

STORMY OR SUNNY?: EXPLORING INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS THAT  
INFLUENCE CAMPUS RACIAL CLIMATE

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Curry School of Education and Human Development and the School  
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Doctor of Philosophy

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by

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APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation, (“Stormy or Sunny?: Exploring Institutional Factors that Influence Campus Racial Climate”), has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Curry School of Education and Human Development and the School of Nursing in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Noah and Jude. May this dissertation contribute to creating more equitable, positive, and supportive educational experiences for all Black children.

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## **LINKING DOCUMENT**

Over 60 years after most predominantly or historically White postsecondary institutions (PWI or HWI) began admitting students of color, many still struggle to create positive racial climate. Racial climate is often equated with increasing the numbers of students and faculty of color (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005), but it is a much broader concept that encompasses “community members’ attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations around issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity” (Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008, p. 205). Racial climate shapes campus experiences and outcomes. For students, racial climate influences adjustment, institutional attachment, persistence and degree completion (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Among faculty, racial climate is linked to satisfaction and retention (Jayakumar, Howard, Allen, & Han, 2009; Turner, Myers, & Creswell, 1999). It is well established that students and faculty of color perceive racial climate more negatively than their White counterparts (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Victorino, Nylund-Gibson, & Conley, 2013). Thus, racial climate has been identified as an important factor in the persistent underrepresentation of certain communities of color in postsecondary institutions (Fries-Britt, Rowan-Kenyon, Perna, Milem, & Howard, 2011; Griffin, Muñiz, & Espinosa, 2012).

Although HWIs have long struggled with racial climate, it has received increased national attention in the last few years because of high-profile racial incidents and student protests. In the fall of 2015, colleges and universities experienced an upsurge in student

activism, with students protesting across the nation and organizing to issue formal demands to approximately 75 colleges and universities to “end to systemic and structural racism on campus” (The Demands, n.d.). An analysis of these demands showed that across institutions, the most common demand was policy change, with 91% of student groups calling for reviews and revisions of institutional policies and practices affecting climate and diversity (Chessman & Wayt, 2016). Students also demanded a range of other changes, including senior leadership support and advocacy, more resources for marginalized students, increases in diversity, diversity/cultural competency training, and curricular changes (Chessman & Wayt, 2016). As the demands illustrate, colleges and universities must undergo significant institutional transformation to create welcoming environments for all students.

Driven in part by student demands, campus leaders are also interested in improving racial climate. A 2016 survey of college and university presidents showed that more than half of four-year institution presidents described racial climate as a higher priority than it was just three years before (Espinosa, Chessman, & Wayt, 2016). Presidents also reported taking various actions to address student concerns about racial diversity. The most common actions were initiatives to increase diversity followed by allocating resources to racial diversity initiatives, minority support services, and diversity/cultural competency training (Espinosa et al., 2016). Despite these institutional initiatives, racist incidents continue to occur regularly on campuses across the nation (Campus Racial Incidents, n.d.). Moreover, colleges and universities may struggle to manage the tensions between campus inclusion and free expression. In a 2018 survey of

college and university presidents, almost all reported that both diversity and inclusion and free expression were very important, yet 87% believed the concepts were odds with each other on campuses nationwide (Espinosa, Crandall, & Wilkinson, 2018).

Creating a positive campus racial climate continues to be one of most pressing challenges facing many colleges and universities. Because increasing numerical diversity does not alone improve climate (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Milem et al., 2005), campus leaders, policymakers, and researchers must consider other aspects of racial climate. Moreover, as college and universities undertake a range of efforts to improve climate, it is important to explore how institutional policies and practices drive and shape racial climate.

### **Unifying Theoretical Framework**

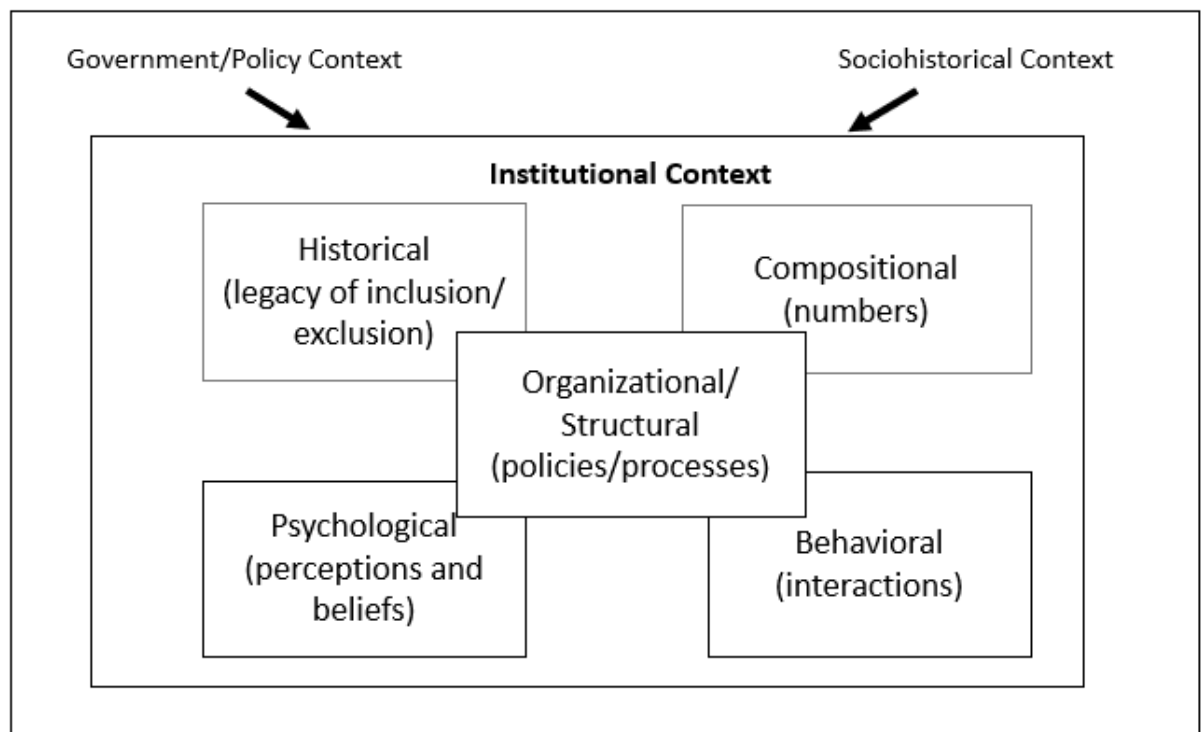
The three manuscripts that make up this dissertation examine various aspects of racial climate, with a particular focus on institutional factors. The campus racial climate (CRC) framework, developed by Hurtado and colleagues (1998, 1999) and modified by Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005), unifies and connects the three papers (Figure 1).

The CRC model views racial climate as a multidimensional construct shaped by the interactions of forces external and internal to colleges and universities. *Governmental policy* and *sociohistorical context* are acknowledged as two external forces influencing the institutional context for diversity. This dissertation acknowledges the role of external factors, but primarily focuses on the five interconnected factors internal to an institution.

Within an institution, the CRC framework identifies three institutional-level and two individual-level dimensions that are in dynamic relationship with each other. The

institutional-level dimensions include the institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion of racial groups (*historical*), the numerical representation of students, faculty, and staff from different groups (*compositional*), and the institutional structures and processes that embed group-based privilege and oppression (*organizational/structural*). The individual-level dimensions include individual actions and intergroup contact experiences (*behavioral*) and individuals' beliefs and perceptions of racial discrimination, intergroup conflict, and institutional practices and priorities (*psychological*) (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005).

Figure 1. Campus Racial Climate Framework



Hurtado and colleagues (1998, 1999) developed the CRC framework to help policymakers, institutional leaders, and scholars in their efforts to create comfortable,

diverse environments that facilitate the development of all students. Since its inception, scholars have used the campus climate framework to guide examinations of various student outcomes and experiences, such as departure, persistence, satisfaction, and experiences with discrimination (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Museus et al., 2008; Park, 2009; Yi, 2008). Importantly, the framework has also been used to understand how interactions between the climate dimensions impact educational experiences and outcomes (Griffin et al., 2012; Hurtado et al., 2008). Additionally, although the CRC framework focuses on students' racialized experiences, the essential features have been used to capture the experiences other student groups, such as women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students, international students, and other groups (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012). Moreover, the campus racial climate framework has been used to examine the climate for diversity for faculty and staff (Jayakumar et al., 2009; Mayhew, Grunwald, & Dey, 2006), and it has served as a basis for explaining the underrepresentation of faculty of color (Fries-Britt et al., 2011).

### **Manuscript 1: Beyond Integration: Black-Themed Residential Programs and the Educational Benefits of Diversity**

The first manuscript of my dissertation developed out of a paper written for a course on Racial Justice and Law. During one class, we debated whether students should be allowed to live in “segregated” university housing. I found the topic intriguing and began investigating whether legal scholars had addressed it. I was surprised to find that most scholars who had written about ethnic-themed college residential programs found them problematic. In addition to the common view that they reduced intergroup contact,

several scholars argued that Black-themed residential programs harmed Black students, the people they were primarily designed to support. Because I saw value in Black-themed residential programs, both for Black students and those from other groups, I wanted offer a different perspective to the conversation. The manuscript was submitted to several legal journals<sup>1</sup> in January 2019.

The first manuscript uses educational research to support the argument that Black-themed residential programs contribute to, rather than undermine, the educational benefits of diversity. Consistent with external policy factors included in the CRC framework (Hurtado et al., 1999, 1998), the manuscript is grounded in the Supreme Court's reasoning in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003). The central argument, however, is based on research related to the dimensions of campus racial climate. In short, Black-themed residential programs are an institutional practice that commonly relates to an institution's history of exclusion and also impacts the other climate dimensions. Research shows that Black students at HWIs perceive campus environments as less welcoming and more hostile than non-Black students (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Sedlacek, 1999), and counter-spaces, like Black-themed residential programs, lessen isolation and help students succeed despite race-related stress (e.g., psychological climate) (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Black-themed residential programs also help create the necessary "critical mass" of Black students by facilitating recruitment and retention (e.g., compositional diversity) (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> Manuscript one is formatted in accordance with A Uniform System of Citation (the "Bluebook") as required by most legal journals.

In terms of the impact on students from other racial/ethnic groups, the primary argument against Black-themed residential programs is that they reduce intergroup contact (e.g., behavioral climate). I counter this argument by debunking the widely held belief that Black-themed residential programs are only for Black students. Many Black-themed residential programs have diverse resident bodies and also invite the larger campus community to participate in cultural events and discussions that center Black perspectives. Moreover, Black-themed residential programs often provide structures that facilitate positive diversity interactions while reducing negative interactions. I argue Black-themed residential programs promote cultural understanding for Black students and the larger community and promote positive intergroup interactions which ultimately lead to the educational benefits of diversity outlined by the Supreme Court.

### **Manuscript 2: “It Absolutely Impacts Every Day”: Diversity Allies Connect Racial History and Current Climate at a Southern Professional School**

The second manuscript of my dissertation developed out a desire to explore an institution that was known for “doing diversity” well. As I became more involved in diversity efforts at several educational institutions, I noticed a common resistance to making significant structural or systemic changes. I began wondering if any institutions or schools were willing to make systemic changes and what it would look like if they did. Accordingly, I undertook a qualitative study of a professional school with a reputation for being committed to diversity and equity. Although I interviewed students and faculty at the school about a range of topics related to racial climate, my review of the literature

revealed little attention to how an institution's history of exclusion impacts current climate (Hurtado et al., 2008). Therefore, that became the focus of paper two.

This manuscript used the campus racial climate framework to explore the ways in which an institution's history of racial segregation influences present-day racial climate at a professional school in the south. Specifically, I investigated two research questions: 1) How faculty and senior administrator diversity allies believed their professional school's history of racial segregation influences present-day racial climate; and 2) What the allies recommended for addressing their school's racist history. Participants included eight faculty and administrators who volunteered to serve as diversity allies at the school. I interviewed each participant for approximately one hour and used thematic analysis to analyze the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings show participants perceived their school's history of exclusion as directly and indirectly impacting all other climate dimensions. The allies explained that despite some recent initiatives that improved racial climate, their school's embarrassing history of exclusion created an environment in which historical and present racism were often unaddressed. Thus, students and faculty of color, particularly Black students, were left to contend with a hostile climate, while racial biases of White faculty, staff, and students were not challenged and often reinforced. Additionally, allies described how some White faculty with implicit racial biases shaped organizational processes, such as faculty recruitment and hiring, graduate student admissions, and the curriculum, which in turn influenced other aspects of climate. The allies offered several suggestions to address the school's exclusionary history, including sharing a more complete history, admitting



its role in segregation and repairing the harm it caused, and addressing current systemic racial issues that stem from past injustices. Study results supported the interconnected nature of the climate dimensions described by the CRC framework (Hurtado et al., 1999, 1998), and they also illustrated the complex ways in which a history of exclusion indirectly affects various aspects of current racial climate.

### **Manuscript 3: Perceived Institutional Commitment to Diversity and Sense of Belonging Among Students from Different Racial/Ethnic Groups**

The third manuscript stemmed from an applied research project aimed at helping a school within a larger public flagship university understand their students' experiences. The school was particularly interested in assessing students' sense of belonging at the school and their perceptions of racial climate. Scholars recommend that any institution interested in improving racial climate begin with a systematic assessment to understand the scope of the problem and the need for change (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Milem et al., 2005). Thus, the school conducted a survey to inform student programming and initiatives, and paper three is based on those data.

Manuscript three is grounded in the Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (DLE model) (Hurtado et al., 2012). The DLE model is an extension of the campus racial climate framework that incorporates the five original climate dimensions (Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005), but extends the original model in several ways. The DLE applies to multiple identity groups (not just race/ethnicity), addresses how diversity dynamics operate in curricular and cocurricular spheres including the role of

staff in advancing diversity and student outcomes, and explicitly connects the model and climate dimensions to educational outcomes (Hurtado et al., 2012).

The literature shows that certain aspects of racial climate, namely interactions with faculty and peers, and perceptions of the environment, influence students' sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Yet, there is little research about how students' views of their institution's commitment to diversity relate to their sense of belonging. Accordingly, this study used a mixed methods concurrent triangulation design to examine perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity and sense of belonging among graduate and undergraduate students from different racial groups. Specifically, it explored: 1) whether students' perceptions of their school's commitment to diversity predict sense of belonging and whether that association varies by race, and 2) what institutional practices students find beneficial or inadequate and how those perceptions vary by race. Numeric and narrative survey data were collected from 403 students and were analyzed separately then combined to cross-validate findings (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Quantitative findings demonstrated that students' perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity were significantly related to their sense of belonging after controlling for other variables previously linked to sense of belonging. Students' race/ethnicity did not moderate the relationship between perceived institutional commitment and sense of belonging, but other results showed variation in students' perceptions of institutional practices across and within racial groups. White students had

higher perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity than students of color. Moreover, the qualitative results revealed patterns in how students from different racial/ethnic groups perceived institutional practices and heterogeneity within each racial/ethnic group which was related to students' belonging and commitment scores.

### **Conclusion**

The three dissertation manuscripts reflect a cohesive approach to exploring contemporary issues of racial climate at HWIs. Specifically, the manuscripts use a range of methods and include perspectives from individuals who play different roles on campus and are members of different communities. Together, the three papers contribute significantly to the field by underscoring the complexity of understanding and improving racial climate, shedding light on the multiple ways in which institutional history and practices influence climate, and providing future directions of inquiry.

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## BEYOND INTEGRATION: BLACK-THEMED RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS AND THE EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY

*Kimalee C. Dickerson\**

### INTRODUCTION

As the new school year began in 2016, a national controversy erupted over California State University Los Angeles’s (Cal State LA) new Halisi Scholars Black Living-Learning Community.<sup>2</sup> Cal State LA designed the Halisi Community “to enhance the residential experience for students who are a part of or interested in issues of concern to the Black community living on campus by offering the opportunity to connect with faculty and peers, and engage in programs that focus on academic success, cultural awareness and civic engagement.”<sup>3</sup> Critics—both liberal and conservative—called it racially segregated housing.<sup>4</sup> Some opined that the Halisi Community violates state and

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<sup>2</sup> H. Scott English, *California State University’s Answer To Racism...Segregation?*, INQUISITR, <https://www.inquisitr.com/3495491/california-state-univeristys-answer-to-racism-segregation/> (last visited Jan 18, 2019); Matt Hamilton, *Black-focused Housing at Cal State L.A. Draws Criticism, But It’s Nothing New*, LATIMES.COM, <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-housing-cal-state-la--20160906-snap-story.html> (last visited Jan 18, 2019); Mike McPhate, *California Today: No, Cal State Isn’t Creating Segregated Housing*, THE NEW YORK TIMES, January 20, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/08/us/california-today-colleges-segregated-housing.html> (last visited Jan 18, 2019); Earl Ofari Hutchinson, *Are Separate Dorms A Good Or Bad Thing For Black Students?*, HUFFPOST, September 8, 2016, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/earl-ofari-hutchinson/are-separate-dorms-a-good\\_b\\_11912864.html?ec\\_carp=3854061983317140341](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/earl-ofari-hutchinson/are-separate-dorms-a-good_b_11912864.html?ec_carp=3854061983317140341) (last visited Jan 18, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> *California State University Los Angeles Themed-Living Communities*, <http://www.calstatela.edu/housing/themed-living-communities> (last visited Jan 18, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> English, *supra* note 2; Annabel Scott, *Civil Rights Leader Says California College’s Segregated Dorms Violate Federal Laws*, THE DAILY CALLER, September 8, 2016, <https://dailycaller.com/2016/09/08/civil-rights-leader-says-california-colleges-segregated-dorms-violate-federal-laws/>.

federal laws and conflicts with the aims of the civil rights movement,<sup>5</sup> while others deemed it un-American.<sup>6</sup> Cal State LA defended its new community, explaining it is open to all students and that culturally or ethnically-themed residential spaces are neither rare nor new.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to critiques of the community itself, racially-themed campus housing like the Halisi Community are often challenged as part the larger debate over affirmative action in higher education. Although universities have long recognized they are legally required to make ethnic-themed housing available to all students regardless of race or color, these communities have been the focus of intense disagreements about racial diversity and integration on college campuses.<sup>8</sup> While many of the arguments presented here apply to other types of “safe spaces” for students of color at predominantly white institutions (PWIs),<sup>9</sup> this article focuses on Black-themed residential programs, which continue to be targets of intense scrutiny and debate.

The Supreme Court has not examined whether ethnic-themed campus residential programs are consistent with the use of race conscious admissions policies. However, using the Supreme Court’s reasoning in *Grutter v. Bollinger*,<sup>10</sup> scholars and policymakers have argued that the ethnic-themed residential programs are evidence that an institution is

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<sup>5</sup> Scott, *supra* note 4 (noting that Michel Meyers, the leader of a top civil rights organization, believes California State University Los Angeles violated California state and federal civil rights laws by “establishing, funding and staffing a “racially-identifiable” dorm for black students only).

<sup>6</sup> English, *supra* note 2 (noting that conservative websites claimed segregated housing was “not a very ‘American’ response to feeling uncomfortable”).

<sup>7</sup> English, *supra* note 2; McPhate, *supra* note 2.

<sup>8</sup> See discussion *infra* Parts II.A, II.B.

<sup>9</sup> Vinay Harpalani, “*Safe Spaces*” and the Educational Benefits of Diversity, 13 DUKE J CONST. LAW PUBLIC POLICY 117, 119 (2017) (defining “safe spaces” as “institutions and programs devoted to supporting minority students and other marginalized groups on college campuses”).

<sup>10</sup> 539 US 306, 329-33 (2003).

not committed to diversity.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, critics have argued that colleges and universities where such programs exist should or may be stopped from considering race in admissions.<sup>12</sup> Rarely, however, do critics acknowledge the benefits that Black-themed residential programs can provide to both Black students and the overall campus community.

This article makes a simple, yet surprisingly uncommon, claim: Black-themed residential programs are consistent with promoting educational diversity. Not only do Black-themed communities provide critical academic and social support to all residents and to other Black students on campus, they can also foster cultural understanding and facilitate positive intergroup relationships. Viewing Black-themed residential programs as serving this dual purpose requires reframing the goal of diversity from integration to cultural pluralism, a perspective consistent with *Grutter*. In short, this article aims to shift our understanding about Black-themed residential programs and how they can contribute to, rather than undermine, the educational benefits of diversity.

Part I summarizes *Grutter* and the educational benefits of diversity outlined by the Court. It discusses separatism, integration, and cultural pluralism as three common approaches to racial justice and situates the *Grutter* decision within cultural pluralism. In a higher education context, cultural pluralism demands policies and practices that support racial group culture and identity while also promoting meaningful cross-racial interaction

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<sup>11</sup> Akhil Reed Amar & Neal Kumar Katyal, *Bakke's Fate*, 43 UCLA L. REV. 1745, 1778 (1995) (arguing that “schools that permit de facto residential segregation may be stopped from pleading Bakke as a defense to affirmative action in admissions”); Kevin Woodson, *Diversity Without Integration*, 120 PENN. ST. REV. 807, 812 (2015) (noting that university policies and social dynamics that facilitate or promote racial segregation are in tension with the logic of *Grutter*); Educational Benefits Realized: Universities’ Post-Admissions Policies and the Diversity Rationale, , 124 HARV. L. REV. 572, 573 (2010) arguing that the “failure to adopt institutional reforms to promote interactional diversity post-admissions renders pre-admissions use of racial preferences unconstitutional”).

<sup>12</sup> *See id.*

and relationships to explore and develop common bonds and shared values.<sup>13</sup> Black-themed residential programs accomplish both of these objectives.

Part II focuses on the history and purpose of Black-themed residential programs. It explains how many of these communities came to exist and explores the contemporary missions of Black-themed residential programs by examining two specific examples with different purposes. This part then offers several ways in which Black-themed residential programs serve Black students at PWIs and connects these benefits to those delineated by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Using examples from several Black-themed residential programs, Part III illustrates how Black-themed residential programs also benefit students from other racial groups. This Part argues that instead of undercutting the benefits of diversity, Black-themed residential programs help maintain a critical mass of Black students, enable positive diversity interactions, and promote cross-cultural understanding. These benefits accrue not only to students living in the Black-themed residences, but also those in the larger community.

## I. *GRUTTER V. BOLLINGER*

### A. *The Majority Opinion*

*Grutter v. Bollinger* is considered a landmark case in which the Supreme Court sought to address racial equality in education. In *Grutter*, a White applicant who was denied admission to the University of Michigan Law School challenged the school's

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<sup>13</sup> See Michael Bocian, *Housing on College Campuses: Self-Segregation, Integration, and Other Alternatives. A Communitarian Report*, COMMUNITARIAN NETW. 1, 22 (1997) (describing the “diversity within unity” model that permits campus housing centered around racial identity or but insists on interactive efforts).

race-conscious admissions policy as a violation of the Equal Protection Clause.<sup>14</sup> Relying on Justice Powell's opinion in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*,<sup>15</sup> the Court held that the attainment of student body diversity is a compelling state interest that can justify the use of race in university admissions.<sup>16</sup>

The *Grutter* majority endorsed the consideration of an applicant's race in university admissions in order to admit the "critical mass" of minority students necessary to achieve the educational benefits that flow from a diverse student body.<sup>17</sup> In so holding, the Court deferred to the law school's judgment that diversity is essential to its "proper institutional mission."<sup>18</sup> Specifically, the law school sought to enroll a "critical mass of minority students" so underrepresented minority students did not feel isolated or like spokespersons for their race and to help dismantle racial stereotypes by helping nonminority students learn there is no one minority viewpoint but rather a variety of viewpoints.<sup>19</sup>

The Court recognized several "substantial" and "important" benefits that flow from student body racial diversity: i) improved cross-racial understanding, ii) the dismantling of racial stereotypes, iii) more enlightened and spirited classroom discussion, iv) improved learning outcomes, v) better preparation for an increasingly diverse

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<sup>14</sup> *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306, 316-17 (2003).

<sup>15</sup> In *Bakke*, the Supreme Court invalidated a race-conscious admissions program at the University of California at Davis' Medical School in a divided 5-4 decision. 438 U. S. 265 (1978). Although he was not joined by any other Justice, Justice Powell authored the Court's opinion. *Id.* at 281-320. Justice Powell opined that the UC Davis' admission program failed the narrow tailoring requirement, but he approved the use of race to further the compelling interest of "the attainment of a diverse student body." *Id.* at 311. Justice Powell, however, emphasized that "[t]he diversity that furthers a compelling state interest encompasses a far broader array of qualifications and characteristics, of which racial or ethnic origin is but a single, though important, element." *Id.* at 315.

<sup>16</sup> *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 316-17.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 3330, 333.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* at 328-29.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at 319-20.

workforce and society, and vi) the cultivation of leaders with public legitimacy.<sup>20</sup> Citing arguments made by United States military leaders, businesses, and law schools, the Court explained that these “benefits are not theoretical but real, as major American businesses have made clear that the skills needed in today’s increasingly global marketplace can only be developed through exposure to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints.”<sup>21</sup> The Court explained that because education is “pivotal to ‘sustaining our political and cultural heritage,’”<sup>22</sup> all individuals must be able to access the knowledge and opportunities provided by public institutions of higher education.<sup>23</sup>

The *Grutter* majority based its compelling interest analysis on the educational benefits that flow from high-quality cross-racial interactions.<sup>24</sup> More specifically, the Court’s diversity rationale was based, in part, on extensive social science research showing student body diversity promoted improved learning outcomes and better preparation for civic life.<sup>25</sup> This research indicated that a racially and ethnically diverse student body is the first essential step in the process of creating a diverse learning environment.<sup>26</sup> However, to produce substantial benefits, institutions of higher education must provide students opportunities to learn about diverse groups and interact with

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<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 330.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.* (citation removed).

<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 331 (citing *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U. S. 202, 221 (1982)).

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at 330 (citing Amici Curiae Brief for American Educational Research Association and articles presenting evidence on affirmative action and campus racial dynamics).

<sup>25</sup> Professor Patricia Gurin, the University of Michigan’s primary expert witness who prepared a report for the litigation which was uncontested and introduced into evidence in the district court, explained that based on her statistical analysis, students who experienced the most racial and ethnic diversity in classroom settings and in informal interactions with peers experienced the greatest improvement in learning and democracy outcomes. See Patricia Gurin, *The Compelling Need for Diversity in Education*, (Jan. 1999), Expert report prepared for the lawsuits *Gratz and Hamacher v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger*, reprinted in 5 MICH. J. RACE & L. 363, 363-425 (1999).

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* at 376.

students from diverse backgrounds both inside and outside of the classroom.<sup>27</sup> The Court closed its compelling-interest analysis by returning to the law school’s argument regarding the need for a critical mass, not just a token number, of minority students. Here, the Court acknowledged the role of race, noting that the “unique experience of being a racial minority in a society, like our own, in which race unfortunately still matters” likely affects one’s views.<sup>28</sup>

### *B. Approaches to Racial Justice*

*Grutter* did not specify how colleges and universities should structure their campuses to promote educational benefits of diversity. However, Justice Scalia’s dissent suggests that racial integration is required. Justice Scalia listed several potential grounds for future constitutional challenges,<sup>29</sup> including challenges to an institution’s true commitment to the educational benefits of diversity if their campus is racially segregated:

Tempting targets, one would suppose, will be those universities that talk the talk of multiculturalism and racial diversity in the courts but walk the walk of tribalism and racial segregation on their campuses—through minority-only student organizations, *separate minority housing opportunities*, separate minority student centers, even separate minority-only graduation ceremonies.<sup>30</sup>

Many scholars, particularly those who share Justice Scalia’s integrationist perspective, have made similar arguments.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Id.* at 377.

<sup>28</sup> *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 333.

<sup>29</sup> Justice Scalia argues, in part, that because the majority failed to provide a clear holding regarding race-conscious admissions, affirmative action litigation will continue. *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 349.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* (emphasis added).

<sup>31</sup> See Amar and Katyal, *supra* note 11 at 1778 (“Schools are not required to adopt affirmative action policies—nor are they constitutionally obliged to address self-segregated housing—but if they do choose to adopt diversity programs, then they should live up to the goal of encouraging people to learn from each other”); Woodson, *supra* note 11 at 809-10 (“Several components of the diversity rationale are contingent upon there being actual racial integration, in the form of high-quality cross-racial interactions and social relationships among students, in campus life”).

Like Justice Scalia, most critics of Black-themed campus housing subscribe to an integrationist view of racial justice. Thus, the dispute over programs or organizations designed to support marginalized students of color essentially represents the clash of two historically competing worldviews of race: integration and separatism. Integrationists oppose Black-themed residential programs because they are inconsistent with the integrationist focus on universal characteristics and the ultimate goals of equal treatment according to neutral norms and the creation of one shared identity without regard race.<sup>32</sup> In comparison, separatists tend to support these programs as consistent with their rejection of universalism in favor of a focus on cultural differences and goal of promoting Black culture and subgroup identification.<sup>33</sup> Because separatism is rooted in race consciousness, integrationists equate it with white supremacy and racism.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, separatists view integration as damaging to important Black institutions and as forcing assimilation of Black people into White cultural norms and practices.<sup>35</sup>

Gary Peller summarizes the different assumptions underlying these two paradigms by comparing Black nationalists of the 1960s and 1970s with integrationists:

Where integrationists underst[and] race through the prism  
of universalism—from within which race consciousness

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<sup>32</sup> See Bocian, *supra* note 13 at 3 (noting the integration approach to university housing emphasizes "achieving equality by bringing people of different backgrounds together to form a single community" with the goal of creating "a society that sees people not as members of groups, but as individuals"); Peller, *supra* note 32 at 771 ("Integrationists are committed to the view that race makes no real difference between people, except as unfortunate historical vestiges of irrational discrimination. In an extreme form of the integrationist picture, the hope is that when contact occurs between different groups in society, not only race, but all ethnic identity will become a thing of the past." (citation and quotation marks omitted)).

<sup>33</sup> See Bocian, *supra* note 13 at 3-4 (stating that the multicultural approach to campus life emphasizes a plurality of cultures and values such that colleges and universities should allow different groups to maintain their distinct cultures).

<sup>34</sup> Peller *supra* note 32 at 778, 790.

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* at 798; see also Alex M. Johnson, *Bid Whist, Tonk, and United States v. Fordice: Why Integrationism Fails African-Americans Again*, 81 CA. L. REV. 1401, 1431 (1993) ("Assimilationist integrationism demands that African-Americans relinquish the unique norms and institutions of their community on terms which obliterate those norms and institutions. Integration into the dominant society becomes a form of 'coercive assimilation'").



appeared arbitrary, irrational, and symmetrically evil whether practiced by whites or blacks—nationalists view[] race in the particular context of American history, where racial identity was seen as a central basis for comprehending the significance of various social relations as they are actually lived and experienced, and within which the meaning of race was anything but symmetrical. . . . In contrast to the integrationist premise that blacks and whites are essentially the same, the idea of race as the organizing basis for group consciousness asserts that blacks and whites are different, in the sense of coming from different communities, neighborhoods, churches, families, and histories, and of being in various ways foreigners to each other.<sup>36</sup>

### C. *Grutter and Cultural Pluralism*

Although the Supreme Court has commonly adopted an integrationist perspective in race-related education cases,<sup>37</sup> this article argues *Grutter's* reasoning regarding the educational benefits of diversity is consistent with a third model that attempts to transcend the dichotomy of integration versus separatism by adopting aspects of both approaches.<sup>38</sup> Various names have been given to this intermediate option,<sup>39</sup> but it is most

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<sup>36</sup> Peller, *supra* note 32 at 791-92; see also Bocian, *supra* note 12 at 11, 15 (explaining that “[t]he integration model holds that the amalgamation of people with different beliefs and backgrounds creates a unified American identity. Those who hold this view believe that self-segregation will have the negative consequence of tribalizing society” while the “[m]ulticulturalists argue that without their subgroup identity, minorities will be subsumed under the hegemony of the dominant culture.”).

<sup>37</sup> Johnson, *supra* note 35 at 1426 (“To summarize, *Brown*, *Fordice*, and a generation of school desegregation cases premised on a similar assimilationist vision of integration quite logically result in the destruction of African-American schools”).

<sup>38</sup> See Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Elites, Social Movements, and the Law: The Case of Affirmative Action*, 105 COLUM REV 1436, 1488 (2005) (“*Grutter* offers no coherent theory of justice because it gives every major constituency involved in the affirmative action debate a bit of what it wanted to hear. . . . But this strategy arguably came at a high cost. To the extent that the Court’s emphasis on utilitarian concerns is viewed as a repudiation of the arguments urged by the mostly minority distributive justice strand of the coalition, *Grutter* sends paradoxical signals. It celebrated pluralism while demonstrating the extent to which whites—elite organized interests, in particular—set the terms of the legal and political debate about the meaning of the Equal Protection Clause.”).

<sup>39</sup> Johnson, *supra* note 35 at 1456 (stating that “the ideal version of integration, nonassimilationist and truly integrative of pluralistic cultural practices and norms, may be achieved in future society by treating racial and cultural differences based on race as meriting the same sort of treatment that religious differences receive in our society”); Peller, *supra* note 32 at 817-18 (envisioning a “liberal integrationist” approach that “would systematically replace the individualist focus of traditional integrationism with a focus on cultural communities, and simultaneously view institutional practices as a reflection of particular manifestations of

often referred to as cultural pluralism. Cultural pluralism exists when individuals develop communities based on differences such as race/ethnicity or culture, and these cultural communities are accepted, adhere to universal values, and do not function separately from each other or compete for resources.<sup>40</sup> In a college setting, a cultural pluralism model champions spaces on campuses designed around racial/ethnic identity or affinity, but also requires interactive efforts to bring students together to explore and develop common bonds and shared values.<sup>41</sup>

The Supreme Court's reasoning in *Grutter* is consistent with cultural pluralism. On one hand, the majority stressed the need to make public institutions of higher education accessible to all to "sustain[] our [shared] political and cultural heritage" and realize the "dream of *one* Nation, indivisible."<sup>42</sup> At the same time, the majority acknowledged that the unique experience of being a person of color in the United States is likely to effect one's views because race still matters in our society.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the Court explicitly celebrated cultural pluralism, noting the "overriding importance" of preparing all students for an increasingly global marketplace "through exposure to widely

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cultural power. . . . [T]his kind of ideology would interpret norms of diversity in terms of the creation of a 'creole' institutional and public culture that would contain within itself the elements of composite cultures, rather than flatten out difference into an assumed universal and neutral set of public practices").

<sup>40</sup> Antonia Pantoja, Wilhelmina Perry & Barbara Blourock, *Towards the Development of Theory: Cultural Pluralism Redefined*, 4 J SOC. WELF. 125, 130-31 (1976); see also John W. Berry, *Psychological Aspects of Cultural Pluralism: Unity and Identity Reconsidered*, 2 TOPICS IN CULT. LEARNING. 17, 19 (1974) (explaining that the ideal model of group relations, democratic pluralism, is characterized by "[t]he free and regular association of culturally-distinct groups is motivated by some mutual (national) set of goals, which is sufficient to maintain positive relations").

<sup>41</sup> Bocian, *supra* note 13 at 4 ("The Diversity Within Unity Model strives for a society of "layered loyalties," in which people have allegiance both to their particular subgroups and to the greater society in which they live. Those who hold this view contend that people can maintain and nourish their distinct cultural heritages, while simultaneously fostering a greater community with shared values and commitments. They argue that colleges and universities should allow subgroups to live and learn in their own communities, but be bound to other groups through interactive efforts.").

<sup>42</sup> *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306, 331-32 (2003).

<sup>43</sup> *Id.* at 333.

diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints.”<sup>44</sup> Black-themed residential programs support these laudable goals.

## II. BLACK-THEMED RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS

### A. *History of Black-themed Residential Programs*

As colleges and universities began admitting more students of color in the 1960s and 1970s following *Brown v. Board of Education* and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,<sup>45</sup> the number of Black students attending PWIs skyrocketed.<sup>46</sup> However, many of these institutions were unprepared for an influx of Black students, and as one social scientist noted at the time, most PWIs lacked “either the skill or the determination” to educate students who differed from the middle-class White students they were accustomed to having on campuses.<sup>47</sup> As recent additions at most PWIs, Black students encountered campus environments, courses, and extracurricular programs shaped by and reflecting the dominant middle-class White culture. Not surprisingly then, “gaining [B]lack recognition on campus” was the leading protest issue for Black students at that time,<sup>48</sup> and Black students spent their spare time at PWIs in activities most meaningful to them, especially promoting civil rights or improving their experiences on campus.<sup>49</sup>

During the late 1960s, Black student unrest stemmed both from outright incidents of racism and “the ‘feel’ of an alien institution whose inhabitants often display quite

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<sup>44</sup> *Id.* at 330-31.

<sup>45</sup> M. Christopher Brown, *Collegiate desegregation and the Public Black College: A New Policy Mandate*, 72 J. HIGH. EDUC. 46, 49 (2001) (contending that desegregation did not reach higher education until one decade after Brown, when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964).

<sup>46</sup> Woodson, *supra* note 11 at 817. Predominantly White institutions (PWIs) are institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment. Additionally, the majority of these institutions excluded non-Whites before 1964. *Id.*

<sup>47</sup> John A. Centra, *Black Students at Predominantly White Colleges: A Research Description*, 1970 ETS RES. BULL. SER. 1, 1 (1970) (citation omitted).

<sup>48</sup> *Id.* at 14.

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*

unconscious insensitivity and ignorance.”<sup>50</sup> One source of conflict was the incorrect assumptions and expectations PWI faculty and staff had about Black students’ needs. For example, faculty and staff expected Black students to assimilate into a PWI’s social-cultural and academic life without needing any substantial alteration of academic structure or programs, while Black students expected faculty and staff to respond to their individual needs and desired greater diversity of activities and lifestyle.<sup>51</sup> As a result of the institutional racism and hostile climates Black students frequently encountered at PWIs, they demanded institutional changes to improve their experience on campus, including courses in African American and Black studies, the recruiting of more Black students and faculty, and Black cultural programming and residential houses.<sup>52</sup>

Over 50 years later, Black student enrollment at PWIs has decreased since the 1970s and 1980s for various reasons,<sup>53</sup> and Black students at PWIs across the country continue to encounter hostile campus environments and experience overt and subtle

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<sup>50</sup> *Id.* at 15 (citation omitted).

<sup>51</sup> Jewelle Taylor Gibbs, *Black Students/White University: Different Expectations*, 51 *J. OF COUNSELING & DEV.* 463, 469 (1973).

<sup>52</sup> See FABIO ROJAS, *FROM BLACK POWER TO BLACK STUDIES: HOW A RADICAL SOCIAL MOVEMENT BECAME AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE* (2010) (describing how student activism led to the creation of Black Studies academic programs at universities around the country); MARTHA BIONDI, *THE BLACK REVOLUTION ON CAMPUS* (2012) (examining how black college students demands for black studies departments during the 1960s ultimately reshaped higher education across the nation); Reuben R. McDaniel Jr & James W. McKee, *An Evaluation of Higher Education’s Response to Black Students* (1971) (concluding that PWIs were not responding in meaningful ways to black students’ needs and providing a list of recommendations for PWIs to adopt to better support black students).

<sup>53</sup> See Shaun R. Harper, Lori D. Patton & Ontario S. Wooden, *Access and Equity for African American Students in Higher Education: A Critical Race Historical Analysis of Policy Efforts*, 80 *J. HIGH. EDUC.* 389, 398 (2009) (“Over a century of gainful policy efforts have been undermined by the following: the steady underrepresentation of African American students at PWIs; continued over-reliance on racially-biased college entrance exams; consistent attempts to dismantle affirmative action; increased statewide admissions standards for public postsecondary education, without corresponding advances in public K-12 schools; reports of racism and negative African American student experiences at PWIs; low African American male student persistence and degree attainment rates; forced desegregation of HBCUs; inequitable funding for HBCUs; and the decline of need-based federal financial aid.”).

forms of racism.<sup>54</sup> PWIs were not prepared to meet the needs of their increasing populations of Black students in the 1960s, and many are still not prepared today.<sup>55</sup> Like the Black student activists during the movements of the 1960s and 1970s, many of today's Black undergraduates are banning together to protest racist fraternity parties, speech, and hate crimes.<sup>56</sup> Some have even resurrected the demands of their predecessors as they continue to seek institutional changes aimed at creating equity and more supportive, welcoming, and positive campus climates.<sup>57</sup> In the last few years, Black students at several institutions have again demanded that their institutions increase representation of Black students and faculty and create safe spaces designed to meet the unique needs of Black students including cultural centers and Black-themed housing.<sup>58</sup> Before the creation of the Halisi Community, the Black Student Union at Cal State LA demanded, among other things, a "housing space delegated for Black students and a full time Resident Director who can cater to the needs of Black students. . . . This space

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<sup>54</sup> See Lori Patton Davis, *Why Have the Demands of Black Students Changed So Little Since the 1960s?*, THE CONVERSATION, Nov. 16, 2015, <http://theconversation.com/why-have-the-demands-of-black-students-changed-so-little-since-the-1960s-50695> (explaining that the current demands from black student activists at the University of Missouri, Yale University, University of Kansas, Emory University, UC Berkeley and other schools across the country look "eerily similar" to the demands made by black students in the 1960s); Scott Jaschik, Black Student Protest at Brown: 50 Years Ago and Today, INSIDER HIGHER ED, Dec. 6, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2018/12/06/black-student-protest-brown-50-years-ago-and-today> ("Fifty years after black students walked out of classes at Brown University to demand that it increase their numbers, black students did the same thing on Wednesday"); Racial Tension and Protests on Campuses Across the Country, THE NEW YORK TIMES, Nov. 10, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/11/us/racial-tension-and-protests-on-campuses-across-the-country.html> (describing protests U.C.L.A., the University of Missouri, the University of Michigan, and the University of Oklahoma).

<sup>55</sup> Davis, *supra* note 53.

<sup>56</sup> Gina A. Garcia et al., *When parties Become Racialized: Deconstructing Racially Themed Parties*, 48 J. STUD. AFF. RES. PRACT. 5–21 (2011); Mary Beth Marklein, *Black Students Can Face Uneasy Adjustment to College*, USA TODAY, February 11, 2014, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/02/11/black-history-month-black-students-white-schools/5405903/> (last visited Jan 18, 2019).

<sup>57</sup> See, e.g., Davis, *supra* note 53; Jaschik, *supra* note 53; Black Liberation Collective Our Demands, <http://www.blackliberationcollective.org/our-demands/> (last visited Jan 18, 2019).

<sup>58</sup> Black Liberation Collective Our Demands, *supra* note 57.

would also serve as a safe space for Black CSLA students to congregate, connect, and learn from each other.”<sup>59</sup>

### *B. The Purpose of Black-themed Residential Programs*

Today, Black-themed campus communities are considered residential living-learning programs. There are many types of living-learning programs, but they are broadly defined as programs in which undergraduate students live together in a portion or entirety of a residence hall and participate in academic and/or extra-curricular programming.<sup>60</sup> Residential living-learning communities allow students with similar interests, backgrounds, or identities to live together. In the case of racially- or ethnically-themed communities, the commonality revolves around interest in the heritage or culture of a particular racial or ethnic group.<sup>61</sup> While the specific purpose of Black-themed living-learning communities varies by school, they are open to all students regardless of race or ethnicity. To provide a better idea of the range of the missions of Black-themed campus communities, this Article will examine two in detail: Cornell University’s Ujamaa Residential College and the University of Connecticut’s SchOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House.

#### 1. Cornell University’s Ujamaa Residential College

Cornell University’s Ujamaa Residential College, founded in 1972, is one of the nation’s oldest Black-themed campus communities.<sup>62</sup> Ujamaa is an East African word meaning “the process of working together as an extended family to build and maintain a

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<sup>59</sup> Anthony Williams, BLACK STUDENT UNION AT CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LOS ANGELES ISSUES DEMANDS AFRIKAN BLACK COALITION (2015), <http://afrikanblackcoalition.org/2015/11/23/black-student-union-at-california-state-university-los-angeles-issues-demands/> (last visited Jan 18, 2019).

<sup>60</sup> KAREN INKELAS, NATIONAL STUDY OF LIVING-LEARNING PROGRAMS: 2007 REPORT OF FINDINGS, 1-2 (2008), available at <http://www.lib.umd.edu/drum/handle/1903/8392>.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*

<sup>62</sup> Cornell University Ujamaa Residential College, <https://living.cornell.edu/live/wheretolive/programhouses/ujamaa.cfm> (last visited Jan 18, 2019).

cohesive community.”<sup>63</sup> Ujamaa is open to first-year, transfer, and upper level students and has 144 residents.<sup>64</sup>

Like many Black-themed residential programs, Ujamaa was created in response to the demands of Black students who felt the school was not meeting their needs.<sup>65</sup> Ujamaa has faced both strong criticism and support since its inception, and it has been the target of several investigations following complaints that it excluded students from housing based on race or ethnicity.<sup>66</sup> In 1996, the United States Department of Education ruled that Ujamaa did not violate federal civil rights laws.<sup>67</sup> Throughout these challenges,

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<sup>63</sup> *Id.*

<sup>64</sup> Cornell’s current student enrollment data does not disaggregate underrepresented students of color, which includes Hispanic, Black, Pacific Islander, and American Indian students, who made up of 18% of enrolled students in Fall 2018. Institutional Research and Planning, <http://irp.dpb.cornell.edu/university-factbook/student-enrollment> (last visited Jan 18, 2019). However, the Cornell’s class of 2017 was 7% Black. Daniel Aloï, Class of 2017 reflects increases in diversity, CORNELL CHRONICLE, August 15, 2013, <http://news.cornell.edu/stories/2013/08/class-2017-reflects-increases-diversity> (last visited Jan 18, 2019).

<sup>65</sup> WAYNE C. GLASKER, BLACK STUDENTS IN THE IVORY TOWER: AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT ACTIVISM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA, 1967-1990 (2009) (explaining that when black students began attending Cornell in the late 1960s, they did not have private resources to fund fraternity or sorority houses or social centers like those that existed for white students and were often based on religion such as the Hillel Center for Jewish students); *Cornell Dorms Based on Race Are the Focus Of an Inquiry*, THE NEW YORK TIMES, March 16, 1995, <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/03/16/nyregion/cornell-dorms-based-on-race-are-the-focus-of-an-inquiry.html> (stating that Cornell’s Ujamaa dormitory was created following the 1969 takeover of the main student union by black students who felt the school was not meeting their needs).

<sup>66</sup> See Michael Meyers, Cornell’s Insult to Brown Decision, WALL ST. J. May 17, 1996, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB832290677208346000> (last visited Jan 18, 2019) (condemning Cornell University’s race-themed housing as promoting balkanization and racial stereotypes). In 1974, the New York State Board of Regents issued an order accusing Ujamaa of de facto segregation because there were no White student member and ordering it to integrate. Barbara Linder, Ujamaa Ruling Poses Dilemmas for Cornell, THE CORNELL DAILY SUN (Feb. 11, 1974), <http://cdsun.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/imageserver/imageserver.pl?oid=CDS19740211&key=&getpdf=true>. In 1977, a Cornell signed a consent decree with the state that the dormitory could continue because Cornell promised to make sure admission was not based on race. Cornell Dorms Based on Race Are the Focus of an Inquiry, *supra* note 65. In 1995, Ujamaa, along with Cornell’s Latino and American Indian themed dormitories, faced another investigation by the State Department of Education into whether the dormitories violated state laws prohibiting schools from excluding students from housing based on race or ethnicity. *Id.* At that time, 79 percent of the students living in Ujamaa were Black. Ultimately, the 1994 complaint against Ujamaa was dismissed. *Id.*

<sup>67</sup> William Honen, *No Violation of Rights is Found in Cornell Dorms for Minorities*, N.Y. TIMES (Sept. 24, 1996) <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/09/24/nyregion/no-violation-of-rights-is-found-in-cornell-dorms-for-minorities.html>

Ujamaa supporters have explained that the house is open to all students and welcomes non-Black residents.<sup>68</sup>

Ujamaa’s mission is to “celebrate[] the rich and diverse heritage of Black people in the United States, Africa, the Caribbean, and other regions of the world” as the community supports the development of its members and helps students excel at the university.<sup>69</sup> Ujamaa sponsors a range of activities and events that support its mission, including lectures, cultural celebrations, and a weekly student-organized forum called Unity Hour.<sup>70</sup> Ujamaa has several faculty advisors and notes that its vast alumni network is a valuable resource for residents.<sup>71</sup>

## 2. University of Connecticut’s ScHOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House

One of the newer Black-themed residential programs, the University of Connecticut’s Scholastic House of Leaders in Support of African American Researchers and Scholars (ScHOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House) was established in the fall of 2016.<sup>72</sup> Although ScHOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House is open to all male students,<sup>73</sup> it specifically aims “to support the scholastic efforts of male students who identify as African American/Black through academic and social/emotional support, access to research opportunities, and professional development.”<sup>74</sup> In 2015, only 55 percent of black male students at the University of

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<sup>68</sup> Eric Byer, *How Cornell Student Housing Really Works*, N.Y. TIMES LETTER TO THE EDITOR (April, 25, 1994), <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/05/04/opinion/1-how-cornell-student-housing-really-works-986585.html>

<sup>69</sup> Cornell University Ujamaa Residential College, *supra* note 62.

<sup>70</sup> *Id.*

<sup>71</sup> *Id.*

<sup>72</sup> ScHOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House Learning Community Program, (2016), <https://lc.uconn.edu/schola2rshouse/> (last visited Jan 18, 2019); Jake New, *University of Connecticut Opens a Living-Learning Center for Black Men.*, SLATE, February 9, 2016, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2016/02/university-of-connecticut-opens-a-living-learning-center-for-black-men.html>.

<sup>73</sup> New, *supra* note 72.

<sup>74</sup> ScHOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House Learning Community Program, *supra* note 72. In the fall of 2018, 770 of UConn’s 23,466 undergraduates were Black or African American men. University of Connecticut Undergraduate Enrollment By Ethnicity and Gender Fall 2018, <https://oire.uconn.edu/wp->



Connecticut graduated within six years in 2015, the lowest of any racial group.<sup>75</sup>

Recognizing the need for support designed specifically for Black male students, ScHOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House aims to increase the retention and persistence of its residents at the university and beyond.<sup>76</sup> Approximately 40 students live at ScHOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House which is situated within a larger living-learning center that includes several programs and 700 other students.<sup>77</sup> Although the University of Connecticut began planning its new living-learning community before 2015, its announcement of the ScHOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House followed student demands for ethnic-based housing due to hostile campus environments.<sup>78</sup>

Like Ujamaa, ScHOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House has been the center of much debate. Supporters praise its attempt to address low retention rates and racism experienced by Black men at PWIs.<sup>79</sup> Opponents claim ScHOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House is racial and gender segregation.<sup>80</sup> In March 2016, two commissioners on the United States Commission on Civil Rights wrote a letter to the president of the University of Connecticut expressing apprehension about ScHOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House.<sup>81</sup> The Commissioners were particularly concerned that ScHOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House was intended to and would in fact promote racial isolation on campus which would impede meaningful cross-race interaction.<sup>82</sup> Supporters, however, argue ScHOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House will help Black male students succeed and cope with the

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content/uploads/sites/35/2018/11/ethbysch18\_UG.pdf (last visited Jan. 18, 2019). Additionally, the six-year graduation rate for Black male students is about 54 percent, while the graduation rate for white male students is 80 percent. New, *supra* note 72.

<sup>75</sup> Julia Werth, *Despite Controversy, "Scholars House" to Open in Fall*, THE DAILY CAMPUS, May 6, 2016, <http://dailycampus.com/stories/2016/5/6/despite-controversy-scholars-house-to-open-in-fall>.

<sup>76</sup> ScHOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House Learning Community Program, *supra* note 72.

<sup>77</sup> New, *supra* note 72.

<sup>78</sup> *Id.*

<sup>79</sup> *Id.*

<sup>80</sup> *Id.*

<sup>81</sup> Russell Blair, *U.S. Civil Rights Commissioners Say UConn Dormitory Plan Promotes Racial Division*, HARTFORD COURANT, March 23, 2016, <https://www.courant.com/education/hc-uconn-african-american-students-scholars-house-20160323-story.html>.

<sup>82</sup> *Id.*

unique barriers they face, including underrepresentation, social isolation, transition issues, and racial stereotyping from both their peers and their professors.<sup>83</sup>

### *C. How Black-themed Residential Programs Benefit Black Students*

Despite the continuing debate over Black-themed residential programs, they offer concrete benefits to Black students at PWIs. Specifically, they provide necessary support to reduce isolation and improve academic outcomes, help transmit and nourish valuable cultural heritage, and support healthy racial identity development. By providing these educational benefits, Black-themed residential programs promote the compelling interest in diversity adopted by the Supreme Court.<sup>84</sup> In the more recent cases *Fisher* cases, the Supreme Court reaffirmed the educational benefits of a diverse student body, including “a robust exchange of ideas, exposure to differing cultures, preparation for the challenges of an increasingly diverse workforce, and acquisition of competencies required of future leaders”<sup>85</sup> and “the lessening of racial isolation.”<sup>86</sup> Black-themed residential programs provide these benefits, and others, to Black students. While many programs are designed to benefit to residents, Black students who do not participate in a Black-themed residential program can also benefit.

#### 1. Lessen Isolation and Counter Hostile Racial Environment

Research consistently shows that Black students at PWIs perceive campus environments as less welcoming and more hostile than non-Black students.<sup>87</sup> Black students commonly face a range of stressors stemming from institutional, cultural, and

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<sup>83</sup> New, *supra* note 72.

<sup>84</sup> *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306 (2003).

<sup>85</sup> *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, 579 U.S. \_\_\_\_ (2016).

<sup>86</sup> *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, 570 U.S. 297, 300 (2013).

<sup>87</sup> Shaun R. Harper & Sylvia Hurtado, *Nine Themes in Campus Racial Climates and Implications for Institutional Transformation*, 2007 NEW DIR. STUD. SERV. 7 (2007); William E. Sedlacek, *Black Students on White campuses: 20 years of research.*, J. COLL. STUD. PERS. (1987).

interpersonal racism.<sup>88</sup> Additionally, Black students frequently report experiencing microaggressions that range from racial slights, recurrent indignities, and stigmatization to unfair treatment and personal threats or attacks.<sup>89</sup> As a result of constant physiological, psychological, cultural, and emotional stress, many Black students experience various degrees of racial battle fatigue, defined as the physiological and psychological strain and energy lost when one is dedicated to coping with racial microaggressions and racism.<sup>90</sup>

Consistent with their more negative assessment of general campus climate,<sup>91</sup> Black students in predominantly White residence halls perceive significantly more interracial tension than White students and rate the residence hall climate more negatively than White students.<sup>92</sup> A study of racial microaggressions in residence halls revealed that in a variety of interpersonal interactions with roommates, floormates, and other peers in residence halls, students of color, including Black students, shared common experiences of being targeted on the basis of race.<sup>93</sup> For example, students of color witnessed racial slurs in residence halls which conveyed the message that they do not belong.<sup>94</sup> In addition to experiencing interpersonal conflict, Black students feel a lack of belonging because of

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<sup>88</sup> Sedlacek, *supra* note 87 (listing common forms of racism faced by Black students at PWIs including admissions, interactions with faculty, and issues in general campus life such as residence halls, with fraternities, and police).

<sup>89</sup> Daniel Solorzano, Miguel Ceja & Tara Yosso, *Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate: The Experiences of African American College Students*, J. NEGRO EDUC. 60–73 (2000); William A. Smith, Walter R. Allen & Lynette L. Danley, “Assume the Position... You Fit the Description” *Psychosocial Experiences and Racial Battle Fatigue among African American Male College Students*, 51 AM. BEHAV. SCI. 551–578 (2007); Binkley and Whack, *supra* note 54.

<sup>90</sup> Smith, Allen, and Danley, *supra* note 89. Some of the cumulative physiological and psychological symptoms of racial battle fatigue include tension headaches and backaches, elevated heartbeat, extreme fatigue, loss of self-confidence, frustration, denial, and emotional and social withdrawal. *Id.*

<sup>91</sup> Julie R. Ancis, William E. Sedlacek & Jonathan J. Mohr, *Student Perceptions of Campus Cultural Climate by Race*, 78 J. COUNS. DEV. 180–185 (2000); Harper and Hurtado, *supra* note 87.

<sup>92</sup> Vanessa D. Johnson, *Cultural group perceptions of racial climates in residence halls*, 41 J. STUD. AFF. RES. PRACT. 114–134 (2003).

<sup>93</sup> Stacy A. Harwood et al., *Racial Microaggressions in the Residence Halls: Experiences of Students of Color at a Predominantly White University.*, 5 J. DIVERS. HIGH. EDUC. 159 (2012).

<sup>94</sup> *Id.* at 166.

the absence of Black cultural presence in the physical environment of many residence halls (e.g., residence hall pictures, art, and namesakes) and the lack of representation in organizations like the Resident Housing Association.<sup>95</sup>

Black-themed campus communities provide academic, social, and emotional support to help Black students thrive despite a hostile campus climate and to ensure they “do not feel isolated.”<sup>96</sup> To cope with feelings of self-doubt, frustration, and isolation that result from experiencing racism and racial microaggressions in academic and social spaces at PWIs, Black students often create “counter-spaces” to challenge deficit notions about Black people and create a positive environment.<sup>97</sup> These crucial spaces provide a place where Black students’ experiences are validated, and they can vent their frustrations and commune with others who share or can understand their experiences of microaggressions and overt discrimination. Black-themed campus communities are a form of institutionally sanctioned counter-spaces.

Black-themed residential programs also provide an immediate network of same-race peers and allies interested in Black culture and issues relevant to the Black community. For Black students, having more same-race friends during college is related to enhanced academic commitment and motivation at the end of college.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, high achieving Black males reported that even though they had meaningful relationships with non-Black students, their same-race peer support significantly enhanced the quality of their college experiences, helped them accomplish more, and aided in their successful

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<sup>95</sup> Bryan K. Hotchkins & T. Dancy, *A House Is Not A Home: Black Students’ Responses to Racism in University Residential Halls.*, 43 J. COLL. UNIV. STUD. HOUS. 42, 47-48 (2017).

<sup>96</sup> *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306, 319 (2003).

<sup>97</sup> Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso, *supra* note 89 at 70-73.

<sup>98</sup> Shana Levin, Colette Van Laar & Winona Foote, *Ethnic Segregation and Perceived Discrimination in College: Mutual Influences and Effects on Social and Academic Life*, 36 J. APPL. SOC. PSYCHOL. 1471–1501 (2006).

adjustment to college.<sup>99</sup> Like other types of racial affinity groups, Black-themed campus communities help Black students meet the social and academic demands of college and facilitate the transition into broader social and academic systems on campus.<sup>100</sup>

Opponents of Black-themed campus communities contend that they create racial separation that further exacerbates the hostile racial environments and discrimination experienced by Black students at PWIs and ultimately reinforces larger societal racial inequalities.<sup>101</sup> However, as Drew Days explains:

Black students should not have to subject themselves to undue psychological and emotional stress . . . [at PWIs]. 'Afro-Am houses,' properly handled, need not be the source of racial divisiveness. Rather, they can serve to promote the healthy integration of black students and black culture into the life of predominantly white institutions. Such integration does not demand black assimilation but instead reflects respect for cultural diversity.<sup>102</sup>

In addition to providing a counter-space, Black-themed campus communities also provide Black students the opportunity to join together as a collective body. On average, Black students comprise less than 10 percent of the student body population at PWIs.<sup>103</sup> Because of their minoritized status, Black students wield less power when their unique interests do not align with the majority student interests. Black-themed dorms and other ethnic-based spaces provide a space for Black students to organize and concentrate their presence and power along lines of ethnic identity.<sup>104</sup> History reveals campus

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<sup>99</sup> Shaun R. Harper, *Peer Support for African American Male College Achievement: Beyond Internalized Racism and the Burden of "Acting White"*, 14 J. MEN'S STUD. 337, 347-48 (2007).

<sup>100</sup> Richard Nagasawa & Paul Wong, *A Theory of Minority Students' Survival in College*, 69 SOCIOL. INQ. 76, 83 (1999).

<sup>101</sup> Woodson, *supra* note 11 at 839-40.

<sup>102</sup> Drew S. Days III, *Brown Blues: Rethinking the Integrative Ideal*, 34 WM. & MARY L. REV. 53, 73 (1992).

<sup>103</sup> *Supra*, notes 52, 63, and 74 and accompanying text.

<sup>104</sup> See Bocian, *supra* note 13 at 15 (noting that by promoting program houses for African Americans and other marginalized groups, "universities and colleges bolster the campuses' diversity by lending resonance

changes resulting from Black students uniting their power to demand changes at their colleges and universities.<sup>105</sup> Black-themed campus communities often provide a space for students to explore issues of power and inequality and unite to address them.

## 2. Cultural Exposure and Preservation

In addition to providing support to reduce isolation, Black-themed residential programs expose Black students an array of Black cultures and perspectives, thereby preserving and transmitting Black history and culture. Critical race scholar Alex Johnson argues that historically or predominantly Black colleges and universities must be maintained because of their important role in preserving the unique cultural “nomos” or norms of the Black community.<sup>106</sup> More specifically, he argues the schools serve as transmitters and preservers of African-American culture and give Black students the choices of when and whether to integrate into mainstream White culture.<sup>107</sup> Johnson contends historically or predominantly Black colleges and universities serve as an effective counterbalance to the maintenance of white culture through predominantly white colleges.<sup>108</sup> A similar argument can be made for Black-themed residential programs at PWIs.

The Supreme Court has repeatedly emphasized the cultural socialization function of public education and the importance of exposure to different cultures.<sup>109</sup> However,

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to the presence of minorities. . . . [B]ecause their numbers are fewer and their power less, minority students cannot achieve equality without concentrating their presence and power along lines of subgroup identity”).

<sup>105</sup> *Supra*, notes 55 through 58 and accompanying text.

<sup>106</sup> Johnson, *supra* note 35 at 1431-33.

<sup>107</sup> *Id.* at 1432.

<sup>108</sup> *Id.* at 1456.

<sup>109</sup> See e.g., *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306, 331 (2003) (acknowledging the importance of preparing students for work and citizenship and describing education as pivotal to “sustaining our political and cultural heritage”) (citation omitted); *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483, 495 (1954) (describing education as “a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment”).

PWIs primarily reflect and promote White middle-class cultural norms.<sup>110</sup> As a result, not only do many Black students feel unrepresented and isolated because their culture, history, and perspective are not reflected on campus, there are also limited opportunities for Black students to learn about the history and cultures of their own group. Part of exposing students to “diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints”<sup>111</sup> includes teaching Black students about the diversity of culture, language, religion, thought, and experiences within the Black community.<sup>112</sup> Black-themed residential programs provide residents and visitors the unique opportunity to explore within-group differences in a supportive learning environment centered on Black heritage.<sup>113</sup>

Moreover, Black-themed residential programs can facilitate relationships between Black students and faculty or community elders—many of whom are knowledgeable about and can transmit valuable culture. For instance, Cornell’s Ujamaa House has several faculty and community fellows “that provide students with opportunities to explore and cultivate their academic, intellectual, and cultural interests” while also building inter-generational relationships that help preserve Black culture and heritage.<sup>114</sup>

In addition to faculty affiliates often housed in African American & African studies

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<sup>110</sup> Johnson, *supra* note 35 at 1456 (“Predominantly white colleges are not ‘neutral’ environments in which African-Americans and whites can meet and learn as equals. Rather, such colleges are institutions that maintain and promote white norms. Such schools mask a white cultural perspective or norm that has the effect of stifling or eradicating the consciousness of African-American students”).

<sup>111</sup> *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 330.

<sup>112</sup> See Johnson, *supra* note 35 at 1415-16 (explaining that African-Americans have their own culture, language, and religions, each a product of their subordinated position in American society and that membership in the African-American ethnic group provides valuable socializing functions).

<sup>113</sup> Even the names of many Black-themed residential programs, such as the University of California Santa Cruz’s Rosa Parks African American Theme House, University of Iowa’s Young Gifted and Black Living Learning Community, and San Francisco State’s Hip Hop Culture Learning Community, signal a celebration of Black culture and heritage.

<sup>114</sup> Cornell University Ujamaa Residential College, *supra* note 62.

departments, most Black-themed residential programs also have staff or fellows who are knowledgeable about Black culture and have experience supporting Black youth.<sup>115</sup>

Some critics of Black-themed residential programs argue that they disadvantage Black students in the long term by limiting their access to the White cultural capital, capital which is beneficial in later work relationships.<sup>116</sup>

While a lack of White cultural capital may explain some lingering economic inequalities,<sup>117</sup> this deficit-oriented approach narrowly defines cultural capital and overlooks the value of other forms of cultural capital that exist within communities of color.<sup>118</sup> Critical race theorist and education scholar Tara Yosso identifies six forms of cultural wealth that exist in communities of color. These include: aspirational capital (e.g., the ability to maintain future hopes and dreams, even in the face of barriers); familial capital (e.g., cultural knowledges nurtured among kin that contain a sense of community history and memory); social capital (e.g., the networks of people and resources that support navigation through institutions); navigational capital (e.g., skills of

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<sup>115</sup> For example, the position description for a fellow at Dartmouth College's Shabazz Center for Intellectual Inquiry requires "[d]emonstrated knowledge of African and African American histories, identities, politics, and cultures." Shabazz Center Fellow Position Description, [https://students.dartmouth.edu/living-learning/sites/students\\_living\\_learning.prod/files/living\\_learning/wysiwyg/shabazz\\_center\\_fellow\\_position\\_description\\_1.pdf](https://students.dartmouth.edu/living-learning/sites/students_living_learning.prod/files/living_learning/wysiwyg/shabazz_center_fellow_position_description_1.pdf) (last visited Jan. 18, 2019).

<sup>116</sup> Woodson, *supra* note 11 at 848-50 (arguing that race-themed campus organizations and housing deprive Black students access to the valuable financial and cultural capital of their non-black classmates ultimately hindering them from establishing valuable interracial relationships in the workplace with white colleagues, supervisors, and potential mentors on the job).

<sup>117</sup> *See id.* at 850 (contending that Black people's lack of rapport with White colleagues and mentors "contributes to the well-documented racial disparities in workplace social capital, and thereby reinforces racial disparities in access to opportunities, support, and a variety of career outcomes").

<sup>118</sup> Sociologist Prudence Carter uses the terms "dominant" and "non-dominant" capital and defines them as follows: "The term dominant cultural capital corresponds to Bourdieu's conception of powerful, high status, cultural attributes, codes and signals. Non-dominant cultural capital embodies a set of tastes or understandings including preferences for particular linguistic, musical, or interaction styles accorded to a lower status group. Non-dominant cultural capital describes the resources used by lower status individuals to gain 'authentic' cultural status positions with their respective communities." Prudence L. Carter, "Black" Cultural Capital, Status Positioning, and Schooling Conflicts for Low-income African American Youth, 50 SOC. PROBL. 136, 138-39 (2003).



maneuvering through social institutions, particularly those not created for communities of color); and resistant capital (e.g., knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality).<sup>119</sup> The relationships, knowledge, and support provided in Black-themed residential programs arguably foster each of these forms of cultural wealth, many of which help Black students to navigate and succeed at PWIs.

The cultural wealth—knowledge, skills, abilities and networks—possessed and used by communities of color should be viewed as an empowering asset.<sup>120</sup> The assumption that Black students require access to White cultural capital to succeed is based on the traditional view that White, middle class culture is the standard by which all other forms of culture are judged.<sup>121</sup> However, cultural pluralism recognizes the value in different cultural communities. Black cultural capital can nurture and empower Black students individually and the Black community as a whole. Given the typically limited opportunities for Black students at PWIs to explore and connect with Black culture and history, Black-themed residential programs are integral in creating, maintaining, transmitting, and ultimately preserving valuable cultural knowledge and capital.

### 3. Facilitate Positive Racial/Ethnic Identity Development

The development of racial/ethnic identity, or the sense of what it means to be a member of one's racial or ethnic group, is an important normative process that begins

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<sup>119</sup> Tara J. Yosso, *Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth*, 8 RACE ETHN. EDUC. 69, 77-80 (2005).

<sup>120</sup> See *id.* at 82 (explaining that “the main goals of identifying and documenting cultural wealth are to transform education and empower People of Color to utilize assets already abundant in their communities”).

<sup>121</sup> Yosso, *supra* note 119 at 76 (arguing that Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital “exposes White, middle class culture as the standard, and therefore all other forms and expressions of ‘culture’ are judged in comparison to this ‘norm’”).

during adolescence and extends into the college years.<sup>122</sup> Exploring and resolving one's ethnic identity arguably helps Black students develop the "competencies required of future leaders"<sup>123</sup> including the ability to navigate "the challenges of an increasingly diverse workforce"<sup>124</sup> While there are various models of Black racial identity development, individuals generally move from a lack of a clear identity and/or identification with White cultural values to a period of exploration which ultimately leads to a firm commitment to their racial/ethnic identity and the ability to navigate in a multicultural world.<sup>125</sup> For Black students, the exploration or immersion period is often triggered by exposure to racism and involves a rejection of the dominant White culture combined with a desire to explore their own cultural heritage.<sup>126</sup>

There are numerous benefits associated with achieving a positive racial identity. For Black adolescents and college students, having positive attitudes about their racial group is associated with more positive psychological functioning, and a positive racial identity can act as a buffer against the psychological impact of racial discrimination.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Alicia Fedelina Chavez & Florence Guido-DiBrito, *Racial and ethnic identity and development*, 1999 NEW DIR. ADULT CONTIN. EDUC. 39, 40 (1999).

<sup>123</sup> *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306, 330 (2003); *see also* Fisher v. Un. Tex. At Austin, 579 U. S. \_\_\_ (2016) (citing *Grutter*).

<sup>124</sup> Fisher

<sup>125</sup> Cross developed one of the first models of Black racial identity development in which an individual progresses from unawareness of race through embracing Black culture exclusively toward a commitment to many cultures and addressing the concerns of all oppressed groups. William E. Cross, Jr., *The Psychology of Nigrescence: Revising the Cross Model*. (1995). Similarly, Parham theorized that individuals move through angry feelings about Whites to developing a positive Black frame of reference and ultimately develop a realistic perception of racial identity and bicultural success. Thomas A. Parham, *Cycles of Psychological Nigrescence*, 17 COUNS. PSYCHOL. 187 (1989). *See also* Jean S. Phinney & Anthony D. Ong, *Conceptualization and Measurement of Ethnic Identity: Current Status and Future Directions*, 54 J. COUNS. PSYCHOL. 271, 273 (2007) ("A developmental perspective suggests that the formation of an achieved ethnic identity based on learning about one's ethnic group and making a commitment to the group leads to the rejection of negative views based on stereotypes. . . . [A] number of studies have found positive attitudes such as pride and feeling good about one's group to be part of an achieved ethnic identity. Positive feelings for one's group have been shown to predict happiness on a daily basis.") (citations omitted).

<sup>126</sup> Parham, *supra* note 125.

<sup>127</sup> Robert M. Sellers & J. Nicole Shelton, *The Role of Racial Identity in Perceived Racial Discrimination.*, 84 J. PERS. SOC. PSYCHOL. 1079 (2003).

Students who identify more with their racial group and evaluate it more positively have been shown to have greater self-esteem, fewer depressive symptoms, and greater attachment towards school.<sup>128</sup> Additionally, considering race a more significant part of one's identity (e.g., racial centrality) is associated with a higher educational attainment (high school attendance and completion, and college attendance) and higher college grade point average among Black college students.<sup>129</sup>

Related to the exploration phase of racial identity development, Black-themed residential programs give Black students the choice to live in an environment immersed in Black culture within a PWI. For many students, this experience is a vital step in the process of developing a positive racial identity.<sup>130</sup> During this phase of development, the sense of belonging and connection to one's own racial-ethnic group created by living in a Black-themed community may be a significant "source of emotional security and personal strength."<sup>131</sup> However, not all Black students will be in the same phase of development or endorse the same racial ideology.<sup>132</sup> While some Black students may strongly desire immersion in their own cultures, others may prefer housing centered on another social identity or topic of interest while others may prefer traditional residence hall or may not have a preference at all.<sup>133</sup> Black-themed residential programs tend to be

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<sup>128</sup> Michael Hughes et al., *Racial Identity and Well-being Among African Americans*, 78 SOC. PSYCHOL. Q. 25 (2015).

<sup>129</sup> Robert M. Sellers, Tabbye M. Chavous & Deanna Y. Cooke, *Racial Ideology and Racial Centrality as Predictors of African American College Students' Academic Performance*, 24 J. BLACK PSYCHOL. 8, 8 (1998).

<sup>130</sup> Johnson, *supra* note 35 at 1405, 1418 (arguing that forced integration will not result in the integration idea; rather the integration idea will only be reached when African-Americans, including Black college students, are given the choice of if and when to integrate into the larger society).

<sup>131</sup> *Id.* at 1451 (citation omitted).

<sup>132</sup> Sellers, Chavous, and Cooke, *supra* note 130.

<sup>133</sup> Johnson, *supra* note 35 at 1447 (describing three main categories of Black students during his undergraduate experience: (1) nationalists who wanted very little to do with White students; (2) desegregationists, who identified with the Black community, but also felt comfortable interacting with

relatively small compared the total number of Black students on campus, so not all students can choose to participate in the residential immersion experience.<sup>134</sup>

Nevertheless, providing a Black-themed residential program helps create a supportive environment that promotes development of a healthy racial identity for Black students.

### III. HOW BLACK-THEMED RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS FURTHER THE DIVERSITY RATIONALE

Black-themed residential programs do not only benefit Black students, they also contribute to the educational benefits delineated by the Supreme Court. At a minimum, by providing support to Black students, Black-themed residential programs help create and maintain a “critical mass of minority students” necessary to produce diversity benefits.<sup>135</sup> Beyond contributing to compositional diversity, Black-themed residential programs offer opportunities for diversity interactions and cultural exchange between program residents and with the larger campus community which can help reduce racial isolation and stereotypes.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, the programs provide opportunities for “a robust exchange of ideas” and “exposure to differing cultures” for residents and the larger community.<sup>137</sup> Part III discuss how Black-themed residential programs promote diversity benefits and provides examples from several institutions.

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White students; and (3) assimilationists who did not identify with other African-Americans and made a conscious choice to socialize with Whites).

<sup>134</sup> See MAYA A. BEASLEY, *OPTING OUT: LOSING THE POTENTIAL OF AMERICA’S YOUNG BLACK ELITE* 75 (2012) (finding that although just over 10% of the black student population at Stanford University lived in the Ujamma House, its impact extended beyond the Black residents. Specifically, many black students who did not live at Ujamma ate there during meals and socialized there. Thus, it was not only a residence, but “a center of African American student socialization.”).

<sup>135</sup> *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306, 333 (2003).

<sup>136</sup> *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, 570 U.S. 297, 300 (2013).

<sup>137</sup> *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, 579 U.S. \_\_\_\_ (2016).

*A. Create and Maintain a “Critical Mass” of Black Students*

In higher education affirmative action cases, the Supreme Court has repeatedly emphasized the educational benefits that flow from having “critical mass” or “meaningful representation” of underrepresented students of color.<sup>138</sup> In addition to combating isolation, a critical mass of underrepresented students reduces racial stereotypes as White students learn there is no one “minority viewpoint.”<sup>139</sup> In other words, student body diversity is a necessary precondition for students to experience diversity benefits in ways that would not occur in a more homogeneous student body.<sup>140</sup> Research overwhelmingly indicates that student body diversity is positively related to informal interactional diversity.<sup>141</sup> That is, students attending institutions with an ethnically diverse student body report more cross-group interactions than students attending more homogenous institutions. These classroom and informal cross-racial interactions then become the foundation for many of the benefits that flow from racial/ethnic diversity.<sup>142</sup>

Black-themed residential programs can help recruit Black students to PWIs. Although overall Black enrollment in colleges and universities has increased over the past 20 years,<sup>143</sup> the percentage of Black undergraduates at many top-ranked universities shrunk between 1994 and 2013.<sup>144</sup> While there are many reasons for this decrease,<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 309.

<sup>139</sup> *Id.* at 320.

<sup>140</sup> Patricia Gurin, *Selections From the Compelling Need for Diversity in Higher Education, Expert Reports in Defense of the University of Michigan*, 32 EQUITY EXCELL. 36–62 (1999).

<sup>141</sup> Gary R. Pike & George D. Kuh, *Relationships among Structural Diversity, Informal Peer Interactions and Perceptions of the Campus Environment*, 29 REV. HIGH. EDUC. 425, 427 (2006) (noting that findings from most studies indicates that structural diversity is positively related to informal interactional diversity).

<sup>142</sup> Gurin, *supra* note 141.

<sup>143</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Facts, <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=667> (last visited Jan. 18, 2019).

<sup>144</sup> Andrew McGill, *The Missing Black Students at Elite American Universities*, THE ATLANTIC (Nov. 23, 2015), <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/black-college-student-body/417189/>

<sup>145</sup> *Id.* (discussing several reasons for decreased enrollment of Black students).

Black-themed campus communities can help attract talented Black students to top-ranked schools by signaling a commitment to an inclusive community that values Black heritage. Current Black students may also be more likely to recommend the school to others if they have a positive experience and feel their institution supports them. While creating a Black-themed residential program will not alone address negative campus racial climate, having Black-themed residential program reflects culturally pluralistic values that can help attract more Black students.

Perhaps even more importantly, Black-themed campus communities can increase retention and graduation rates so Black students remain on campus after they matriculate. On average, Black students have significantly lower graduation rates than White students.<sup>146</sup> Given the range of race-related stressors experienced by Black students, particularly those at PWIs, this should not be surprising.<sup>147</sup> Compared to other racial groups, the 2013 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students was lowest for Black students (41%).<sup>148</sup> Retention statistics are particularly low for Black male undergraduates, who statistically have the lowest likelihood of completing college.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, Black students' experiences of hostile environment are related to

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<sup>146</sup> Lauren Camera, The College Graduation Gap is Still Growing, U.S. NEWS (Mar. 23, 2016), <http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/data-mine/2016/03/23/study-college-graduation-gap-between-blacks-whites-still-growing> (noting the growing gap between the numbers of black and white students who graduate).

<sup>147</sup> *Supra*, notes 86 through 94 and accompanying text.

<sup>148</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2016, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016007.pdf> (last visited Jan. 18, 2019).

<sup>149</sup> Shaun R. Harper & Stephen John Quaye, *Student Organizations as Venues for Black Identity Expression and Development among African American Male Student Leaders*, 48 J. COLL. STUD. DEV. 127, 127 (2007) (stating that Black male undergraduates have the worst college completion rate among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education).

attrition, with more positive perceptions of campus racial climate correlated with higher retention rates.<sup>150</sup>

Many Black-themed residential programs developed at least in part to provide a supportive academic environment to aid Black students in successfully completing their degrees and ultimately prepare them for the workforce. North Carolina State University's Black Male Initiative (BMI) program expects residents to accomplish specific learning outcomes that support their academic success and retention. These goals include “creat[ing] individualized goals for academic and co-curricular involvement,” “identify[ing] campus resources that will be helpful to their matriculation,” and “articulat[ing] strategies to address challenges that may arise throughout their lifetime.”<sup>151</sup> To date, there is no research examining how participation in Black-themed residential programs influences retention or graduation for Black students. Nonetheless, offering support designed to meet the unique needs of underrepresented students arguably helps colleges and universities maintain the critical mass of Black students required to achieve educational benefits that flow from student body diversity.

### *B. Facilitate Positive Diversity Interactions*

The presence of a critical mass of Black students on campus is the starting point, but simply bringing and keeping students on campus is not sufficient to produce

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<sup>150</sup> See Derrick Love, AnnMarie Trammell & James Cartner, *Transformational leadership, campus climate and it's impact on student retention*, 14 in ACADEMY OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP 31 (2009) (“African American students at PWIs were surveyed and results concluded a strong correlation between campus climate and student retention”); Derrick Love, *Student Retention Through the Lens of Campus Climate, Racial Stereotypes, and Faculty Relationships*, 4 J. DIVERS. MANAG. 21 (2009) (finding a positive correlation between the perceptions of African-American students pertaining to student retention and campus climate, racial stereotypes, and faculty relationships at a predominantly white institution).

<sup>151</sup> NC State Living and Learning Initiatives, <https://villages.dasa.ncsu.edu/village-options/black-male-initiative/benefits-and-expectations/> (last visited Jan. 18, 2019).

substantial diversity benefits.<sup>152</sup> The diversity benefits specified in *Grutter* depend on the quality, frequency, and nature of classroom and informal interactions among diverse peers.<sup>153</sup> Students benefit not only from their own diversity interactions, but also from being in an educational context with certain conditions, such as “a curriculum that reflects the historical and contemporary experiences of people of color, programs that support the recruitment, retention and graduation of students of color, and an institutional mission that reinforces the colleges’ commitment to pluralism.”<sup>154</sup> Black-themed residential programs are consistent with these conditions.

A common critique of Black-themed residential programs is that they undermine the benefits of diversity by reducing intergroup contact.<sup>155</sup> It is important to acknowledge that positive interaction with peers from other racial or ethnic groups is related to a range of positive outcomes, particularly for White students.<sup>156</sup> However, much of the research on diversity or intergroup interactions has focused on neutral or positive cross-racial interactions, such as meaningful discussions about diversity or social justice and sharing of personal feelings and problems.<sup>157</sup> Only recently have researchers begun to consider

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<sup>152</sup> Gurin, *supra* note 26.

<sup>153</sup> *Id.*

<sup>154</sup> Mitchell James Chang, *Quality matters: Achieving benefits associated with racial diversity*, COLUMB. KIRWIN INST. STUDY RACE ETHN. OHIO STATE UNIV. (2011).

<sup>155</sup> Amar and Katyal, *supra* note 11; Blair, *supra* note 81 and accompanying text (detailing the letter from two Commissioners on the US Commission for Civil Rights to the president of the University of Connecticut).

<sup>156</sup> Nicholas A. Bowman, *Promoting Participation in a Diverse Democracy: A Meta-Analysis of College Diversity Experiences and Civic Engagement*, 81 REV. EDUC. RES. 29–68 (2011) (diversity experiences related to greater civic engagement); Nicholas A. Bowman, *College Diversity Experiences and Cognitive Development: A Meta-Analysis*, 80 REV. EDUC. RES. 4–33 (2010) (diversity experiences related to cognitive development); Chang, *supra* note 157 (summarizing various outcomes associated with cross-racial interaction); and Thomas F. Pettigrew & Linda R. Tropp, *A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory*, 90 J. PERS. SOC. PSYCHOL. 751 (2006) (students’ intergroup interactions are associated with lower levels of intergroup prejudice).

<sup>157</sup> Patricia Gurin et al., *Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes*, 72 HARV. EDUC. REV. 330–367 (2002).



the impact of negative diversity interactions, which can include experiences of discrimination or tense interaction with peers from other racial groups. Negative diversity interactions happen in various locations, but often occur in residence halls.<sup>158</sup> Negative diversity interactions, particularly in informal interactions with peers, are associated with a variety of negative outcomes, including lower cognitive and critical thinking skills and academic self-confidence.<sup>159</sup> Negative diversity interactions have also been linked to lower levels of cultural awareness, tolerance of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, self-efficacy for social change, perspective-taking, support for institutional diversity practices, and development of a pluralistic orientation.<sup>160</sup> In fact, students who reported mostly negative interactions with different-race peers were likely to think they had fundamental value differences with students from other racial/ethnic groups and were more likely to identify with others in their own racial group.<sup>161</sup> Thus, negative diversity interactions undermine the benefits of diversity the Supreme Court articulated in *Grutter*.

In comparison to traditional residence halls, students in “living/learning” communities report more positive social interactions. The 2007 National Study of Living-Learning Programs found that compared to traditional residence hall students, living/learning participants reported more positive interactions with peers and faculty,

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<sup>158</sup> Harwood et al., *supra* note 93.

<sup>159</sup> Thomas F. Nelson Laird, College Students’ Experiences with Diversity and Their Effects on Academic Self-confidence, Social Agency, and Disposition Toward Critical Thinking, 46 RES. HIGH. EDUC. 365–387 (2005) (finding that negative diversity experiences, but not positive ones, were related to the overall disposition to think critically); Josipa Roksa et al., *Engaging with Diversity: How Positive and Negative Diversity Interactions Influence Students’ Cognitive Outcomes*, 88 J. HIGH. EDUC. 297, 315 (2017) (finding that “negative diversity interactions have a strong negative relationship to need for cognition and critical thinking skills at the end of college and that these negative effects hold for both students of color and their white peers”).

<sup>160</sup> Sylvia Hurtado, *The Next Generation of Diversity and Intergroup Relations Research*, 61 J. SOC. ISSUES 595–610 (2005).

<sup>161</sup> *Id.*

perceptions of an academically and socially supportive residence hall climate, and peer diversity interactions.<sup>162</sup> Additionally, students in living/learning communities focused on domestic diversity issues, including race/ethnicity or other social identities, scored the highest on appreciation for diversity among various types of living/learning programs.<sup>163</sup> These data provide evidence that structure of living/learning communities, including Black-themed residential programs, facilitate more positive interactions and climate and a greater appreciation for diversity consistent with the benefits outlined by the Supreme Court.

Black-themed residential programs encourage positive diversity interactions in two ways. First, in communities with mostly Black residents, Black-themed residential programs can be a respite for Black students. Intergroup interactions can invoke anxiety for both White students and students of color because of the uncertainty and unfamiliarity in interactions with outgroup members.<sup>164</sup> Additionally, many Black college students spend large amounts of social energy coping with prejudice and discrimination as well as functioning in a campus culture they find unwelcoming and foreign.<sup>165</sup> This leaves them with little energy to engage in vital interracial interactions that promote cross-racial understanding and help dismantle racial stereotypes.<sup>166</sup> Black-themed campus communities can act as a buffer, allowing Black students to reserve social energy to engage in vital cross-racial interactions in other spaces.

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<sup>162</sup> INKELAS, *supra* note 60 at 1.

<sup>163</sup> *Id.* at 13.

<sup>164</sup> Nicholas Sorensen et al., *Taking a “Hands On” approach to diversity in higher education: A Critical-Dialogic Model for effective intergroup interaction*, 9 ANAL. SOC. ISSUES PUBLIC POLICY 3–35 (2009).

<sup>165</sup> Valerie A. Lewis, *Social Energy and Racial Segregation in the University Context*, 93 SOC. SCI. Q. 270, 270 (2012).

<sup>166</sup> See Harpalani, *supra* note 9 at 133 (arguing that racial/ethnic student organizations can promote cross-racial interactions because they serve as a “home base” students of color).

Second, given the challenges in communicating across differences,<sup>167</sup> Black-themed residential programs offer repeated opportunities for structured dialogue and learning that increase the likelihood of positive diversity interactions. Based on media portrayals and common rhetoric, many people assume that only Black students participate in Black-themed residential programs,<sup>168</sup> when in fact, some institutions have great racial diversity among residents. For example, at Stanford University's Ujamaa House,<sup>169</sup> fifty percent of the residents are from the African Diaspora while the other fifty percent are from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Ujamaa House aims to create "a safe environment for open, honest, and sometimes challenging dialogue" and offers various programs and events that facilitate structured interaction among residents.<sup>170</sup> Both structured and informal interactions are supported by staff who are culturally competent and able to support a diverse student population.

Black-themed residential programs also provide unique opportunities for guided interaction and dialogue with the larger campus community. For instance, Dartmouth College's Shabazz Center houses a Black-themed residential program and is also used for various programs and events that "promote the intellectual breadth of residents and stimulate intellectual dialogue within the greater community."<sup>171</sup> Since programs offered by Black-themed residential programs center Black experiences, they often offer unique perspectives not found in other spaces on campus.

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<sup>167</sup> See Sorensen et al., *supra* note 165.

<sup>168</sup> Harpalani, *supra* note 9.

<sup>169</sup> Stanford Residential Education, <https://resed.stanford.edu/residences/find-house/ujamaa> (last visited Jan. 18, 2019).

<sup>170</sup> *Id.*

<sup>171</sup> Dartmouth Living Learning Communities, <https://students.dartmouth.edu/living-learning/communities/identity-based-communities/shabazz-center-intellectual-inquiry> (last visited Jan. 18, 2019).

### *C. Encourage Cross-Cultural Understanding*

Related to positive diversity interactions, Black-themed residential programs promote diversity benefits from *Grutter* by challenging students to consider alternative viewpoints and exposing them “to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints.”<sup>172</sup> While Black students at PWIs frequently have opportunities to encounter perspectives of people from outside their racial group, there are often fewer opportunities for non-Black students to explore the Black experience. Black-themed residential programs provide residents and the larger community with opportunities to better understand the diversity of Black culture, history, and perspectives.

In comparison to other campus spaces that typically reflect White culture and history, being immersed in the physical space dedicated to Black culture is in itself a cultural immersion experience and learning opportunity. For instance, the University of Pennsylvania’s W.E.B. Du Bois College House is “adorned with majestic reminders of our legacy,” including photo exhibits, an extensive library, and an art gallery all dedicated to Black culture and history.<sup>173</sup> Much like a museum, some Black-themed residential programs use décor and physical space to share knowledge and facilitate discussion about Black art and contributions. As program residents and visitors learn about Black heritage, they are better equipped to share their knowledge with others.

Many Black-themed residential programs sponsor events that draw large audiences with the goal of broad exposure to Black heritage. For example, Wesleyan University’s Malcolm X house is dedicated to “exploration and celebration of the cultural

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<sup>172</sup> *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306, 330 (2003).

<sup>173</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois College House, <https://www.collegehouses.upenn.edu/about/dubois> (last visited Jan. 18, 2019).

heritage of the African Diaspora, both for [residents] and for the larger Wesleyan community.”<sup>174</sup> Each year, residents organize an event celebrating Malcolm X during Black History Month.

In addition to large cultural celebrations, Black-themed residential programs host smaller discussions for residents and the university community related to social justice and the unique present-day experiences of Black people. Because Black-themed residential programs center the experiences of Black people, Black students often select the topic and terms of conversations, which gives them greater freedom to express themselves and discuss issues that likely would not arise in other spaces.<sup>175</sup> For example, Wesleyan University’s Malcolm X House hosted a discussion about how race impacts the Wesleyan experience, including topics like racial profiling, assumptions about class made based on skin color, and the history of and role of students of color on campus.<sup>176</sup> Many White students may be unaware these topics, as students of color are more likely to engage in conversations about power, privilege, illegitimacy of the status quo, and need for social change.<sup>177</sup> Black-themed residential programs provide a space for these discussions to occur and for students to gain exposure to the range of perspectives in the Black community.

Lastly, living in a Black-themed residential program or attending smaller programs offers another important cultural experience for White students: the feeling of discomfort that occurs from being a numerical minority.<sup>178</sup> This experience can help

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<sup>174</sup> Malcolm X House, <https://www.wesleyan.edu/reslife/housing/program/malcolmx.htm> (last visited Jan. 18, 2019).

<sup>175</sup> Harpalani, *supra* note 9 at 154.

<sup>176</sup> Wesleying, <http://wesleying.org/tag/malcolm-x-house/> (last visited Jan. 18, 2019).

<sup>177</sup> Sorensen et al., *supra* note 165.

<sup>178</sup> Harpalani, *supra* note 9 at 160.

White students develop cross-racial understanding and empathy and prepare them for the nation's changing demographics.<sup>179</sup> Moreover, research shows that people who attend diverse schools and live in racially integrated neighborhoods as children are more likely to live in integrated neighborhoods as adults, thereby interrupting the intergenerational perpetuation of racial fears and prejudice that racial segregation reinforces.<sup>180</sup>

Participating in a Black-themed residential program may have similar long-term effects for White students.

#### CONCLUSION

This article contributes to the continued debate over Black-themed residential programs by highlighting the ways in which they benefit Black students and promote the educational benefits of diversity. Contrary to popular belief, campus housing for students who share a racial identity or who are interested in learning about a particular racial group does not equal racial segregation. Rather, Black-themed residential programs are an opportunity to recognize, support, and celebrate the unique history, needs, and culture of Black people. Some Black-themed residential programs recognize that Black students continue to face unique challenges at PWIs and therefore require unique supports. Other programs invite interested students and community members to learn about and celebrate the experiences and heritage of Black people. Whatever the mission, the entire campus community benefits when the institution recognizes, values, and meaningfully incorporates Black people and their cultures.

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<sup>179</sup> *Id.*

<sup>180</sup> Jomills Henry Braddock III & Amaryllis Del Carmen Gonzales, *Social Isolation and Social Cohesion: The Effects of K-12 Neighborhood and School Segregation on Intergroup Orientations*, 12(6) TCHRS C. REC. 1631 (2010); Michal Kurlander & John Yun, *Fifty Years After Brown: New Evidence of the Impact of School Racial Composition on Student Outcomes*, 6 INT'L J. EDUC. RES. POL'Y & PRAC. 51 (2005).

In the postsecondary context, integration has typically required students of color to assimilate into predominantly White spaces and ways of being. Cultural pluralism, on the other hand, encourages different cultural communities to exist within a shared environment. Black-themed residential communities allow Black students to live in cultural communities designed to nourish their unique needs and heritage. At the same time, they offer opportunities for diverse residents and members of the larger community to engage in high quality diversity interactions and cross-cultural understanding. It is this balance between integration and separatism – or diversity within unity<sup>181</sup> – that best promotes the educational benefits outlined in *Grutter*.

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<sup>181</sup> Bocian, *supra* note 13.

“It Absolutely Impacts Every Day”: Diversity Allies Connect Racial History and Current  
Climate at a Southern Professional School

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“It Absolutely Impacts Every Day”: Diversity Allies Connect Racial History and Current Climate at a Southern Professional School

Amid recent racial unrest and high-profile incidents on college campuses across the nation (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012), students organized in 2015 to demand institutional changes to address systemic racism. Many of the formal demands issued to more than 75 colleges and universities overlap, with students pushing for greater faculty and student diversity, curricular changes, and expanded budgets for resources to support underrepresented students (Harris, Barone, & Davis, 2015; The Demands, n.d.). Additionally, students want their institutions to address past challenges with race and racism. They are calling for colleges and universities to acknowledge troubling racial history, remove racist monuments, rename buildings named after White supremacists, and require courses about historical racial violence (The Demands, n.d.).

Driven in large part by student demands, racial climate has recently become a high priority for many college and university presidents than it was in the past (Espinosa, Chessman, & Wayt, 2016). Presidents have most often responded to student pressures with initiatives aimed at increasing diversity among students, faculty and/or staff (Espinosa et al., 2016). However, many institutions have also begun examining racist pasts. Since 2014, more than 45 institutions have joined Universities Studying Slavery, a collaborative effort to address historical and contemporary issues of race and inequality in higher education and university communities (“Universities Studying Slavery,” n.d.). So far, much of the historical work has concentrated on how Historically White Institutions (HWIs) participated in and benefited from slavery (Wilder, 2013).

Consequently, many HWIs have sought to make amends for ties to slavery through special programs, research projects and symposiums, renaming buildings, and even giving preferential admissions treatment to descendants of enslaved people (Doerer, 2018; Eaton, 2018). Beyond exploring slavery, some institutions are now turning to more recent racial history, including their roles in racial segregation.

While we know that students are calling out the continued influences of historical racism and institutions are responding by beginning to grapple with the past, we know less about the experiences and perceptions of those on the front lines of diversity work. Although all faculty and administrators shape university life and racial climate (Harper, 2017), some institutions have developed diversity ally programs in which certain staff serve as resources and/or advocates for diversity and inclusion. Allies are generally defined as “people who work for social justice from positions of dominance” (Patton & Bondi, 2015, p. 489). Thus, allies are not members of the target group they are supporting, but can be members of a different nondominant group (e.g., lesbians serving as allies for gay men) (Brown & Ostrove, 2013). Because diversity allies often serve as “go to” people on diversity issues, it is essential to understand their perceptions about how racist institutional history continues to impact current climate and what institutions should do to address history.

This study utilizes the campus racial climate framework (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999, 1998; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005) to examine narratives of diversity allies at one southern professional school with a history of racial segregation. Campus racial climate has frequently been applied to investigate student outcomes, but less attention has been paid to the experiences and perspectives of faculty

and staff (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012). The author was not able to locate any study aimed at understanding how a history of exclusion continues to impact present-day racial climate as perceived by faculty and staff, particularly those who serve as diversity allies. As more colleges and universities reckon with different eras of their racist pasts, it is important to understand how a history of exclusion can have a lasting influence on present-day racial climate.

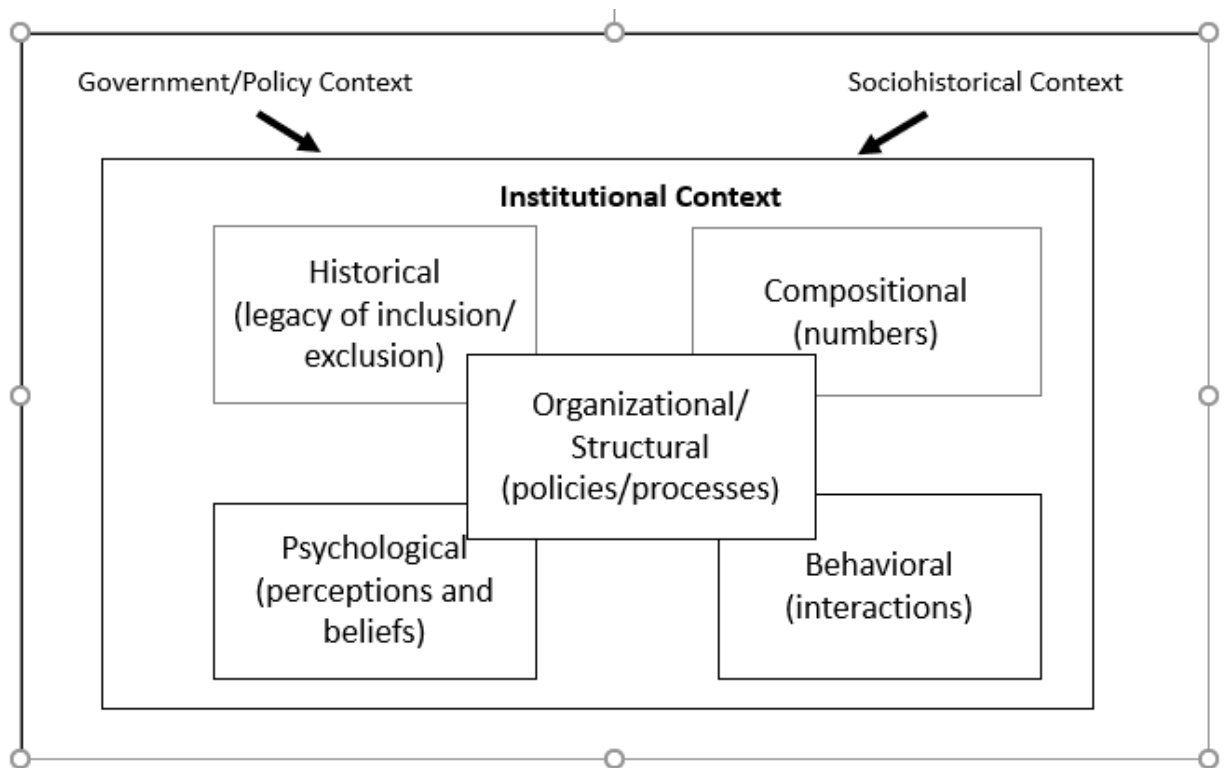
### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

#### **Campus Racial Climate Framework**

This study uses the campus racial climate framework to explore how diversity allies perceive their professional school's history of racial segregation as impacting current racial climate. Campus racial climate is "part of the institutional context that includes community members' attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations around issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity" (Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008, p. 205). The campus racial climate framework was originally developed by Hurtado and colleagues (1998, 1999) and later modified by Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005). The campus racial climate framework recognizes that students are educated in racial contexts and views racial climate as a multidimensional construct shaped by the interactions of forces external and internal to colleges and universities. Because meaningful assessments of campus racial climate should include multiple perspectives including individuals who play different roles on campus (Hurtado & Dey, 1997), the model has also been applied to faculty and staff (e.g., Fries-Britt, Rowan-Kenyon, Perna, Milem, & Howard, 2011; Jayakumar, Howard, Allen, & Han, 2009; Mayhew, Grunwald, & Dey, 2005).

The external forces that together shape the internal institutional context include governmental/policy environment and sociohistorical events (Hurtado et al., 1999, 1998). Internal to an institution, there are five interconnected climate dimensions. Recognizing that climate reflects both institutional- and individual-level lived experiences of organizational life, the framework identifies three institutional dimensions as well as two individual dimensions (Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Campus Racial Climate Framework



The first institutional dimension, compositional diversity, refers to the numerical representation of individuals from various racial and ethnic groups among students, faculty, staff, and administrators on campus. Second, the historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion considers how the historical vestiges of inclusion or exclusion of racial/ethnic groups affect the current campus climate and practices. Third, the

organizational/structural dimension identifies structures and processes that often appear neutral or go unquestioned, yet perpetuate systematic inequity among racial groups. These processes often are based on agreed upon procedures implemented by dominant groups of faculty and administrators and include tenure, recruitment and hiring, budget allocations, diversity in the curriculum, institutional commitment to diversity, and other institutional practices and policies (Hurtado et al., 2012, 1998; Milem et al., 2005).

Among the individual-level climate dimensions, the psychological dimension involves perceptions of the environment, views of intergroup relations, and perceptions of discrimination or racial conflict within the institutional context. The psychological dimension also includes attitudes about individuals from different racial and ethnic backgrounds and views about institutional responses to diversity. Lastly, the behavioral dimension of the campus climate refers to the context, frequency, and quality of interactions on campus among and between individuals from different racial/ethnic groups. The behavioral dimension includes formal interactions in curricular or cocurricular settings and informal interactions that occur outside of intentionally designed educational activities. The psychological and behavioral dimensions are closely related and reinforce one another (Hurtado et al., 1999, 1998; Milem et al., 2005).

### **The Historical Dimension**

Unlike the other four dimensions of campus racial climate, the historical dimension is “rarely assessed” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 59) and remains “largely unaddressed” (Hurtado et al., 2008, p. 206) in campus racial climate research. Despite the lack of scholarly attention, an institution’s historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion is an important dimension that “serves as the backdrop for the campus racial climate” (Milem

et al., 2005, p. 23). The historical dimension emphasizes how the historical vestiges of exclusion, which were part of a larger sociohistorical and policy context of racial segregation, impact the present-day campus climate and practices. While some campuses have a history of admitting students of color since their founding, most HWIs have a history of limited access and exclusion (Hurtado et al., 2012, 2008). This history of exclusion often results in unrecognized benefits for particular groups to the detriment of groups that have been historically excluded and the existence of attitudes and behaviors that impede or prevent cross-racial interaction (Milem et al., 2005).

Understanding the continued influence of an institution's historical legacy involves an in-depth examination of a particular institutional context, and it is difficult to assess with quantitative approaches (Hurtado et al., 2012). Thus, the few researchers who have examined historical legacy tend to use qualitative or mixed methods. Specifically, case studies are commonly used to assess the historical legacy of exclusion and subsequent policy changes that influence the campus climate for diversity (e.g., (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2009; Peterson et al., 1978). The vast majority of these studies have focused on how students are impacted by the historical context.

The literature suggests vestiges of segregation continue to affect campus racial climate for students of color, particularly Black students. In a qualitative study of racial climate across five campuses, Harper and Hurtado (2007) found that Black students expressed the highest degrees of dissatisfaction with the campus social environment. Unlike students from other racial groups, Black students described the racist reputations their institutions continue to have in Black communities. The authors theorized that the

reputational legacy of racism provided one explanation for Black students' dissatisfaction with the climate. Similarly, Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996) found that both Black parents and students were aware of a university's reputation for being racist and unwelcoming. In addition to their own experiences, the participants drew on the collective memory of exclusion within the Black community to evaluate the university and make educational decisions.

Other researchers have investigated how the historical context impacts Black students over time. Peterson and colleagues (1978) investigated institutional responses to increased Black student enrollment in the late 1960s to early 1970s. In studies of Black graduate student experiences over the three decades following desegregation, Johnson-Bailey and colleagues (2008, 2009) found that while patterns of support held relatively constant, certain negative elements of climate decreased over time while others remained the same or worsened.

Very few studies have investigated the historical dimension as it relates to faculty or staff. Using the campus racial climate framework, Griffin, Muñiz, and Espinosa (2012) explored factors influencing graduate diversity officers' (GDOs) efforts to increase racial diversity among graduate students. The researchers found that historical legacy had limited relevance to GDOs' work. Specifically, one GDO used his institution's history of inclusion as evidence of a welcoming environment, while the only GDO at an institution with a history of *de jure* segregation reported slowly overcoming history through outreach and recruitment. Aside from this study focused on GDOs working to create a more diverse graduate student body, the author was unable to find any research exploring

faculty or staff perspectives about how an institution's historical legacy of exclusion continues to impact racial climate or what an institution should do to address its past.

### **Method**

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which a history of racial exclusion influences present-day racial climate at a professional school in the south. The study employs a single case study approach, with the professional school serving as the unit of study, to examine the perspectives of faculty and senior administrators at the school. This approach supports the goal of understanding lived experiences within a particular real-life context (Yin, 2009). To investigate the lasting influence of racial segregation at this particular professional school, this paper addresses the following questions:

1. How do faculty and senior administrator diversity allies believe their professional school's history of racial segregation influences present-day racial climate?
2. What do the allies recommend for addressing their school's racist history?

### **Setting**

This study site is a public flagship research university in the south. Like many southern HWIs, this university has an historical relationship with slavery and enslaved people. After emancipation, the university remained racially segregated by law and did not admit its first Black student until the 1950s following a judicial mandate. Schools within the university began admitting Black students at different times ranging from the early 1950s to the late 1960s, but Black students did not to enter the university in meaningful numbers until the late 1960s. Today, White Americans make up about 60% of the university's undergraduate and graduate student populations and 80% of the



faculty. In recent years, the university has begun to explore and acknowledge its racial history through research, community discussions and programming, and architectural changes such as memorials and renaming buildings. Despite these changes, students of color continue to rate the campus climate more negatively than their White counterparts, with Black students rating the climate most negatively.

The professional school shares the university's history with slavery and segregation, and it did not admit the first Black student until the 1960s. However, the professional school was selected as the unit of study because of its reputation as a leader in diversity within the university. In the last few years, the professional hired a dedicated diversity officer and adopted several diversity initiatives and programs, including faculty diversity training, efforts to recruit faculty from traditionally underrepresented groups, holistic admissions review, and programming to support students of color. Moreover, the professional school is beginning to address its racist history. The school recently honored its first Black graduate with a ceremony and portrait, and the dean offered the first Black graduate a formal apology on behalf of the institution.

Within the last few years, the professional school also developed a faculty and staff diversity ally program. The purpose of the program is to "provide an identifiable network of support for underrepresented students," including students of color and other marginalized groups. Each year, faculty and staff are invited to volunteer for the ally program. Allies are expected to attend an annual training and are invited to additional diversity trainings. Allies are also expected to: 1) be publicly identified as a support person; 2) mentor and develop connections with underrepresented students; 3) help plan and attend social functions for underrepresented students; and 4) serve as first responders

following events that have potential to impact students, especially underrepresented students. Allies commit to participating in the program for one year, but many opt to continue.

### **Participants**

The sample consists of eight diversity allies at the professional school. Two participants are senior administrators and six are faculty members. In terms of racial/ethnic diversity, the participants represent three racial/ethnic groups, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and White, with a majority of the participants identifying as White. All of the participants hold a doctoral degree and regularly interact with students. Participants have worked at the professional school anywhere from less than two to more than 25 years. The participants represent four departments within the school.

### **Data Collection**

Participants were identified using purposeful sampling based on the assumption that discovering, understanding, and gaining insight requires selecting a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998). All allies were invited to participate in the study via email. Out of the 20 diversity allies who were contacted about the study, eight agreed to participate.

The principal researcher interviewed each ally for approximately 60 minutes. All participants were asked for permission to audio record interviews for verbatim transcription. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Reflecting Yin's (2009) emphasis on the role of theory in guiding case study research, interview protocols were developed based on the internal dimensions of the racial climate framework (Hurtado et al., 1999, 1998). The protocols focused on four

broad topical areas: the professional school's commitment to diversity, history of racial segregation, recent diversity initiatives, and general racial climate. Additionally, the individual interviews were tailored to address position-specific issues.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed in a series of iterative steps consistent with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After several initial readings of the interview transcripts, inductive and deductive coding processes were used to name and identify discrete concepts that emerged from the data. In the deductive phase, the author reviewed literature on racial climate and used the dimensions to develop an initial list of a priori codes. During the inductive phase, the initial list of codes was amended to include additional codes that emerged from the data. Codes were then organized into higher-level themes, which were further refined and defined to confirm the themes and help identify alternative explanations or contrary statements.

Multiple strategies were utilized to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings and conclusions. To ensure construct validity, information was collected from multiple sources including participants with different perspectives within the school (e.g., faculty in different departments, administrators) (Yin, 2009). Moreover, analytic memos were used throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing process to clarify thinking about potential findings and emerging connections between themes and to capture the lead researcher's immediate thoughts and feelings. These memos helped create a written audit trail supporting the trustworthiness of the results (Saldaña, 2015).

### **Findings**

While some allies quickly linked their school's history of segregation to contemporary racial issues, others initially found it difficult to make a connection. Brook explained:

It's impossible to look at a direct impact to say, well because of this, that's why this, I mean maybe a policy has been around for a long time and it's still here.

That'd be the most direct, but I think more of it is just in an environment and it, it's a little amorphous and so you know it, but you know, grabbing it and pinning it down is not so easy.

Nonetheless, all of the allies identified ways in which their professional school's history of racial segregation influences current racial climate and made recommendations about how to more effectively reckon with the racist past. The findings are organized around six themes: three highlighting the remaining vestiges of exclusion (research question one) and three reflecting recommendations to address racist history (research question two).

#### **Legacies of Racial Segregation.**

##### ***"Nobody likes to hear the disgusting history, right?"***

The allies described how their school's history of exclusion created a contemporary environment in which embarrassing history and ongoing racism are often unaddressed. The allies believe understanding history is "vitally important," but they characterize it as "very tarnished" and hard to talk about. Avery reported that students resist learning about racial history in class:

I've highlighted some of that, but we don't talk about - I mean nobody likes to hear the disgusting history, right? So students are always like, ah, oh my God are

we done yet, can we go on, you know, we heard this in [another class]. We don't want to hear this again.

London explained that the problem "has always been that racism just isn't recognized." Moreover, Casey observed that school's racial history is "one of those things that we're just kind of slowly learning about. I don't know why it's taken us so long, I guess because the White people were in control, right?"

Nonetheless, the allies reported recent changes in terms of more opportunities and increased willingness to have "difficult conversations" about racism. Through recent events and interactions, Brook reported becoming more aware of racial discrimination:

In the last year, where people were very vocal about saying, you know, you may not have seen this and you may not think it exists, but let me tell you what it's like for me. So yeah, it's been - Not that I thought it didn't exist, but it's been, it's been pretty powerful.

The allies attributed many of these positive changes to their school's new dedicated diversity officer. They believed that the new "safe spaces" and training opportunities had "really been a contribution to improving things for folks who have taken advantage of those opportunities." However, as London observed, only limited numbers of "students, faculty and staff have actually been involved in that training. I mean, I'd be surprised as if it's better than 10 percent."

Accordingly, allies believed much of the school community, particularly the White students, faculty, and staff, continue to be unaware of "how insidious racism [is] at the school." Harper described a gap between leadership's commitment to diversity and faculty understanding:

I think the leadership is totally committed. I don't think a lot of faculty are because they don't get it. . . .I think people here, there are still faculty who, who don't understand, they don't understand white privilege and they don't understand the microaggressions that are said. . . . Things happen and I won't go into everything, but things happened that is an unconscious racism and they just don't get it.

While some allies recommended mandatory diversity training, Harper was pessimistic about training uninterested White faculty. Instead, Harper thought "it's time for some people just to retire. It's just, they just don't get it." Harper also recounted an example of unconscious racism among White students:

I'm just seeing it and I hear what people say, what White people say and do, and a lot of, it's just ignorance and I guess it's what [faculty training] would call, what is it? Implicit or unconscious racism. . . .I see it in my classes. I see students . . . use the word "colored." Three different groups of students used it. And, I said, you know, time out. There are words we can use, words we can't. And then someone popped up and said, "Well, can we use the word Negro?" And I said, no. I was just shocked.

Closely related to the enduring culture of indifference to and unawareness about racism, allies consistently identified racial bias, specifically implicit or unconscious bias, as a vestige of the school's history of segregation. Allies reported learning about implicit bias at faculty workshops, and described it as "ignorance" or a lack of awareness about one's racial beliefs and attitudes. While the allies acknowledged that everyone has implicit biases, they described the implicit racial biases of White faculty and students as

the principal drivers of racial climate. The allies report that these biases, bolstered the school's uncomfortable racial history and continuing culture of ignorance, impact the other climate dimensions.

*“Who do we end up with? Another White graduate of the University.”*

Allies pointed out that White faculty with implicit racial biases often had the power to shape organizational processes. Specifically, allies described how the implicit racial biases of some White faculty and administrators influence faculty recruitment and hiring, graduate student admissions, and the curriculum. Each of these organizational processes in turn impacted other aspects of racial climate.

The allies openly acknowledged their school's difficulty hiring faculty of color and consistently identified ongoing implicit racial biases of White faculty as a key factor. They repeatedly described biased search and admissions committees that favor White applicants and disadvantage applicants of color. Avery explained how search committee perceptions of different types of degree-granting institutions operate as a barrier to recruiting faculty of color:

I mean you can't have your own bias about what a [Historically Black College or University] is going to bring or what they can't do. And then, I mean they have. . . faculty, but if you think, oh, they're just not going to be able to stand up to the standards of [the professional school], then you're not going to ask them.

Additionally, Avery recalled observing White faculty on search committees devalue the work of colleagues of color who study marginalized populations. Avery reported having to “push back on a lot of my colleagues in the comments that they make around the

search and who to interview and how to read through the bias on the feedback forms that we get.”

Allies also indicated that unconscious bias influences who is hired for leadership positions, and these decisions maintain the racial status quo. London explained:

Well, it’s that insidious bias. (sigh) Really. People don’t even know how they behave. They don’t because they say to themselves, uh, oh, I’m an open minded, um, inclusive person. They think they act that way. . . I was on a search committee for a prestigious post at the university. We were encouraged to go out and find competitive and qualified people. We found a competitive, qualified Black woman as far as I could see. And all the other people who turned in evaluations of this woman thought she was the best pick. Who do we end up with? Another White graduate of the University.

Because the White “powers that be” tended to hire White people for prestigious positions, the allies observed that there were few people of color, particularly Black people, in positions of power. London noted, “we really have only had one Black administrator in the school in the 100 plus years we’ve been a school. Lots of administrative assistants, secretaries, etc. But really, um, no powerful individuals.” Moreover, London deduced that Black faculty and staff who are hired “play their roles because that is what works for them to succeed and to maintain themselves in the system.” Accordingly, for them to “to speak out, to raise a ruckus . . . to ask for any more than is given, it’s just not done. And that goes way back.”

Similarly, allies recognized how some White faculty’s implicit racial biases impact the graduate student admissions process. Avery had served on several admissions



committees and noted that “politics enter into every decision.” Additionally, Avery said that faculty often make assumptions that students, particularly students of color, will “have a difficult time getting through the program because ABC and although that’s valid, we can’t make admissions decisions based off of that. We’ve got to come up with that objective forum and just kind of go with that.” Reflecting on a recent doctoral admissions decision, Harper observed, “there was just a lot of unconscious bias. People never saw it. They just don’t see it.” However, Harper also noted that “the leadership took over and that’s the key. The leadership gets it, thank goodness. And they have the power to do what needs to be done and just to do it.”

Lastly, the allies explained how some White faculty’s implicit racial biases and discomfort talking about race were historical legacies that impact class content. Avery reported:

I think it impacts the examples we use in our classroom. You know what people say, how we interpret, all of that is flowered by our own biases and until we become more aware of what those biases are and how we may have selected things like we don’t even know, like some faculty don’t even realize that they chose like every [stereotypical example] is a Black woman. And it’s like really, are they the only ones like ever, you know, like, can we be a little bit more inclusive there?

Relatedly, Casey shared that several Black students “came to see me [for help] because every time this one professor put up examples of poor uneducated people, it was always a picture of someone of color, not necessarily a Black person, but always a person of color.” Because the Black students “noticed that and the faculty member didn’t even

know she was doing it,” Casey supported a syllabus review process “not only to maybe add some interesting things, but make sure that we’re not showing our bias.” The allies’ statements illustrate how White faculty’s unrecognized racial bias and lack of understanding about past and present racism impact organizational processes that in turn influence other aspects of climate.

***“I notice when I’m in a room full of White people.”***

The allies believed their professional school’s racist history impacts all of its community members, but reported differential impacts by race. Several allies shared the perception that White stakeholders were less impacted by the vestiges of segregation. As a White ally, Jordan recognized her privilege in not having to think about the school’s history. Jordan explained that her positionality made it difficult to know how history impacts the present “because these are things that I don’t have to constantly, aren’t constantly in my face the same way that they are for other people. And so, I don’t want to generalize because it’s not my lived experience.” Similarly, Casey noted that physical reminders of history affects everyone, but suggested that individual awareness and racial identity influence the nature of the impact:

Oh! It absolutely impacts every day. I mean, this whole university, impacts all of us. Oh my gosh! . . . I don’t think you can escape the racist history of this place even one day. It doesn’t mean it’s always on your mind, but if you just look around when you’re walking, there’s so many reminders. Other races, if you’re aware of it, I guess. And I think the university is doing a better job of making people aware of it.

The allies described a uniquely detrimental impact on potential and current community members of color, particularly Black students and faculty. Alex observed that because of the state's demographics and history, "African American and White is the focus primarily." The allies also mentioned the state's particular history of massive resistance to integration and the present-day "overtly" hostile racial climate in the state and local communities influence the racial history and current climate of the professional school.

Within this context, several allies viewed racist acts targeting Black students as evidence of the continued legacy of racial segregation. In essence, they connected the professional school's historical anti-Black racism to contemporary anti-Black racism. London recounted an example of recent racial discrimination against a Black woman student who "was accused of bullying someone else by email. She demonstrated and I have every belief and confidence that she was hacked and that she was used and abused. Nevertheless, [the larger university's judicial process] threw her out." Similarly, Alex noted that, "While, no African American student has come and talked to me specifically about issues that they might have today, it wouldn't surprise me if there are still issues that come up." Alex went on to recount a recent "direct assault" that impacted the school community:

We had people putting things up in the elevators and stuff like that. So that type of behavior is still happening. And it finds its way in. I don't believe what happened over the summer within this building occurred by someone who has an office in this building or comes to this building on a regular basis. But it still had a great impact on the faculty, staff and students.

Furthermore, the allies connected the school's history of *de jure* segregation to present-day *de facto* racial segregation. Alex, an ally of color, observed, "There's just a lot of *de facto* segregation in here. I mean, that's what I found. I don't know if that becomes sort of self-selected segregation or if it's just still trying to overcome history of segregation." Alex also acknowledged how, in a school where the population remains majority White, the lack of intergroup interaction leads to feelings of discomfort in all-White spaces:

It's interesting because it seems like there is this *de facto* segregation and, and I mean, I feel it. . . . I mean, I notice when I'm in a room full of White people, I actually do, you know, and it almost always takes me a moment where I'm like - this discomfort. And then I'm like, okay, well you know they're okay. It's okay.

Alex's statements point to multifaceted connections between the school's history and present-day interactions, numerical diversity, and feelings about the school environment.

Lastly, allies reported that history did not only affect people of color at the school, it also impacts potential faculty applicants of color. Allies described the lack of racial diversity as a historical legacy that made the professional school less attractive to potential faculty of color. London, a White ally, imagined that if she were Black and "saw that there were no Black deans, and that there were no Black administrators in power, why would I come here? Really. You have to have some kind of community for someone to join. We don't have it." The allies similarly believed that the history of segregation enabled present-day racist incidents which deterred potential faculty of color. Harper reported not realizing how much history influences the present until she saw a "room full of people of color who were very angry" following the latest racist incidents.

Harper revealed that after national coverage of the racist incidents, regardless of search committee efforts to recruit faculty of color, “we couldn’t even get candidates. And I think [the racist incidents] affected it. The dean has really been pushing for established faculty . . . but we haven’t been able to hire any of color, any.” Harper’s comments show how allies connected the school’s history, present-day racism, and the perceptions of potential faculty of color which in turn impact the school’s ability to diversify its faculty.

### **Reckoning with a History of Exclusion.**

*“I’m not sure we do a good job of telling all those stories.”*

Beyond the recent ceremony honoring the school’s first Black graduate, the allies admitted they knew little about the school’s history of racial segregation or the experiences of its early students of color. Most thought honoring the first Black graduate was “an important first step,” but all believed their professional school should do more to address its historical legacy. For most allies, this included sharing more stories about the school’s history. Casey noted, “I’m not sure we do a good job of telling all those stories and there are so many out there.” Brook agreed and express discomfort making recommendations because “we need to know more of the story in order to understand what pieces are important. I can’t say what else [the professional school] should do because I don’t know the story.”

Beyond uncovering and sharing more stories, the allies suggested their school present a more complete history including positive and negative aspects. Alex expressed that “it’s really important to be honest, to understand what that struggle [integration] was because I am sure it didn’t happen easily.” Jordan similarly suggested the importance of acknowledging negative aspects of history:

I think we still have a long way to go. I think that bringing [the first Black graduate] in last year was an important first step and [the first Black graduate], um, was probably, I mean, was probably far too kind in the way that she characterized her experience here. . . . She focused on the positive.

While most allies described the recognition of first Black graduate as a helpful step towards addressing history, Avery thought the school had done “nothing” to address its history of racial segregation. Additionally, Avery questioned the school’s intent in recognizing its first Black graduate:

Of course, [the first Black graduate] has brought out some great stories and news media and all those wonderful things. I’m not sure what it’s done for the school as a whole. . . . Yeah. I’m not sure. I’m not sure if that was even the intent even, you know. . . . It is one of those things where I have to pause and be like, mmm why are you doing this? You know, this is, let’s make it mean, you know what it needs to mean.

The allies’ comments demonstrate a range of reactions to attempts to the school’s recent attempt to acknowledge its history.

***“What is the word? Reparations.”***

In addition to uncovering and bringing forth a richer, fuller history, allies discussed the need for atonement. They believed that it was important for the professional school to admit its role in segregation and repair the harm it had caused.

Some allies thought their professional school should acknowledge the past suffering caused by the institution. Casey believed it was important for the professional school to “expose our flaws and not hide them, but then also acknowledge the sacrifice

that a lot of people made so that we could have beautiful buildings and right and a great education and a great place to go.” Similarly, Alex recommended developing a “repository of information” for members of the school and community to not only share stories, but for the school to acknowledge and repair the harm it caused:

And most important is to hear how the school owns it today. Because I do think it’s very important that the school, you know, owns their own role in the racism and prejudice that was pervasive, you know, from my understanding, on this campus and at one time, right. So, they had a role in supporting that even if they were, even if their role was being completely silent. But to understand that, to have them own that and then say this is what will be done. This is what we’ve done, what we continue to do to sort of, you know, to pay it back. What is the word? Reparations.

Lastly, a couple of allies discussed the school’s formal apology to its first Black graduate as a way to make amends. During a ceremony the year before, the Dean apologized to the first Black graduate on behalf of the institution. Val recalled that the honoree “came running over on the stage . . . saying [to the Dean] oh I forgive you!” Val described the apology as “tearful, it was very emotional. It was her response though that made me think, wow! You know, look how [this school] affected people. . . . It made me think, why didn’t [the school] do this sooner?” The allies’ suggestions illustrate various methods to redress the harms caused by segregation.

***“The depths of racism have not been plumbed here yet.”***

Lastly, most of the allies expressed a desire for their professional school to be accountable for addressing current racial issues that stem from past injustices. The allies

advocated for a united effort, including faculty reflection and training, to increase awareness about past and present racism. When asked what the professional school has done and should do to acknowledge its racial history, Jordan shared, “I think just to make it more present tense. Like it can’t just be individuals that are passionate about it, that continued to seek out representation of voice. It needs to be all of us.” In addition to faculty studying disparities, Jordan recommended “an equal approach to understanding kind of your own lived experience here and how you’re contributing or not contributing to those disparities existing within our students and our faculty members.” Avery supported mandatory diversity training for “anybody that touches students” along with structured opportunities for interaction because “you cannot become aware of your own biases and take this journey on culture humility, humility around differences without just shared experiences with people who are different.”

Additionally, allies pointed out that students should learn how the past influences the present. Casey believed that acknowledging history meant “not just talking about the specifics that have happened in the [professional school], but how that kind of racial history in [the field] in general affects what we do even if it didn’t take place here.” Accordingly, Casey recommended “finding the ways in the curriculum” to talk about racial disparities in the field because “there’s very little out there that doesn’t have some kind of racial context.” Casey believed that by teaching about racial history in almost every class it “becomes less threatening and it makes it easier for people to talk.”

Lastly, allies believed school leadership must assess the continued impact of racism. London recommended a comprehensive plan:



I really believe that the depths of racism have not been plumbed here yet because nobody's asking. . . If I were the president, I would search for independent Black scholars and researchers and hire them one for each school from out of the state. I would also find in each school, a Black champion. And those two people would convene sessions with Black members of the student body, the staff, and the faculty and start a year's worth of uncovering issues. Positives, what we think we should do more of. Negatives, what we should do less of. Strategies for accomplishing both of those. I would insist that they start collecting data. . . . I mean, just a compilation of Black presence at the University to start out with because we don't even have a baseline. So what if we made some good changes, would we even know?. . . And then once you have that, work at it and see where you are at five years. And that's five years out of 200 years. It's a drop in the bucket.

These recommendations demonstrate the perceived importance of understanding how history connects to the present.

### **Discussion**

As more colleges and universities confront their racist histories, questions arise about the connections between history and the present. Grounded in the racial climate framework (Hurtado et al., 1999, 1999), this study provides insight into how an institution's history of racial segregation impacts current climate. The findings illustrate the complex and highly interconnected nature of the five internal racial climate dimensions. Because the participants perceived history as directly and indirectly impacting all other climate dimensions, this study builds on prior work suggesting that

racial history “serves as the backdrop for the campus racial climate” (Milem et al., 2005, p 23). This study also offers a unique perspective from diversity allies who, by virtue of their roles, support marginalized students and serve as institutional “first responders.”

The diversity allies identify lasting influences on individuals and the institution and offer recommendations to address the persistent negative consequences of history. The campus racial climate framework facilitates understanding of how the climate dimensions function together to perpetuate historical inequities and influence behaviors and attitudes. Based on the findings, Figure 2 depicts an adaptation of the campus racial climate framework showing multiple ways in which an institution’s history of exclusion can influence the other climate dimensions.

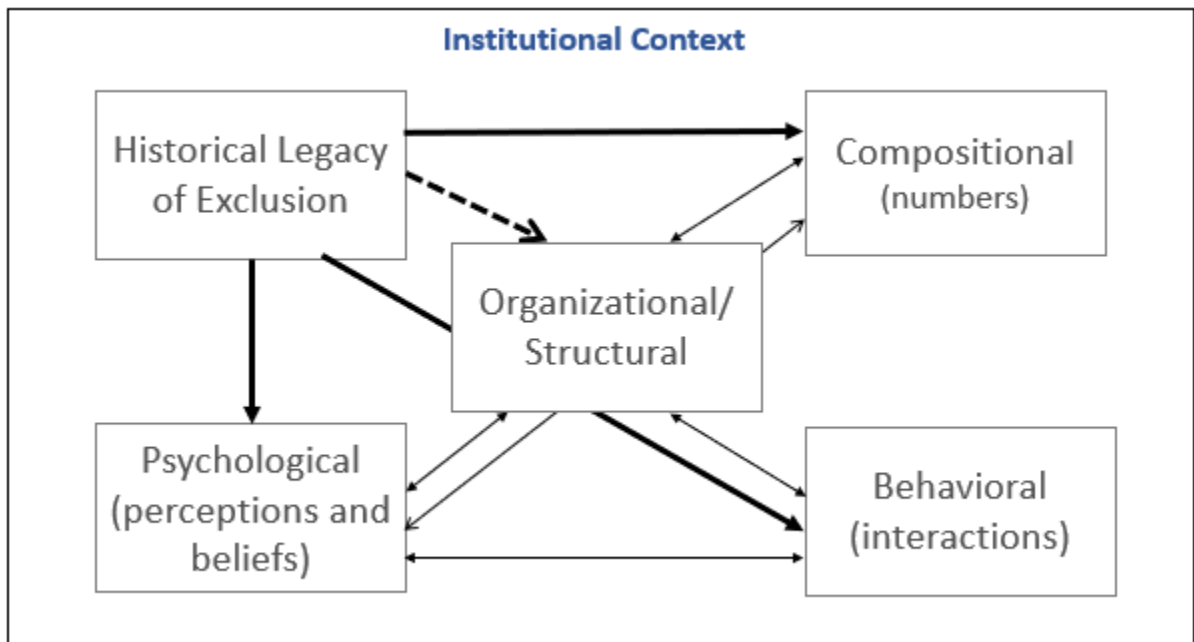


Figure 2. Reinterpretation of the campus racial climate framework based on the study findings, with attention to how the historical legacy of exclusion influences current campus racial climate. Direct connections between history and other dimensions are highlighted by bold arrows.

### **Interactions Among Internal Climate Dimensions**

The psychological climate, including perceptions of the environment and beliefs about different racial groups, appears to be particularly salient legacy of segregation. As in the original framework (Hurtado et al., 1999, 1998), the arrow from history to psychological climate represents the relationship between the dimensions. The allies described their school's historical legacy of exclusion—and its failure to adequately address it—as affecting students and faculty of color differently than their White counterparts. They believed Black students continue to experience a hostile climate (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Additionally, allies suggested that physical reminders of exclusionary history reduced feelings of belongingness for people of color (Sue et al., 2007). Furthermore, findings show that potential faculty of color perceived the climate as unwelcoming due to historical legacies of limited faculty diversity and ongoing racist incidents. In comparison, for many White faculty and students, allies believed the failure to adequately address history perpetuates ignorance about and indifference to issues of race and racism. The unconscious racial attitudes and beliefs of White students and faculty were viewed as negatively affecting intergroup interactions (Milem et al., 2005) and influencing organizational decisions which significantly impact compositional diversity.

Findings show the behavioral climate, including the frequency and nature of intergroup interactions, is also influenced by institutional history and is closely related to psychological climate (Griffin et al., 2012). These relationships are represented by the arrow connecting history to behavioral climate and the bidirectional arrow between behavioral and psychological climate. Consistent with the original model (Hurtado et al.,

1999, 1998), allies believed exclusionary history contributed to contemporary racial self-segregation, a phenomenon that reduces intergroup interactions and also influences racial attitudes and perceptions of climate (Antonio, 2001). Moreover, findings show that ignoring the institution's history of exclusion perpetuates negative racial interactions, which have been shown to also affect perceptions of climate (Hurtado et al., 2012).

While the original framework identifies old campus policies as organizational vestiges of exclusion, only one ally mentioned such policies, and she did provide any specific examples. Accordingly, the findings suggest a weak direct relationship between history and organizational climate which is represented by dashed line on Figure 2. Instead of a direct relationship, allies describe an indirect connection through White faculty's racial biases which shape curriculum, faculty/administrator recruitment and hiring, and graduate student admissions. These organizational decisions support the racial status quo: a predominantly White community with mostly White faculty/administrators in positions of power who, along with many White students, have unacknowledged racial beliefs and biases and limited meaningful interaction with people of color. In short, the findings indicate that history is the backdrop supporting recursive loops between the organizational dimension and the compositional, psychological, and behavioral dimensions.

First, the allies connected the vestiges of implicit racial bias to stereotypical class examples. Curricular decisions by White faculty, such as picking texts without a critical eye for deficit messages, are a form of White Institutional Presence that is often overlooked by White students and professors, but implicitly communicates racialized messages that reinforce racial beliefs (Gusa, 2010). For the students of color who often

recognize the racial coding, deficient messages and/or a lack of diverse perspectives in the curriculum may not only generate negative intergroup interactions, but also contribute to a climate of exclusion (Milem et al., 2005).

Consistent with the literature, the diversity allies suggest that persistent racial biases affect hiring and admissions decisions (Kayes, 2006; Posselt, 2016). The biases allies describe are similar to aversive racism, or the biases of White people who believe that they are not prejudiced, but whose unconscious negative feelings and beliefs get expressed in subtle, indirect, and often rationalizable ways that can influence organizational decision making (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Pearson, 2017). Despite their unconscious nature, these racially biased hiring and admissions decisions ultimately impact compositional diversity, which in turn influences future organizational practices along with perceptions of the environment and intergroup interactions (Griffin et al., 2012).

A few allies described exclusionary history as directly connected to the continued lack of numerical diversity as the original framework illustrates (Hurtado et al., 1998). However, most allies described history as indirectly affecting compositional diversity through the other climate dimensions. In particular, recruitment, hiring, and admissions processes significantly influence student, faculty, and administrator diversity (Fries-Britt et al., 2011; Griffin et al., 2012), and allies believed the legacy of White faculty's implicit racial biases greatly impact these processes. However, allies also attributed the lack of faculty diversity to the perceptions of potential faculty of color who, because of historical and ongoing biases at the professional school and in the wider community, find the school unattractive (Fries-Britt et al., 2011). This study expands on the original racial

climate framework and indicates that a historical legacy of exclusion impacts contemporary climate in complex and often convoluted ways.

### **Institutional- and Individual-Level Interventions**

The allies offered various suggestions to interrupt the cycles that perpetuate race-based exclusion. The recommended interventions are consistent with restorative justice models of racial reconciliation which have been applied to in various settings, including post-secondary institutions (Walker, 2006). The central values of restorative justice include repairing harm and relationships, centering the experiences and needs of victims, requiring genuine accountability and responsibility-taking from those responsible for harm, and returning ownership of the resolution to victims, responsible parties, and communities (Walker, 2006; Zehr, n.d.). The emergent themes parallel the truth and reconciliation process: uncovering the past, healing relationships through repair and reconciliation, and ensuring the same mistakes are not repeated.

Like the racial climate framework, the truth and reconciliation process has both individual and institutional components. At the individual level, allies emphasized the need to reduce racial biases and increase understanding about past and present racism. The findings show the allies were positively influenced by diversity workshops and meaningful intergroup interaction. Thus, most believed other faculty, particularly White faculty, would benefit as well. Diversity training is particularly effective when complemented by other diversity initiatives, targeted to both awareness and skills development, and conducted over a significant period of time (Bezrukova, Spell, Perry, & Jehn, 2016). For students, the allies recommend incorporating discussions of race, racism, and history throughout the curriculum, curricular practices that linked to decreased racial

prejudice, particularly for students who take more than one diversity-related course (Bowman, 2010; Chang, 2002; Denson, 2009). Uncovering the past also helps to establish a “collective memory” which makes it harder for individuals to deny or overlook that certain activities took place (Gibson, 2004).

As critics of the well-known South African truth and reconciliation commission (TRC) point out, it is also crucial to address the systems that supported and continue to support racial inequities (Mamdani, 2002). The findings suggest some recent improvement in racial climate due to school leaders’ increased commitment to diversity and resulting diversity initiatives. Yet, the allies unanimously believed their school was in the early stages of addressing its history of exclusion. Therefore, all expressed a desire for the school to uncover, share, and acknowledge a more complete history. Although most allies described school’s recognition of its first Black graduate as an “important first step”, the ceremony and apology reflect an individualized approach to reparations that centers victims rather than the larger institution and its structures (Collins & Watson, 2015). Accordingly, findings show the allies also importantly called for the institution to assess and address persistent negative consequences of history.

### **Limitations**

This study provides important insights, but has several limitations. First, it focused on a small sample of diversity allies and did not include students’ perspectives or perspectives of faculty and administrators who chose not to volunteer as allies. Nonetheless, the analysis highlights several areas institutions can target to address vestiges of exclusion. Additionally, the findings capture the perceptions of actors within a specific institutional context with a unique current and historical climate. While this allowed an

in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of interest, it limits the applicability of the findings to other institutions. Finally, the study does not explore the role of external climate dimensions in shaping campus racial climate.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

To meet goals of increasing diversity and improving racial climate, campus leaders must have “a clear understanding of the root causes of the problem” (Griffin, 2016). At many HWIs, an unresolved history of exclusion is a root cause of many contemporary race-related problems. Although colleges and universities may be tempted to ignore undesirable histories of exclusion, they should not pretend such histories or their ensuing legacies do not exist (Hurtado et al., 1998). Instead, campus leaders should think critically and creatively about how to use history to uncover hidden patterns and drive institutional change (Fuentes & White, 2016).

With these goals in mind, campus leaders must not only ensure that institutional policies and statements evidence a commitment to diversity, they should also demonstrate an understanding of historical issues of race and racism. Ignoring past challenges with racism can imply that an institution and its leaders lack a genuine commitment to or awareness about diversity and inclusion, thereby undermining policies and other efforts to promote diversity. In comparison, by acknowledging a history of exclusion, institutional leaders demonstrate knowledge of past transgressions and a sincere desire to create a more inclusive future. Such messages may help garner broad support for diversity policies and initiatives (Hurtado et al., 1999).

Based on the study’s findings, I offer several recommendations for practice. First, colleges and universities should actively engage all community members in race-related



history, both positive and negative. When campus leaders do not initiate opportunities to learn about the histories of larger institution and the various schools within in it, most community members remain oblivious. Since local communities also influence campus climate for diversity (Hurtado et al., 2012), it is also important to consider the history of these contexts. Moreover, because there may be resistance to or discomfort in learning about racial history, it is vital for institutional leaders and diversity advocates to explain why it is important to understand history and how it continues to impact the present. Leaders should also own their institution's role in supporting segregation and, based heavily on input from community members with different perspectives, should determine appropriate ways to repair the harms caused by the institution. HWIs have recently taken measure to redress histories of slavery ("Universities Studying Slavery," n.d.). Similar actions should be taken to address and redress histories of exclusion.

Additionally, institutional leaders must identify and address persistent negative consequences of history that may continue to disproportionately benefit certain groups to the detriment of others (Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005). The findings show that history, a factor rarely assessed and often left out of discussions about diversity, plays a critical role in shaping contemporary climate. History, however, often indirectly affects the present, which can make its lasting influences more difficult to recognize. Truly addressing a historical legacy of exclusion requires an in-depth institutional assessment that includes multiple perspectives, centers the experiences of historically underrepresented groups, and is used to hold the institution accountable for rectifying inequities. By addressing all dimensions of campus racial climate, colleges and

universities not only can increase student and faculty diversity, they can also implement systemic changes that will ultimately improve racial climate.

Finally, this article offers several suggestions for future research. First, future research on the historical context should explore a broader range of postsecondary institutions, such as those with historically inclusive missions or those founded after legal segregation ended. Future research should also include institutions at different stages in the process of addressing history, from those just beginning to explore and address history to those where the historical context is well known and routinely considered in current practice. Moreover, future research should include longitudinal studies that examine how experiences and outcomes differ as institutional approaches to history change over time. Lastly, future research should include a wider range of perspectives, including students, faculty and staff who hold various positions and ranks, and stakeholders from various racial/ethnic groups.

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Perceived Institutional Commitment to Diversity and Sense of Belonging Among

Students From Different Racial/Ethnic Groups

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## Perceived Institutional Commitment to Diversity and Sense of Belonging Among Students

Belonging is a fundamental and basic human need (Maslow, 1954). For college students, sense of belonging is related to relationships with individuals on campus, but it also includes a more global sense of belonging and feeling connected to a larger community and the institution (Pittman & Richmond, 2008). College students' sense of belonging on campus is linked to a number of important outcomes, from persistence to well-being (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Pittman & Richmond, 2007). Because belonging is so important, many colleges make efforts to help students cultivate it.

Researchers and practitioners have emphasized the importance of belonging, but some groups of students have consistently felt unwelcome on college campuses. In the past, students of color at historically White institutions (HWIs) have found their campuses to be hostile and racist, and unfortunately, many continue to have similar experiences today (Rankin & Reason, 2005; Sedlacek, 1987; Telles & Mitchell, 2018). Amidst a wave of recent student protests and demands for institutional change, college presidents reported in 2016 that campus racial climate had become a higher priority compared to past years (Espinosa, Chessman, & Wayt, 2016). Importantly, this renewed focus on racial climate provides an opportunity for campus leaders to consider how to improve all students' sense of belonging.

Several aspects of campus racial climate, including interacting with diverse peers and experiencing a welcoming environment, are linked to students' sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007). Therefore, one common suggestion to

improve students' sense of belonging is for colleges and universities to pay more attention to racial climate and undertake efforts to promote a positive racial climate for all students, particularly those from historically underrepresented groups (Berryhill & Bee, 2007). However, whether campus initiatives are effective in improving racial climate depends in part on students' perceptions of their institution's commitment to diversity (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). When students, particularly students of color, feel their institutions are not committed to diversity, they are more likely to feel alienated and experience racial tension (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Milem et al., 2005). On the other hand, higher perceived levels of institutional commitment to diversity are associated with low racial tension and increases in personal goals to promote racial understanding (Milem et al., 2005). The literature indicates that students' perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity play an important role in improving racial climate and by extension, could potentially help increase sense of belonging. Yet, there is little empirical evidence connecting students' views of their institution's commitment to diversity to sense of belonging. This study seeks to fill that gap in the literature.

## **Literature Review**

### **Sense of Belonging**

Scholars have described sense of belonging as a psychological measure of integration in the college community (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2012). Sense of belonging is broadly defined as college students' "perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)" (Strayhorn,

2018, p. 28-29). Sense of belonging involves a cognitive evaluation of one's role in the group that then leads to an affective and/or behavioral response (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2018).

Students' sense of belonging matters because it is linked to important academic and psychosocial outcomes. The greater a student's sense of belonging, the more likely he or she is to persist in college (Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Hausmann et al., 2007), participate in class and seek help from faculty (Ostrove & Long, 2007), and have higher levels of motivation, engagement, and achievement (Zumbrunn, McKim, Buhs, & Hawley, 2014). Moreover, for undergraduates, a sense belonging, both at the classroom and at the broader university level, has been found to be positively related to academic self-efficacy, scholastic competence, social acceptance, and global self-worth (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Gummadam, Pittman, & Ioffe, 2016; Pittman & Richmond, 2007). Among graduate students, a sense of belonging is associated with academic self-concept (Curtin, Stewart, & Ostrove, 2013). Additionally, women and students of color in doctoral STEM programs are most likely to publish at rates comparable to their White male peers when they feel a sense of belonging (Fisher et al., 2019). Sense of belonging has also been linked to lower levels of depression and loneliness (Gummadam et al., 2016; Pittman & Richmond, 2008).

Given the relationship between sense of belonging and key educational outcomes, a growing body of research has explored factors related to sense of belonging (Hagerty et al., 1996; Hausmann et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2008). Aspects of students' social identities, including race, gender, and social class, have been shown to influence sense of belonging (Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1995; Ostrove & Long, 2007). In terms of race, Johnson and

colleagues (2007) found first-year White students felt a stronger sense of belonging on their campuses than students of color. Research on belonging uncertainty suggests that feelings of belonging are particularly important for historically underrepresented students (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Specifically, cues about lack of belonging or reminders about underrepresentation can trigger disruptive concerns about one's acceptance and belonging within the institution which undermine motivation and achievement. It makes sense then, that certain aspects of the campus environment, such as campus racial climate, also affect students' sense of belonging (Berryhill & Bee, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

### **Racial Climate**

Campus racial climate captures the attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations in an institutional community around issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity (Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008). Hurtado and colleagues (1998, 1999) developed a campus racial climate framework that illustrates how multiple internal and external forces work together to shape campus racial climate. The authors conceptualize campus racial climate as the product of five interconnected dimensions: 1) historical (history of inclusion/exclusion of racial groups); 2) compositional (numerical representation of racial/ethnic groups); 3) organizational (policies, structures, and processes); 4) psychological (attitudes and perceptions of discrimination, intergroup conflict, and institutional priorities); and 5) behavioral climate (nature of intergroup interactions) (Hurtado, Clayton-Pedersen, Allen, & Milem, 1998; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). Subsequent research shows the campus racial climate has a considerable impact on students' experience and educational

outcomes, including degree attainment (Hurtado et al., 2008; Museus, 2008). Based on a group's representation and relative status on a campus, members of different racial/ethnic groups experience the dimensions of climate differently (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). Not surprisingly, students of color tend to perceive campus racial climates more negatively than their White peers (Rankin & Reason, 2005; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003).

Although studies operationalize the constructs differently, two aspects of racial climate relate consistently to students' sense of belonging: 1) students' interactions with peers and faculty, and 2) students' perceptions of the racial environment. Interactions with racially diverse peers, through activities like socializing or co-curricular involvement, promote a sense of belonging for White students and students of color (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Additionally, supportive faculty interactions are positively related to students' sense of belonging (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002; Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007). In fact, validating experiences with faculty and staff can mitigate the negative effects of discrimination and bias on students' sense of belonging (Hurtado, Alvarado, & Guillermo-Wann, 2015).

While these positive relationships have been documented for all students, there is some evidence that the interplay between diverse peer interactions and belonging may vary among students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. Using data from a national sample of first-year undergraduates, Johnson and colleagues (2007) found that unlike White, Black, and Asian students, Hispanic/Latino students were the only racial/ethnic group for which interactions with diverse peers and professors related to their sense of belonging. Similarly, Strayhorn (2008) found interacting with diverse peers affected both

White and Latino students' sense of belonging, but the influence was greater on Latinos students. In another study, Strayhorn (2009) found that socializing with diverse peers was positively related to sense of belonging for Black and White men, but such interactions had a greater influence on White men's sense of belonging. Together, these findings suggest the relationship between some aspects of racial climate and students' sense of belonging differs by race.

Additionally, students' perceptions of the campus racial climate impact their sense of belonging. Students are less likely to feel part of the campus community if they perceive racial tension or have experienced discrimination (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Locks et al., 2008). While this relationship holds for all students, students of color experience more racial discrimination than White students (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Indeed, several studies document how experiences of discrimination and feelings of alienation can reduce feelings of belonging among students of color (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009).

On the other hand, students' positive perceptions of racial climate (typically operationalized as the absence of racial tension and/or positive intergroup interaction) relate to increased feelings of belonging for students from all racial groups (Berryhill & Bee, 2007; Nuñez, 2009). However, some evidence suggests students' race/ethnicity may affect how perceptions of racial climate relate to sense of belonging. For instance, in a study of racial climate and social integration among undergraduates, Chavous (2005) found Black students' perceptions of interdependence between racial groups, equal status, and norms encouraging intergroup interactions were related to higher sense of



community. For White students, however, while equal status perceptions were positively related to sense of community, perceived group interdependence was related to lower sense of community.

While we know how certain aspects of racial climate – namely positive interactions and perceptions of the environment – relate to feelings of belonging, we know less about other aspects of racial climate such as students' perceptions of their institution's commitment to diversity. Perceptions of an institution's commitment to diversity are an important part of psychological climate (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). Students' perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity have been linked to various outcomes including openness to diversity (Harper & Yeung, 2013), learning (Lundberg, 2012), grade-point averages, and perceptions of racial tension and alienation (Milem et al., 2005).

A few qualitative studies also suggest that students' perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity may relate to sense of belonging. Jones, Castellanos, and Cole (2002) explored the experiences of students of color from four racial groups and found that all groups questioned their university's commitment to diversity. Additionally, the students reported an unwelcoming environment and feeling that they did not belong. In a study of how students define university belonging, Slaten and colleagues (2014) found more than half of participants discussed diversity and inclusivity as an environmental factor related to belonging. While these studies suggest a possible connection between students' beliefs about their institution's commitment to diversity and their sense of belonging, is it not yet clear how the two concepts are related or whether that relationship is consistent across racial groups.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in the Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (DLE model) (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012). The DLE model incorporates the five climate dimensions from the campus racial climate framework (Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005), but extends the original model in several ways. Most notably, while the DLE model recognizes the continuing significance of race, it applies to multiple social identity groups. The DLE model identifies multiple contexts of inclusive learning environments, including external systems, the internal climate, the individual-level dynamics that occur within institutions, and outcomes for individuals and society. As the authors explain, “it is a model of climate, practices, and outcomes” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 101).

The DLE model views creating a sense of belonging as an important process that is separate from, but influenced by campus climate. The DLE model posits that several processes, including creating community or sense of belonging, occur in curricular and cocurricular contexts at the intersection of student and educator’s identities and practices (Hurtado et al., 2012). These processes serve as mediating factors that drive essential student outcomes. The five dimensions of campus climate (historical, compositional, organizational, psychological, and behavioral) pervade the institution’s curricular and cocurricular contexts thereby influencing faculty, staff, and students.

The organizational and psychological dimensions of climate and their relationship to sense of belonging are of particular interest in this study. An institution’s commitment to diversity is part of its organizational climate that influences students’ perceptions of racial climate (Hurtado et al., 2012; Milem et al., 2005). Symbolic action, such as a

mission statement that articulates commitment to diversity, may help build perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity. However, when symbolic actions are not aligned with institutional policy and structures, it can imply an artificial commitment to diversity (Hurtado et al., 2012; Yosso et al., 2009). For instance, in a study of racial climate at five campuses, Harper and Hurtado (2007) found that students from different racial groups all expressed frustration with incongruence between espoused and enacted institutional values concerning diversity. Despite this commonality, the authors found gaps in social satisfaction by race. White and Asian students expressed satisfaction with the social environment and found it difficult to identify aspects they would change, while Black students expressed the highest degrees of dissatisfaction and Latino and Native American students fell in the middle.

Although Harper and Hurtado (2007) did not specifically investigate students' sense of belonging, their results suggest race may play an important role in understanding the relationship between perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity and sense of belonging. The present study aims to explore the relationship between these two important concepts.

### **Methods**

This study used a mixed methods concurrent triangulation design (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) to examine perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity and sense of belonging among undergraduate and graduate students from different racial groups. Specifically, it explored the following research questions:

1. Quantitative: Do students' perceptions of their professional school's commitment to diversity predict their sense of belonging? Does the association between institutional commitment to diversity and sense of belonging vary between White students and students of color?
2. Qualitative: How do students perceive institutional practices related to belonging and racial climate (e.g., what practices do they believe are beneficial or insufficient)? How do students' perceptions and recommendations vary by race?

### **Participants and Procedure**

The participants (N = 403) were undergraduate and graduate students in a professional school at a predominantly White public institution (PWI) in the Southeastern United States. Seventy-two percent of participants were female and 15% were male (12% did not report gender). The racial composition of participants was 77% White, 8% Asian, 6% African American/Black, 4% Hispanic/Latino, 1% Multiracial, 1% Middle Eastern, and 1% Other; 13% of respondents did not report their race. Just over half of participants identified as graduate students (55%), 32% were undergraduates, and 13% did not report their academic level. Overall, the sample was fairly representative of the professional school's demographics for race, gender, and academic level.

Participants were recruited through an email invitation sent to all on-campus students (about 1,200) at the professional school inviting them to participate in an online survey in spring 2018. Approximately one-third of the students completed the survey. Participants were informed that the survey would be anonymous and that purpose of the study was to provide feedback on their student experiences. The survey took approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

**Instrument**

The survey instrument consisted of questions regarding demographic information, sense of belonging, perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity, perceptions of peer relations, experiences of discrimination, and open-ended items. All quantitative items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale.

**Demographics.** The demographic portion included questions about gender, race/ethnicity, and academic level. Given evidence that students of Asian heritage may have different experiences of climate and belonging compared to students of color from other groups (Museus & Park, 2015; Samura, 2016; Tan, 1994), two dichotomous variables were created for race/ethnicity. The first included all students who identified as Asian/Asian American (Asian = 1), and the second included all other students of color (e.g., American Indian, Black, Latinx, and Multiracial). The latter group was labeled as “under-represented” in the new, dummy-coded variable (under-represented = 1), and White students served as the reference group.

**Sense of Belonging.** The dependent variable in this study was students’ sense of belonging at the professional school. Sense of belonging was measured with an adapted version of the revised Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM; Goodenow, 1993). The PSSM was originally devised to assess school belonging in high school students, but has been adapted to be used with college students related to the university and classroom settings (Freeman et al., 2007; Gummadam et al., 2016; Pittman & Richmond, 2007). Both the original and the college revision of the PSSM have been found to have adequate internal consistency (Goodenow, 1993; Pittman & Richmond, 2007).

The survey included 11 of the 18 items on the PSSM, such as “I feel like a real part of [the professional school]” and “There’s at least one professor or staff member at [the professional school] I can talk to if I have a problem.” The measure used a 5-point rating scale format with responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Given mixed findings about the factor structure of this scale (e.g., Freeman et al., 2007; Gummadam et al., 2016) and the use of only 11 of the 18 items, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine scale structure in the given sample.

**Perceptions of Campus Racial Climate.** An adaptation of the Multicultural Assessment of Campus Programming (MAC-P; McClellan, Cogdal, Lease, & Londono-McConnell, 1996) was used to measure students’ perceptions of campus racial climate. The MAC-P measures six different dimensions of climate for diversity, including institutional responsiveness and student relations, and each dimension has been shown to have adequate internal consistency (McClellan et al., 1996). The current study included eight items of the 11 items that assess perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity, such as “[The professional school] sponsors programming focusing on multicultural issues.” Additionally, the survey included three of the seven items that assess perceptions of student relations, such as “The environment at [the professional school] is free from racial conflict.” The measure used a five-point Likert-type response scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Given the use of only 11 of the 18 items to measure the two factors of interest, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine scale structure in the given sample.

**Experiences of Racial/Ethnic Discrimination.** Experiences of racial/ethnic discrimination were measured with a single item. “How often have you experienced bias,

discrimination, or exclusion at [the professional school] because of your race/ethnicity?”

The response scale was a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from never to very often.

**Open-ended Items.** In addition to the quantitative items on the survey, participants were given the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions, two of which were included in the analyses:

1. What, if any, specific events or activities that have occurred this academic year have made you feel a part of the [profession school's] community?
2. If you were the dean, what changes would you make at [the professional school] to promote a welcoming, positive environment for all students? List specific recommendations.

### **Data Analysis**

This study used a mixed methods concurrent triangulation design (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) in which qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently in one phase. The data were analyzed separately and then compared and combined to cross-validate findings and generate meta-inferences at the end of the study.

#### **Quantitative analysis.**

Quantitative data analysis proceeded in three stages. First, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on the items measuring belonging and the items measuring perceptions of racial climate. MPlus, version 8 (Muthen & Muthen, 2017) was used for the EFA. To select the best-fitting model, we used the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), with lower AIC scores indicating better fit; the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), with scores above .90 indicating good fit; the Root Mean Square Error of

Approximation (RMSEA), with values closer to zero (and less than .08) indicating good fit; and the Chi-square statistic, with non-significant models indicating better fit (Kline, 2015). We also examined factors loadings, excluding items with loadings below .40. Finally, we considered interpretability when selecting the best-fitting model; well-fitting models with strong item loadings and fewer cross-loadings were considered more parsimonious.

Results from the EFAs were used to compute composite scores, as described in the results section. We calculated descriptive statistics (i.e., mean scores) to determine patterns of responses in the sample for each construct and examined correlations to establish initial estimates of the magnitude and direction of interrelationships among the independent and dependent variables. We used a t-test to compare White students and students of color on sense of belonging and institutional support for diversity, then conducted a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test for differences between White students, Asian students, and under-represented students on both variables.

Finally, we used ordinary least squares regression to estimate the net effect of the predictors on sense of belonging for White students and students of color. An a priori assessment of statistical power suggested that for a power level of .80, the sample size was adequate for identifying moderate to large effect sizes (e.g., Cohen's  $f^2 = .15$  to  $.35$ ); however, the sample size was insufficient for detecting small effects (e.g., Cohen's  $f^2 = .02$ ; Soper, 2019). In the regression models, dummy-coded demographic control variables (e.g., academic level with [under/grads] as reference group; and gender, with [fe/males] as reference group) and other variables noted as significant predictors of sense of belonging (e.g., peer interactions, experiences of racial discrimination, and sense of



difference) were included as covariates. We then examined the main effects of institutional commitment to diversity and of the dummy-coded racial/ethnic categories (using White students as the reference group) on sense of belonging.

In the final models, we entered interaction terms by multiplying the institutional commitment variable (centered at the grand mean) by the dummy-coded racial/ethnic categorical variables for under-represented students and for Asian students. Interaction effects were probed by calculating the simple slope of the association between institutional commitment to diversity and sense of belonging for each racial/ethnic category. As with the EFAs, regression analyses were conducted in MPlus, version 8. By default, MPlus estimates parameters using all available information (i.e., full information maximum likelihood, or FIML) rather than deleting cases with missing values.

### **Qualitative analysis.**

Qualitative data were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). First, open inductive coding was used to develop meaningful patterns based on responses to the open-ended survey questions (Charmaz, 2006). Next, focused coding was conducted to help researchers group codes and refine them into larger groups of categories (Tables 6 & 7) (Saldaña, 2015). Lastly, axial coding was used to make connections between categories and contexts to allow for patterns to develop (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). At this stage, data were analyzed according to students' race/ethnic group to identify patterns within and across groups. Additionally, students' mean scores on belonging and perceptions of commitment were integrated into the qualitative analysis while developing patterns.

## RESULTS

### Quantitative Results

**Scale structure.** We used an EFA to test one-, two-, three- and four-factor solutions for the eleven items on the Sense of Belonging scale. The AIC values were similar across all four models (Table 3). Chi-Square statistics were significant for all but the four-factor solution; however, there were multiple, single-item factors in the four-factor solution, making it difficult to interpret. Similarly, the three-factor solution had multiple, cross-loaded items, also making it difficult to identify factors. Based on fit statistics and interpretability (Table 3), the two-factor solution was selected as best-fitting and most parsimonious for the eleven items on the Sense of Belonging scale. The first factor included nine of the eleven items, which all reflected students' sense of belonging at the institution. Two items loaded onto a second factor, which reflected a student's sense of feeling different from others at their institution (Table 1). All items loaded onto their respective factor at .6 or above and the model fit the data reasonably well, with a CFI of .95 and RMSEA of .09 [.07, .10]. The results were used to compute composite scores by calculating the mean of the respective items. Mean sense of belonging (nine items) was used as the dependent variable, and mean sense of difference (two items) was included as a covariate in the regression models.

We used the same process to determine the factor structure of the eight items assessing students' perceptions of campus racial climate. As with the items on the belonging scale, the most parsimonious solution was the two-factor model (Table 3). While the three- and four-factor solutions had marginally better fit statistics, due to single-item factors and cross-loading items, these models were difficult to interpret. One

item, “[The professional school's] should address cultural diversity at new student orientation,” which was developed for the survey and not part of the original measure, did not load well onto any factor (i.e., factor loading less than .30) and was dropped. The final two factors included seven items reflecting institutional support for diversity, and three items reflecting perceptions of the peer diversity climate (Table 2). All of the remaining ten items loaded onto their respective factor at .4 or above and the model fit the data well, with a CFI of .97 and RMSEA of .08 [.06, .09]. The results were used to compute composite scores by calculating the mean of the respective items. Mean perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity (seven items) was a primary independent variable and mean perceptions of peer diversity climate (three items) was included in the regression models as a covariate.

**Descriptive statistics.** Mean scores and correlations for key variables are reported in Table 4. All variables were moderately, positively correlated with one another. The strongest correlation was between institutional commitment to diversity and peer diversity climate ( $r = .73^{**}$ ); thus, when conducting the regression analyses we examined collinearity statistics to determine if the peer diversity climate variable should be removed from the analyses. The variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance statistic were both at acceptable levels (VIF < 4.0, tolerance > .20) so peer diversity climate was retained in all models.

The t-test comparing White students and all students of color on sense of belonging approached significance ( $t_{347} = 1.85, p = .07$ ), with the trend suggesting White students had higher average belonging scores compared to students of color ( $M = 4.37$  vs. 4.24). An ANOVA compared sense of belonging across three racial/ethnic categories:

under-represented students, Asian students, and White students. There was no significant, between-group difference ( $F_{2, 343} = 2.14, p = .12$ ); however, a least-square difference post-hoc test revealed a trend toward significance in the mean belonging scores of White and Asian students ( $M = 4.37$  vs.  $4.16, p = .05$ ). Mean scores of White students and under-represented students were not significantly different ( $M = 4.37$  vs.  $4.29, p = .36$ ). The t-test comparing White students to students of color on institutional commitment to diversity was significant ( $t_{346} = 3.05, p = .002$ ), with White students reporting a higher perception of commitment to diversity compared to students of color ( $M = 3.65$  vs.  $3.32$ ). This pattern was confirmed in the ANOVA ( $F_{2, 342} = 6.10, p = .002$ ). Post-hoc tests showed that White students had higher perceptions of commitment to diversity compared to students of color from under-represented groups ( $M = 3.65$  vs.  $3.21, p = .001$ ). White students also had higher mean scores than Asian students, but only at the trend-level ( $M = 3.65$  vs.  $3.38, p = .09$ ).

**Sense of belonging: Main effects.** After controlling for gender, academic level, racial discrimination, sense of difference, and peer diversity climate in the regression model, there was a significant, positive association between institutional commitment to diversity and sense of belonging ( $b = .11, p = .007$ ). Additionally, compared to White students, students from under-represented racial/ethnic groups had higher average scores on the sense of belonging scale ( $b = .25, p = .002$ ). In contrast, there was no significant difference in the sense of belonging scores for Asian students compared to White students ( $b = .01, p = .92$ ). Results are reported in Table 5.

**Sense of belonging: Moderation effects.** Two interaction terms were added to the model to test the moderating effects of racial/ethnic group membership (under-

represented or Asian students compared to White students) on the association between institutional commitment to diversity and sense of belonging (Table 5). The association was not significantly different for students from under-represented racial/ethnic groups compared to their White peers ( $b = .07$ ,  $p = .41$ ); however, there was a trend toward significance for Asian students compared to their White peers ( $b = .16$ ,  $p = .09$ ).

We examined the simple slopes of the association between institutional commitment to diversity and sense of belonging for each group (Figure 1). For White students, the slope trended toward significance ( $b = .08$ ,  $p = .09$ ); in contrast, the simple slopes for under-represented students ( $b = .15$ ,  $p = .03$ ) and for Asian students ( $b = .25$ ,  $p = .01$ ) were both significant. While the simple slope for under-represented students was significant, the non-significant interaction term indicates that it was not significantly different from the simple slope for White students. Similarly, the difference in simple slopes between Asian and White students only trended toward significance.

**Sense of belonging: Post Hoc Analyses.** Because of unexpected findings regarding cross-race differences in sense of belonging (i.e., under-represented students had higher scores than White students in the main effects model), we ran additional analyses to determine if key covariates (peer interactions, experiences of racial discrimination, and sense of difference) were accounting for these results. With only demographic covariates in the model (i.e., other key covariates removed; Table 8), there was no significant difference in belonging scores between under-represented and White students ( $b = .05$ ,  $p = .5$ ) while the difference between White and Asian students approached significance ( $b = -.19$ ,  $p = .06$ ). A higher belonging score for under-represented students compared to White students only emerged when controlling for

sense of difference ( $b = .18, p = .02$ ) and discrimination ( $b = .17, p = .04$ ). Additionally, a lower belonging score for Asian students compared to White students only emerged when controlling for peer diversity climate ( $b = -0.21, p = .03$ ). Lastly, there was a significant moderating effect for Asian students compared to White students when controlling for all covariates except discrimination ( $b = .17, p = .13$ ) and there was no moderating effect for under-represented students compared to White students in any model.

### **Qualitative Results**

Findings illustrated that students from different racial/ethnic groups reported varying activities or experiences as contributing to their sense of belonging and suggestions to improve school climate. Moreover, within each racial/ethnic group, students with belonging (and often commitment) scores below the mean perceived institutional practices differently than those with higher scores. Findings are presented in terms of the patterns that emerged by racial/ethnic group.<sup>182</sup> Characteristics of the respondent making the statement are provided in parentheses.

#### **White Students.**

Three distinct patterns emerged among White students: 1) students who focused on individual experiences of exclusion unrelated to race; 2) students who suggested diversity changes even though they may not view such changes as impacting their own sense of belonging; and 3) students who found the school welcoming or did not have suggestions to improve it.

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<sup>182</sup> Qualitative data were analyzed only for the largest four racial/ethnic groups: White, Asian, Latinx, and Black students.

First, a small group of White students focused on their individual experiences of exclusion. While these students varied in their perceptions of commitment to diversity, most had belonging scores well below the mean, and their suggestions often reflected experiences that caused them to feel excluded. For example, one female graduate student suggested “mak[ing] the classes more accessible to part-time, adult students or at least don’t tell those students that you have a part-time program when you really don’t” and another explained, “I’ve gone to events and don’t know anyone, so the events feel alienating. Maybe a program that helps connect people and allow them to sit down and talk 1-to-1 and develop relationships.” Many of these students either did not complete the events question or indicated there were no events that made them feel included. Those who specified events most commonly listed academic events like “orientation” or a “research lectureship series.” Additionally, a few students, particularly those with higher perceived commitment scores, suggested that the school should focus less on race and be more inclusive regarding other aspects of identity: “Begin focusing on diversity of opinion as the primary necessity for tolerance and inclusion. Host speakers with conservative viewpoints, or even centrist viewpoints” (male graduate).

Second, a substantial group of White students primarily suggested diversity-related changes. Common suggestions included requiring “multicultural training” for faculty including how to “include diversity in the curriculum”, “diversifying the faculty”, and sponsoring “talks, movie nights, and events centered around race and discussions of change.” Some students, mostly graduate students, also suggested structural changes such as “changing the name of the school”, hiring a dedicated diversity officer, creating “sequential and strategic course requirements for students dealing with issues of identity

and structural oppression”, and changing “the way we hire professors to [value] scholars who have experience teaching/supporting marginalized students.” Students who made diversity-related suggestions had a wide range of perceived commitment scores, but those who suggested structural changes beyond diversifying faculty and student bodies generally had lower scores compared to those who focused on events.

Despite offering diversity related suggestions, these White students generally did not report diversity-related events as contributing to their own sense of belonging. Instead, they most often listed community building social events followed by academic experiences as making them feel part of the school community. Moreover, while there was great heterogeneity in their belonging scores, many had scores around the mean (e.g., within one standard deviation above or below). A few students noted how they would benefit from the suggested diversity changes, for example, “I would have more events such as the [invited lecture about race], which I attended and really liked” (female graduate). Other students recommended changes designed to benefit students of color: “Create spaces and opportunities for students and professors of minority groups to interact exclusively with one another: monthly coffee breaks/networking for students and professors of color” (male graduate).

The third pattern among White students were those who found the school welcoming and/or did not have suggestions for improving the climate. These students tended to have belonging and perceived commitment scores near or higher than the mean, and undergraduates were overrepresented. Although some students did not respond to the suggestions question, others indicated they were unsure of changes to suggest or had no suggestions. For example, students reported, “I’m not sure, this is a tough question”



(female graduate) and, “I would make no changes. [The school] does an extraordinary job at advocating for diversity and including every student of every race, gender, etc.”

(female undergraduate). A subset of these students explained that while they felt welcome as a White student, they did not know how students of color feel: “I don’t have any [changes]. I’m a majority student and I just don’t know what minority students would prefer or need to feel more welcomed” (female undergraduate). Most identified social/community building events followed by relationships and academic experiences as contributing to their sense of belonging.

### **Asian Students.**

Two patterns emerged for Asian students: 1) students with belonging scores below the mean offered limited diversity-related suggestions and 2) students with scores at or above the mean generally did not mention diversity.

Asian students with lower belonging scores (and often perceived commitment scores) suggested numerous diversity programs and initiatives to improve climate. However, the suggestions tended to be brief and/or vague. For example, students suggested the school: “Make it so that minority issues were talked about more and that there were more events with diversity involved” (undergraduate female); “Put more effort in seeing more diversity among staffs, faculty, and students” (graduate female); and “Reach out and make personal connections with marginalized students” (undergraduate female). Although they recommended diversity-related changes, these students most often listed academic experiences such as “teaching my class” or “the Dean’s list banquet” as contributing to their sense of belonging.

In comparison, Asian students with higher belonging scores did not mention diversity events or suggestions. In fact, most of these students did not answer the suggestions question. Those who did answer either reported that the environment was already welcoming or suggested minor, non-diversity related changes. For example, one student said, “The environment is already positive for me. If I were to do something, I would probably show how diverse the student population is” (male graduate). Another suggested, “I would have the recurring community building events take place outside of class times” (female undergraduate). Most students completed the events question, and they indicated that community building events (e.g., “Events with free food!”) along with relationships and academic experiences (e.g., “The way that my professors interact with me in class, and the way that they build the classroom environments”) contribute to their sense of belonging.

### **Latinx Students.**

Two patterns developed for Latinx students. Latinx students with belonging scores (and typically commitment scores) below the mean primarily shared their perceptions related to diversity, while those with higher belonging scores mentioned diversity but also discussed other aspects of their experience or identities.

Latinx students with belonging and commitment scores below the mean offered diversity-related suggestions to improve school climate. Suggestions varied in length and specificity, but covered a range of areas from programming (e.g., “continue to hold community dialogues for important issues”, undergrad male) to faculty training (e.g., “professors need to be educated in being multiculturally competent and truly BELIEVE that it is important”, graduate female) and accountability: “When students come forward

to report bias and prejudicial incidents perpetrated by professors, \*actually\* holding those professors accountable rather than having them lie low for a semester then returning them to their same posts after the outrage has died down” (undergraduate male). Additionally, these students often identified diversity events such as “the exploring diversity series” as contributing their sense of belonging,

In comparison, Latinx students with belonging scores at or above the mean reported that community building social events like “the welcome events as well as the coffee offered during midterms and finals” made them feel part of the school community. Moreover, while some suggested diversity-related changes, these students also provided recommendations related to other aspects of their experience or identities. For instance, in addition to recommending a required “unconscious bias course” for students, a part-time student suggested “guest speakers scheduled after normal business hours or at least record them so that those of us who have F/T jobs can see them later” (graduate female). An international student noted, “I would expand Career Services to international students as well” (undergraduate female). Many of the Latinx students, particularly those with belonging scores above the mean, referenced their own experiences as a basis for their diversity-related suggestions: “As the single Latina student in my cohort of study, and not knowing any faculty/staff that are Latina women, I would suggest strong efforts be made in recruiting both Latina/o students and Latina faculty/staff” (graduate female).

### **Black Students.**

Regardless of their belonging or perceived commitment scores, most Black students suggested ways their professional school could improve the climate for diversity and better support students of color. Nonetheless, Black students with belonging scores

below the mean focused more on race and diversity than students with higher scores who also discussed community building events and experiences as contributing to sense of belonging.

Black students offered a plethora of suggestions, ranging from general (e.g., “get rid of any stereotyping, elaborating on the diversity of our studies and students”, undergraduate female) to comprehensive and structural: “I would begin by hiring a firm to conduct an audit to conduct a comprehensive campus climate survey that includes surveys, interviews, focus groups and observations – in classrooms and public spaces – and then hire a diversity officer to implement the recommendations” (graduate female). Black students commonly suggested diversifying the faculty, staff, and student bodies and/or providing additional resources to support students of color such as “hiring a dean of diversity & inclusion, creat[ing] support groups for underrepresented students, [and] engag[ing] with alumni of color more to create a network for students” (graduate, no gender specified). Some students also connected their suggestions to personal experiences: “I would also provide a clearer path/set of consequences when a student experiences microaggressions or discriminations in the classroom. I have described experiencing discrimination in a class and the issue was not addressed. This reduced my sense of belonging/made me feel like I did not matter more than the professor in the particular circumstance” (graduate female).

Although almost all Black students suggested ways to improve the school’s racial climate, only students with belonging scores below the mean indicated that events centering race and/or diversity, such as an invited speaker talking about race or a “difficult dialogues” workshop, contributed to their sense of belonging. In comparison,

Black students with belonging scores above the mean reported that community social events, such as the “holiday party” and “ice cream social” made them feel part of the community. Additionally, a few Black students with higher belonging (and typically commitment) scores recommended community building events to improve climate (e.g., “as a transfer student, I would promote more activities to have transfer students feel included” or “create a variety of different bonding events”).

### **Discussion**

This study demonstrated that students’ perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity were significantly related to their sense of belonging, even after controlling for variables previously shown to be related to sense of belonging. However, the results also suggest that other climate factors, including perceptions of personal discrimination, sense of difference, and perceptions of peer diversity, are important in understanding differences in sense of belonging across racial/ethnic groups. Although students’ race/ethnicity did not moderate the relationship between perceived institutional commitment and sense of belonging as expected, other aspects of the results, particularly when the qualitative and quantitative results were integrated, showed variation in students’ perceptions of institutional practices both across and within racial groups. Overall, the results of this study suggest that colleges and universities concerned with increasing students’ sense of belonging should consider institutional policies and practices related to diversity and how students from different groups may perceive them.

This study indicates that in general, students’ perceptions of commitment to diversity relate to their sense of belonging. However, it also illustrates several important differences between racial/ethnic groups. White students had higher perceptions of

institutional commitment to diversity compared to students of color. This finding is consistent with prior research showing that students of color question their university's commitment to diversity (Jones et al., 2002, Watson et al., 2002). In particular, findings showed that White students had significantly higher perceptions of commitment to diversity compared to underrepresented students of color (e.g., American Indian, Black, Latinx, and Multiracial) while the difference in perceptions between White and Asian students approached significance.

Regarding sense of belonging, when we controlled for factors previously found to be related to belonging (e.g., experiencing racial discrimination, perceptions of peer diversity, sense of difference), we counterintuitively found that students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups reported a higher sense of belonging than White students while there was no significant difference in the sense of belonging scores for Asian compared to White students. Post-hoc analyses suggests that several covariates may in fact explain the relationship between race and sense of belonging. For example, results showed that underrepresented students of color had higher belonging scores than White students only when we controlled for racial discrimination and feeling different or not accepted. Thus, for underrepresented students of color, specific experiences of discrimination and incidents that lead to feeling different may be more important factors in their sense of belonging than perceptions of more distal aspects of climate (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). This aligns with the qualitative results which demonstrate the significance of experiencing discrimination, particularly for underrepresented students of color. Moreover, the qualitative results suggest that the ways in which White students feel different or unaccepted are distinct from students of color and also may contribute to

differences in sense of belonging. Combined, our results raise important questions about whether we are measuring the same underlying construct when we ask students of color and White students about their sense of belonging at a PWI.

Similarly, we found that controlling for discrimination changed the moderation results for Asian students. With all covariates included in the model, there were no significant differences in the association between institutional commitment to diversity and sense of belonging for underrepresented students of color or Asian students compared to White students. However, when we entered covariates separately, there was a significant moderating effect for Asian students compared to White students when controlling all covariates except discrimination. Specifically, results showed a stronger association between institutional commitment to diversity and sense of belonging for Asian students compared to White students except for when controlling for discrimination. Like underrepresented students of color, experiencing racial discrimination appears to be a key factor in sense of belonging for Asian students. Moreover, the qualitative results suggest that unlike White students for whom school commitment to diversity may not impact their own sense of belonging, perceptions of institutional actions related to diversity do appear to matter for many Asian students.

Additionally, the qualitative results help explain quantitative results by illustrating patterns in how students from different racial/ethnic groups perceived institutional practices. Overall, some students found institutional efforts related to belonging and climate lacking, while others found them more than adequate. Furthermore, heterogeneity existed within each racial/ethnic group which often related to students' belonging and commitment scores.

Asian students with lower mean belonging scores and most Black and Latinx students regardless of scores perceived the school's racial climate and/or climate for diversity climate as lacking. Thus, they suggested various diversity-related changes often based on their own experiences of exclusion. Many White students also suggested changes to improve the climate for race and/or diversity, but they generally did not explicitly connect proposed changes or current diversity efforts to their own sense of belonging. Among White students, only those who perceived nonracial aspects of the school as lacking explicitly connected their suggested changes to their own sense of belonging. Additionally, some White students believed the professional school should focus less on diversity issues, a belief that has been associated with less openness to diverse perspectives (Harper & Yeung, 2013). Lastly, White students and Asian students with higher belonging and commitment scores perceived the school's efforts and climate as satisfactory and often did not have recommendations for improvement.

Study results support Hurtado and colleagues (2012) DLE model, which considers creating a sense of belonging an important process that is related to and influenced by the dimensions of campus climate. This study provides further evidence that perceived institutional commitment to diversity is an important aspect of the psychological dimension of campus climate (Hurtado et al., 2012, 1998; Milem et al., 2005). Yet, findings also suggest that diversity efforts undertaken by an institution can be perceived as inadequate by one student, while the same actions could be perceived as effective or even unnecessary by another student (e.g., Harper & Yeung, 2013). Accordingly, future research should further explore the range of students' perceptions of institutional diversity efforts and how those perceptions relate to different student identities and



experiences. Moreover, future research should consider the intersection of race/ethnicity with other social identities.

There are a few limitations associated with the current study that can also be addressed in future research. First, the study had a relatively small sample size, particularly among students of color. The sample size reduced the power of the study making it more difficult to detect small or medium effect sizes. Accordingly, future studies should include a larger sample which would increase power. Second, the study relied on self-report data and did not examine institutional policies, practices, or structures. Symbolic actions may help build perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity, but can imply an artificial commitment to diversity if not aligned with institutional structures and policies (Hurtado et al., 2012; Yosso et al., 2009). Future studies should examine how institutional structures and tangible actions relate to perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity and feelings of belonging. Lastly, the cross-sectional nature of this study makes it impossible to infer whether the relationship between perceived institutional commitment to diversity and sense of belonging was causal in nature. A longitudinal study, in which changes in sense of belonging and perceptions of institutional commitment could be assessed over time, would help to examine the direction of the effect.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the growing literature on college students' sense of belonging by illustrating that students' perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity are an important factor in belonging. While previous studies have linked other aspects of racial climate including interactions with diverse peers and psychological perceptions of climate to students' sense of belonging

(Berryhill & Bee, 2007; Chavous, 2005; Locks et al., 2008), few studies have examined perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity. Overall, this study suggests the continued need to consider institutional efforts to promote a positive racial climate along with students' perceptions of those actions.

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Table 1. Factor loadings for eleven items from the Sense of Belonging measure

Item	Sense of Belonging	Sense of Difference
There's at least one professor or staff member at [the professional school] I can talk to if I have a problem.	.62*	-
People at [the professional school] are friendly to me.	.67*	-
I am treated with as much respect as other students at [the professional school].	.71*	-
I feel very different from most other students at [the professional school].	-	.73*
I feel like a real part of [the professional school].	.61*	-
It is hard for people like me to be accepted at [the professional school].	-	.64*
Other students at [the professional school] take my opinions seriously.	.61*	-
Most professors at [the professional school] are interested in me.	.75*	-
I can really be myself at [the professional school].	.68*	-
People at [the professional school] know I can do good work.	.75*	-
I feel proud of belonging to [the professional school].	.70*	-

Note. Factor loadings < .4 are not shown; \*p < .05

Table 2. Factor loadings for eleven items from the Perceptions of Racial Climate measure

	Institutional Commitment to Diversity	Peer Diversity Climate
[The professional school's] students are exposed to the history and culture of minority groups.	.74*	-
There are adequate resources and support for diverse student populations at [the professional school].	.81*	-
Minority student leaders are supported at [the professional school].	.82*	-
Recruitment of students from underrepresented groups is a priority at [the professional school].	.84*	-
[The professional school's] student services (student affairs, career services, etc.) provide outreach programs for diverse student groups.	.81*	-
[The professional school's] should address cultural diversity at new student orientation.	-	-
[The professional school's] sponsors programming focusing on multicultural issues.	.50*	-
Professors at [the professional school] adequately address issues of race/ethnicity and racism in the classroom.	.47*	-
The environment at [the professional school] is free from racial/ethnic conflict.	-	.66*
There is a great deal of unity and sharing among minority and majority students at [the professional school].	-	.66*
At [the professional school], friendships are more likely to be determined by common interests rather than by race.	-	.83*

Note. Factor loadings < .4 are not shown; \*p < .05

Table 3. Model fit statistics for exploratory factor analyses of Sense of Belonging and Perceptions of Racial Climate

Solution	AIC	CFI	RMSEA [90% CI]	Chi-Square (df)
<u>Sense of Belonging</u>				
1-Factor	9747.0	0.90	.10 [.09, .12]	226.3 (44)***
2-Factor	9678.8	0.95	.09 [.07, .10]	138.2 (34)***
3-Factor	9609.5	0.99	.05 [.03, .07]	50.8 (25)**
4-Factor	9600.1	1.00	.04 [.00, .06]	25.3 (17)
<u>Perceptions of Racial Climate</u>				
1-Factor	9904.6	0.90	.11 [.11, .13]	267.7 (44)***
2-Factor	9761.1	0.97	.08 [.06, .09]	104.2 (34)***
3-Factor	9730.2	0.99	.06 [.04, .08]	55.3 (25)***
4-Factor	9714.1	1.00	.03 [.00, .06]	23.1 (17)

Note. AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; CFI = Comparative Fit Index;

RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; CI = Confidence Interval;

df = Degrees of freedom. \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 4. Mean scores and correlations for key variables

Variable	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4
1. Sense of Belonging	4.33 (.61)	-			
2. Institutional Commitment to Diversity	3.57 (.90)	.40**	-		
3. Sense of Difference	3.70 (1.07)	.53**	.28**	-	
4. Peer Diversity Climate	3.74 (1.02)	.49**	.73**	.41**	-
5. Racial Discrimination	4.78 (.67)	.39**	.38**	.40**	.41*

Note. \* p < .05; \*\*p < .01.

Table 5. Regression Results for Sense of Belonging

	Model 1	Model 2
	<i>B(SE)</i>	<i>B(SE)</i>
Intercept	2.21 (.27)***	2.72 (.36)***
Academic Level	.01 (.05)	.00 (.05)*
Gender	-.09 (.06)	-.09(.07)
Racial Discrimination	.17 (.05)***	.14 (.07)*
Sense of Difference	.20 (.02)***	.20 (.03)***
Peer Diversity Climate	.07 (.04) <sup>†</sup>	.08 (.04)*
Institution Commitment to Diversity	.11 (.04)**	.08(.05) <sup>†</sup>
Under-Represented Students	.25(.08)**	.25 (.07)***
Asian Students	.01 (.10)	-.00(.10)
Institutional Support X Under- represented	-	.07(.08)
Institutional Support X Asian	-	.16(.10) <sup>†</sup>
R-Square	.38 (.04)***	.38 (.06)***

Note. <sup>†</sup>p < .10; \*p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001.

Table 6. Categories of Events/Experiences that Contribute to Sense of Belonging

Category	Explanation	Example	Frequency
Community	Social or community building activities and events	“Welcome Back Picnic”	100
Academic	Academic experience (classes, conferences, awards, etc.)	“Orientation, attending classes, practicum”	39
Relationships	Interactions or relationships with faculty, staff or students	“daily interactions and conversations with students and faculty”	26
None	States no activities or did not attend any events	“none” or “N/A”	23
Race	Events or experiences involving race or culture	“Support of students of color”	21
Diversity	Events or experiences involving diversity generally (not race/culture)	“movie screenings by [diversity committee]”	15
Program	Cohort or program specific event (either academic or social)	“[program] cohort dinner”	12
Co-curricular	Co-curricular activities or experiences	“participating in [leadership program]”	7
Nonspecific	Vague response; does not indicate a specific event or experience	“a lot, even just studying in [building] makes me feel more connected”	6
Negative	Negative/Exclusion experience reported	“Faculty not responding to my emails	5
Email	Electronic and other communications from the school	“emails from Dean”	3
Career	Career-related experience or event	“round table career events”	2

Note: Students could provide multiple suggestions in response to the question.



Table 7. Categories of Suggestions to Create a More Positive School Environment

Category	Explanation	Example	Frequency
Racial Diversity	Refers specifically to either race or culture	“Diversify power positions so that they are not all white men/women”	55
General Diversity	Refers to diversity generally without specifying groups	“Assist department heads and hiring committees with bias training to strengthen the recruitment and selection of diverse faculty”	45
Social	Social or community building activities	“More community wide events during non academic times”	24
Other Diversity	Refers to specific group or identity other than race (e.g., LBGQTQ, conservative, international students)	“Teach about disability, universal design and accessibility”	21
Welcoming	Describe as already welcoming	“I feel as though all students feel welcomed”	15
Academic	Academic events or activities	“more info sessions on different classes that are not in your major”	14
No changes	None or N/A	“n/a” or “none”	10
Program	Program or cohort specific	“Field placements, at least in [specific program], seems extremely rigid”	7
White Unsure	Don’t know how SOC feel (white students only)	“I’m a majority student and I just don’t know what minority students would prefer or need to feel more welcomed”	6
Unsure	Not sure about what suggestions to make	“I do not know”	5
Financial	Financial or budget related	“You need to address the funding realities surrounding every doc student in every program”	3
Dean	Dean’s relationship with students/community	“If I were the dean, I would be more present in the [school] community”	3

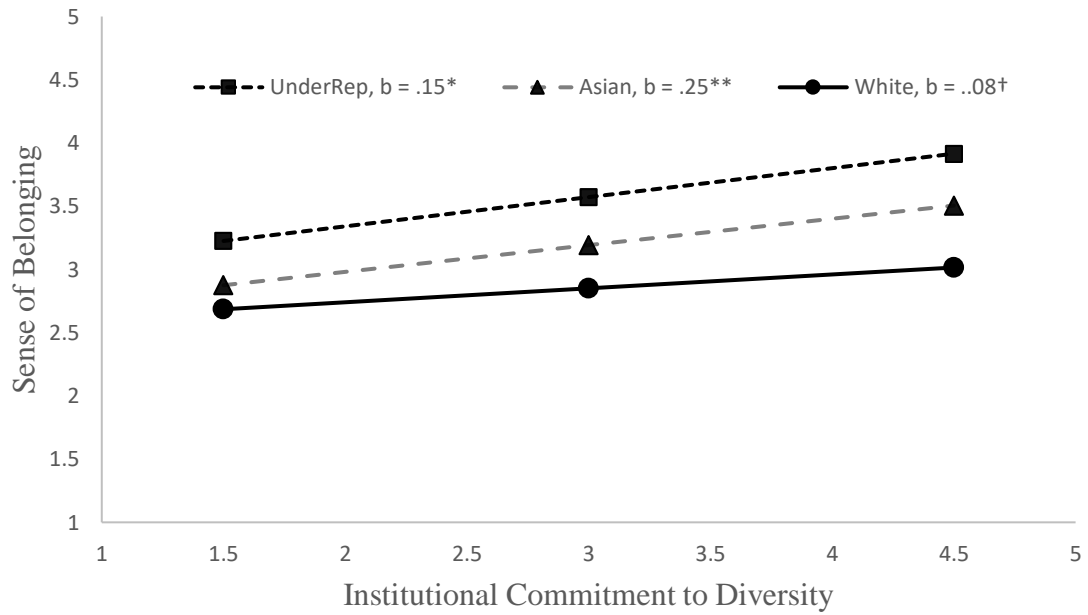
Note: Table only includes suggestions that were reported more than once. Students could provide multiple suggestions in response to the question.

Table 8. Regression Results for Sense of Belonging, Only Demographic Covariates Included

	Model 1	Model 2
	<i>B(SE)</i>	<i>B(SE)</i>
Intercept	3.90 (.19)***	4.80 (.13)***
Academic Level	-.11 (.06) <sup>†</sup>	-.11 (.05)*
Gender	-.22 (.07)**	-.22 (.08)**
Institution Support for Diversity	.25 (.03)***	.20 (.05)***
Under-Represented Students	.05 (.09)	.08 (.06)
Asian Students	-.19 (.10) <sup>†</sup>	-.18 (.10) <sup>†</sup>
Institutional Support X Under- represented	-	.11 (.07)
Institutional Support X Asian	-	.31 (.12)*
R-Square	.20 (.04)***	.22 (.05)***

Note. <sup>†</sup>p < .10; \*p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001.

Figure 1. Institutional Commitment to Diversity and Sense of Belonging by Race/Ethnicity



Note. †p < .10; \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01.