; Scott, 2009; Zagenczyk, Gibney, Few, & Scott, 2011). Cheney (1983) argues that identification helps us make sense of our experience, organize our thoughts, make decisions, and anchor ourselves.

Although studies have used OIT to examine a number of issues including turnover, sexual harassment, and perceived corporate social responsibility and the impact of organizational identification on job performance (Glavas & Godwin, 2013; Scott, 2009; Shin, Hur, & Kang, 2016), few scholars have applied OIT to the university setting. Students' identification with their university can affect several factors including alumni donations and time spent volunteering with campus programs (Myers, Davis, Schreuder, & Seibold, 2016). O'Keeffe (2013) and Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, and Woods (2009) found that sense of belonging had a positive impact on student's institutional

commitment and persistence. Additionally, the attitude student's hold toward their university can strongly affect retention and graduation rates, students willingness to contribute to the success of their school, and university effectiveness (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014; Myers, Davis, Schreuder, & Seibold, 2016).

In a study with 555 university students at a public university over a six-month period, Myers, Davis, Schreuder and Seibold (2016) examined current students' identification with their college. In the study, students were asked to list any events, occasions, or experiences that made them feel less attached and those that made them feel more attached to the university. After using a constant comparative method, reading students' open-ended responses, and noting common themes, Myers et al. (2016) reported that campus sporting events, university sponsored social events, university sponsored social organizations, the surrounding student-inhabited community, academics, university life and student activism on campus helped students feel more attached to their university. Interestingly, some of these same responses emerged when students were asked about things that made them feel less attached, in addition to the student community, academics or university services, university sponsored organizations and social events, and university life in general (such as lack of traditions or inactive student body). Two unique factors that caused some students to feel less attached to their school included incidents of racism and hate crimes in addition to not fitting into the social environment of the university. Feeling alienated from the social environment stemmed from lack of diversity and students not being perceived as "typical" students. Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella and Hagedorn (1999) found that when African American students encountered "a campus climate of prejudice" they felt less committed to the

university (p. 147). Myers et al. (2016) argue that understanding how undergraduate students identify with their university is important not only from a theoretical standpoint but also practically, as it can provide useful information. This information could influence universities' policy and planning decisions regarding if and how programs, clubs, and events are funded and supported which may have implications for student engagement and retention. When students are integrated socially and academically, they feel a sense of belonging on campus (Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009).

A relationship exists between employees' perceptions of an organization and organizational identification. For instance, Shin, Hur, and Kang (2016) studied employees' perceptions of corporate social responsibility and job performance and found that when employees believed that their organization was attempting to be more socially responsible, organizational identification and job satisfaction increased, which in turn produced superior job performance. Although the framework posited in this study suggests that ESO leaders' organizational identification (resulting from their racial experiences and standpoints) influences their perceptions of institutional diversity efforts, it could be that ESO leaders perceptions of institutional diversity efforts impact student's organizational identification. Understanding ESO student leaders' organizational identification is beneficial because it can help understanding of racially and ethnically underrepresented student's experiences at faith-based PWIs, their perceptions of the institution, and their commitment to the institution.

This study's theoretical framework suggests that ESO leaders' experiences with racism and microaggressions may cause racial battle fatigue, which can then influence ESO leaders' standpoints and their identification with their university, which can in turn

influence their perceptions of diversity and diversity efforts at their predominantly White college. In other words ESO leaders' racial battle fatigue, standpoint, and organizational identification, impact ESO leaders' perceptions of institutional diversity and of their role in those efforts. A visual representation of how these theories come together to create this theoretical framework may be helpful.
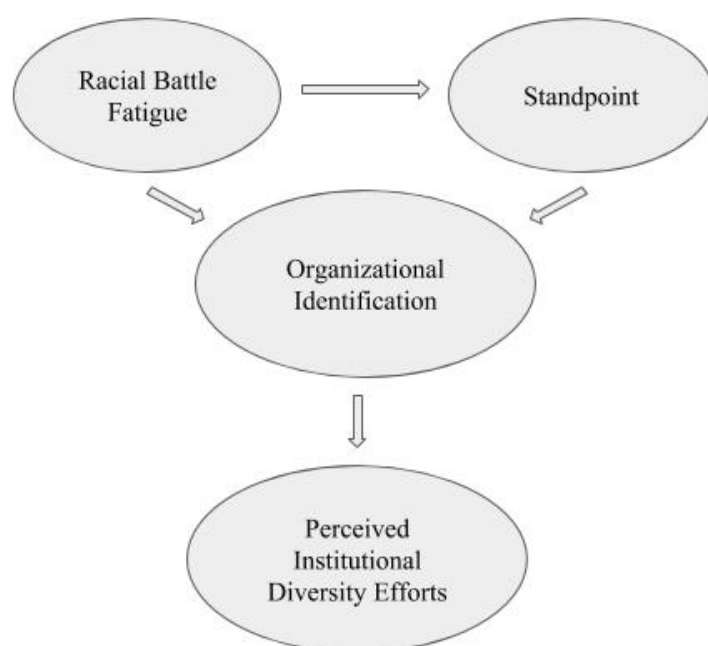
Figure 1. ESO leaders' perceptions of the university's diversity efforts are impacted by their racial battle fatigue experiences, standpoint, and sense of belong or identification with the institution.

Summary

The literature review began with a discussion of campus climate as a salient factor for understanding racially/ethnically underrepresented student's experiences and perceptions of their university. While college administrators attempt to diversify their institutions by recruiting more racially and ethnically underrepresented students, their efforts are often undermined by the prevailing unwelcoming campus climate

underrepresented students encounter when they arrive on these campuses, even on Christian campuses. The unwelcoming climate may cause racial battle fatigue in racially or ethnically underrepresented students, which manifests in different ways including frustration, anxiety, depression, self-doubt and other such responses. These experiences may influence ESO leaders' view of the university and their sense of belonging on campus. ESO leaders occupy unique social locations as both marginalized students and campus leaders. From these positions, as outsiders-within (Collins, 2009), ESO leaders are able to perceive the temperature within ESO communities and the overall campus community, making them uniquely qualified to speak on campus diversity and inclusion.

The chapter also discussed the importance of examining representation, institutional history, traditions, mission, interactions across race and ethnicity, and intergroup relations, when assessing institutional diversity. All of these factors work together to influence students' perceptions of diversity on campus and their sense of belonging or identification with the institution. Sense of belonging is important as it has implications for student satisfaction, commitment, and retention. ESO leaders' racial battle fatigue experiences at a PWI inform their unique standpoints as watchers and outsiders-within and influence their sense of identification with the institution, which in turn affects their perceptions of institutional diversity and their role in institutional diversity efforts. If students experience microaggressions, and other negative race-related incidents, they may feel less identification with the university, which could impact how they view the university. By asking participants about their experiences, this study seeks to understand how ESO leaders perceive the university's diversity efforts and their own role in those efforts.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As previously mentioned, few studies have explored ESO student leaders'

perceptions of institutional diversity efforts. This study sought to address this gap in the

literature. The study sought to understand ESO student leaders' perceptions of

institutional diversity efforts and how they understand their role in these efforts,

specifically at a predominantly White, faith-based institution. The study asked the

following research questions: (1) How do student leaders of ESOs perceive institutional

diversity efforts at a faith-based PWI and (2) How do student leaders of ESOs perceive

their role in institutional diversity efforts at a faith-based PWI? This chapter describes

how the study was conducted. The chapter proceeds as follows: first, I overview the

study's research design, and then I discuss the sample and sampling procedures.

Following that, I discuss the data collection and data analysis processes. Finally, a

discussion of the study's research validity and ethical considerations follows.

Research Design

Because the goal of the study was to gain insight into students' perceptions of

institutional diversity and their role in them, a qualitative approach was utilized. I used a

hermeneutical phenomenological methodological approach because it allows for a

description of the *lived experiences* of several individuals with a concept or phenomenon

(Creswell, 2013). This study sought to describe the essence of a lived phenomenon,

which, in this study, refers to ESO student leaders' experiences and perceptions of

institutional diversity efforts. Phenomenology is the ideal approach because it allows researchers to understand the *what* and *how* of participant's experiences. Phenomenology "provides a logical, systematic, and coherent resource for carrying out the analysis and synthesis needed to arrive at essential descriptions of experience" (Moustakas, 1994, "Empirical science and human science" section, para. 16). A phenomenological study design allows for an exploration of the common experience student leaders of ESOs have with diversity at their university, how they experienced their role, and the meaning they derived from their shared experience.

Creswell (2013) explains that in phenomenology, the researcher must go beyond their own knowledge and experiences to "elicit rich and descriptive data" to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon (p. 331). The phenomenological researcher brackets her or his experiences so that she can better understand the essence of people's experience. I began the study by describing my experience as an undergraduate ESO student leader. I did this as a way to identify and expose any biases or assumptions I bring to the research. In discussing my experiences, I hoped to separate my experiences from those of my interview participants. I also conducted a literature review early in the study and read Creswell (2013) *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* to determine whether the study called for a phenomenological approach, which it did. Phenomenology allows the researcher to understand "the essence of the experience" by interviewing a group of people who have experience with the phenomenon (p. 104). This approach was thus ideal for my study as I sought to understand ESO leaders' perceptions of institutional diversity efforts and their perception of their role in these efforts.

Research Setting and Access

The study was conducted at a small, 4-year, private, liberal arts Christian university in the Southwest region of the United States. As previously mentioned, the university has a little over 4,500 students, and 67 percent of the population are White/Anglo-American, 8.1 percent Black/African American, 14.1 percent Hispanic or Latino American, 1 percent Asian American or Pacific Islander, 0.4 percent Native American or Alaska Native, 4.5 are percent two or more races, and 4.5 percent are international non-resident students. 59 percent of the student population is female and 41 percent male. This university was selected because it is a faith-based PWI and has several ESOs, which were necessary criteria for the study.

Gaining access to participants was not a challenge because I have a relationship with the director of the OMA who oversees all of the ESOs examined in this study. I spoke with the director about my study before recruiting study participants. The director texted and emailed potential participants about my study and encouraged them to look out for an email from me. He also provided me with a list of potential participants. I reviewed the list he sent me and compared it to the OMA webpage to find students who were currently ESO student leaders or had been leaders within one academic year of the study being conducted. Students who fit the criteria of being an ESO leader were emailed and invited to participate in the research (see Appendix B for participant recruitment letter). Once a student agreed to participate in the study, we arranged a meeting time and place and I emailed her or him a consent form (see Appendix C for the consent form), which they signed before the interview began.

Participant Selection and Sampling Procedure

Participants

Nine participants were included in this study, which is within the recommended range in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). All the participants were currently enrolled as full time students at the predominantly White institution examined in the study and each participant either currently served as an ESO leader or had done so within the past academic year. Study participants served in different roles in their organizations: president, vice-president, chaplain, advertising and public relations, member liaison, treasurer, and historian. Each of the ESOs they represented had been active for at least five years. The participants were leaders in two organizations, the Black Students Organization and the Hispanic Students Organization. The study included two males and seven females ranging from sophomores to seniors. There were three Hispanic/Latino and six Black/African American participants in the study.

Types of Sampling

The study utilized purposive sampling or purposeful selection as Maxwell (2013) calls it. When using purposeful sampling, the researcher selects specific individuals and sites that can provide a better understanding of the research question and the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). The study also used criterion sampling, which Creswell describes as "cases that meet some criterion [and is] useful for quality assurance" (p. 158). Each participant was selected because they could speak directly to the experience of being an ESO leader at a faith-based PWI. The criteria was simple: (1) be a student at a faith-based PWI, and (2) be a leader of an ESO. It was necessary to use

purposive and criterion sampling because of the specificity of the study and the limited availability of student leaders of ESOs at the faith-based PWI used in this study.

Data Collection Procedure

The first step in the data collection process was recruiting participants for the study. I sent out an email inviting participation from ESO leaders identified by the Director of the OMA. Twenty-two students were invited to participate in the study and nine responded and were included in the study. Following that, a general interview guide was developed to gain insight into the perceptions and experiences of student leaders with institutional diversity efforts.

Nine face-to-face one-on-one semi-structured interviews ranging from 60-105 minutes were conducted on the university campus. Phenomenological interviews are informal and interactive and use open-ended comments and questions (Moustakas, 1994). To begin, participants were asked a broad, general question: What organization are you with? After this I proceeded to ask more in-depth open-ended questions (see Appendix D for interview guide). I began with open-ended questions so that I could gather data that would help me compile a "textual and structural description" of student's experiences (Creswell, 2013, p. 81). Each interview included two grand tour questions which were asked in the middle of the interview: "Can you tell me a story or about a time when you, as a Black/Latina/o/Biracial student or student leader, felt most connected to the university?" and "Can you tell me about a story when you, as a Black/Latina/o/Biracial student, felt disconnected to the university?" Other open-ended questions were asked such as "What is the purpose of your organization?" "What has your experienced as a Black/Hispanic student been like at the university?" and "What do you know about the

university's diversity initiatives?" Additionally, clarifying questions were also asked during the interview.

All interviews were recorded on an iPad and on an iPhone using the Voice Memo application and then uploaded to the Nvivo Qualitative Research Software Package for transcription.

Data Analysis

After transcribing the interviews, I read each transcript and removed overlapping and repetitive statements from the transcripts (mostly fillers such as "like" or "you know"). While reading the transcripts, I also wrote down a word or phrase if I noticed it used multiple times during the interview or if it was unique or interesting to me. After this process, I wrote a short paragraph or bullet points summarizing my initial impression of the participant's experience. I then followed the data analysis process suggested by Creswell (2013). I went through each transcript line by line and identified "'significant statements,' sentences or quotes" and then I developed "clusters of meaning from these significant statements into themes" (p. 82). This initial step allowed me to group or categorize similar statements, sentences, or quotes together. Similar statements or codes were grouped together using the Nvivo Qualitative Research Software Package. In Nvivo, the codes were organized into larger meaning units; those meaning units formed the key themes in the study. I also printed and read each transcript again (some I read twice) to further immerse myself in the data and see whether I had missed any significant ideas or themes. These steps were followed by the third step Creswell suggests, which is writing descriptions of what participant's experienced. I used the clustered themes to write descriptions of *what* participants experienced, these are called textural descriptions

of the experience (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994) and included verbatim examples to demonstrate participant's experiences. I then wrote structural descriptions, which are descriptions of the "context or setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). Here I described *how* the student experienced the phenomenon. The final step of data analysis involves incorporating the textural and structural descriptions to write a "composite description that presents the 'essence' of the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). Here I discussed the common experiences of the participants to provide a rich description of the phenomenon, or student leaders perception of the university's diversity efforts and their own role in these efforts. I wrote notes in Nvivo and on paper describing how ESO leaders perceive institutional efforts and what their experiences on campus were like.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I wrote memos. Maxwell (2013) argues that writing memos throughout the research process is beneficial and that memos should be written during data analysis because they "not only capture your analytic thinking about your data, but also *facilitate* such thinking, stimulating analytic insights" (p. 105). I wrote memos from the time I began collecting data and when analyzing the data. In qualitative analysis data collection and analysis happen simultaneously (Maxwell, 2013).

Research Validity

Although methods and procedures do not guarantee validity, they are "essential to the process of ruling out validity threats and increasing the credibility of your conclusions" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 125). To test the validity of my conclusions and avoid possible threats to the validity of the study, I used four strategies suggested by qualitative

researchers: verbatim transcriptions, negative case analysis, peer review or debriefing, and bracketing.

I transcribed each interview verbatim including any pauses, clarifying questions, and appearances of physical discomfort exhibited by the interviewee. I slowed each interview recording in Nvivo significantly while I transcribed so that I could record each participant's description as accurately as possible. I also categorized all data including that which seemed contrary to my other findings and observations to make sure I did not ignore data that does not fit my conclusions. Negative case analysis calls the researcher to "refine working hypotheses as the inquiry advances." As I read and reread the transcripts, I made note of any cases that presented "negative or disconfirming evidence," by noting these cases and including them in my analysis and findings, Creswell (2013) states that this "provides a realistic assessment of the phenomenon under study." (p. 251). I also sought input from three colleagues, in addition to my faculty advisor, at different points in the data collection and analysis process, this validation strategy is called peer review or debriefing. Peer review "provides an external check of the research process." (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Peers asked me questions about my methods and interpretations and helped me eliminate or combine some codes or themes. This feedback provided for more rich and accurate findings. Finally, because the goal in qualitative research is not to eliminate the researches influence on the study "but to understand it and use it productively" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 125), I stated my experiences early in the study. I worked to expose and minimize my biases through memo writing and discussing the study with my faculty advisor and peers. I also used open-ended non-leading questions, which were reviewed by two faculty advisors.

Ethical Considerations

Approval for the study was granted by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before interviews were conducted. I recruited students by sending an email message (see Appendix B for participant recruitment letter). When participants expressed interest in participating in the study, they were provided with an informed consent form approved by the IRB detailing the purpose of the study and the structure and duration of the interviews. Students were also informed that participation in the study was voluntary, that no compensation will be given for participation in the study, and that only general demographic will be recorded. Participants were notified that they had the right to stop the interview at any time should they become uncomfortable. All interview transcripts and recordings were kept on a password-protected device, which was either in the researchers care or in a locked room on university premises. I informed research participants that I may discuss their interviews with my faculty research advisor but that we would only refer to them using pseudonyms or simply as a participant 1, 2, etc. I also removed all identifying information from interview transcripts.

Using a phenomenological approach to understand ESO leaders' perceptions of institutional diversity efforts is invaluable because it illuminates several participants' experiences with a single phenomenon. Phenomenology is a helpful framework to understand how ESO student leaders perceive institutional diversity efforts at a faith-based PWI and how these students perceive their own role in these efforts. By asking participants to describe how and what they experienced on campus, we can better understand diversity efforts at PWIs. The study included nine ESO leaders at a small, private Christian university. The participants held different leadership positions and were

part of two of the biggest ESOs on their campus, the Black Students Organization (BSO) and the Hispanic Students Organization (HSO). Although the study had significantly more females than males, seven and two respectively, gender was not a significant part in this study. The study did include more Black/African American ESO leaders than Hispanic ESO leaders, which could be significant depending on the findings of the study. All participants were purposefully selected because they fit the established criteria for the study. By recruiting and selecting ESO leaders at a faith-based PWI, I was better able to answer the questions posed by the study. Data collection followed a semi-structured interview format, which allowed me to ask all the participants the same questions and to ask for more information when it was beneficial to do so. Data collection and analysis took place simultaneously in this study. Each interview was transcribed verbatim using Nvivo software. Data analysis involved finding significant statements, developing meaning units, and writing textural and structural descriptions of ESO student leaders experiences. Data analysis also included memo writing. Research validity included four strategies: verbatim transcriptions, negative case analysis, peer review or debriefing, and bracketing. Ethical considerations included IRB review and approval before the study began. All documentation regarding IRB approval, participant recruitment and consent, and interview protocol can be found in the appendix section.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study sought to answer two research questions: (1) How do student leaders of ESOs perceive institutional diversity efforts at a faith-based PWI and (2) How do student leaders of ESOs perceive their role in institutional diversity efforts at a faith-based PWI? Findings from the study indicate that participants had mixed perceptions of institutional diversity efforts. Eight out of the nine participants expressed some level of knowledge of the university's diversity initiatives, although most were uncertain about what exactly the university was doing to become more diverse. Only eight ESO leaders knew in detail what the university was doing to promote diversity and inclusion on campus. Five out of nine participants knew that the university had a Diversity Task Force although most were not sure what exactly the Diversity Task Force was. A significant number of the participants did not believe the university was fully diverse while some expressed optimism that it was becoming more diverse. At least five participants believed the university was trying to be more diverse. Participants perceived their role and their organization's role as salient to the university and to achieving institutional diversity. Participant's perceptions of their role were complicated by challenges to the campus climate, including an unwelcoming campus culture, distrust, traditionalism, and faith, which affected their feelings of disconnect from the university. Overall, most ESO leaders understood their role to be mentors and spokespersons for racially and ethnically underrepresented students on campus. This chapter elaborates on my findings through

46

five emergent themes: (1) Connectedness; (2) Disconnect; (3) Challenges to campus climate; (4) Unclear institutional diversity efforts, and (5) ESO leader's role in institutional diversity.

Connectedness

In order to understand how ESO leaders perceive institutional diversity efforts, it is important to first gain an understanding of their feelings of connectedness or belonging on campus. Students' experiences play a large role in shaping their attitudes toward and perceptions of the university. To gain understanding of students' feelings of connectedness, I asked ESO leaders to tell me about a time when they felt most connected to the university. From participants' responses to the question: "Can you tell me about a time when you as a Black/African American or Hispanic student felt most connected to the university?" three sub-themes. First, participants felt connected to the university when they were a part of different opportunities or were involved in some way. Second, participants felt connected when they felt known or had relationships with people on campus. Third, participants felt connected to the university through their ESOs and the OMA. Additionally, some students felt connected to the university when instances of racism or prejudice occurred on campus. This last sub-theme, agency, was not a significant theme but I included it because it is important to include cases that are "negative or disconfirming" as they provide a more accurate assessment of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 251).

Feeling a Part of/Involvement

More than half of the participants described feeling connected to the university when they were a "part of" something. ESO leaders discussed being a part of different

organizations, events, and activities such as sports teams on campus. Being a part of

something helped students feel that they "belong" and that they were not alone. When I

asked "can you tell me about a time you as a Black/African American student felt

connected to the university?" Participant 5 provided the following response

> I wouldn't say it's like a particular time like it comes and goes. So it's like when
>
> I'm . . . a part of different things then I feel most connected to [the university],
>
> like being a part of things in my department, being a part of BSA, being a part of .
>
> . . I'm not necessarily a part of any of the social clubs but I have friends in the
>
> social clubs specifically XYZ and they make me feel [like] a part of them all the
>
> time you know . . . so . . . I feel like I'm connected to something here . . . I feel
>
> like okay I'm not just here you know just like a African American guy trying to
>
> get his education alone you know.

Participant 9 appreciated it when departments on campus came to ESO events and

intentionally reached out to racially/ethnically underrepresented students to ask them to

be a part of events or organizations on campus. When the committee in charge of

organizing events to welcome freshmen on campus came to the BSA chapel to invite

them to apply to be on the committee, she said that it made BSA members "feel like

we're a part of [the university's] community." Participating in different university events

and traditions such as the university chapel also fostered feelings of connectedness, as did

involvement in different opportunities like being a tour guide on campus. Sharing

experiences with people and being part of a community fostered a sense of togetherness

and belonging. Participant 4 said that knowing "different people from like different

backgrounds" helped him feel comfortable and no longer "like an outsider." Participant 1

described an occasion in which she was at a professor's home for an event hosted by the HSO and one of the other members mentioned being teased by her family for not being fluent in Spanish to which Participant 1 replied "same!" She said that she felt that "they understand" because they had the same background and experiences as hers. For her, being a part of her ESO group helped her feel belonging because she was with people who understood "the struggle between these different worlds;" those worlds being her Hispanic heritage and her American heritage.

ESO leaders also felt connected to the university through their leadership roles and when they were able to represent the university. Participant 4 said that being a part of the unofficial university soccer team and representing the university made him feel connected. Similarly, Participant 9 recounted being called on thrice in one day by a tour guide who introduced her as a leader on campus and asked her to introduce herself and tell the group of prospective students about herself and her organization. She felt excited that she was called on to speak to a group of diverse students saying she "literally felt connected." She went on to say the following

> It's like at that time they didn't see me as you know the vice president of BSA . . .
> as in like the girl who's always ranting and yelling . . . they didn't see me as like
> this group that's always upset on campus, they saw me as a [university] leader
> and they wanted me to express what I loved about [the university] . . . and then
> like I was also drawing in like people of other races because they're like 'Oh so
> are there other student associations?' I was like 'yes!' . . . and I really felt like I'm
> really doing what [the university] wants me to do."

Being able to represent the university created a sense of community and "being a part of" for some ESO leaders. It seemed that contributing to the university and its mission helped them feel connected with the institution.

Interestingly, for some students being involved or a part of different groups or activities, which were not directly affiliated with the university such as a church or various organizations, helped them feel connected to the overall institution.

Being Known/Relationships

In this sub-theme, students felt connected to the university through relationships with faculty, administration and students, when they felt known by faculty and other students. Students appreciated times when people took the time to get to know them and reached out to them. Participant 8 said she felt excited and "extra nice" when faculty or staff members who are not Black wanted to get to know her and "how they can be educated on the issues" that she cared about. When a professor took the time to know her and her passions, Participant 8 said she felt like the university was investing in her. Participant 9 recounted an occasion when she was at a restaurant in town and a professor teased her about paying for her family's meal. She was pleasantly surprised and appreciative that a an "important person" knew her and recognized her off campus,

> I was like wow like I know you see my face because of BSA but I never knew that she knew my name I didn't know that you took the time to like know my name and I was like wow I might just have paid for you guys, you know, because you said my name.

Participant 3 demonstrated the significance of being seen or known by a staff member and by other students. She said that in class she would always sit in the back

feeling as though she "didn't have that much to offer." She felt that she couldn't speak up because her background was different from many students in the room whose parents had advanced degrees and knew more about the field of business and marketing. On the first day of school when a professor introduced themselves and invited the class to come meet them she would just hide in the back because she felt as though she "wouldn't even matter." One day, a staff member called all the female Hispanic students together, including Participant 3, in her department

> We all sat down and I heard their . . . how they felt and . . . I'm glad I didn't feel
> alone but at the same time . . . it's sad that . . . they felt the same way . . . so when
> I heard their stories as well I felt connected and it made me feel comfortable like
> knowing I wasn't the only one out there and I know there's other people too . . .
> so that's when I felt like okay like hey I'm not the only one and ever since then . .
> . we started meeting up every week and we would like have chapel on Wednesday
> just on our own you know and ever since then like I've felt like I can't let that be
> an excuse anymore and I have to do something about that.

Participant 3 added that although she wanted to drop one of her most challenging courses, she persisted because she realized through her experience with the group that she was not alone and that her voice mattered.

Participant 2 said that as a leader she often invited faculty and staff on campus to the BSA chapel, so that students could identify those people who "care" about them. She said during chapel, "we would you know like have them stand up and stuff say this is [so and so] . . . so that they would know that these people came and they care." A number of participants identified a number of people who they had relationships with including

faculty and staff who they felt cared about their community. When faculty and administration attended ESO events, they showed students that they cared. Participant 6 said the vice president of the university attended their events and that "it was really important for . . . the members to see that like administration cared about Black students or minority students so much so that like they were present." She also added that "seeing administration and like top people being a part of our things makes it feel like we actually are valued on campus."

The relationships students had on campus created a sense of community, belonging, and importance for racially/ethnically underrepresented students. Many ESO leaders chose to be leaders because the officers before them had intentionally formed relationships with them. The most significant way in which participants felt connected to the university was through their connection to the OMA.

"OMA is Like a Lifeline"

Like Participant 1, a number of the participants said they felt connected to the university via their connection to their ESOs. Participant 4 and Participant 7 said that they felt connected to the university when they attend OMA events. ESO chapels created a "sense of home" for many racially/ethnically underrepresented students as Participant 9 said. When asked to describe the ESO, participants used words such as "home," "family," "belong," "community," and "safe haven." Because they were able to feel belonging within their ESO, students felt belonging on campus. Being a part of the OMA helped some students feel like they "belong somewhere" as Participant 7 phrased it. Participant 7 added that she felt connected to the university because of the "Christian aspect" of the university as well as the OMA. She said that if the OMA did not exist; she would not feel

connected to the university. For most people, feeling connected to the university via the OMA was not an issue, however, Participant 6 said that feeling connected to the OMA did not help her feel connected to the university. When asked to describe a time when she felt connected to the university she said

> I don't think that I can come up with a specific time that as a Black student I felt connected to [the university], certain aspects of [the university], of course, because of OMA and BSA. But [the] actual [university] as a Black student I can't . . . think of a specific example.

She went on to explain that these feelings stemmed from being burnt out and her experiences with tokenism, in addition to the incidents of racism and prejudice on campus. She also said, "It's kinda like either . . . you associate with all of [the university] or [the university] in general and the majority, or you associate with OMA, and it's almost kinda like two separate schools even." Some students felt connected to the university through their affiliation with the OMA while some did not. For most people, the OMA and the ESOs within it was a "lifeline" (Participant 6) that fostered feelings of attachment and belonging.

Agency

Although this was not a significant theme, it was interesting to hear two ESO leaders say some students felt connected to the university when an incident of racism or prejudice took place on campus. As previously mentioned, a few months prior to the interviews, two White/Caucasian students at the university posted a video of themselves in blackface on social media. This resulted in members of the BSA and other OMA groups coming together to host a demonstration where students from every ethnicity

stood up and spoke about their experiences on campus and how the blackface incident impacted them. Students, various faculty and staff members, and some university administrators were present at the demonstration. Participant 2 said that the during the demonstration she felt connected "in the sense that all of my problems or issues, all of these textbook problems that you see, are very real." Hearing other students made her feel validated. Participant 2 further explained that it was significant to have faculty and staff members present at the demonstration

> I think it wasn't just, you know, because that was mostly minority students getting
> up there and saying that but it was like looking out in the crowd and seeing
> professors and some students and staff members there listening and I felt like we
> were all on one accord at one point having an actual conversation and I was like
> "okay, we are connected." [The president] was out there and some important
> people from the Board or whatever but they were we were all there and we were .
> . . all having this conversation and I was like "okay [the university] is listening
> now."

Seeing the president of the university and other university administrators at the demonstration made Participant 2 feel that "we're all on one accord, having an actual conversation." The demonstration also helped some students feel a sense of agency. Participant 9 said that several students participating in and organizing the demonstration "felt like wow we really came together to try to fix the situation." The incident allowed students from across the campus to know each other and to share and expose all of the negative experiences they had. It seemed almost counter-intuitive that a racist incident would cause students to feel connected to the university. After reading their responses

and consulting the memo's I wrote about the interviews, it became evident that what caused students to feel connected was not the racist incidents per se, but the unity they felt when they were able to express their frustrations and struggles and come together to create change. Moreover, feeling heard by the university also helped students feel acknowledged and validated.

Although there were times when students felt connected on campus through their involvement on campus, relationships with others, and sense of agency, there were many times when they felt disconnected from the university. The following section discusses participant's feelings of alienation from the university.

Disconnect

As expected, racially/ethnically underrepresented students described many instances when they felt disconnected from the university. In this sub-theme, students discussed times when they experienced racism, ignorance or microaggressions, and exclusion and how those experiences made them feel. To understand students' feelings of alienation I asked the following questions: "can you tell me about a time when you as a Black/African American or Hispanic/Latina or Bi-racial student felt disconnected from the university?" and "have you heard any stories or times when other Black/Hispanic/Asian students felt connected or disconnected to or from the university?" Participant's responses to these and other questions yielded three sub-themes: a) Feelings of Marginality or "otherness" (b) "It's like a different world" and (c) Inhabiting a conflicting role.

Feelings of Marginality or "Otherness"

In this theme, ESO student leaders described experiences where they felt "othered" or alienated from the university. Feelings of "otherness" emerged from student's experiences in the classroom and on and off campus. Participant 1 described feeling different, like "a fish out of water." These feelings of otherness emerged due to several factors including incidents of racism or discrimination, lack of representation or exclusion, ignorance or micro-aggressions, and nonverbal cues.

Some interviewees described feeling alienated from the university because of instances of racism or discrimination either perpetrated against them personally or against their racial or ethnic group in class or on campus. As previously mentioned, one recent incident at the university involved two White/Caucasian freshmen girls posting a video of themselves in blackface on social media. In describing the incident, Participant 7 described feeling "really hurt" and "shocked" by the incident. In another similar incident where racial slurs were posted on social media after several Black/African American speakers addressed students in a chapel meeting, Participant 5 expressed hurt, stating "it made feel bad it made me really question if I wanted to be on campus, you know, I mean I contemplated a lot leaving freshman year . . . it wasn't a good feeling at all." One participant discussed a particularly disturbing incident where an Asian student was targeted on campus

> I can think of an instance that an Asian student told me that he was walking from the library one day . . . at night and this truck drives by and was like "Hey Asian you want some bread?" and literally threw a ball of bread at him.

Although students from the university may not have perpetrated this incident, it still

caused these students to question their university and their own belongingness on

campus. Similarly, while the other incidents such as the blackface incident did not target

the participants in this study specifically, the ESO leaders still felt hurt and marginalized,

as Participant 7 said it "actually [made] like a lot of people like really question [the

university]."

A number of participants cited a lack of representation as something made them

feel like "outsiders." In their narratives, participants mentioned lack of representation in

social clubs (or sororities and fraternities), chapel, faculty and staff, leadership positions,

in the classroom, and in the curriculum. Oftentimes, not being represented in the

classroom caused students to feel "like one of a few" or "different . . . kind of

outsider[s]," which sometimes caused some students to disengage from the learning or

not speak up even when they wanted to. Participant 7, for instance, mentioned a

classroom discussion about slavery which made her feel uncomfortable and although she

wanted to speak up, refrained because she didn't want to "stir up any anger," I asked her

why not and she said because "if you're one of few . . . you may not have anybody to

come to your rescue, your defense . . . about it and you might stand alone." When I asked

about times when she felt disconnected Participant 2 talked about her experience in the

classroom

> I'm a nursing student . . . in the nursing program and . . . in my cohort there are
>
> only three . . . four Black students and so just . . . a lack of representation and in
>
> our classes. A lot of times we have to talk about the cultural aspects of things and
>
> every time we talk about African Americans it's like so awkward. Because first of

all its always something negative, like African Americans have hypertension

African Americans have this they do this this this and . . . it's like it's just . . . real

awkward. And it'd be better if . . . I didn't feel like I was the only person in there

Participant 2 commented that when one of her instructors incorporated different

perspectives in her class it "enhanced the learning." She also explained that most

instructors do not do so, "more often than not they'll let you have your comment or your

different opinion but they will not wrap it back around to the education which makes you

feel less connected and makes you feel like your stuff isn't . . . your opinions [are] not

valid." Participant 1 further demonstrated students desire for diverse perspectives in the

classroom

I'm a bible major and vocational missions and so I've had like different cultural

books that I've had to read and that kind of thing and like always and majority of

time being that by like White male professors talking about diversity it was just

like okay, I mean I can understand like if they've experienced different things that

they've lived in a different country for a long, long time that's great, I've

experienced this my whole life, . . . so it's just those kind of things that I've just

felt weird about and kinda felt disconnected that I think [the university] could do a

better job of like diversifying the staff just to where I wouldn't feel like whenever

they're and they would refer to us "okay you have your American White western

lens on" and I'm like "no I don't." That's not me that's only part of my lens and

so I don't see the world through your eyes.

Another major source of isolation was social clubs. Three participants mentioned

feeling like they didn't belong when interacting with social clubs. Participant 4 said he

felt as though some social clubs "just care about their own types of people and don't really like accept Hispanic members or Black members or people that just like think different." When asked what lead him to believe this he said "I guess just in looking at their members for example like the different cultures that they represent and also . . . like I know when people . . . from different cultures try to pitch for this specific club but not really getting into it like being rejected." Participant 3 said something similar, stating that she felt disconnected from social clubs because she "didn't see any Hispanics [in] anything." Participant 9 further elaborated on this

> You can look at them and you can see it you know the leaders of the social clubs are always going to be of a certain race and that sets the tone you know . . . [ABC] . . . has the most Black people in it and that's why it's considered the most diverse because you can see the difference in the skin tone from light to Black.

Although these organizations may not intentionally exclude racially and ethnically underrepresented students, due to the lack or low numbers of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and members, students felt unwelcome around them. Participant 7 said while going through the rushing process she "just felt kinda like a[n] odd ball" like "I have to fit into this box to be able to fit in."

Some participants mentioned feeling like they have to speak up or be representatives for their race because there were so few of them on campus. Interesting, Participant 7 said that because there was a lack of Black women faculty or staff members on campus, she felt as though she was a mentor as a Black woman and that she had to be careful how she carried herself. She elaborated by saying "I don't want to say I'm on a pedestal or anything . . . but [I'm] being held to a different standard because people do

look up to me so I always try to be careful what I say." Participant 7 did not perceive this role as burdensome though. For Participant 6, the lack of racially/ethnically underrepresented students on campus caused "extreme stress" because she felt the burden of tokenism. She described feeling pressure from the university to speak for everyone who looked like her.

I don't know what to say because I don't know what they're thinking because . . . I can't talk to them all at once and sum that all up and then tell you what you wanna hear. And so it's . . . kinda like . . . I want to be a leader and I want to help these people and I do want to speak I want to speak about them, but I want us all to be able to speak for ourselves. I don't want to be like just the go-to girl whenever you have an issue that relates to Black students or Black culture. And you like ask me my quote unquote expert opinion and . . . I'm just qualified because I'm Black. But really I can only think about my Black experience you know. And so that has been stressful and sometimes . . . I find myself wanting to kinda like retreat like further and further into my own community and culture because I don't have to speak you know for them because we all already know what's going on with ourselves.

Participant 2 expressed similar pressure felt by individual African American students and the community as a whole. She said the pressure to be a representative or "the ideal Black person," made her question her identify and sense of self. A lack of representation caused some participants to fear that their entire racial/ethnic group would be viewed as a monolith. Participant 2 expressed this saying "we . . . don't want them to

look at BSA and say . . . this is what Black people think on this campus because that's not true."

Another source of marginalization was ignorance or micro-aggressions. Ignorance refers to incidents in which participants perceived an unawareness or lack of knowledge, intentional or unintentional, about themselves, their community or their organization from instructors and peers. Ignorance and micro-aggressions are categorized together because sometimes an incident was interpreted as an act borne of ignorance by some but as a direct act of prejudice or racism meant to demean or embarrass by others. Micro-aggressions can be unintentional but can still be interpreted as deliberate by the recipient for various reasons thus there exists a fine line between ignorance and micro-aggressions. For instance, Participant 6 perceived the following as ignorance

> Oh! One time though, oh gosh . . . one time my professor, bless her heart, came into our classroom and was trying to be up to date about current events and stuff and she was like so what do you guys think about Colin Kaepernick and this . . . the national anthem boycotting and all that stuff. Everybody's hands go up like "I just don't understand" and "it makes me mad" [it's] so disrespectful and blah blah blah" and . . . they were like "I mean he's not even oppressed he's a football player he makes x amount of money" and then my teacher was like "Yeah its crazy right? I mean people fought and died for this country if they don't like it here they can leave.

Although the student perceived it as ignorance on the part of her professor, she later described how it made her feel, saying "its moments like . . . those that I feel most disconnected from [the university] because it's like 'wow, I can't believe so many people

don't see what I'm going through' . . . I don't want to have to always speak up and explain what I'm going through." Participant 8 said that she felt hurt and mad when she recounted an incident similar to Participant 6's where she invited her professor to an event hosted by the BSA and he responded that "the only thing he knew about Black people was Popeyes fried chicken." The same instructor, at a different time told the class that he used to judge Black people who were mixed. Similarly, Participant 9 talked about feeling "awkward" and "uncomfortable and annoyed" when, for instance, a professor asked her to come up and teach everyone how to "nae nae" or "dab" even though there was another student who was a dancer and not part of a racially/ethnically underrepresented group. When she declined the invitation, the professor called on another Black student. Sometimes events which may not be seen as microaggressions or racism made students feel uncomfortable like when students on campus said "all lives matter" or they had "Trump Make America Great Again" stickers on their computers, or when people touched their hair like in the case of Participant 2. Reflecting on her experience, Participant 2 said she felt "fed up" and "sick" and that it was "hard to be a Black person" because of the ignorance she encountered. For Participant 9, when her peers misunderstood issues that affected her like the blackface incident or the Black Lives Matter forum her organization held on campus, she felt as though those students were saying that her life and the lives of other African American people on campus were inconsequential.

Another source for students' feelings of alienation stemmed from nonverbal cues. Nonverbal cues consisted of incidents where students felt marginalized because of the way someone treated them or spoke in an indirect way about them or other

ethnically/racially underrepresented people. This included someone's actions or body language or the things they implied through tone of voice. One example of a nonverbal cue that upset ESO leaders was when the president of the university attended events hosted by the BSO only after a racist incident occurred on campus or the way the president spoke about racist incidents. After the blackface incident, Participant 8 and Participant 9 said they felt "kinda like he flowered around the issue" or "danced around the issue." When he attended the chapel hosted by the BSO the following day, Participant 9 said that some students felt "disrespected" because he only came "because this made the news" or because he wants to save the university's money (Participant 8). Another nonverbal cue emerged when students described feeling uncomfortable with people staring or looking at Black/African American and Hispanic students in class when topics such as slavery or incidents of overt racism took place on campus or when a large group of Black students were together. Participant 1 said that after blackface video was posted on Snapchat, it felt like "eyes were turned on minority groups." Participant 7 quipped "it's like people look at us and it's like 'Oh like oh so y'all know about slavery" and it's like I didn't live in slavery like I know what I know, but . . . like it's kinda uncomfortable.'" Participant 9 said that when she was with a group of Black people she "can see the eyes and like the looks and the whispering" which felt "awkward and uncomfortable" and made her realize how Black people are perceived in society. I asked her how she thinks African American people are perceived and she said "like threatening, scary, and violent or aggressive and angry."

Nonverbal cues were perhaps best described by Participant 3 who said "you may not say it but your body language tells me you don't want me." Two participants said

they felt uncomfortable when they saw "Make America Great Again" signs and confederate flags on campus or in the surrounding community. Participant 8 said "those things make me very uncomfortable because I don't know if I'm about to get shot I don't know what's gonna happen, that makes me nervous . . . that scares me and other minority students on campus because we don't know if our life is in jeopardy we don't know and so that's something that I fear for." One striking demonstration of the impact of nonverbal cues or exclusion on communicating "otherness" was described by Participant 5 who said he and his Black teammates on the baseball and basketball teams felt "not seen,"

> It was just hard because me and my friend . . . and then another guy actually we were [the] only Black guys on the team, it was just hard. We felt like we had to work ten times harder and it just wasn't like I let it go because it was too much it was too stressful and . . . I thought you know I came here to play baseball and get can education I can still get an education here so I'll stay . . . It's just like we weren't seen. It's just like when they had people do stuff at practice we were . . . the last ones to be called on or like I was a pitcher so like . . . all the other guys got to pitch during the week, they got to pitch before me and I was always the last person to go and pitch and just I don't know it just like hurt. And . . . I felt like I was working so hard to prove myself but I was never gonna get that validation from the coach or anything like that. . . . So it just got to the point where I thought . . . maybe God has something else in store for me so I just I felt like I need[ed] to pursue my education you know. Baseball is gonna it was gonna end somewhere anyway. . I felt . . . like . . . I wasn't good enough . . . I didn't feel like at the time .

. . . it was him. . . . I felt like I wasn't working hard enough I needed to work on

myself so I think that was the reason, you know, have to be given a chance to

actually prove yourself and I felt like I was working to get that chance and I never

got the chance

When I asked Participant 5 why he did not fight or speak up he responded "I was

so physically and emotionally and mentally drained and not . . . in the right mind to even

fight a battle like that that I just didn't do it." Feelings of marginalization and "otherness"

had a significant impact on many participants. In addition to feeling like they were on the

outside as individuals, ESO leaders felt like their organizations were also not part of the

university community.

"It's Like a Different World"

Another way participants felt disconnected was due to the relationship between

ESOs and the OMA and the rest of the campus. When describing the ESO, Interviewees

often used descriptors such as "home," "family," "community," and "fit in." Participant 2

described it as "a place where they can feel that their culture is represented, hash out their

frustrations, . . . exist on campus . . . evolve on campus and participate on campus . . .

with a safe community that reminds them of home." Racially and ethnically

underrepresented students joined ESOs to feel a sense of belonging that they did not feel

on campus. There seemed to be a disconnect between the community and attachment

students felt within ESOs or with the OMA, and the rest of the campus. Participant 6

explained it this way

A lot of the times as a Black student I feel like . . . it's as if I'm in you know

elementary middle school or something like that and I'm being pulled out of class

for like special education and special attention and things like that instead of

feeling like a regular student and a part of the rest of the classroom and so with

[the university] I feel like because I'm a Black student like [there's] a lot of these

specific things geared towards because I'm a Black student and not a lot of the

general things geared to me just because I'm a student, . . . it's kinda like either . .

. you associate with all of [the university] or [the university] in general and the

majority or you associate with OMA, and its almost kinda like two separate

schools even. . . . [It's like] I can have a . . . strong connection over here with the

minorities and then with events and things like that that are supposed to be for all

of the school I can't find a connection with it because its like its like a different

world

Participant 7 said that the culture at the university was different because it "doesn't really

cater too much towards minority students" and that although her overall experience on

campus had been "disheartening, . . . OMA made it better." For students like Participant

3, OMA was "like their sorority . . . because no matter what you are or what color you are

or where you come from you fit in that place." Participant 3 felt hurt and alienated when

she tried to join social clubs so the OMA became her sorority. As I listened to their

responses, I noticed that OMA groups shared a closeness with each other that was not

replicated with other non-ESO groups or with the university. When asked a follow up

question about who he felt cared about Hispanic students and the HSO, Participant 4 said

I guess among OMA organizations we have done a really good job in supporting

each other in like different events . . . whatever support they might need. And I

feel like . . . because OMA as a whole has been very supportive to each other and

very close to each other . . . we've become more like a family. But like outside

OMA . . . I feel like sometimes it's just OMA and just like outside it's just like

none.

Participant 7 also verbalized this closeness between OMA groups and their desire or need

to support each other. She said that she made it a point "to always support all my OMA, I

don't wanna say brothers and sisters, but all the OMA officers and other organizations."

Her response suggested a family-type closeness between the ESOs. In his interview,

Participant 5 also talked about wanting to build community with and garner support from

non-ESO organizations and to welcome them in their community and to "love them like

our brothers and sisters."

The disconnect between students in ESOs and the rest of the campus caused some

participants to feel like other groups or departments on campus approached ESOs when

they wanted to appear more diverse. Participant 8 said she had an issue with departments

who came to events hosted by the BSO because they "need Black people" to be more

diverse. Participant 6 and Participant 8 felt that when departments or other organizations

came to ask OMA for "some of your students" it made it seem as if the students who are

members of ESO groups were not a part of rest of the student body. Participant 6 worked

in the OMA for almost 3 years and explained this notion and her frustration with it

Whenever another officer, so like this could be the Students' Association, this

could be Res[idence]Life, this could be a different aspect of student life, this

could be a specific department, literally any office on campus, whenever they're

looking for minority students or Black students they come to OMA and say "Hey

we need some of your students" and it's like "Okay, pause for one second,

because these are also your students, they attend [the university], you work for
[the university], they're your students as well." Also the OMA office does not
have a record of every single minority student, know them by first and last name,
[know] their major and their hometown, and can just, you know, divvy them out
to you whenever you need them. . . . It is your job to make connections with these
students as well.

While ESO leaders felt a sense of community with other ESO members and
leaders, they sometimes felt alienated from the rest of the university, Participant 2 spoke
using an "us" and "them" dynamic. Many participants wanted to feel a sense of
belonging on campus and not just with other ESO members but found this challenging.
Another source of disconnect for participants was due to a feeling that they occupied a
conflicting role.

Inhabiting a Conflicting Role

Another theme that emerged from the data was this idea of inhabiting a
conflicting role. In this theme, participants either felt as though they personally occupied
a conflicting role or they felt as though their organizations did. Participant 4 for instance
expressed a desire to fit in on campus while at the same time fighting assimilation by
trying to be "very Hispanic." Participant 6 said Black women on campus faced a unique
challenge: "the hair issue." She said that Black women were asked about their hair
constantly, and although she felt it was a good thing that people were noticing "[it's] also
like kind of uncomfortable because . . . I mean I don't want my hair to be the center of
attention. I want you to be focusing on me and what I bring to the table." Thus, while
students appreciated that there was attention on something that was important to them, it

sometime also brought negative or undue attention. Some participants also found difficult their leadership role difficult. Although they enjoyed planning events and carrying out other duties associated with their role, it was difficult to balance school and lead officers "who barely make it to meetings" or unite members of their community, as Participant 1 and 8 discussed. Thus, conflict arose either from participants' roles as students and leaders or from their identity as racially or ethnically underrepresented students.

Another significant conflict arose from students feeling like they had to be a "voice for the people" as Participant 2 called it or "speak for everybody else that's supposed to be like them." For some students being a spokesperson forced them to speak up about certain issues in class even though they would rather not but for others it caused them to be silent even when they would like to speak up to avoid people thinking "this is what Black people think" (Participant 2). As previously mentioned, for Participant 6, the role of being a representative or token made her want to retreat further and further into her ESO community although she appreciated being able to speak about her community.

In terms of the organization, occupying a conflicting role referred to pressure for the ESO to "cater to the White majority" (Participant 2) by being a source of entertainment rather than a place for people to be educated about different cultures. Participant 9 described the conflict

I feel that the officers often got caught up in what [the university] expects from us, what society expects from us, which is entertainment and it its so quick and easy to just perform for them so that they like us and then we can stay on campus. It's like okay let's do that but let's also educate them, you know.

Participants 2, 3, 6, 8, and 9 talked about not wanting to be seen as a source of

entertainment. For instance, Participant 9 said that other students sometimes came to the

chapel hosted by the BSO "when they get tired of their own chapel . . . like 'Oh I just

need to get a refresher or entertainment.'" Participant 8 felt frustrated with African

American students from the BSA being "used as a form of entertainment" when visitors

came to campus. She said that Black students were asked to lead chapel when certain

people or events came to campus. For the Black/African American students this was

especially important to avoid

> That's something that like you often find in the Black culture like that's
>
> something that's attributed to Black people like we're good at sports singing and
>
> dancing and performing and things like that but we don't always have light shed
>
> on the intellectual side or the kinda activism or educational side [of] things.

ESO leaders wanted people to learn something at their events because when they came

just to be entertained, Participant 3 believed that "it's not impacting them with like you

know . . . where we came from or like what music or what food we have." Participant 2

viewed this as an issue because she said that when ESO cultures were seen as "fun" or

something one "participates in" White/Caucasian people were not formed into "cultural

people who are aware of culture," additionally, she did not think this was "healthy for the

students of color who . . . exist in that culture." Participant 8 expressed feeling irked

because she felt that being used as a source of entertainment during the university's

chapel time negated the goal of her gospel group, which sought to educate and culturally

form people. Participant 8 summarized this frustrating saying "I feel like we are more

than just entertainment, we are more that just our bodies, we are more than just a quota here . . . we're more than athletes."

Feelings of marginality or disconnect caused ESO students to feel frustrated, hurt, alone, used, and not seen. Participant's feelings of exclusion created dissonance for many racially/ethnically underrepresented students at the university who, as Participant 6 said, "feel like [they] have to work harder to feel a part of [the university]." These experiences undoubtedly impact the way students perceive the university. Participants also discussed some factors that posed a challenge to the way they perceived the university and people associated with the university.

Challenges to Campus Climate

One of the questions I asked during the interviews was "In your opinion is [the university] diverse?" Only one participant said that yes, the university was diverse. Three participants said the university was not diverse, two said "we're getting there," and the others said "yes and no" or that it could be more diverse. Most participants, seven out of nine, said that the university was structurally or compositionally diverse. Participant 5 said he felt like the school was "statistically" diverse and that there was "a good mixture of people" because he knows people from a number or different ethnicities and races. Participant 7 said that although the university could be more diverse, it was diverse in her opinion because there are students "from all across the world, . . . from all across the state, all across the country." One participant said the university was not statistically diverse because the number of underrepresented students was still minimal compared to the majority. Other participants thought the university was diverse because there were people from different religious and socioeconomic backgrounds and because there were

different organizations on campus. Although a few participants thought that the university was diverse, several disagreed and provided reasons why they thought so. Participants' responses indicated that there were some challenges on campus that made it harder for the university to be more diverse and inclusive. Participants talked about the culture of the campus and their perceptions of the motives of the university and people associated with the university. Participants also talked about the university's traditionalism as a hindrance to inclusion. Additionally, faith was also sometimes perceived as a hindrance to institutional diversity efforts, although many students said it was actually helpful to making the campus more diverse. Four sub-themes emerged as potential challenges to institutional diversity and diversity efforts: (a) unwelcoming campus climate, (b) distrust, (c) traditionalism, and (4) the faith factor.

Unwelcoming Campus Culture

Several participants felt that the culture of the university was not diverse. They discussed several events or people on campus who were not welcoming to diverse students and perspectives. Participant 7 felt the university was geared toward the majority culture

> I wouldn't say it [is] diverse because the culture of the university to me doesn't
> say diverse; it's more centered towards middle class Caucasian Americans, that's
> the culture of it. Like if you notice the music that we sing in chapel you know, it's
> more contemporary, which I love contemporary Christian music but it's not like
> something for everybody.

Participant 2 elaborated on this idea, citing various aspects of the university that made her feel the campus was not inclusive

> [The university] has lots of people from different places but . . . [the] culture is not diverse it just has elements of difference like within it to make it look diverse . . . Just because you put Black bodies on campus doesn't mean that you have diversity within your cafeteria or diversity within your curriculum or diversity within your faculty [or] diversity within how you choose to sing your songs, how you host your chapels, how you choose to run your basketball games.

One example that came up several times that indicated a lack of inclusivity on campus was the university's biggest event called Sing Song. Students said the style of singing in Sing Song was geared toward White/Caucasian students, Participant 7 joked that you "can tell . . . it wasn't made for minorities." Some participants pointed to the amount of resources dedicated to Sing Song compared to the "measly budget" allocated to OMA events (Participant 2). Participants also talked about the style and choice of songs sung during the university's chapels and those played by the university band at events. They also mention the lack of diversity in leadership. Participant 9 said that people in leadership positions in social clubs were "of one race and one viewpoint, they all come from the same background close to each other" so the way that the club was run followed the same direction. She said that while there were students from different ethnic/racial backgrounds on campus "at the end of the day we still have to assimilate, change the way we . . . see things to fit into this whole other society." Again, a lack of representation in leadership, in the curriculum, and even style of singing caused students to feel that they we not part of the university culture.

Some participants talked about the campus environment as suspect or hostile. Participant 1 said that after the blackface incident, she realized that she couldn't assume

that everything was okay and that she needed to stay vigilant because that incident could happen to Hispanic students too. Participant 6 suggested that there were some "hostile" people on campus

> I think there are hostile areas on campus. I don't know where they are but I know that they exist because Yik Yak showed that. And I'm just like "wow, I really wish I knew the faces to these people." So that I won't now [be] . . . walking around thinking "do you think that's . . . somebody who like made those racist comments?" And I just don't know. "Do you think it's this person? What if its really the person that's been next to me all of this time?" And like I hear incidents . . . there was a girl who literally first week of chapel was trying to sit somewhere in chapel and you know its crowded in the first week because everybody needs chapel credits at that time, and someone literally said "sorry you can't sit here only White people sit here" – pauses – Now this girl for the rest of her time is like "I don't know where to sit in chapel because I don't know if I'm gonna sit in the wrong quote unquote wrong section again." And I feel like that's where you end up with a lot of . . . why you see a lot of Black people here and a lot of these people here . . . because it's like 'Well I know I can sit there because they're like me,' you know. So I think there are hostile areas on campus, I don't think the overall campus is hostile.

Racist messages posted online after Black/African American people spoke or prayed during university events such as chapel also led Participant 9 to the idea that there were areas on campus that were hostile and unwelcoming. This created an environment of suspicion where she often wondered who could have posted the racist or insensitive

messages. In addition to perceiving the campus as unwelcoming or hostile, participants also expressed some distrust of the university.

Distrust

Many ESO leaders expressed some distrust of the university or of people associated with the university. For instance, Participant 7 and 8 assumed that university alumni or donors did not want diversity on campus. When I asked Participant 7 what she thought was the reason for a lack of diversity on campus, she responded

> I don't wanna say this, but . . . like they have so many old like so much old money here. A lot of the people who are alumni who probably give to [the university] are like people who are conservative Caucasian people who probably don't, probably wouldn't want OMA events . . . to be like campus-wide things . . . rather than just being for select students and everything. So I would say maybe because a lot of the people who give to [the university] they wanna keep the traditions the way they want to keep them.

Participant 8 said she heard that donors might be the reason that the university did not implement changes. It was not clear why participants had these thoughts or ideas. There was also an assumption that when the university became involved with diversity or addressed racist incidents it was to save the university's money or to save the university's reputation and not out of genuine concern for underrepresented students. The president's presence at ESO events was sometimes interpreted as "political" or suspect as were his responses to certain racist incidents as Participant 8 explained

> The issue with him that I hear of a lot of Black students say is like for example when the Blackface thing happened okay the next day he spoke in chapel we

didn't really feel like he addressed the issue we felt like he kinda like he flowered around the issue he but when he addressed the Yik Yak he said we will not tolerate racist acts here at [the university]. He wasn't as aggressive as he was with that with the Blackface. The Blackface was more you know like in your face like it was more personal because you know and he didn't deliver to us you know he didn't help us we didn't really feel like really delivered the words that we needed to hear at that time and an issue is that after he did the whole thing in [the chapel arena] he then comes to BSA chapel on Thursday. He's never at BSA chapel but you wanna come on Thursday you wanna greet all these Black students, that's a problem for me that's a big problem and that's a problem for other Black students that were telling me like no he disrespected us.

Three participants believed that the university "used" ESO groups. Participant 2 said the university was "strategic" about which groups sang in chapel depending on which events were taking place on campus. Participant 4 said faculty or administration and other non-ESO leaders on campus either didn't attend ESO events or when they did attend they came "just to say they were a part of it" but did not ask questions or "try to become . . . educated about what you're saying." For Participant 4 this indicated that they didn't really care but came just to say they were there.

Some students also didn't trust the campus police. Participant 6 said that some Black/African American students choose not to call the university police "even though it's like the same eight or ten officers each year and you kinda get to recognize faces" because they felt "uncomfortable" or "uneasy." Another challenge to multiculturalism on campus came from students perceiving the university as traditional.

Traditionalism

Three participants thought that the university did not really want to increase diversity because they did not want to break away from their traditions. Participant 5 described the university as "very traditional" and said "they have very traditional ways of doing things." Participant 2, 7 and 8 believed that some of the university's traditions could hinder diversity on campus. When I asked interviewees what they believed hindered diversity on campus, Participant 7 shared the following

> I would say [the university's] traditions. They wanna live up to them, so stuff like Sing Song, which I believe that's you know that should stay, but I just feel like you know and then two I feel like maybe [the university's] scared of shying people away, especially because [the university] is ugh I don't wanna say this, but its made like they have . . . like so much old money here, like . . . a lot of the people who are alumni who probably give to [the university] are like people who are conservative Caucasian people who . . . probably wouldn't want OMA events . . . to be like campus-wide things . . . rather than just being for select students and everything. So I would say maybe because a lot of the people who give to [the university] . . . wanna keep the traditions the way they want to keep them.

Similarly, Participant 2 thought that traditionalism hindered diversity on campus. When I asked her to share what she believed was the reason for the lack of diversity on campus she said

> They don't want it . . . They like tradition. The senior leadership team and the alumni like tradition. They like to come here and say that [a residence hall] looks relatively the same, that the [cafeteria] is serving . . . the same food, that Sing

Song is still [the] same. I mean [the university] makes a lot of its money based

upon . . . based off of tradition and I don't think that they wanna change that.

Participant 2 and 8 also believed that the university's Christian traditions could

hinder diversity on campus. A few students talked about the university chapel, which

followed specific a White evangelical tradition, as isolating. Participant 8 said it

"prevents followers of Christ from understanding cultures" meaning the university's faith

tradition excluded others who use musical instruments or sing different songs or sing the

same songs differently. Participant 8 added that some of the traditions followed by social

clubs also hindered diversity on campus. She indicated that some students felt

disconnected from the university when traditional events such as Homecoming took place

on campus.

I don't feel like [the university] looks at ways that they can incorporate diversity

and inclusion they don't see that their traditions are not inclusive . . . they just see

that Sing Song brings us money, its something that we love to do they don't see

how homecoming could be an issue, and that's the thing they have not been woke

and so that kinda degrades the experience here.

Some traditions from the university's faith heritage or organizations on campus

evidently pose a challenge to creating a more inclusive campus. Another potential

challenge to diversity and inclusion stemmed from the faith-based nature of the

university.

Faith as a Factor

Faith played an important role in the lives of many participants in this study. For

eight out of nine participants, faith was important to them personally and/or to their ESO.

I asked participants "does the religious or faith-based nature of the university help or hinder diversity at [the university]?" and "how does the religious or faith-based aspect of [the university] affect your organization?" Some participant's felt that the faith-based nature of the university gave their ESO "a deeper sense of purpose," (Participant 1) and a reason to be more inviting and inclusive. Participant 6 and 7 felt that the Christian aspect helped some people care about diversity more and "more willing to learn about other groups or like interact with other groups." Participant 5 and 6 said it also allowed BSA to show students they care about them by praying for them and it allowed them "to display a huge part of our culture . . . openly" because "religion and church is a big component of Black culture." A few participants said faith or religion helped their organization have a deeper connection to the university and to the mission of the university. Participant 4 added that "Christianity and Jesus just like bring people together" and that because the ESO and the rest of the campus "share one same Jesus" the two were more connected.

For some participants, however, the faith-based nature of the university hindered diversity efforts on campus. Participant 1 said that because the university was affiliated with one faith tradition, an evangelical faith tradition, it could isolate some students from a different faith tradition such as Catholicism. Participant 5 suggested that the faith-based university's strict guidelines isolated some racially and ethnically underrepresented students. When I asked him whether the faith-based nature of the university helped or hindered diversity on campus he responded this way

> In some ways I feel like it hinders . . . a tad bit more than it helps because it's
> almost . . . even [a] race [thing] to me. I just say that because I know the friends
> that I had . . . they knew it was a religious school coming in but they didn't think

it would be as strict as . . . it is and that hinders diversity because a lot of Black

students don't wanna have visitation hours for maybe three or four hours once a

week you know . . . that's a big factor but that's a strict guideline that [the

university] has because of its religious affiliation. So that . . . loses you know a lot

of diversity. And then things like the international students a lot of them know

about Christianity and things like that but a lot of them . . . I think . . . they

changed it up a little bit but where you're required to take bible classes and things

like that they're not really interested in those types of things so it just like kinda

hinders them in that . . . aspect as well. I just think the strict guidelines of being a

religious school kinda hinders it just a tad bit more than it helps diversity.

Participant 7 felt that faith hindered diversity on campus because "a lot of people

just don't know . . . God, they know of Him but they don't really know Him," she

continued

If they knew Him they would, you know, allow Him to show them what love is

and . . . then a lot of these issues with diversity wouldn't be issue[s]. We wouldn't

have to have, you know, like I love OMA but it wouldn't have to be . . . like [the]

place that you go downstairs to, it would be something that like you would see

OMA all around you.

Participant 7 and 8 viewed faith as something transformative. They thought that

on campus "it's more about religion than it is about . . . having a relationship." Participant

8 said the university had "a spirit of religion." They wanted the university to teach

students how to love God and others and to truly follow Christ so that there would be no

issues with racism and prejudice. Participant 2 contributed a unique perspective on the conversation. She also felt that faith hindered diversity efforts on campus.

> I think that more often than not it hinders diversity. I think that it has the potential to help it its just that . . . I don't think that certain leaders want change or want diversity as bad as they say, and the religious atmosphere is something they can often hide behind and I think the traditions that are revolved around Christianity and its history have implications for today and so I think that a lot of that is seen out on this university . . . The problem with Christianity and the religious atmosphere comes in when we talk about these issues and you know they'll say stuff like yes diversity is important and yes it's important that we deal with these issues but then they always wrap it back around to and God and Jesus will help or they say and remember we are all one in Christ or they say you know like you are not Black or White we are just Christians and even though they're acknowledging the problem they try to wrap it you know around Christianity and what that does is that stops conversation. And so . . . I think after this meeting I was like . . . I said like okay . . . we can't use Jesus as an excuse to not get things done . . . so much of the time is spent saying well let's just talk about how in Christ we are one or you know Jesus loves us all or when [the president] talked about the blackface incident he talked about how God's mercy and grace is so good and so big and it's like that's really great but also lets have some justice here for these students and let's you know correct our students let's not use the Bible as an excuse when its convenient for you, you know.

Participants had mixed perceptions about the way in which the faith-based nature of the university impacted institutional diversity efforts. Four participants believed faith or religion helped diversity on campus while four thought it hindered diversity. Some participants thought it helped and hindered diversity.

Although students expressed challenges on campus, at least three students said that people on campus were "nice." For instance, Participant 7 shared the following

Another thing I would say a lot of the faculty members, even though I said what I said about [the university], a lot of the faculty members are very nice, so I would say they're very nice.

Participant 5 and 8 echoed the same sentiments. Participant 5 found his department open and welcoming. He said that although he had difficulty adjusting on campus after his friends left, he stayed because he liked the people and that the people on campus had helped him grow spiritually and mentored him in different ways. Participant's responses reinforced the significance of positive relationships in helping students feel accepted and belonging on campus.

In the next section, I discuss how ESO leaders said they perceived diversity and diversity efforts on campus. Following, I discuss ESO leaders' perceptions of the role they play in institutional diversity efforts.

Unclear Institutional Diversity Efforts

ESO leader's notions about the meaning of diversity played a significant role in their perceptions of institutional diversity efforts. ESO leaders described diversity as "a lifestyle" and "more than just placing people with different backgrounds together" (Participant 2, 8 and 1). Participant's perceptions of diversity included religious and

socioeconomic diversity, racial and ethnic diversity, and representation in different organizations. After asking ESO leaders what they thought about diversity on campus, I asked them what they knew about the university's diversity efforts. The themes in this section emerged from answers to several questions including: "What do you know about the university's diversity initiatives?" and "What do you think about their effectiveness?" Three sub-themes emerged from participant's responses: (a) "I don't know what they're doing," (b) Uncertainty, and (c) "They're trying." This section further elaborates on these themes.

"I Don't Know What They're Doing"

At least three participants said they did not know what the university was doing to create a more diverse and inclusive campus. I asked Participant 3 what she knew about what the university was doing to become more diverse and she simply answered, "What do I know? I have no clue." After laughing for a while she said the school should help students who struggled financially and had to leave the university as a result. Similarly, Participant 5 said "I mean I hear people talk about the diversity of [the university] but I really don't know what they're doing about it like the actual effort they're putting in it." He said he knew that BSA was trying to help but was not sure what the university was doing. Participant 4 mentioned the Diversity Task Force but was not sure who they were or what exactly they did. When asked whether he thought the university's diversity efforts were effective or not he said

> I think they sometimes are. I'm really not . . . I guess they sometimes are in the
>
> fact that I'm not sure how to explain it. Like I don't know exactly what [the

university] is tryna do to promote diversity so I wouldn't know what they're doing good. I don't know what they're doing.

Participant 1 was also not sure what the university was doing and said she might not know what they're doing because she couldn't see it. She said that although she didn't know anything about the Diversity Task Force (other than knowing that it existed) she thought that the OMA was effective in promoting diversity,

Well personally I'd say OMA does a great job because you're constantly hearing about the things that are going on . . . there's never a dull moment with OMA . . . [they] have all these things spread out throughout the year to where there's always something culturally happening on campus. I think that's a big factor into being effective because there's always something to learn and experience

There seemed to be a distinction in some student's minds between the OMA and the university. So, when I asked what they knew about what the university was doing to be more diverse, most participants did not discuss the OMA as part of the university's diversity efforts but more as if it was its own entity. As previously mentioned, the OMA was sometimes viewed as its own community or world rather than as a part of the university. While some participants said they had no idea what the university was doing to become more inclusive, other participants knew a little more, although they were not sure.

Uncertainty

Quite a few participants were uncertain or confused about what the university was doing to achieve diversity and inclusion on campus. Seven participants knew that something was being done but few could clearly articulate what exactly the university

was doing. Participant 1 said she went to a meeting where she received a pamphlet that contained information with steps the university was taking to be more diverse but she didn't know "all the inside details and stuff." Participant 6 said "I have a general idea of what they're tryna do. Can I quote it word for word? No. But the general concepts I get." Although Participant did 6 said she had "a general idea" she actually knew more than all of the other participants about the university's efforts.

> So, I know that like they're trying to figure out like what exactly needs to be done and I know, I think they've got like a time frame that they're trying . . . to get certain goals met. And so I know that the first stage or the stage that we're in right now is kinda like gathering research and opinion[s] from students, input from students and things like that and observations . . . to figure out what exactly needs to be done and how to do it. And I think maybe in years past they kinda had the same goals but students didn't have as much of a say and input into it and maybe that's where things went wrong and that's why they're trying . . . things differently this time. So I know that's the phase we're in now and I know they're looking at specific things such as like the environment in the classroom, the environment on campus, the feelings of support, things that the school offers or doesn't offer, things like that.

Participant 6 was one of the most engaged and involved participants on campus. She worked in the OMA for almost 3 years and was often asked to speak about issues of diversity and inclusion to different individuals and organizations on campus. Thus, it is not clear whether her knowledge about institutional efforts stems from her heavy involvement and close working relationship with the Director of the OMA or from being

an ESO leader, or both. She joked that she had been contacted by the university's paper

so much that she eventually had to ask them to speak to somebody else.

Six participants mentioned the Diversity Task Force team when asked what they

knew about the university's diversity efforts. Three ESO leaders said they did not know

what the Diversity Task Force was, Participant 4 was one of them

Well I'm not sure what it is . . . I just hear that they are called a Diversity Task

Force but I guess just like . . . a group of people . . . I think they're students and

faculty that just like try to promote diversity on campus

Participant 4 was not sure what exactly what the task force was but understood their

presence at OMA meetings and events as the university listening to students. Participant

7 was also not sure what the Diversity Task Force was

I think I don't know 100 percent they're the kinda like they bridge the gap

between students and faculty when thing happen on campus. I'm not 100 percent

sure. But I know they're made up of faculty members who basically, I think

they're . . . because . . . as students we can propose what can happen on campus,

but they're like kind of the ones who have that connection to like the higher ups in

the in [the university].

Participant 9 sounded more sure and said the task forces job "is to figure out and

advocate for the minority group[s] on campus." One reason students may not have been

clear on the purpose or mission of the task force is because some participants said they

only found out about the task force after some racist incidents took place on campus.

Participant 1 first brought up this idea, "I honestly had no idea that [the university] was

like actively pursuing diversity with that and I didn't [know about] the Diversity Task

Force until after the fact." Participant 7 said she also didn't know the task force existed and thought that the blackface incident "helped shed more light on them." Although many participants expressed uncertainty about what the university was doing, they knew that they were trying to accomplish something.

"They're Trying"

A phrase that kept coming up when I asked participants what they knew or thought about institutional diversity efforts was "they're trying." Five participants said the university was trying to do something including "recruiting diversity," figuring out what needs to be done by "gathering research and opinion[s] from students," listening to students and implementing their ideas, and diversifying the food offerings in the cafeteria. For instance, I asked Participant 7 what she knew about the university's efforts and she responded "Well I know that they're trying . . . they're trying to make things happen and I'm noticing but I don't know too much about it." She said that she noticed changes in the food, more events hosted by the OMA, and that a member of the task force team came to speak with students at an OMA event. Although she wasn't too clear on what was being done, she felt that "they're making the steps that are needed . . . to bring more diversity to campus."

It was clear from six of the participants' responses that they had interacted with or at least knew of the existence of the Diversity Task Force. A significant number of participants answered the question about their knowledge of the university's diversity efforts by talking about the Diversity Task Force and a few talked about the OMA. Five participants mentioned that students were being asked questions about their experiences

or thoughts about diversity. One participant talked about surveys she had received via email that asked her about her experiences on campus.

Not knowing what exactly the university was doing to foster diversity and inclusion on campus made it difficult for some students to say whether the university's efforts were effective or not. Four participants did not respond to the question about the effectiveness of the Diversity Task Force or the university's diversity efforts because they said they didn't know what they were. One participant simply said she thinks the university's efforts are "going really well so far" because we ran out of time. Participant 9 said she thought the university's efforts were "great." She said the efforts would take some time and that she "doesn't believe things can get done, big projects can get, done over night." Similarly, Participant 7 said "I feel like they're making the steps that are needed . . . to bring more diversity to campus and I feel like OMA is helping a lot too." Participant 8 was the only one who had a more elaborate response regarding the university's diversity efforts. She felt that the university relied on the OMA and the Diversity Task Force to promote diversity on campus, which, in her opinion, was problematic.

> I feel like [the university] has this mindset the administration team has this mindset we've got an Office of Multicultural Affairs, we have a Diversity Task Force, then our diverse problems are solved and . . . that's a big issue that mindset that we're good to go. We're not good to go and the reason being is because you're not woke you're not in the loop and they've kind of ignored the issue so they're not in the loop. . . . It's effective for them to have the two Diversity Task Force and OMA but the two groups can only have substance when you know the

administration team helps to support the efforts of these groups like I feel like they the effectiveness is lost if they don't manage the productivity of the two groups, when they don't manage their productivity then there's no accomplishing the goal of diversity and inclusion but then I don't feel like [the university] looks at ways that the can incorporate diversity and inclusion they don't see that their traditions are not inclusive the don't see that they just see that sing song brings us money its something that we love to do they don't see how homecoming could be an issue and that's the thing they have not been woke and so that kinda degrades the experience here and their efforts.

Participant 7 shared some of the same sentiments earlier in the interview

If you were to take OMA out the picture I would say there wouldn't be a lot of diverse events because OMA is basically I feel like OMA is used to keep [the university] quote unquote diverse, which it really shouldn't be OMAs job that should be something the university should want, you know. They should have faculty members working to do that . . . but it shouldn't be solely on students because if you think about OMA [the director of OMA] is the only faculty members, like OMA is basically students run, he's just the connection to the other faculty members.

A few students expressed optimism regarding the university's diversity efforts, saying "I think it's going really well so far," "they're great" and "I feel like they're making the steps that are needed to . . . you know to bring more diversity to campus" as Participant 6, 7, 8, and 9 said. Participant 7 also said she noticed more diversity in the faculty and the type of music played at football games. She also said that "a lot of the

faculty members are very nice." Towards the end of the interview, when I asked what it is she would like university administration and faculty to know about diversity on campus Participant 6 said the following

> I think I want them to know that first . . . their work towards truly being diverse isn't going unnoticed, not just by me but like by other students as well, like people see that things are changing and they're trying to change. Also students definitely do care. But I think I would also like for them to know . . . about the disconnect between like minorities only feeling at home in this aspect of [the university] and the majority students feeling at home in the other aspect of [the university], which is much bigger and so there needs to be a way that both groups can access the full version of [the university].

Evidently, ESO leaders hold complex perceptions about the university's diversity efforts. While some think that the university is trying, a few think that they could do more to foster a diverse and inclusive environment without relying on the OMA and the Diversity Task Force. Participants also discussed their own role in institutional diversity efforts, which is the focus of the next section.

ESO Leader's Role in Institutional Diversity

ESO leaders had different perceptions of their role in institutional diversity efforts. I asked some participant's what role they believed they played in institutional diversity efforts and a few participants said their role was to speak up for other students and to support them. Participants mostly viewed themselves and their ESO as vital to diversity and inclusion on campus. Unfortunately, I neglected to ask each participant what role they believe they play in institutional diversity efforts. From the responses that

were given two sub-themes emerged: Mentors and Liaisons. This section discusses these themes.

Mentors

Participants 8, 7, and 9 described themselves or said other students described them as an "example," a "mentor" and a "role model." Participant 2 said that her role was to "be that glue in a sense that like connects people together. Similarly, Participant 9 felt her role was to be the "in-between person" between Black students and faculty and staff on campus.

So, whenever the Black students are you know hurt, sad, offended, upset and they don't know how to like approach the factually and staff, you know, I'm here to say, you know, what's wrong? . . . How can I help you? Like what can I do to get how you feel to be heard you know or if you know they're too just too angry to where they feel like if they go they're just gonna be yelling and stuff like okay like that I can go into the meeting and say hey [Dr. X] this is what the Black students on campus are concerned about, this is what's hurting them you know. And I'm like I'm the in-between person like I bridge the gap between the two . . . And then the same for faculty and staff you know how can we better help you know the Black students on campus so they come to me and then I go to them the Black students and then I come back to them saying well this is what we need this is what we need help with this is what we want.

Some participants helped other racially and ethnically underrepresented student's deal with racist incidents and made decisions about actions that needed to be taken in response to these incidents. After racist messages were posted on the social media

application Yik Yak in the spring of 2016 (some racial slurs were posted on the application after some Black/African-American speakers delivered a message or prayed in chapel), Participant 6 said some students came to her "in tears" because they were hurt about what was posted online. Even after Participant 2 was no longer an officer, she said she had to do "damage control" and talk to the students who were upset about the blackface video. ESO leaders organized a demonstration after the blackface incident and a peaceful protest on campus after another incident occurred where parking tickets containing derogatory language and racial slurs were placed on some Black students' cars. The president of the BSO also arranged a meeting with university administrators to discuss the Yik Yak incident. The meeting produced a few results. First, the university's president spoke to the student body during a chapel meeting and told students that behavior such as that displayed on Yik Yak was unacceptable. Second, the university administration blocked Yik Yak from working on campus.[1] Third, the university's Senior Leadership Team (a group of influential people who make decisions about budgets and the direction of the university) met with leaders of students organizations where they discussed several issues including working to have more diverse speakers in chapel.

Because of their work and how other students viewed them, participants understood their role to be important for both the institution and their peers. Not only do ESO leaders serve as mentors and change agents they are also spokespersons for other students.

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[1] When I spoke to the Vice President for Student Life he was unsure about whether the university was successful in banning the application from campus or not. Some participants said the application was banned and added that the WiFi connection in the chapel building was disabled or functioned at reduced speed; the Vice President did not confirm this to be the case.

Liaisons

A few participants believed their role was to speak up for members of their ESOs. Participant 2 and 4 said their role was to be "a voice for the people." A few participants believed their role in institutional diversity efforts was tied to their role in their ESO. Participant 4 said that his role was to grow the unity among Hispanic students and to be a "voice of Hispanics . . . in whatever I do." Meaning that his role was to speak out if there was an issue affecting the Hispanic community on campus. Participant 2 also saw believed her role was tied to her ESO and her role in her ESO

> Well like [the university's] mission is to what is it? Cultivate students for Christian service and leadership throughout the world. Okay so if you want to you know cultivate these students or whatever . . . for Christian leadership and service throughout the world, well that's what BSA wants to do. We want to spiritually form people so they can serve and lead when they leave college. We wanna do that, we just see that to do that you have to educate them, you have to teach them about social work and ideas and you have to teach them about diversity you have to teach them about how to actually love their neighbor you have to teach them okay what do you love more do you love money more or do you love caring about people more? Because one of this is the Christian way one of this is not. And so I feel like we operate within [the university's] mission, it's just that I feel like sometimes we're taking it seriously whereas [the university] as a whole just kind of says it and then moves in a different direction because [the university] is a business.

Similarly, Participant 5 said that BSA was "a vital part of . . . upholding the face of [the university]" and could help with the university's diversity efforts. He explained that if students did not feel connected to the university, they could attend BSA events which would help them feel like they were a part of something, which would in turn help them feel connected to the university. Participant 6 thought that her role was to help build and strengthen her organization because the organization, along with other ESOs, helped many underrepresented students stay at the university. By helping the organization "reach its fullest potential" she and other ESO leaders helped promote diversity on campus. Thus, ESOs play a role in helping students feel connected to the university.

A few participants believed they influenced diversity on campus by "making a big deal" out of things. Participant 2 and 6 said that by making a big deal of issues like the blackface video they forced the university to revise their outlook on diversity. By hosting the demonstration, one participant believed BSA leaders showed university administration that there were serious issues on campus that needed to be addressed. Participant 2 and 6 believed that the demonstration and other events spurred the university to implement the Diversity Task Force and begin asking how they could diversify the campus.

> I feel like when I was an officer of BSA . . . we made such a big deal about like not letting . . . like things that bothered us . . . we made sure like it was always a big deal to us because . . . we weren't just speaking for ourselves we were speaking for 300+ members and so we always made sure other people knew it was a big deal and then it became a big deal to them. And honestly I feel like stuff like that and of course other things on campus or other incidents or events or

programs on campus have led to administration putting in so much time and effort

for revising . . . their look on diversity and that's why we're having like those

conversations during Sundaes on Mondays about . . . how minority students feel

in the classroom, how first gen and international students feel and what

administration needs to do what professors need to do. What things will help us

feel more supported and things like that. I feel like that's because we made such a

big deal during the times that we did.

Many ESO leaders perceived their role as well as their ESOs role as vital aspects

of institutional diversity efforts. They also thought they played an important role as

mentors and change agents for racially and ethnically underrepresented students on

campus.

Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of the study through five major themes:

connectedness, disconnect, challenges to campus climate, unclear institutional diversity

efforts, and ESO leader's role in institutional diversity. Students had many positive

interactions with students and peers on campus, which fostered feelings of connectedness

and belonging. Being included and known by different individuals or departments on

campus and being part of their ESO helped students feel as though they were a part of the

campus community. Although participants felt connected to the university in some ways,

experiences with racism, "othering," ignorance or micro-aggressions, and lack of

representation often caused students to feel disconnected from the university. These

negative experiences influenced participants' view of the campus. Students sometimes

perceived the campus as unwelcoming and expressed distrust of the people associated

with the university. Participants felt that the university's traditions and faith-based nature sometimes negatively impacted diversity on campus although almost half of the participants viewed faith as a helpful factor rather than a hindrance to the university's diversity efforts.

Participants had complex perceptions of institutional diversity efforts. A third of the participants reported not knowing what the university was doing to foster diversity and inclusion on campus. The rest of the sample knew something was being done; they discussed the OMA or the Diversity Task Force. While some students seemed to view the university's efforts favorably ("they're trying") some were either unsure of the university's initiatives and therefore could not comment on their effectiveness, or thought that the university relied heavily on the OMA and ESOs to make the campus more diverse. Participants mentioned several factors including the cafeteria, structural or compositional diversity, campus events, curriculum, and chapel, as indicators of diversity or lack of diversity on campus. Finally, many participants had positive perceptions of their own role in institutional diversity efforts and viewed themselves as mentors and liaisons for other underrepresented students. Some participants viewed their role and their ESOs as helpful and vital to creating a multicultural and inclusive campus.

These findings are significant. In the next chapter, I discuss these findings in relation to the research questions and situate them within the theoretical framework and literature discussed earlier in this study. The study's limitations and implications are also discussed. Finally, suggestions for future research are provided.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The goal of this phenomenological study was to explore ethnic student

organization (ESO) leaders' perceptions of institutional diversity efforts and their

perceptions of their role in those efforts. This chapter discusses the findings of the study

within the context of the research questions and relevant literature discussed earlier in the

study. First, I discuss the findings through the study's research questions. Following that,

I discuss the participants' experiences through a discussion on campus climate. Next, a

discussion of the ways in which ESO leaders' experiences impact their perceptions of

institutional diversity efforts follows through the theoretical framework proposed earlier

in the study. Finally, I discuss the significance of ESOs and diversity at faith-based

institutions. The chapter ends with a discussion of the implications of the study,

limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

How Do ESO Leaders Perceive Institutional Diversity Efforts at a Faith-Based

PWI?

The goal of this study was to understand ESO leaders' perceptions of institutional

diversity efforts. The study found that ESO leaders held complex perceptions of diversity

and diversity efforts on campus. A third of the study participants said they did not know

what the university was doing to become more inclusive. Seven participants possessed

different levels of knowledge of institutional initiatives. Although one participant said she

had no knowledge of the university's diversity efforts, she was aware of the existence of

the Diversity Task Force and said that the OMA was doing a good job with promoting diversity on campus. At least six participants knew about the university's Diversity Task Force, although few could clearly articulate what the task force does. Some participants discussed the university's OMA and their ESOs when describing institutional diversity efforts. Participants thought the OMA was doing a good job of promoting diversity on campus. One participant described the OMA as a "lifeline." Overall, most participants were unsure of what the university was doing although more than half indicated that they knew the university was doing something, by saying "they're trying." Participants noticed more racially and ethnically underrepresented students and faculty on campus, different food options in the cafeteria, and an increase in cultural events on campus. They also mentioned interacting with the Diversity Task Force at OMA meetings. At least four participants said they thought institutional diversity efforts were going "great" while four other participants did not comment on the effectiveness of the university's diversity efforts. The participants did not delve too deeply in the effectiveness of the university's initiatives, some did not know what the university was doing and thus could not comment on the effectiveness. Those who said the university was not diverse mentioned the low number of diverse faculty and staff on campus and lack of representation of underrepresented people in their classes, curriculum, and social clubs. Similarly, participants mentioned the unavailability of diverse courses. One participant said that students had to "fight" to be in one Black/African American professors English courses.

Some participants thought the university's traditions hindered institutional diversity efforts. Participants said the choice and style of songs sung during chapel, Homecoming, and Sing Song, hindered diversity efforts on campus. One participant said

that if the university wanted to become more diverse, they simply had to review their traditions and how they allocated their resources. A few participants mentioned that while Sing Song received large sums of money, their organizations did not, which signaled to them that ESO events were seen as less important than the musical competition. This caused some students to think that diversity was not important to the university.

ESO leaders' perceptions of diversity on campus were influenced by their knowledge of the university's initiatives as well as their experiences on campus. As Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (1999), Smith (2009), and Perez (2013) found in their studies, ESO leader's experiences impacted their perceptions of the university. Instances of overt and covert racism in the classroom, on and off campus, and online, lead some participants to perceive the campus as isolating, hostile, and unwelcoming. Experiences with racism, stereotyping, exclusion, lack of representation, ignorance, microaggressions, and nonverbal cues caused participants to believe the campus was not diverse. These experiences are discussed further later in this chapter under challenging campus climate.

How Do ESO Leaders Perceive Their Role in Institutional Diversity Efforts at a

Faith-Based PWI?

There are a number of reasons why ESO leaders said they chose to be involved with their organizations – to be plugged in, to learn more about their own culture, to share their culture with the rest of the campus, and to create a sense of home, belonging, and community for other students. Although I did not ask each participant what role they believed they played in institutional diversity efforts, the participants I did ask perceived their role to be salient to diversity on campus. Participants described themselves as

mentors, bridges, role models, and liaisons. They spoke up for students when difficult or unjust situations occurred on campus and connected underrepresented students with university administrators. For instance, when racial slurs were posted on social media the president of the BSO met with university administrators, which prompted the university to undertake efforts to ban the social media application Yik Yak on campus. Additionally, after the meeting, the president of the university addressed the student body during a chapel meeting and told students that the behavior displayed online was unacceptable. Students often approached ESO leaders for guidance and support. Even when ESO leaders moved out of their roles, they were still seen as leaders on their campus. Two participants were approached by students who were "hurt" and "in tears" after racist incidents took place on campus even though they no longer served as ESO leaders at the time. Participants believed their role was to support and be a liaison for racially and ethnically underrepresented students. Participants said their role was to be "voices for the people."

A number of ESO leaders understood their role in institutional diversity efforts within the context of their ESO. This was interesting because it supported the findings of the pilot study I conducted as an undergraduate student. In my earlier study, I found that ESO leaders believed they served as advocates for racially/ethnically underrepresented students and that it was their job to build relationships with students, faculty, and staff across campus. Participants in this study also viewed their role the same way. Some participants believed that by serving and leading their ESOs they enhanced diversity and diversity efforts on campus. One participant believed that by making sure the ESO was effective in its work, her and other ESO leaders helped the university retain

underrepresented students. Several participants believed their role was to support the university's efforts and its mission. If, for instance, a Black student does not feel a sense of belonging on campus, by being part of the BSO she can feel connected to that community which would in turn help her feel connected to the university. Thus, it is important for ESO leaders to create a welcoming and supportive environment for racially/ethnically underrepresented students so that other students feel connected and a sense of belonging on campus, which can then impact retention as several scholars suggest (Caplan & Ford, 2014; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, & Yonai, 2014; O'Keeffe, 2013). One participant contended that the BSO carried out the mission of the university by preparing students to serve and lead in a diverse world.

ESO leaders believed they play a vital role on campus. They create awareness of problems on campus, build connections between students and faculty, staff, and university administrators, mentor and lead other students, and stimulate change through meeting with university administration and hosting demonstrations and protests on campus. Additionally, ESO leaders help educate the campus on different cultures.

The study findings revealed that ESO leaders hold complex perceptions of institutional diversity efforts. Several participants said the university is doing "great" and believe campus administrators are working towards creating an inclusive campus environment. Some ESO leaders believed the university is not doing enough to promote diversity and thought that the university relies on the Diversity Task Force, the OMA and ESOs to create diversity on campus. A few participants were encouraged by the progress they saw on campus but also thought the university could do more to promote a multicultural atmosphere. Study findings also revealed that ESO leaders perceive their

role as important to institutional diversity efforts. Many viewed themselves as mentors, spokespersons, and change agents.

Findings in the Context of Relevant Literature

In the following sections, I discuss the findings of the study through relevant literature. The first section discusses the challenges to the campus climate at the university. Students faced many challenges on campus, which impacted their sense of belonging and perceptions of the university. In the next section I discuss how student's experiences impacted their perceptions of institutional diversity and identification with the university and how the study's theoretical framework helps understanding of ESO leaders' perceptions. Following that, I discuss the significance of ESOs on predominantly White campuses. These organizations provide support for racially/ethnically underrepresented students and help with student integration and persistence. Finally, a discussion on diversity and the faith-based institution follows.

Challenges to Institutional Diversity Efforts

Many racially and ethnically underrepresented students found their campus to be unwelcoming and sometimes even hostile, which is consistent with several studies discussed in the study's literature review (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Flemming, 1984; Gonzales, 2002; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Hunn, 2014; Karkouti, 2016; Robertson, Bravo, & Chaney, 2016; Tatum, 1999). There were overt instances of racism and prejudice where racial slurs were posted on social media after Black/African American people spoke or prayed in chapel, fake parking tickets with racist insults and sexist language posted on some Black students' cars, a blackface video posted online by two White freshmen, and a ball of bread thrown at an Asian student while the words "hey

Asian you want some bread?" were shouted at him out of a moving vehicle. These incidents lead Participant 6 to say "there are hostile areas on campus." Participants also discussed the presence of confederate flags on campus and in the community and "Trump: Make American Great Again" stickers, which made two participants feel uncomfortable. One participant said the flags made her feel scared and unsafe, she said she wondered if she was going to get shot walking in the community. Additionally, students spoke about professors who made insensitive or offensive remarks or called on Black students to teach the class how to dance. One professor told a student that "the only thing he knew about Black people was Popeyes' fried chicken." This was consistent with Tatum's (1999) discussion on page 77-78 in *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* where she talks about the difficult environment many racially/ethnically underrepresented students encounter at PWIs. Other, more covert or microaggressive, incidents also impacted student's sense of belonging on campus. Two Black female participants said that other students had touched their hair, which made them feel vulnerable or "othered." As previously mentioned, while White/Caucasian students and faculty may not mean to offend African American students, these actions are still often perceived as hurtful and insensitive. A few participants said these microaggressions were stressful and tokenistic. Lack of representation in social clubs, faculty, and leadership positions, in the classroom and in the curriculum also added to feelings of exclusion. Some students said they felt pressure to speak up for their entire race or to be "the ideal Black person" because they were often the "only one" in class.

A few participants said they wished more White students attended their events so that they could discuss issues relating to race and ethnicity like the Black Lives Matter

movement together. Three participants said they felt annoyed when White students asked them if they could attend BSA events even though they weren't Black. They wanted all students to come to their events. Participants also wanted faculty, staff, and administrators to attend their events. When faculty and administrators came to ESO events, students felt valued, seen, and important. Thus, when faculty and administrators, including the university's president, chose to only attend ESO events after racist incidents occurred on campus, participants questioned the university's motives. Participant 2 wanted the university to allocate more resources to ESOs and their events to demonstrate that the university values diversity and multiculturalism.

Many students felt excluded from the university's traditions especially Sing Song and Homecoming. One participant literally said that the culture of the campus is "centered towards middle class Caucasian Americans." She referenced the music sung during the university's chapel meetings. Chapel was mentioned multiple times as a source of exclusion or isolation. Two participants in this study wanted the university to know that "diversity is a lifestyle and not an experience" meaning that diversity should permeate daily life on campus. The university's traditions, courses, leaders, etc. should demonstrate a commitment to multiculturalism. While the university continues to recruit more racially/ethnically underrepresented students, the culture of the university is slow to change. Higher education institutions, including faith-based ones, would benefit from taking a multidimensional approach to diversity and inclusion, realizing that according to these findings, adding more Black or Hispanic people does not make an institution diverse, the key is in creating a more inviting and welcoming campus climate for all.

Smith (2009) writes that it is important to study the campus climate because "it provides opportunities to reflect on the culture and values of a campus, how people are treated, and how they perceive the institution with respect to diversity" (p. 61). Hearing student's stories about their experiences on campus provides insight into the campus climate. These experiences can help explain the reasons why racially and ethnically underrepresented students perceive the campus climate less positively than their White peers as Worthington (2008), Rankin and Reason (2005) and Harper and Hurtado (2007) found in their studies. This can also explain why racially/ethnically underrepresented students at faith-based universities perceive the campus spiritual climate less positively than White students (Peredes-Collins, 2013). College campuses should be places where every student feels loved, supported, and a sense of belonging, yet Black, Hispanic, Asian, and other racially/ethnically underrepresented students often find this not to be the case. Understanding the challenges underrepresented students face on campus can help faith-based universities better understand their students and equip them as they work to create truly diverse and inclusive environments. Universities should take more intentional steps to include underrepresented students in their curriculum and traditions, provide necessary training for staff and faculty members who were often sources of insensitive remarks or behaviors, and continue to seek ways to hire and retain more diverse faculty and students. Colleges should realize that perceptions of campus climate are affected by structural or compositional diversity and students' perceptions of inclusion or exclusion, cross-racial interactions, and representation (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, as cited in Paredes-Collins, 2013).

It is important to add that many students had positive experiences on campus as well. Participants said people on campus were "nice" and spoke fondly of the relationships they had with students, faculty, staff, and university administration. These relationships blessed the lives of several participants who found mentors who provided support and helped them grow and persist in college. One participant mentioned that although he contemplated leaving his freshman year, he stayed because the liked the professors and students on campus.

The Impact of Student's Experiences on Perceptions of Institutional Diversity

Similar to Caplan and Ford (2014), who found that microaggressions caused those who experienced them sadness, anxiety, and other physical and psychological outcomes, participants in this study reported sadness, frustration, self-doubt, shock, distrust, anxiety or fear, discomfort, withdrawal, and drains on their energy. This was also consistent with Smith, Mustaffa, Jones, Curry and Allen (2016) and Hotchkins and Dancy's (2015) research which showed that racially/ethnically underrepresented students and student leaders experience racial battle fatigue from their encounters on predominantly White campuses. Although participants had positive experiences with faculty, staff, and other students on campus, they had many negative experiences as well. Participants used the words "depressed," "hurt," "angry," "frustrated," "not seen," "shocked," "battle," "uncomfortable and annoyed," "awkward," "fed up," "sick," and "physically and emotionally and mentally drained" when describing their responses to racist incidents or the unwelcoming campus climate. Participants sometimes thought that the university or people associated with the university, such as alumni, did not really want to create an inclusive campus. A few participants in the study were suspicious or distrustful of people

on campus (for instance, Participant 6 suggested that there were hostile areas on campus one needed to look out for) or of the university's commitment to diversity. The university's efforts were sometimes seen as disingenuous, as if they were implemented to save the university's money or reputation. All of these responses are similar to the racial battle fatigue responses Smith (2004) described. One of the most heartbreaking stories to came out of this study was Participant 5 who not only questioned his own ability to play baseball (even though he was on the varsity team since high school and had been recruited to play for the university) but eventually gave up his dream of playing baseball because he felt "no seen" by the coach. He said the coach often overlooked him and his other Black teammates. For instance, he said that the Black players were called on last to pitch at practices. Although he knew he was a good athlete, he chose not to take action against the coach because he was "so physically and emotionally and mentally drained." It was almost unreal how closely these participant's experiences resembled those described by Tatum (1999), Smith (2004), Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) Gonzales (2002), Fries-Britt and Turner (2001), Robertson, Bravo and Chaney (2016), Hunn (2014) and other researchers. These responses impacted ESO leaders' perceptions and identification with the university.

Findings indicate a slight divergence from the theoretical framework proposed in the study. Participant's negative racial experiences, which caused "hurt," "frustration," "anger," etc., informed students' viewpoints and their perceptions of the university which in turn impacted their sense of belonging. In other words, racial battle fatigue impacted participant's standpoint and their perceptions of institutional diversity efforts, which in turn affected their identification with the institution. The study's theoretical framework

hypothesized that racial battle fatigue would influence ESO leaders' standpoint and organizational identification, which would then impact their perceptions of institutional diversity efforts and perceptions of their role in those efforts. When students were hurt or targeted they perceived the campus as unwelcoming which negatively impacted their sense of belonging. This supports the findings of several studies (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Myers, et al., 2016) which suggest that experiences with racism or discrimination cause racially and ethnically underrepresented students to hold less favorable perceptions of their university. The findings were consistent with Shin, Hur and Kang's (2016) study, which found that employees' positive perceptions of their organization impacted their identification with the organization.

The study provides valuable insight into racially and ethnically underrepresented students experiences and perceptions of diversity at PWIs. Although some participants felt less identification and commitment to their university because of racist or prejudicial incidents on campus, which supports Cabrera, Nora, Terezini, Pascarella, and Hagedorn's (1999) findings, many students still loved their university and wanted to continue to lead and serve on campus. ESO leaders described their overall experiences on campus as "a roller-coaster," "an internship," "disheartening," "struggle but empowering," "challenging but overall good," "entertaining, depressing, disappointing," and "worth it." Although they experienced difficulties on campus, many still appreciated and enjoyed being leaders and still felt a duty to improve the campus for their peers and future generations. Just as Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) found, when student leaders had negative racial experiences on campus they remained resilient and were motivated to continue to better the campus. Colleges would benefit from working to improve the

"chilly climate" prevalent on many campuses realizing that students' organizational identification has the potential to improve student's commitment and persistence, graduation and retention rates, alumni donations, performance, and satisfaction with the college experience, according to several studies (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014; Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Myers, Davis, Schreuder, & Seibold, 2016; O'Keeffe, 2013; Shin, Hur, & Kang, 2016). Furthermore, colleges should realize that diversity has a positive impact on society at large.

Ethnic Student Organizations as Vital Elements for Institutional Diversity

Participants in the study said that ESOs provide a sense of belonging and refuge for racially/ethnically underrepresented students and a place where they don't have to try to fit in. Participant 3 said the ESO was her sorority. This was especially significant because many participants, including Participant 3, perceived social clubs or sororities as unwelcoming and some chose not to participate in them for that reason. Participants described these counter-spaces as "community," "home," "home away from home," "safe haven," "family," and "lifeline." Students said these organizations provided a "sense of belonging." As previously stated, sense of belonging is crucial for retention, persistence, and graduation rates and even for satisfaction with the college experience (Hausman et al., 2009; O'Keefe, 2013). When students feel identification or "oneness" with the university they are more inclined to contribute to the success of the school (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Myers, et al., 2016; Zagenczyk et al., 2011). ESOs provided ESO leaders an opportunity to be involved on campus and to positively influence other students, which can also impact persistence and graduation rates (Tinto, 1993). These organizations were also salient for the ESO leaders own growth. One participant, for

instance, said that being a leader helped her gain better communication skills. Two participants said that their involvement with their ESO and with the OMA was helping them develop skills that they can use in the future. Participants also discussed a relationship between involvement in ESOs and racial identity development. Almost all of the participants came to understand their cultures better as a result of their involvement in these organizations. One participant said the ESO helped her "embrace her culture" while another said it allowed her to feel like she was not alone. Others found that these organizations enabled them to serve and grow as activists and expose injustice and organize meetings and demonstrations after racist incidents occurred. Involvement in ESOs also allowed participants to help other students grow spiritually. These findings support several studies cited earlier in this study including Museus (2008), Harper and Quaye (2007), Tatum (1999), Doan (2015), Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) and Inkelas (2004) who asserted that ESOs are vital for racially and ethnically underrepresented students' sense of belonging, racial identity development and expression, relationship building, socialization and integration, and persistence. It is possible that ESOs might deter some students from socializing with students who are not in ESOs. Still, these organizations seemed to have a positive impact on participants in this study. It would be interesting to see whether positive outcomes from involvement in these organizations continue even after students graduate, one study suggest that this could be the case (Bowman, Park, & Denson, 2015). Consistent with Museus' (2008) research, participants' responses suggest that ESOs "served as sources for cultural familiarity, vehicles for cultural expression and advocacy, and venues for cultural validation" (p. 576).

Because of the role these organizations play, they have the potential, as Kuk and Banning (2010) suggested, "to serve as significant agents to advance the multicultural and diversity goals of college campuses" (p. 355). First, ESOs create a sense of home or belonging for racially and ethnically underrepresented students, which is vital for underrepresented students on predominantly White campuses (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Second, these organizations involve ESO leaders on campus which helps them feel a sense of belonging and empowers them persist and graduate as Tinto's (1993) involvement model and Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, and Woods' (2009) research suggests. Third, ESOs enhance a PWIs' informal interactional diversity efforts (Gurin et al., 2002). ESOs provide opportunities for cross-racial interactions, which are essential for meaningful diversity to occur. Events hosted by the BSO and the HSO bring people together and provide an opportunity for people to learn about different cultures in a relaxed environment. Finally, ESOs create awareness about issues that affect racially or ethnically underrepresented students. In this study, ESO leaders and members engaged campus administrators and students through events and demonstrations after racist incidents. By participating in this study, ESO leaders also helped provide insight on underrepresented students' experiences at PWIs.

ESOs can contribute significantly to a university's multicultural goals because they already have what Kuk and Banning (2010) described as contributions, additive and social action relationships with their institution. They support and contribute to many colleges' diversity and multicultural goals in various ways. By working with these organizations, colleges can significantly enhance their goals and create campuses that are truly diverse and inclusive.

Diversity and the Faith-Based Institution

"I love this school and came knowing that it has flaws, but I didn't think that this would

be their flaw, because it's a Christian school" (Participant 7).

Faith played an important role in the lives of ESO leaders at the faith-based

institution examined in this study. For some participants, faith was holistic (meaning that

it had spiritual, cognitive, and cultural implications) and transformative, shaping their

perceptions of themselves, their work as leaders, and the university. Faith helped some

participants view racism or discrimination as something "of the flesh" and gave them to a

deeper calling to love others and to correct those who hurt them, including their

professors. One participant even talked about racism as a "heart issue" and believed that

fighting against racism and prejudice helped those in the dominant group. Because the

two greatest commandments are to love God and to love others she said she felt an

obligation to teach her White peers how to better love God and others. A few students

chose to attend the university because of its religious affiliation even though they knew

that they might not feel welcome or accepted. Four participants believed the faith-based

nature of the university helped institutional diversity efforts. Faith gave their ESOs a

deeper sense of purpose, a stronger connection to the university, and encouraged people

to care about diversity. Conversely, four participants believed faith hindered diversity and

diversity efforts on campus. One participant thought the Christian university's strict rules

(e.g. curfew in the dorms) could deter some students from attending the university. Two

participants suggested that the university used faith as an excuse to not have

conversations about diversity or change practices that alienate some students. Traditions

associated with the university's faith heritage such as the style of worship in chapel

caused some students to feel excluded. Christian colleges should realize that their campuses can cause "religious culture shock" (Participant 1) for some racially/ethnically underrepresented students who may not be familiar with the traditions of the university.

As previously mentioned, Paredes-Collins (2013) found that racially/ethnically underrepresented students often hold less positive views of spirituality on their campuses. This was true for some students in this study who said the school had a "spirit of religion" and that it did not teach students how to love or truly follow Christ. Two participants felt the university used faith or religion as an excuse not to confront racism; Participant 2 called it "the Jesus excuse." While participant's responses may not affect the way the university operates, for instance some traditions associated with the university's faith heritage will likely not change, other factors might be more amenable to change. The university should not omit chapel meetings because they are integral to its identity, however it could modify the types of songs sung or the style of singing so that chapel is more inclusive of people from diverse backgrounds.

Christian colleges need to evaluate the culture and climate on their campuses if they desire to help their students learn and grow and be prepared to serve and lead in a globalized world. One U.S. Census study projects that by 2060 minorities will comprise 57 percent of the United States population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012,). The world is becoming increasingly smaller. Thus, by not preparing their students to live and learn in diverse environments, Christian colleges are doing their students, themselves and the message of the Cross, a disservice. When racist incidents occurred on campus, some participants in the study questioned the university's Christian identity. College should go beyond structural efforts and evaluate their faculty and staff who often created difficulties

for students in this study. As one student lamented, it does not help if the administration wants diversity but the faculty, staff, and students do not. Students attend chapel together almost daily but some leave only to find that their Christian peers posted racist and offensive messages posted about them on social media. At the university examined in this study there was a racist incident almost every year over the past three years. All of the incidents of racism and prejudice happening on Christian campuses (see for instance "White supremacy fliers found on Texas Christian University's campus," 2017) indicate that Christian universities need to do a better job of educating their students about different cultures and about God.

Christian colleges cannot keep recruiting underrepresented students only to have them leave before completing their education. Paredes-Collins (2009) states that most schools in the CCCU (the university in this study is a member of the organization) do not view diversity as important enough to dedicate resources, policies, and practices to it. This needs to change. Diversity and inclusion ought to permeate Christian campuses. For many White students, college might be the first and only time they interact with such a diverse group of people. Universities should take advantage of this and help mold these students into people who can serve and lead in any environment, not just in conservative White/Caucasian contexts. These institutions need to do the difficult work of transforming their student's thoughts, behaviors, and attitudes, which is the point of higher education. D'Souza (1991) aptly wrote that other than the military, only American campuses bring such diverse groups of people into close contact "thus the American campus becomes a very useful test case for institutional and social policies that draw racial groups together – or pry them apart; that promote integration – or separatism; that

foster ethnic collegiality and harmony- or isolation and bitterness" (p. 18). Because their work has implications for the kingdom of God, administrators at faith-based PWIs have an important task on their hands.

Limitations to the Study

One of the limitations of the study is that participation was voluntary. It is likely that those who chose to participate in the study were already interested in the topic thus their views might not be representative of a larger sample. Another limitation of the study was the interview protocol used in the study. Some of the interview questions were not as focused as they needed to be. Narrowing the questions to ten or twelve questions focusing on diversity and institutional efforts could help focus the study and yield responses that directly pertain to the study. The study yielded a lot of data, some of which was not necessarily significant to understand diversity efforts and ESO leaders' role in diversity efforts at a faith-based PWI. Finally, only two student organizations were represented in the study and six out of nine participants were Black/African American. It would be beneficial to include different racial and ethnic groups, particularly biracial, Asian American and Pacific Islander and Native American or Alaska Native groups, to gain more understanding of underrepresented students' experiences at PWIs.

Implications

Implications for the Current Setting

Colleges cannot achieve true, meaningful diversity without the help of students, staff, and faculty. The university's strategic plan indicates that the university has, as one of it's goals, to foster a "relational university" and intends to achieve this through several objectives. One of the university's objectives was to create a Diversity Task Force. Five

out of nine participants in the study knew about the Diversity Task Force. This is a good sign. There is, however, much room for growth because most students were uncertain about the purpose and mission of the task force. It would behoove the university to clearly articulate the task forces' goals and objectives to student leaders. Elliott et al. (2016) contend that "the statement of institutional diversity and inclusion must be clearly defined for students, faculty and staff to conceptualize and practice" (p. 1). ESO leaders cannot support what they do not know or understand.

The university should continue to recruit more racially/ethnically underrepresented students, faculty and staff, students shouldn't have to "fight" to get into one Black professors class (as one participant stated). However, the university should focus on improving the campus culture and climate now. For instance, a significant number of students in the study talked about an annual musical competition called "Sing Song" which made them feel excluded from the university. A simple tweaking of the style of singing or judging could create a more welcoming environment for many racially or ethnically underrepresented students. A tradition that excludes potentially 20-25 percent of the student population surely warrants some modification. Another area of improvement involves faculty and staff members. It troubled me to hear participants say that their instructors said things such as "if they don't like it here they can leave" or "the only thing I know about Black people is Popeyes fried chicken." It may be tempting to dismiss these as either exaggerated or isolated incidents but not only would that contradict an abundant amount of research but it could have deleterious effects on the university's diversity mission. Whether or not professors meant what they said or were

simply joking, their words impact how students perceive these professors, the university, and possibly the Christian faith.

So, what can the university do? First, White/Caucasian faculty and staff members need to talk about race and diversity more (see Gene Demby's August 18, 2016 NPR article "On social media, as in life, White people are way less likely to talk about race" which provides some interesting findings about the differences in race conversations between White and Black Americans). Staff, faculty, and administrators cannot fix what they do not acknowledge and discuss. Second, the university needs to provide resources and training, including cultural competency training, for their faculty and staff. Reading books such as Tatum's (1999) *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria? And other conversations about race* can be helpful for professors to begin understanding their students and their own racial identity development as it has implications for student engagement in the classroom. The university should invest in cultural competency training and provide other resources for all their departments and staff and find ways to encourage and incentivize them to utilize the resources. Participant 8 was very passionate about this type of training and spoke about the importance of it repeatedly

> The task force . . . needs to influence everyone on campus. It may be their direct goal to accomplish diversity and inclusion but I feel like they need to do more than just do stuff for the students – the faculty, and the staff, and the administration needs training too. If you focus on the students . . . that becomes an issue because then when the students become good the faculty doesn't become good and then its not even its not balanced we're not a community we're divided. . . . [The Diversity Task Force has] . . . to look at everything . . . everyone is a part

of it – not just Res[idence]Life, not just the students, not just OMA, everyone is a

part. So I think that one thing that they need to do is . . . to look at ways that

everyone can be part of the Diversity Task Force vision and objectives and

initiatives, they need to find ways that everyone can fit in there not just the way

that students or not just the way that [the university] can provide for incoming

students but what can they be doing now to provide now for faculty and staff

members. And that's why a lot of workplaces do like cultural competency training

conflict management training, [the university] needs all that as well.

Third, faculty, staff, and administrators need to form more intentional

relationships with racially and ethnically underrepresented students. Students in this

study said they felt connected and valued when their professors took the time to know

them and attend their events. One participant said that having staff or faculty members

and their spouses as advisors for their organizations "makes diversity on campus more of

a priority" and makes it feel that "what we're doing matters." Relationships can help

students and faculty understand each other better. Faculty members also need to

incorporate more diverse perspectives in their classrooms otherwise students feel "like

their opinions are not valid" or they check out during class like one participant in this

study did. Professors could start by using textbooks or course materials by Hispanic,

Black, Asian, and Native American authors. It would also help if professors incorporate

diverse student's experiences into their lessons rather than ignoring them. Professors

should also avoid calling on students to "give the Black or Asian perspective" in class.

While many students might not care, this action can further alienate students who already

feel vulnerable in classes where they might be only one of a few

Latino/Black/Asian/Native American students. If students don't volunteer their stories,

they might not want to share them. If they do want to share, having a relationship with

the professor might help students be more forthcoming with their experiences. Finally,

according to Perez (2013), who conducted one of the few recent studies on diversity at

Christian colleges, the university needs to view efforts to become more diverse as a

biblical mandate. He writes that "schools should start their efforts by analyzing their

mission to evaluate whether they are truly committed to trying to make progress, and

officially stating the theology behind these efforts" otherwise, he argues, the school

should abandon its efforts. The university's efforts should be genuine and Christ centered

and students shouldn't feel used by the university or be distrustful and wary of their

university's intentions.

Implications for Higher Education

Colleges need to help racially/ethnically underrepresented students feel identified

with the culture of the campus. Finding ways to integrate ESOs into the mission and

culture of the university is vital to creating a truly diverse and inclusive campus.

Bowman, Park and Denson (2014) suggest that colleges "consider continuing and

broadening support for [ESOs] via funding and resources such as office space, advising,

and faculty mentors" and promote the events ESOs host as this may positively impact the

campus climate (p. 142). In this study, one participant said that when the university

promoted events hosted by the BSO they had higher student, faculty, and staff attendance

and they felt supported by the university. Supporting and partnering with these

organizations can be extremely beneficial. Students learn from each other, and if ESO

leaders are aware of the university's goals and objectives, they can relay or reinforce

those to the rest of the student body. Not only are ESOs and ESO leaders' venues for student's learning and development, they are sometimes the only connection underrepresented students have to their university. The findings of this study suggest that ESO leaders perceive their role as salient to the university and to promoting diversity on campus. Working with ESO leaders can significantly improve universities' diversity efforts as Kuk and Banning (2010) posit. Asquith et al. (2011) suggest that universities use ethnic/racial minorities "in an official or unofficial capacity" to promote the university diversity education (p. 220).

Institutions might also consider making their diversity goals simpler to access and understand because students are often busy and may not take the time to read elaborate pamphlets and documents distributed by the university or attend or focus in long meetings. Students shouldn't learn about the university's diversity efforts after racist incidents occur. They should know who on their campus is responsible for handling racism and sexism unlike in Caplan and Ford's (2014) study. Doan (2015) contends that diversity and inclusion in higher education is the responsibility of each individual and organization on campus. Some participants in this study felt that the university relied on ESOs and the OMA to promote diversity on campus. These organizations cannot be responsible for improving the culture and climate of an entire university. All colleges should work with their ESOs and other organizations to promote an inclusive community. In this study, students felt alienated by university traditions, the curriculum, worship during chapel, their professors, social clubs (fraternities and sororities), and the university culture. These cannot be fixed by ESOs. Tatum (1999) submits that for students not to feel invisible or marginalized they "need to see themselves reflected in the environment

around them – in the curriculum, in the faculty and staff, and in the faces of their classmates" (p. 215). Thus, colleges need to evaluate their traditions, student organizations, curriculum, course, residence life policies and practices, etc. as they work to promote diversity.

Finally, universities should remember that social media contributes to student's perceptions of a university and that what happens online has implications for their universities. When a student posts a blackface video, racially/ethnically underrepresented students look to the university for guidance and action. This is why universities have to focus on transforming their student's attitudes, beliefs, and values. Offering and/or requiring core courses that discuss race and inequality could positively impact many students' education and development.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study explored at the experiences of nine ESO leaders at a predominantly White, Christian university. Future research should examine the perceptions of ESO leaders at more than one Christian college and at larger public universities. Expanding the study to more campuses with larger student bodies could provide different perspectives. Future research should also explore how institutions perceive student organizations and how they could more effectively partner with them to create an environment that is welcoming to all students. The following study questions should be studied: What are best practices for training faculty and staff on diversity and inclusion on college campuses? What have universities done or what could they do to make their traditions more inclusive for all students?

Conclusion

This study sought to answer two questions: (1) How do student leaders of ethnic student organizations perceive institutional diversity efforts at a predominantly White, faith-based university? (2) How do student leaders of ethnic student organizations perceive their role in institutional diversity efforts at a predominantly White, faith-based university? Findings reveal that ESO leaders hold complex perceptions of institutional diversity efforts. Some participants believed the university was trying to create a more inclusive community and expressed optimism about what the university was attempting to accomplish. Others doubted institutional commitment to diversity and thought the university relied heavily on the OMA and the Diversity Task Force to create an inclusive campus. The study also found that student held varying levels of knowledge of what the university was doing to foster diversity. While six students were aware that the university had a Diversity Task Force, very few could clearly articulate its mission and purpose. Furthermore, at least four students could not comment on the effectiveness of the institutions diversity efforts either because they did not know what the university was doing or because they had an idea but were uncertain of institutional diversity efforts. In response to the second question, ESO leaders said they believed their role was crucial for diversity efforts on campus. ESO leaders believed their role was to be spokespersons for racially and ethnically underrepresented students on campus. Additionally, ESO leaders served as mentors or examples for underrepresented students and as "bridges" between students and university administration, faculty and staff, and other departments or organizations on campus.

The idea for this study stemmed from the experiences I had as a student leader of an ESO and from Kuk and Banning's (2010) assertion that colleges overlook campus student organizations in their diversity efforts. As an ESO leader, I questioned what role, if any, we played in the institutions diversity efforts. I wondered why we were not a more integral part of the university's goals considering that we worked hard to create a diverse and inclusive the campus. Organizations spend hundreds of dollars to learn how to create diversity but often neglect the resources right under their noses. As one participant said "its simple, like why don't you just go to the diverse students? . . . We can have a conversation about this and we can do this together and get further." This study submits that ESO leaders already play a significant role in diversity efforts at faith-based PWIs but can do even more if colleges partner with and support them. ESOs can advance the diversity mission of their university. As outsiders-within, ESO leaders are the "ideal knowers" on predominantly White campuses. They are uniquely positioned to assess the "temperature" of their campus from various angles – from their own perspective as underrepresented students, from the members of their ESOs, and from the university staff, faculty and administration's perspective. As a result of their unique standpoint, ESO leaders can provide valuable insight for colleges looking to promote a diverse atmosphere.

The faith-based institution faces a unique challenge in terms of diversity because the university's actions have implications not only for the university but also for the world's perceptions of the Christian faith. Colleges could benefit greatly from working with ESO leaders to enhance multiculturalism on campus and build a more inclusive society.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

12/14/2016

Kholofelo Theledi
Department of Communication
ACU Box 28156
Abilene Christian University

Dear Ms. Theledi

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled **A Phenomenological Study of Ethnic Student Organization Leaders and Institutional Diversity Efforts**

was approved by expedited review (46.110(b)(1) category 7) on 12/14/2016 for a period of **one year** (IRB # 16-110). The expiration date for this study is 12/14/2017 . If you intend to continue the study beyond this date, please submit the Continuing Review Form at least 30 days, but no more than 45 days, prior to the expiration date. Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Request Form within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make **any** changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Study Amendment Request Form.

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Our Promise: ACU is a vibrant, innovative, Christ-centered community that engages students in authentic spiritual and intellectual growth, equipping them to make a real difference in the world.

139

APPENDIX B

Participant Recruitment Letter

Hello, my name is Kholo Theledi. I am a graduate student at ACU in the department of Communication and Sociology. I would love to talk to you about your experience of being a student leader on campus. Specifically, I am interested in learning what it is like to be a leader of a multicultural student organization.

I'd like to interview you for 45-60 minutes and ask you questions about diversity efforts at ACU. Participation is voluntary and there is no compensation for participating in the study.

If you would like to participate in the research I would greatly appreciate your help. Please respond to this email with a time that I could meet with you.

My research is overseen by Dr. Jonathan Camp (jonathan.camp@acu.edu) in the Department of Communication and sociology.

Informed Consent

Title of Study: A Phenomenological Study of Ethnic Student Organization Leaders and Institutional Diversity Efforts

You may be eligible to take part in a research study. This form provides important information about that study, including the risks and benefits to you, the potential participant. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions that you may have regarding the procedures, your involvement, and any risks or benefits you may experience. You may also wish to discuss your participation with other people, such as your family doctor or a family member.

Also, please note that your participation is entirely voluntary. You may decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
Please contact the Principal Investigator if you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or if at any time you wish to withdraw. This contact information may be found at the end of this form.

Purpose and Procedures

Purpose of the Research— The study is part of my Master's thesis and seeks to explore the experiences of student leaders on campus. Specifically, the study explores what it is like to be a leader of an ethnic or multicultural student organization on campus and how student leaders perceive the university's diversity efforts.
Expected Duration of participation-- If selected for participation, you will be asked to attend 1 visit with the study staff. Each visit is expected to take 45 - 60 minutes.
Description of the procedures-- Once you consent to participation in the study, you will be asked to participate in the following procedures:

      Screening— You will initially be screened to determine your eligibility for participating in the study. This screening will involve determining if you are over 18 years of age and serve as a student leader of a multicultural or ethnic student organization on campus.
      Study Procedures— Your involvement in the study consists of a 45 - 60 minute interview where I'll ask you a few open-ended questions to better understand

what it is like to be a student leader on campus. Additionally, the researcher may follow up with you to ask for feedback on conclusions reached during the analysis of the study.

Risks and Discomforts

There are minimal risks to taking part in this research study. Below is a list of the foreseeable risks, including the seriousness of those risks and how likely they are to occur:

Because we will discus issues of race and ethnicity you may experience feelings of anger, discomfort, or frustration. Although it is not likely that these feelings will occur or be significant, please know that you have the right to stop the interview at any point with no penalty.

The researchers have taken steps to minimize the risks associated with this study. However, if you experience any problems, you may contact [Kholo Theledi at kmt11c@acu.edu or Dr. Jonathan Camp at jwc03b@acu.edu. Additionally, you may contact the university medical and counseling clinic at counseling@acu.edu or 325-674-2626

The researchers and ACU do not have any plan to pay for any injuries or problems you may experience as a result of your participation in this research.

Potential Benefits

There are potential benefits to participating in this study. Such benefits may include contributing to the understanding diversity on college campuses. The researchers cannot guarantee that you will experience any personal benefits from participating in this study. However, the researchers hope that the information learned from this study will help others in similar situations in the future.

Provisions for Confidentiality

Information collected about you will be handled in a confidential manner in accordance with the law. Some identifiable data may have to be shared with individuals outside of the study team, such as members of the ACU Institutional Review Board. Aside from these required disclosures, your confidentiality will be protected by not including any identifiable characteristics into the research or discussions about the research. Only general demographic information including age, race and ethnicity, gender and nationality will be requested. Additionally, data will be coded using a university provided computer, which is password protected and remains locked on university premises.

Contacts

You may ask any questions that you have at this time. However, if you have additional questions, concerns, or complaints in the future, you may contact the Principal Investigator of this study. The Principal Investigator is Kholo Theledi, graduate student and may be contacted at kmt11c@acu.edu and/or ACU box 28156. If you are unable to reach the Principal Investigator or wish to speak to someone other than the Principal Investigator, you may contact Jonathan Camp, DMin, PhD, at jwc03b@acu.edu.

If you have concerns about this study or general questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact ACU's Chair of the Institutional Review Board and Director of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Megan Roth, Ph.D. Dr. Roth may be reached at

(325) 674-2885
megan.roth@acu.edu
320 Hardin Administration Bldg, ACU Box 29103
Abilene, TX 79699

Consent Signature Section

Please sign this form if you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. Sign only after you have read all of the information provided and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. You should receive a copy of this signed consent form. You do not waive any legal rights by signing this form.

_____   _____   _____
Printed Name of Participant   Signature of Participant   Date

Kholofelo Theledi

_____   _____   _____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining   Signature of Person Obtaining   Date
Consent   Consent

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol: A Phenomenological Study of Ethnic Student Organization Leaders Perceptions of Institutional Diversity Efforts

Interview Time:

Place:

What I'm going to say at the beginning:

Thanks for agreeing to participate in research interview. I'm going to ask several questions that relate to you being a student leader at ACU. Do you have any questions before we begin?

May I have your permission to record this interview?

[Begin recording]

1. What organization are you with?

2. How long have you been with that organization?

3. What is the purpose of your organization?

4. Why did you decide to be involved with the organization?

5. How did you get into your position?

6. How do you understand your role with your organization? Do you feel like you're having an impact as a leader?

7. What is it like to be a leader of (name of your organization)?

8. What are you excited about in terms of your organization?

9. What are some of the challenges with your organization?

10. Tell me a story or about a time when you, as a Black/Latina/o/Biracial student or student leader, felt most connected to the university?

11. Tell me about a story when you, as a Black/Latina/o/Biracial student, felt disconnected to the university?

11. Have you heard of any times or stories when other Black/Hispanic/Asian students have felt connected or disconnected to/from the university?

12. ACU is, of course, a religiously affiliated university, do you think the religious aspect helps or hinders diversity efforts at ACU?

13. How does the religious aspect of the university influence your organization?

     a. Does it help/hinder the organizations mission/purpose/activities?

     b. Does it help the organization be more connected/disconnected to the university?

14. Do you feel like you personally are able to grow spiritually/religiously at this university?

15. Can you describe examples of the impact of your organization on campus?

16. In your opinion, is ACU diverse?

17. What things indicate to you that ACU is or is not diverse?

     What do you think is the reason for the availability/lack of diversity on campus?

18. What do you know about the university's diversity initiatives?

19. What do you think about their effectiveness?
     a. Do you think these efforts are working or not?
     b. If so, how do you think the efforts are working?

20. What is it that you would like the administration, faculty, others to know?

21. Is there anything else that you would like to say relating to what we've discussed today?

[End recording]

Thank you for participating in this interview, have a great day!