

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Doctor of Education Dissertations

College of Education

Summer 2023

Access Does Not Guarantee Inclusion: An Exploration of Student Organizations Fostering Belonging for Black and Minority Students at a Faith-Based Institution

Heidi Neely

Gardner-Webb University, heidineely@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education-dissertations>



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#), and the [Student Counseling and Personnel Services Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Neely, Heidi, "Access Does Not Guarantee Inclusion: An Exploration of Student Organizations Fostering Belonging for Black and Minority Students at a Faith-Based Institution" (2023). *Doctor of Education Dissertations*. 156.

<https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education-dissertations/156>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Education at Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Education Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. For more information, please see [Copyright and Publishing Info](#).

ACCESS DOES NOT GUARANTEE INCLUSION: AN EXPLORATION OF
STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS FOSTERING BELONGING FOR BLACK AND
MINORITY STUDENTS AT A FAITH-BASED INSTITUTION

By
Heidi C. Neely

A Dissertation in Practice Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University College of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2023

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Heidi C. Neely under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

Jeffery Hamilton, EdD
Dissertation Chair

Date

Dale Lamb, EdD
Methodologist

Date

Elizabeth Jones, EdD
Content Specialist

Date

Dale Lamb, EdD
College of Education Representative

Date

Prince Bull, PhD
Dean of the College of Education

Date

Dedication

To my late Mother, Reverend Callie Neely, though you are no longer on earth, your prayers continue to avail much. You lived a life of integrity, grace, and love for all. Even after 20 years since your homegoing, people still talk about you with adoration and memories of how you impacted their lives. Because of you, I want to leave a similar impact on each student and person I meet. Thank you for the honorable life you lived so our family could follow the path you left. I love you and miss you so much.

To my Grandmother Ruby Clemmer Hall, Aunt Edna Sue Hall, Aunt Bertie Clemmer, Great-Grandmother Ma Callie Hoyle Hoke, and Grandmother Mary D. Neely, the women whose shoulders I stand on, who hold a significant place in my heart, and who sacrificed for their families so our dreams could become a reality. You have gone before me and prepared the way by exemplifying love, prayer, dedication, motherhood, and strength. I honor you.

To My Village

I will forever be grateful to Ms. Shirlene Hoke and Dr. Brenda Hoke, Ph.D., the best Godmothers and Grandmothers anyone could ask for. They selflessly cared for my daughter Callie so I could be fully present as a student. Thank you for 3 years of playdates, Chipotle, slime, eventful and uneventful overnights, birthday parties, after-school pick-ups, piano lessons, kids' meals, Urgent Care visits, kisses, hugs, and Band-Aids. Your encouragement, prayers, sacrifice, and support my whole life mean the world. This journey would not have been possible without you both. I honor you.

To Daddy, Howard Neely, you are the epitome of who a father should be. You are a man of few words, but your actions have ingrained in our family that we are to be

disciplinarians and providers, show good work ethic and academic vigor, and have family in church every Sunday. I appreciate everything you do for us, and I will never stop asking you to bring me souvenirs back from your trips. I love you and I honor you.

To my brothers, John (Freda) and Jerald, who rooted for me and encouraged me, and shared laughs along the way, thank you. To my sister, Erica, though you hesitated to answer your phone when I called back to back with worries and wanting to give up. Thank you for listening to my scattered thoughts, joys, frustrations, whining, and complaining. You prayed with me and for me and continued speaking life into my situation. God answered your prayers! I love you and honor you all.

To my daughter Callie, thank you for supporting me and praying that I could focus and do well in my work. Your love is the absolute best! You cheered me on and told all your friends and teachers about my doctoral journey. I am so proud of you. You are my greatest gift and inspiration. Always know that you deserve to be in any space your heart desires. Never let anyone or anything intimidate you; you are more than a conqueror. You are my special blessing! I love you sweet girl and honor you.

To my extended family and friends, I appreciate all of your support and encouragement. Your prayers were uplifting and guided me through this journey. Thank you. I honor you.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my professor and committee chair, Dr. Jeffrey Hamilton, for his expertise, knowledge, and guidance throughout this program. I have learned so much from each of the DEOL faculty members during my doctoral studies. This endeavor would not have been possible without impeccable support from my DEOL family. My cohort was supportive, and they are an incredible group of people.

In addition, I would like to thank my higher education colleagues who gave me a lot of pep talks and support when I began this journey. To my TRIO Student Support Services colleagues for all that you do for our students and the love, support, encouragement, and grace you have extended to me. I look forward to many years of student engagement, impact, and persistence.

Finally, thank you to every student who shared their experiences with me. Black Student Alliance, I owe you so much gratitude for all you taught me and the challenges you presented. For the members of BSA, your voices did not go unheard. Your feelings and frustration did not go unnoticed. Through this journey, it is my prayer that other Black men and women who follow in your path to higher education find validation, belonging, understanding, and inclusivity wherever they choose to go. Knowing that you trusted me to listen to your stories and to share them with the world, I appreciate you. I wish you all the best in your future endeavors.

Abstract

ACCESS DOES NOT GUARANTEE INCLUSION: AN EXPLORATION OF STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS FOSTERING BELONGING FOR BLACK AND MINORITY STUDENTS AT A FAITH-BASED INSTITUTION. Neely, Heidi C., 2023: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

Black and minority students often do not persist to graduation and voluntarily drop out due to dissatisfaction with the lack of inclusivity and belonging experiences at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). This research examined the sense of belonging and inclusion for Black students at Southern Cross College (SCC; pseudonym), a private, faith-based institution located in an urban city in the southeastern region of the United States. All students are welcomed at SCC; however, there is an obscure caveat. Students whose identities align with specific diverse characteristics (ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religious belief) may find themselves feeling isolated, excluded, and ostracized from the overall campus community. In 2019, five Black students enrolled at SCC pursued creating a student organization that provided a safe space to uplift, support, and celebrate Black culture and diversity. This study identified potential conflicts that may arise when controversial diversity topics, such as racial diversity, campus racial climate, LGBTQ inclusion, women's rights, and academic freedoms, do not align with the religious beliefs upheld by faith-based colleges. A mixed-method design was used to analyze quantitative results from a survey questionnaire about general feelings of belonging. The qualitative research included focus group interviews with Black undergraduate students that provided perceptions of their lived experiences on campus. The findings concluded that Black students did not experience inclusivity and feelings of belonging at SCC. The

research recommended implementing affinity organizations to enhance the lived experiences of Black students, which may increase Black persistence and graduation rates. As a result of this suggestion, the Black Student Alliance organization was established. Another recommendation was for recruitment efforts to hire and retain diverse faculty and staff. The research concludes that fostering a more inclusive campus community and bridging the gap between diverse student populations and institutional values will increase student involvement and engagement.

Keywords: Black student; predominantly White institution; affinity organization; diversity and inclusion; safe space; sense of belonging

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Partnership	7
Controversial Issues	10
Environment.....	12
Organizational Context	15
Organizational Analysis.....	19
Myself as a Leader	22
Significant Challenge.....	27
Definition of Terms.....	29
Limitations of the Study.....	33
Assumptions.....	34
Delimitations.....	34
Organization of the Study	34
Chapter 2: Literature Review	36
Introduction.....	36
Myself as a Researcher	37
Theoretical Framework.....	40
Sense of Belonging	44
Student Involvement Theory.....	45
Student Engagement	47
Student Identity Development	48
Kotter and Change Movement	49
Bolman and Deal's (1992) Four Frames Model	50
Community of Strangers.....	51
Potential Controversy.....	52
Social Justice.....	53
Religious Identity.....	55
Policy	57
Racial Campus Climate.....	58
History of Student Organizations.....	60
Affinity Organizations	62
Student Support Systems	63
Religious Exemptions	64
Review of Qualitative and Quantitative Research	64
Strengths	65
Limitations	65
Summary	66
Chapter 3: Methodology	69
Introduction.....	69
Research Design.....	69
Qualitative Research	70
Focus Groups	70

Quantitative Research	73
Research Questions	75
Setting	76
Participants.....	77
Data Collection	78
Data Analysis	80
Conclusion	81
Chapter 4: Results	82
Introduction	82
Review of Methodology	83
Participants.....	83
Qualitative Themes	84
Limitations	92
Findings.....	93
Conclusion	94
Chapter 5: Discussion	96
Introduction.....	96
Summary of Findings.....	96
Conclusions Organized by Significant Challenge	97
Discussion.....	99
Recommendations for the Organization	100
Final Conclusion	105
References	110
Figures	
1 SWOT Analysis	21
2 Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs	42
3 Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design.....	74
4 Qualitative Themes From Focus Group Interviews.....	85
5 Chi-Square Test of Independence for Survey Question 1	86
6 Chi-Square Test of Independence for Survey Question 2	88
7 Chi-Square Test of Independence for Survey Question 3	90

Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

In April 1969, nine Black students called for equal treatment, calling for change at the campus that was predominantly White. They held a peaceful protest on the roof of a science building to bring awareness to their need for more diversity in the classrooms, better treatment, and support, only to be dismissed. Fifty years later, Black Lives Matter and other protests shed light on how the religious teachings of belonging and refuse further alienated the regard of needs and concerns for identity-based space of Black students at Southern Cross College (SCC; pseudonym).

The police-involved killings of George Floyd and Brianna Taylor negatively affected Black students' psychological and academic well-being. The student involvement theory, introduced by Astin in 1985, outlines how active participation positively impacts a student's college experience and influences various aspects such as adapting to college life, academic achievements, building relationships, progressing, and persisting. Extensive research also indicates that campus involvement and fostering a sense of belonging, as emphasized by Strayhorn in 2018, significantly contribute to student satisfaction and have a positive effect on students. This consultancy project focuses on outlining the steps involved in establishing, organizing, and officially acknowledging a student organization dedicated to celebrating the culture of Black students. To investigate students' acceptance and belonging at a private, faith-based institution, a survey instrument was developed to gauge basic demographic information, students' opinions in general regarding the sense of belonging, general safety on campus, and inclusion and belonging in the classroom. Data were collected from 81 respondents;

17 from respondents who identified as Black or African American in the spring of 2021 at SCC.

Johnson et al. (2013) stated that psychological factors could negatively impact Black students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Research of campus climates indicates a positive impact on diversity is made when the administration creates positive change. Findings revealed that overall, respondents had strong positive feelings of belonging on campus and academically; they did not feel that peers seemed interested in their opinions and ideas related to coursework. Recommendations are offered to help staff and administrators learn to become more supportive and inclusive of Black students to help improve satisfaction, involvement, persistence, and experiences at a faith-based institution.

Higher education is well aware of the many challenges Black students face as the minority population at PWIs. As a result, their persistence and completion rates are lower in comparison to their White peers. Several factors play a role in inclusion and belonging for Black students at faith-based PWIs, including institutional support, campus racial climate, social engagement, and academic support. Experts agree that a sense of belonging is a substantial factor related to retention and graduation (Strayhorn, 2018). It remains crucial for institutional best practices to continually assess the advantages or disadvantages experienced by minority students of color within PWIs (Strayhorn, 2018). Experiences of minority students are a lower sense of belonging: diverse peer interactions, diverse student organizations, and professional relationships with faculty encouraging belonging for students (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hussain & Jones, 2021; Strayhorn, 2008). These intentional practices can be impactful when seeking to provide

more feelings of inclusion and belonging for Black and minority students to increase retention as well as graduation rates. Research shows that Black students who attend PWIs often report experiencing a lesser feeling of acceptance and inclusion than White students (Strayhorn, 2018). In my research, I could not find evidence that belonging felt among Black students was equal to or greater than White students at PWIs.

Over 50 years ago, student protests erupted in the late 1960s, with college students across the southeastern United States protesting against civil rights and the Vietnam War. South Carolina State (1968) and Kent State (1970) were among the colleges tragically losing students to gunfire. Front pages of newspapers across the country told of student protests in April of 1969 at Radcliffe, Harvard, and Voorhees, with students at Voorhees using weapons to overtake two buildings in protest. Faith-based institutions are not immune to racial incidents on campus. In 1969, nine black students took over an administration building to call attention to their student experience. The Black men wanted the administration to bring Black history and Black identity to the college (Memrick, 2014).

Most of the Black men were recruited to play sports, and although the academic reputation was stellar, this was a dream for them to attend college. They came with promises of an education or a better job or with hopes to have a sports career. They enrolled in and outside of the area; they did not feel as though they belonged. One of the last living students said he just wanted the college to have more Black professors and more than just a few Black literature books in the library (Memrick, 2014). After 10 hours of having locked the doors to the building, the Black students peacefully negotiated to leave the building with hopes that their voices had been heard. At the end of the

semester, all seven were indefinitely suspended. In 1970, another Black student at organized the Afro-American Union on campus to bring appreciation for Black students, but it was short-lived. The organization did not expound beyond the inaugural semester. Fifty years later, five Black students, like the nine Black students from 1969, still hope to find ways to stand up for a better college experience that has yet to be resolved. The Department of Education cites that under the 1964 federal civil rights act, colleges and universities that are tax-payer-funded schools should treat all students equally. Title IX and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act have been amended to recognize the rights of students; however, they fall short of religious exemptions at private colleges and universities.

The treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students at private religious colleges and universities is a growing topic of debate. Religious colleges and universities are essential to the nation's educational system. Some religious colleges have limited admission only to those students who share in their particular faith, while others have a handbook on conduct that requires the student body to adhere to religious-based values and rules. Not only does this infringe upon First Amendment Rights, but it also incites challenges to Title IX exemptions granted to religious schools that receive tax dollars through scholarships and grants. The Department of Education cites that under federal civil rights law, colleges and universities that are tax-payer-funded schools should treat all students equally. Title IX and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act have been amended to recognize the rights of students, but they fall short of religious exemptions at private colleges and universities.

In 2010, the Obama administration provided guidance to higher education

institutions, confirming that Title IX protects all students, including those who identify as LBGTQ from sex discrimination, including gender-based harassment. President Joe Biden has reinstated this guidance that was rescinded during the Trump administration. Lawsuits have been filed against the Department of Education and student colleges and universities, seeking a decision to protect students' rights to express and practice their religious beliefs (Brennen, 2022).

Since the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the law has overlooked the sex-based discrimination that educational institutions were alluding to. Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, there was no legal correction of the discriminatory disparities in the college sector of admissions, sports, housing, employment, and athletic programs (Korn, 2022). Most of this impacted women as they failed to receive the same rights as men in colleges and universities. The importance of equal access, the same that was once denied to cis-gender women, is now being denied to LBGTQ individuals.

The interpretation of Title VII's prohibition of "sex-based" discrimination played a crucial role in the landmark civil rights victory for the LBGTQ community, as argued by proponents, leading to the court's ruling in their favor (Brennen, 2022). The levels of discrimination that LBGTQ students face are still categorized in the same manner as sexual harassment and sexual assault; however, this takes precedence when discussing Title IX, and it is imperative to understand that Title IX addresses issues of sex discrimination beyond just sexual assault but also gender equality. Society must understand that anti-discrimination of gender equality in all areas, private and public institutions, should be reviewed, especially when receiving federal funding.

While faith-based colleges prioritize academic and spiritual growth, there has been limited emphasis on fostering diversity within these institutions (Paredes-Collins, 2013). Many faith-based organizations have overlooked issues of diversity and racial discrimination, despite their self-perception of promoting God's love for all individuals with a faith-based identity. Some have suggested Christian institutions, which can often promote typical White theologies, create environments that are unsupportive to Black and LGBTQ students but have offered little empirical evidence supporting this position (Paredes-Collins, 2013). Because of the lack of belonging, I participated in research to further develop a solution to the lack of belonging and involvement opportunities available for Black students on the campus of SCC. I used research to examine how forming a student organization to advocate for students exploring the Black experience to unify, educate, and bring awareness to racial discrimination. This organization will celebrate academic accomplishments and build a sense of purpose for Black students as the minority population at a small, private, faith-based institution. Most Black students at SCC are athletic recruits for men's and women's sports. Many recruited athletes did not have SCC at the top of their list to attend. Many of the athletes spoken to for this study claimed that high school GPAs were a factor in not going to a higher division. SCC recruited them with an athletic scholarship because they did not qualify for an academic scholarship. A few were involved in student organizations or leadership positions outside the athletic arena in residence life as resident assistants. The lived experiences of Black students, athletes, and those attending for academic purposes were perceived to suggest that there was a campus issue with the lack of diversity, inclusion, and involvement.

According to the research, students who positively perceive the campus climate,

inside and outside the classroom, are more satisfied with their college experience and persist to graduation. At private, faith-based institutions, Black students' needs and challenges have not been considered at the forefront of belonging. At SCC, the focus is on the religious saying that "all diversities are welcome," but are they? The definition of diversity encompasses the whole person. The lived experiences of Black students at SCC impact the recruitment, orientation, residential living, and progression rates as challenging. A sense of acceptance and belonging is believed to aid in better academic performance, campus involvement, leadership positions, and a positive overall college experience (Hussain & Jones, 2021; Strayhorn, 2018). Creating an identity-based space is used to provide a sense of community and inclusion for those seeking a place to feel comfortable dwelling.

Partnership

In the fall of 2019, five Black students of SCC gathered in search of a required faculty or staff advisor to form a recognized student organization for minority students. The first step in the requirement for students to form a student organization is to submit an application to the dean's office with a purpose statement, three members in good standing with the college, and an advisor. The students wanted to create a support group for students who have shared similar negative experiences as students on SCC's campus. Black students increasingly sensed an unwelcoming environment stemming from racial bias, racial stereotypes, and diverse faculty and staff scarcity. The students wished for a safe space to voice their concerns or a sounding board to advocate for them. Specifically, students noted a shortage of Black faculty, limited Black cultural programming, and a need for identity-based spaces to feel recognized and included.

In February 2019, SCC acknowledged Black History Month by posting a photo of a baptismal pool made from a stone discovered on the property pre-Civil War that was supposedly used as an auction block to sell enslaved people. Black students voiced in the comments of the post how SCC used the same photo each year to commemorate a month that should be celebratory of accomplishments and achievements of Black people, not a reminder of the unjust and cruel past. The tone-deaf post and lack of cultural awareness of SCC were exposed. The outcry in the comment posts resulted in the college removing the photo from Instagram without comment. This response sparked a conscious movement from students of color to move forward with the Black Student Alliance.

When seeking a required advisor, SCC students desired a Black person. There were only two Black staff members to select from. I was one of them, the other was an athletics staff person. As an employee for over 5 years at SCC, I understood the weariness of being one of the few Black employees. When I accepted the role of advisor in the fall of 2019, of SCC's 200 full-time staff members, seven identified as Black or African American; of those, two were men.

In May 2020, the campus racial climate illustrated that Black students increasingly sensed racial tensions, increased anger, and grief (DeWitt, 2021). George Floyd, an unarmed Black man killed in the middle of the street by a policeman's knee on his neck, caused millions of Americans to protest across the country after his violent death was captured on video. His death, along with Breonna Taylor and other victims of police brutality, ignited anger and disbelief that reached the students, negatively affecting the psychological and academic well-being of Black students. The Black Lives Matter movement and other protests occurred in nearby cities, with students planning to attend.

The protests against police brutality exposed the shortcomings of campus responses to matters of race and diversity. I received an email from SCC's president inviting me to a forum. Unbeknownst to me, only Black students and staff of color received the email. It was summer, and with many of our students off campus, they were on Zoom. The room held 12 Black students and staff and the White president of the college. I listened to students share their lived experiences and the realities of how biases and discrimination left a bad taste. The President listened and ended the meeting. That afternoon, after the Black student forum where student after student exposed heartfelt experiences and tears, the President publicly stated that the college would not stand with Black Lives Matter. Instead, he said the college would stand with its Black students, faculty, and staff against racism and discrimination. Due to its founding religious principles, it would not align the college with Black Lives Matter's liberal allies and partners. This statement shed light on how the religious teachings further alienated the needs and concerns of Black students at SCC.

Using Wells and Kloppenborg's (2018) project life cycle stages to develop a strategy as a guide through the consultancy process from the initial stages to closing was key. First, I defined the problem. Five students of color wanted to create a student organization for Black students similar to Black student unions that are at many other colleges. It is required of any student organization that attempts to organize that they have the college's approval of recognition. A recognized student organization receives acknowledgment, funding, and support from the institution. The organization the five Black students wanted would be open to all students, no matter race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Of the five members, two members of the organization identified as LBGQTQ.

It was important to them that the student organization provide a safe space that provided opportunities for open dialogue led by an advisor trained in diversity and inclusion. Bringing diversity training in a safe space, students hoped it would promote allyship from nonminority students within the college community. SCC is a faith-based institution that provides a liberal arts education and faith-based Benedictine beliefs. The minority traditional students, 18- to 22-year-olds, are primarily admitted to play sports, with the over 22-year-old adult learners enrolled for evening courses. With the campus having 17% minority students, marketing materials, billboards, and social media display Black students in the materials. This material was a marketing tool to recruit minority students, but minority students who enrolled did not feel a sense of support and inclusion at SCC and did not persist to graduation. I followed the process to implement best practices for a successful project. The main objective was to better understand SCC's culture and how it would impact the planning and management of this project. Wells and Kloppenborg (2018) defined culture as the behavior, beliefs, values, symbols, and practices shared among members and taught to new members. SCC has a long-standing tradition of faith-based rituals and beliefs on which the college was founded. SCC has experienced controversy because of the specific religious beliefs and practices at the institution.

Controversial Issues

There are several controversial diversity topics that can arise in religious colleges, depending on the specific religious beliefs and practices of the institution. Some examples include the following:

1. LGBTQ inclusion: Many religious colleges hold conservative views on sexuality and gender identity, which can conflict with efforts to create a more

inclusive environment for LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff. This can include debates over policies on same-sex relationships, transgender rights, and the use of gender-neutral pronouns (Hendershott, 2022a).

2. **Women's rights:** Some religious colleges have been criticized for treating women unfairly, including restrictions on access to birth control, opposition to abortion rights, and gendered roles within higher administration within institutions.
3. **Racial diversity:** Religious colleges may struggle with issues of racial diversity and inclusion, particularly if they have historically served predominantly White student populations. This can involve debates over affirmative action policies, hiring practices, and the experiences of students of color on campus (Hurtado et al., 1998).
4. **Interfaith relations:** Religious colleges may need to navigate tensions between their own religious identity and the presence of students, faculty, and staff from different faith backgrounds. This can involve debates over how to approach religious diversity in the curriculum, how to accommodate different religious practices on campus, and how to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding (Hendershott, 2022b).
5. **Academic freedom:** Some religious colleges have faced criticism for imposing restrictions on academic freedom, particularly in areas that conflict with their religious beliefs (e.g., evolution, sexuality, and gender identity). This can involve debates over whether religious institutions should be exempt from certain academic standards or whether they should be held to the same

standards as secular colleges and universities (Hendershott, 2023b).

Environment

The environment is built strongly on its faith, which is incorporated in values and symbolic relics on the grounds and inside each building. SCC was founded on a doctrine of tradition and steadfast beliefs that are sacred to the community. It was important that this was part of the conversation when meeting with the five students interested in organizing a student club and before establishing a relationship as the advisor with the organization. As an employee, I was aware of primary stakeholders, staff members, and many of the residential students and familiar with how the process of establishing a student organization worked. It was challenging inquiring with stakeholders about diversity discussions and not having receptive feedback. The feedback given was looking at the person as a whole, in the eyes of God, not race or gender.

In the planning and executing phase, the director of student activities reviewed the project charter. Wells and Kloppenborg (2018) showed a document with the project's goals, timeline, risks, rationale, and roles. The project charter is not written in stone, and it is a fluid document where the details will still be ironed out during the process. The charter was used to help identify projects that may be risky and implement new strategies for the host and the contractor. The charter was signed. A major challenge was recruiting hosts during the project due to their resignation from SCC. With each new person, I had to reintroduce the project charter and have support from the employee in the role of director of student activities, and the members of the organization agreed to support them. The requirement to move forward with implementing the student organization was to create a mission, vision, and guidelines. Meetings with interested students, the director

of student activities and the director of residence life included the desire to bring diversity, equity, and inclusion to SCC's campus. The goal was to brainstorm with the students to narrow down what benefits a Black student organization would bring to SCC. The students were vocal about finding ways to make the Black organization be a space for minority students to feel involved as a member of campus, feel heard, and feel that they mattered to SCC in more ways than just as a student athlete. Through the Project Charter, it was determined that this consultancy project would benefit the Black and minority students at SCC. The director of student activities worked with me to move forward with the Black student organization proposal to prepare the application for the dean of students to review. Furthermore, to gain more insight as to understand the SCC experiences of more Black and minority students outside of the founding five, the project host and I planned a series of focus groups. I contacted the five students and asked them to invite other students to a focus group meeting. This timeline began the student data process for qualitative data to gauge the feedback from students. During this time, I researched other small, faith-based colleges and student organizations for minority students and feedback on their sense of acceptance and inclusion.

Next, the problem was defined as a lack of diversity and inclusion for minority students. There was a need to establish a student organization for students of color that would serve as a lasting organization that would embrace and celebrate diversity, equity, and inclusion while also giving Black students a support network to provide encouragement toward persistence through to graduation. A project charter was developed with the stakeholders to guide the process and establish the need and goals. Most of the project charter was based on what the students of color initiated by their

desire to organize a recognized student club and obtain a supportive advisor. Determining the scope of needs involves identifying the client's needs, building rapport, and establishing clear expectations for the consulting engagement. The relationships with the host and students had already been established as a staff member. Wells and Kloppenborg's (2018) project management life cycle guides the project process using four phases: defining, planning, executing, and closing. The initial steps of the defining phase were identifying the problem, selecting an organization, and establishing clear project objectives. A stipulation of the project charter was defining the project scope by communicating with the stakeholders and establishing a written outline of the project's timeline, budget, tasks, and workflow. The director of student activities served as the host, and we began with developing a plan to have a focus group to determine which type of student organization would be most beneficial to the students.

The planning phase consisted of planning a focus group with students interested in joining a club for minority students on campus. Finding the time for the students to meet for more than 1 hour became challenging. The majority of the students who were invited were involved in athletics, so the time had to coordinate outside of class and practices. The focus group data were collected, and I began the process of qualitative research. The five students who initially requested to start the student organization volunteered to invite students who would be interested in being a part of the student organization and participating in a focus group geared towards the lived experiences of a minority on campus. This focus group began the discussion of forming the first Black student organization on the campus of SCC. I was tasked as the lead advisor for Black Student Alliance (BSA) and started from the ground up in navigating ways to bring

awareness, open dialogue, and the importance of recognizing that the gap in Black student satisfaction and experiences is due to the trend of insufficient training in diversity and inclusion of faculty and staff.

Without further ado, after accepting the role of advisor, I began the executing phase to begin an affinity student organization for Black students, and the process for recognition began. In February 2000, the campus racial climate illustrated that Black students increasingly sensed racial tension. The partnership between the faith-based institution and me began when I accepted the advisor role for students seeking to begin an affinity student organization for Black students. An alliance was formed with campus partners, the directors of student activities and residence life, to invite students to participate in a focus group to determine what type of student organization would be most beneficial for them. This began the consultancy project partnership to determine how minority students could feel embraced by the campus community.

In the closing phase, Wells and Kloppenborg (2018) referred to this as the ending of the consultancy with a completed reflection and contribution to the organization. The results that are in Chapter 4 show the results of the convergent data from the qualitative data collected from the focus group and quantitative data from a population sample of students. This phase tied up loose ends and provided a summarization of data for the organization to utilize suggestions.

Organizational Context

SCC is a private, faith-based college in the southeastern United States. The institution was established in the late 1800s by a group of religious individuals who made commitments to live a life of poverty and chastity. Originally, it was male-only, but it

became a co-ed college in the 1970s. In the fall of 2021, enrollment was 1,500, with 900 residential students living on campus. The primary objective is to deliver an education that equips students with the skills and values necessary to lead ethical lives, achieve success in their chosen careers, contribute to society, and positively impact both themselves and others. The college offers over 40 undergraduate majors, including human services management, education, business, and nursing.

The campus is located in a suburban area, and the campus size has expanded to over 200 acres. The campus houses same-sex gendered buildings, with new co-ed residence halls with same-sex floors. Students have curfews and are not allowed opposite-sex visitation after hours. It is a wet campus, meaning that students of legal drinking age can store alcohol, and the college can provide alcohol at certain college events.

It is affiliated with more extensive religious governance, the Benedictines, whose rules it follows and abides by. The Benedictine rules vary differently at each college and university that is associated. Colleges that follow Benedictine rules abide by hallmarks of education—love, prayer, stability, conversation, obedience, discipline, humility, stewardship, hospitality, and community. Sister colleges that follow the Benedictine rules have a strong belief that their education is distinct from that of other faith-based institutions (Tillman, 2021).

1. Love of Christ and neighbor: A response to God's love for all mankind by giving his Son. The college encourages its faculty and students to cultivate a deep love of learning and appreciates the human faculties of mind and spirit (The College of St. Scholastica, 2018).

2. Prayer: A life marked by liturgy and mindfulness to adhere to God's presence and voice as the Benedictine rule directs that nothing is to be preferred to it (Benedict, 1998).
3. Stability: Commitment to daily life throughout the span of life. Benedictine educational institutions put great energy into cultivating lasting relationships between students, faculty, and staff (Tillman, 2021).
4. Conversation: A commitment to execute engagements that bring about the likeness of Christ and in giving of yourself to others. To come to fruition, conversation requires stability, discipline, faithfulness, and resilience (Tillman, 2021).
5. Obedience: This value is an act of listening to hear. According to the Benedictine perspective, obedience is considered essential for both learning and teaching. In a Benedictine educational institution, all individuals are encouraged to actively seek understanding and show respect for differing viewpoints. Additionally, they are expected to uphold high standards of excellence in their thinking and communication practices (The College of St. Scholastica, 2018).
6. Discipline: This is a way of focusing attention and energy on the priorities that matter most. Benedictine life is built around a life of discipline in prayer and work. For institutions that follow the Benedictine rules, they believe students should strive to model discipline in and out of the classroom. The goal is to mature in self-discipline and learn how to reach the goals of students.
7. Humility: Described as abiding in the knowledge and presence of God in your

life; open to personal maturity and seeking growth by depending on your faith and others.

8. Stewardship: The responsibility of being responsible for material things and having the integrity to be just and fair. Benedictine educational institutions seek to foster awareness that they are a part of something bigger that God has given for the sake of all (Tillman, 2021).
9. Hospitality: Openness to making visitors and guests feel at home, no matter how brief the stay is. Benedictines present this hallmark as receiving persons as Christ would treat them, expecting the community to be hospitable to their needs. Tillman (2021) stated that Benedictine colleges strive to extend hospitality to those new to the community or coming from new traditions.
10. Community: This is a call to nurture each individual and serve in everyday life's mission of what is required, whether religious or nonreligious, in an effort to foster respect and well-being. It is the intent of Benedictine colleges and universities to foster responsible living by being grounded in wisdom and refreshed by others' perspectives (Tillman, 2021). In bringing students together in a community, it is imperative to make connections and build on a common ground of seeking a deeper understanding of who they are and their culture.

In 2005, Benedictine-affiliated colleges and universities embraced a set of values that were fundamental to the educational mission and vision of each institution (Tillman, 2021). These 10 hallmarks of Benedictine education serve as a shared understanding within Benedictine institutions and as a valuable reference for new presidents, faculty,

staff, students, and visitors (Tillman, 2021). As a result of these principles and other faith-based doctrines, these institutions have a requirement to employ faculty, instructors, and administrators whose beliefs align with the religious doctrines upon which they were established. Fall 2021 enrollment was approximately 1,500, with 900 residential students living on campus. The mission is to provide an education that will enable students to lead lives of integrity, succeed professionally, become responsible citizens, and be a blessing to themselves and others. The college offers over 40 undergraduate majors, including human services management, education, business, and nursing.

The office of student activities oversees spaces where students can engage and congregate in the campus community with support. It is required that the mission, vision, and values of the college are in alignment with the organizations formed and any programs offered through the office of student activities, which are explained in the literature review.

Organizational Analysis

When making the decision to partner with an organization as a consultant, it is important to know how the organization is set up and the hierarchy of job titles and descriptions within each department. Denison et al. (2012) suggested the importance of understanding culture: the key rituals, routines, and habits that explain much of what goes on daily in organizations. Understanding and learning about the organization's culture is important, as well as understanding how external factors such as political, economic, social, and technological needs impact decisions made within the organization (Pathak, 2020). For prospective students and future employees interested in a college, understanding external factors of the institution and the magnitude of how those factors

can influence decision-making from the top down will help them will be more versed on what to expect if they consider being a part of the community. They can form strategies to minimize the threats and maximize opportunities for themselves. On the other hand, the pace of change may make it difficult to anticipate how long the development may take, especially if this is not a regular practice for an organization (Pathak, 2020).

Strategic thinking and planning lay the foundation for how to facilitate making the right decisions. Hughes et al. (2014) stated that decision-making should be resourced so that when making a decision, the decision makes a significant difference in the choices made. When individuals are pursuing gains, they tend to exhibit a risk-averse behavior, whereas they are more inclined to take risks when trying to avoid specific losses. Hughes et al. suggested that it is important not to automatically accept a solution but instead explore various ways of framing the problem and assessing whether the outcome has an impact on the solution.

A crucial tool for strategic planning in evaluating organizational gaps is the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis. In my case, I utilized a SWOT analysis to examine the factors that Black students should consider when selecting a higher education institution that will guide them toward successful graduation. This technique is used to better understand the reader's and stakeholder's perceptions of faith-based institutions toward Black students. The SWOT model was developed and uses the four techniques for analyzing what is working well now and then developing a strategic plan for the future.

Figure 1*SWOT Analysis*

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strong religious identity that can attract students who are seeking education that aligns with their faith and values. ● has the capacity and vision to make a change and build student leaders with a focus on diversity. ● Strong collaboration between The Office of Student Activities and the Student Affairs department. ● long-standing reputation for providing quality education. ● Small class sizes: allowing for more personalized attention and interaction between students and faculty. ● Dedicated faculty who are passionate about their faith and are invested in the success of their students. ● Alumni support through donations, networking opportunities, and mentorship. ● Program Offerings: There are over 100 different undergraduate programs. 	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Minimal diversity in the student body, faculty, and staff, which may restrict exposure to different cultures, beliefs, and ideas. ● Absence of any diversity or inclusion training. ● Dependence on Religious Affiliation: The college's reliance on its religious affiliation limits funding sources, partnerships, and collaborations with secular organizations or institutions. ● Potential for controversy related to their religious beliefs and policies, which has impacted their reputation within the campus community. ● Clubs and Organizations have very little training and guidance. ● The Office of Student Activities only has one full-time staff person, leading to slow processes and limited support.
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Diversity and Inclusion Training for faculty and staff. ● Partnerships with Secular Organizations or businesses to expand its resources, funding, and opportunities for students and faculty. ● Strengthen alum relations to focus on more mentorship: The college could focus on building and maintaining strong alum relations to tap into their support, engagement, and potential for fundraising, mentorship, and networking opportunities. ● Provide in-depth training for club leaders and club advisors to better equip clubs with the resources and tools they need to flourish. ● Create a thriving environment where students can engage and be challenged both socially and academically on campus. ● Diversity, equity, and inclusion training incorporated in First Year Seminar. 	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Competition from other faith-based, private, or public colleges that embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. ● Lack of trust in the Administration to make sound decisions to address the racial climate on campus. ● Economic challenges and reduced funding from sources such as donations or alums giving could impact the college's financial stability and ability to provide quality education. ● Student organizations discontinue due to a lack of support and student and advisor involvement. ● Students not engaging within the community and going to campus events.

Myself as a Leader

Cultivating a leader is a process that highly depends on your willingness and ability to learn from past experiences (Hughes et al., 2014). Throughout the process of graduate studies in the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership (DEOL) program, each semester I gained more knowledge and understanding about who I am and where I want to go in leadership. Hughes et al.'s (2014) Strategic Leadership Competencies Relevant for Success was a challenging project that assessed my personal reflection on behaviors I exhibit in my leadership role and also took time to reflect on experiences in my career. Behavior change can be touchy and uncomfortable, but Hughes et al. argued that an active learning and developmental support network challenges and supports leaders who seek to change behaviors.

My leadership skills are those of a relationship builder and conflict manager. I use delegation as a tool of wisdom to build up knowledge among my staff and as a means of trust. A project manager assessment centered on my skill as a typical project manager. As a leader, whether “big leader” or “little leader,” I have the confidence to step up as a leader to strategically guide as well as seek out help from my team in order to fill in gaps. When leaders are too self-seeking and self-dependent, they can burn out. This is a trait that I work to avoid. As important as it is to be an inspiring and devoted leader, it is just as important to practice self-care so you can be the leader and team member your team needs.

Hughes et al. (2014) stated that open discussions centered around issues are important. These discussions enable leaders to deal with conflict and ambiguity and to make the right decisions toward a common goal. It is important for me to develop a

consistent message and deliver it so that it acknowledges the value of others and sets the perimeter of my expectations. In order to strengthen my strategic competency in strategic planning, instead of waiting to be called upon and asked to contribute, I must “go against the grain” and put my talents, suggestions, and interests into action by actively engaging with my colleagues.

Relationships throughout the organization are important, but how effectively the alliances are being made does not always come naturally (Hughes et al., 2014). The lack of structure creates confusion, uncertainty, and conflict. Hughes et al. (2014) argued that it is important for employees to pay attention to the political landscape when becoming a strategic leader. Doing so allows you to ask questions to create a common understanding among others and between yourself and others (Hughes et al., 2014). Thinking predicatively about changes in technology, economics, markets, politics, law, ethics, and society and then incorporating data numerically and critically when auditing the strategic capability of an organization leads to innovation (Sorin-George et al., 2016). Strategic leaders must be prepared to create opportunities for alliances that do not form naturally. These strategic leaders reach out to people because they seek possible connections across the organization and beyond (Hughes et al., 2014). Building alliances is not an easy task; potential employees should have experiences that went well and ones that did not, with learning experiences ready to share.

I have learned to cultivate my strengths as a leader in themes of executing and relationship building from texts read in class. As a leader, it is important to get to know each person within my sphere of contacts, like those who are my lateral colleagues, the supervisor to whom I report, and those whom I am responsible for leading. The first

group of people I spend the most time with are those whom I serve as their direct report. As a developer and relator, I use this strength to get to know what they enjoy about the culture of the organization and what areas of improvement of the culture would be beneficial. This is when I listen to hear and not respond. For me, it is how I begin to build rapport with them. Ultimately, I use conversations like these during weekly one-on-one meetings to develop and nurture their organizational skills. With open-ended questions, I ask about their thoughts on their progress, where they want to be challenged, and how receptive they are to feedback. These conversations later become about their future goals and aspirations in the years ahead. I must provide a safe space for them to be transparent about concerns, fears, and successes. When I have spent time with my staff showing my transparency and holding myself accountable to my areas of weakness, they are more comfortable with sharing. When I hear about their future plans, I assure them that I want to cheer them on and support them along the way. My employees should never feel complacent with where they are within the organizational chart. In due time, I want to see them blossom and prosper under my leadership so that they, too, can pay it forward and have a positive impact on those whom they will lead.

Over time, building relationships and trust among departmental colleagues happens as they work alongside you; however, when reaching out across the organization, it is important that the work you produce sets the tone for building your rapport. Hughes et al. (2014) argued that influence is different from persuasion in that it does not happen with just one interaction but over time. As a leader within an organization, it is expected that with time, colleagues will assess integrity and competence to determine if the leader's ideas are in the best interest of the organization

or my own (Hughes et al., 2014). Thinking and acting strategically to influence people within and throughout the organization will more than likely build a sustainable competitive advantage for an employee looking to influence the work environment (Hughes et al., 2014).

Establishing strong relationships as a fundamental element is crucial when aiming to exert influence or persuasion in order to achieve success. Equally important are the subsequent actions taken after receiving a positive response (Hughes et al., 2014). Heifetz and Linsky (2010) proposed adopting a dual role of observer and participant during meetings, enabling individuals to learn by closely observing and taking note of the dynamics at play. This way, I understand body language, attitude, and disposition toward the organization. When you seek collaboration, you strategically know what type of relationship to form (Heifetz & Linsky, 2010). However, Hughes et al. (2014) stated that strategic influence begins with the foundation of understanding yourself and then forming relationships with others, which will continue to build and sustain through change. It is also vitally important in peer relationships. Hughes et al. stated that openness to influence peers is an outcome of natural and trusting relationships.

Hughes et al. (2014) provided valuable insight into the importance of maintaining focus on the vision and sharing that energy with others to foster a multiplying and intensifying effect. This approach aims to cultivate an adaptable, flexible, and resilient atmosphere, ultimately transforming the organization into a dynamic learning engine. While organizations may have a vision, values, and strategic plan to guide them, the actual actions taken at each moment cannot be predetermined or scripted (Heifetz & Linsky, 2010). As each event unfolds, you must respond as a visionary, demonstrating

that you are aligned with the organization's mission and following strategic planning (Heracleous, 1998). Organizations seek those who are motivated to grow in their careers and take the necessary steps to foster the organization's vision.

It is important that I lead with responsibility and belief so that my values of respect, inclusivity, and integrity speak in my interactions with others. Showing compassion for others and sharing my morals and beliefs set the stage for then presenting my expectations. Aligning my expectations around the themes of respect and servant leadership to those we lead and serve gives insight into my work ethic and creates an inclusive space where those who enter know that support and encouragement take place. Taking ownership of my actions, the decisions I make on behalf of my department, or anything that includes my name is important to me. I feel that it is important that my work speaks as a reflection of who I am as a leader. As a leader, I want my work to speak of my passion and how I make the people in my sphere of contact trust in my integrity and leadership. It is important that this consultancy project benefit my growth as a leader, by partnering with a student organization that aligns with my passion in diversity and inclusion. It is just as important that Black and minority students benefit as well as by taking ownership of their experiences and finding their place of belonging on campus. Black students have felt excluded far too long on the campus of SCC, and with my leadership and students who are willing, we want to make a difference for future students of color who choose SCC as their college of choice.

My competencies and strengths were relationship-based: building collaborative relationships and influence across the organization. My bottom two competencies are organization perspective and strategic planning. As a staff member, there has been a lack

of opportunities to improve my skills as a strategic leader. I believe that my skills would be very helpful if given the opportunity to serve on committees or a task force. I feel that my protestant beliefs hinder me from being asked to sit at the table of religiously conservative minds of a male-dominated administration. Only the upper administration's faith is required to align with the faith-based religion, and I feel that the lack of an invitation is due to fear that I may go against the grain.

In the first edition of Hughes et al. (2014), they discussed the concept of "going against the grain" (p. 222), which explains why people often avoid acting in ways most likely to enhance their learning. When new challenges call for different behaviors, getting out of the rut of your old behavior requires more chances of making mistakes and being seen as less competent than before, yet the risks are important in professional development (Hughes et al., 2014). Hughes et al.'s statement on risk was intriguing when comparing the challenges of the missions of faith-based institutions and public institutions in my decision to join the college as an employee. After experiencing the cultures of both types of institutions, this guides my decision-making as an employee, and I feel that it should be taken into consideration for students seeking a college. As an advocate for higher education, it is important to be part of an organization I believe in and whose values align with mine. I will take the risk of challenges and obstacles that come so I have the opportunity to grow and develop professionally.

Significant Challenge

By understanding how Black students' experiences have impacted their perceptions of belonging, other faith-based PWIs can gain insight into Black students and their White counterparts' gaps in inequity. Due to the scarcity of data regarding the sense

of belonging among Black individuals attending religious, private, and PWIs, a qualitative study provided valuable insight into the experiences and perspectives of these students. A quantitative survey tool was randomly distributed to students to compare the responses of Black students' and White students' perceptions of belonging on campus and in the classroom. While working with campus partners to improve the racial climate on campus, the Department of Athletics, which represent the highest percentage of Black students, formed an organization to improve the racial climate and implicate positive change. This organization was led by a team primarily made up of White coaches to lead discussions and provide a speaker series for athletes to attend. Black student athletes in this study reported the initial benefit as welcoming and later described the athletic-based organization as increasingly uncomfortable. The attempt to make an effort to change was noticed, but the lack of openness, institutional barriers, and processes made it difficult to navigate. The ingrained cultural norms at SCC do not allow for any challenges to the ideologies or historical beliefs established centuries ago. Any effort from the campus community that suggested the college incorporate diversity and inclusion training was disregarded. The resistance to change and the challenge of implementing change in an established conservative culture, hundreds of years old, takes a lot of compelling evidence to even suggest change, which defeats the notion to introduce the idea of self-assessed biases in order to accept differences of others. Conservative cultures value tradition and stability, and they are resistant to change. It is not uncommon to meet resistance when introducing new ideas and practices. The effort to seek change by athletics was applauded; however, using an outside consultant who navigated diversity in White spaces would have proven to be more impactful, with respect for tradition and the

conservative identity of the community.

Definition of Terms

Academic Ability

Student motivation for performance in relation to student peers.

Affinity Organization

Organization that is formed on college campuses centered on shared interests (race, gender, ethnicity, hobbies, etc.) to combat isolation and distance from the majority race of students at PWIs and to create their own cultural environment.

Black Students

Persons having origins in any racial group of Africa and who may identify as African American.

Campus Climate

Encompasses the subjective perceptions and impressions of a university's atmosphere, encompassing factors such as interactions between different groups and individuals, as well as the experiences of individuals or specific groups within the campus community (Astin, 1997).

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

A set of principles embraced by numerous organizations, which aim to foster an inclusive environment that values individuals from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, religions, abilities, genders, and sexual orientations.

Diversity

People with various racial, cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds and varied lifestyles and experiences.

Equity Gap

Black students graduating at a lower rate than White students who are consistently above the national graduation average.

Faith-Based Institution

Colleges and universities whose values are formed by a faith that is dedicated to a specific religion.

First-Generation

Students who are the first in their family to attain a 4-year college degree, irrespective of the educational background of their family members (Astin, 1997).

HBCUs

Stands for Historically Black Colleges and Universities. HBCUs are institutions of higher education that were established primarily to serve the African American community during the time of segregation in the United States. These colleges and universities were founded before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and have a historical mission of providing access to higher education for Black students. HBCUs have a significant cultural and historical significance in the African American community and continue to play a vital role in promoting educational opportunities, fostering academic excellence, and supporting the advancement of Black students and communities.

Graduation Rate

Determined by tracking the progress of full-time undergraduate students from their initial enrollment at an institution until they complete their program of study within a specified number of semesters. This measurement allows for an assessment of the percentage of students who successfully complete their bachelor's degree within a given

timeframe, providing insight into the pace at which students are completing their college education.

Inclusion

Entails creating an environment where students feel a sense of belonging and acceptance, enabling them to comfortably share their experiences with others.

Minority

Denotes students who face social disadvantages based on characteristics such as their race, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, veteran status, international status, or disabilities.

PWI

Refers to an educational institution, such as a college or university, where the majority of the student population and faculty are White. This term is often used in discussions of racial diversity and representation within educational settings. PWIs have historically been established and designed to cater primarily to White students and reflect the values, perspectives, and cultural norms of White society. As a result, they may lack diversity in terms of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, which can have implications for the experiences and opportunities available to students from marginalized communities. PWI is used to acknowledge and address this lack of diversity and the need for greater inclusivity and representation in educational settings.

Retention Rate

Quantifies the proportion of first-time undergraduate students who continue their studies at the same institution in the subsequent semester.

Sense of Belonging

A feeling of support, acceptance, and inclusion for a member of a certain group. Strayhorn's (2018) definition that combined human needs' influence on behavior noted the sense of belonging as a student's perception of a feeling of a supportive campus, a feeling of hospitality and connectedness, and a feeling of being cared about and valued by others on campus.

Sense of Community

The experience of individuals within a particular group or community, where they feel a sense of belonging and shared identity. It is characterized by a collective commitment to meeting the needs of its members based on shared faith or values (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This research confirms that the terms sense of community and sense of belonging can be used interchangeably. Hausmann et al. (2007) argued that the sense of belonging is closely tied to the existence of a community, and it ceases to exist if there is no continued engagement and participation from its members.

Students of Color

Refers to any college student who identifies as non-White, including individuals of Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latina/o/x, Indigenous, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or multiracial backgrounds. In this dissertation, the term student of color is used instead of non-White to ensure inclusivity, acknowledging and encompassing students who identify as multiracial.

Student Involvement

Defined by Astin (1997) as the physical and psychological energy the student puts forth into the academic experience. Student involvement refers to the active participation,

engagement, and contribution of students in various aspects of their educational institution and campus community. Student involvement can take place in both curricular and extracurricular contexts and may include activities such as clubs and organizations, student government, community service, leadership development programs, research projects, internships, sports teams, and cultural events.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this consultancy project is the campus of SCC is being randomly surveyed. The study is limited to students who were willing to participate in the survey. The sample size may be a limitation because this is one institution, and the population of students is not generalizable. The study is limited by the number of minority students in the classes in which the survey was distributed. The campus of SCC is a private, faith-based institution in the southeast region of the United States. It is possible that Black students at SCC may have had different shared experiences and no longer lived on campus to participate in the survey. Finally, my presence at SCC could have motivated or affected participants' responses.

Another limitation is the student's willingness to be truthful in their responses during the focus group out of fear of retaliation and my fear of repercussions. Black student athletes who participated in the focus group did not want the conflict of interest to result in any sanctions on their scholarships to play sports. The survey distributed to campus had the goal of measuring the sense of inclusion on campus and in the academic setting. The survey did identify that Black students noted a lower level of being a part of the community, which findings will give suggestions for improvement.

The project host who initially signed on to guide the project left shortly after the

project consultancy began. This consultancy project has a third project host to fulfill the obligation for the project. The turnover rate for staff and faculty who were stakeholders in this consultancy was difficult to navigate, and it was hard to find replacement fill-ins.

Assumptions

For this dissertation in practice, the survey participants shared their perceptions of belonging on campus, in the classroom, and among peers. It was presumed that each student who participated would answer each interview question and survey question honestly. Through focus group discussions, they shared lived experiences as they navigated through their campus experiences. There was also the assumption that no participant received incentives for providing coaxed answers.

Delimitations

The consultancy project was delimited to students at a private, faith-based institution of higher education. By focusing on minority and Black student experiences at this college, the study highlighted the traditions and beliefs of faith-based institutions, as this was the only institution where this research was conducted. The survey distribution and focus group interviews were conducted within the same time frame. The participants who were invited to the focus group by their peers all identified as students of color.

Organization of the Study

This study of this consultancy project is composed of five chapters, beginning with Chapter 1, providing the statement of the problem, an introduction of the partnership with SCC, organizational context, organization analysis, myself as a leader, significant challenge, definition of terms, the significance of the study, limitations of the project, and assumptions and delimitations.

Chapter 2 explores the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the consultancy project's focus on student belonging. Additionally, the chapter contains a literature review related to the feeling of belonging and being integrated as a part of the college community. The lack of student involvement and student engagement for Black and minority students is explored and contributes to a better understanding of why minority students' perceptions of belonging have left a lot to be desired. Religious doctrines, conservative culture, and identity reinforce the status quo at SCC. The cultural norms and values of faith-based colleges and institutions are rooted in religious beliefs that are challenged by student organizations that seek to overturn traditional and established norms. There is also self-exploration into myself as a researcher and how the DEOL program prepared me to analyze data and utilize the necessary tools to conduct interviews.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Included before the literature review is a self-reflection on myself as a researcher. This section describes my mission and vision as a researcher, leader, and student. I analyze my strengths and areas for improvement in my research skills and reflect upon my consultancy and dissertation in practice experience.

The next section of the literature review is the foundations of the theoretical framework beginning with Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs that lays the groundwork. Following Maslow is a collection of other theories from researchers like Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging, Astin's (1984) Theory of Involvement, Kuh's (2009) Student Engagement Theory, Chickering's (1969) Student Identity Development, Kotter's (1995) Change Management Theory, and Bolman & Deal's (1992) Four Frames. The review will provide an overview of the characteristics of each theory and its relevance within the literature reviewed.

The third section reviews campus racial climate issues that students of color and minority students have experienced that have been issued at faith-based colleges and universities. The analyses will seek to delve into issues of policy and controversy that can be found in religious colleges and how the First Amendment's religious freedom to faith-based colleges provides protections for religious practices and choice of conscience. The analyses will seek to define and provide student support in terms of an affinity organization's common strategies that student organizations provide as an outlet of inclusion for students to experience.

The final two sections include reviews of qualitative and quantitative research

practices applicable to this project. Data collection methods and relevant historical information are included along with the strengths and limitations of the reviewed methods.

Myself as a Researcher

Subjectivity

I was aware of my subjectivity as a researcher in that I remained unbiased of the raw data collected during the campus-wide survey. My lens as a researcher was difficult to see clearly at times due to the similarities in experiences of students who contributed to the research. During the focus groups, my empathy showed, and I felt the impact of being ostracized for my beliefs, my ethnicity, and culture along with the students. It was difficult to remain silent and not touch a person or give a hug in order not to skew my data. In the moments alone in my office, I would cry. The excitement of joining an institution with my family's blessings and encouragement, waving as they returned home, to months later feeling the heaviness of not making friends, feeling left out, not fitting into the culture, and yearning to go back home, where I knew I had the support of family was difficult. It is in my nature to problem solve; to fix things. I set out to do that as a researcher and an employee. There were students who sought me out as an advisor to fix the problem of the lack of belonging and racial invisibility. In researching other faith-based institutions, there were smiling faces of minorities, student clubs, and organizations on the web pages representing different cultures and minority groups. Why couldn't minority students at SCC have that? They could. I would set out to make it happen for this group of students who wanted to belong.

Peshkin (1988) wrote that in his subjectivity audit, he referred to "ethnic-

Maintenance-I” (p.19) as what he experienced as situational subjectivity during his research. This is similar to how I connected to the behaviors and sensed where I, too, valued the behavior of the students who shared their ethnic identity that is sometimes ignored by others (Peshkin, 1988, p. 18). When the students who were subjects in this research hurt, I hurt. It angered me when they spoke of feeling used for their likeness on billboards, marketing, and social media to portray a happy student at the college. When student athletes spoke of being cheered by students on the court for their athleticism and high-fived by their first roommate whose family insisted that they be with a person who identified with the faith of the college, not with a person whose skin color they felt apprehensive with, I was in disbelief.

It is important that as a researcher, I give the readers the stories from the student’s perspective so the readers know their stories. To tell their stories is a privilege that I do not take lightly. I recognize their bravery and honor their voices. As a researcher, I want to analyze their worlds and thoughts with integrity. As a researcher, I am a perceptive observer. I listen to hear, not respond. It was relationships of trust that I built with students that allowed them to open up and share their stories and experiences. It is important that I am approachable and trustworthy with my students. Similar to Peshkin’s (1988) Pedagogical-Meliorist I, the belief that human effort can impact others, I found myself wanting to advocate for more diversity on campus, and being the only person of color with a seat at the table became lonely. The minority students of color felt a similar sense of this in the classrooms. After months turned to years of no additional persons of color being hired at SCC, my office became the space place where minority students came to seek refuge. As a researcher, I became overly invested in my work to bring a

student organization to the campus so that after hours, minority students could seek out each other and enjoy each other's company.

Vision

As a reflection of my research analysis through my dissertation in practice, my research vision explored the hypothesis that minority students do not feel welcome at a faith-based college. I explored how the tradition of SCC's mission and vision confirms their conservative Christian values in liberal arts education, yet it continues to recruit minority individuals who seek more liberal, diverse, inclusive, and safe spaces where they are valued and feel as though they belong. As a researcher, I identified potential strategies and solutions to address the lack of belonging for minority students who attend faith-based colleges that are not prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion. One-size education does not fit all, and access is not automatic inclusion. Thankfully, there are researchers who made muddled paths straight for the future of higher education enrollees to make better decisions about institutional fit and sense of belonging.

Skills

During the research collection phase of the consultancy project, it was imperative that as a researcher, yet I remain introspective about my own journey of belonging. In life as well as in careers, people wear different hats depending on what role they are serving. As a researcher, I made sure to understand why this consultancy project was important to the students yet viewed it from a perspective lens unbiased to ensure that it was the student's qualitative experience that I was capturing. Critical thinking is a strength I used in my research. Beginning with the end in mind is a strategy used in order to disclose any gaps or possibilities for overlooking. I do have areas within critical thinking where I need

to hone my skills. It was important that I showed compassion to the subjects of my research. The vulnerability of sharing personal details that may have been triggering was taken into account.

Tools gained through coursework in the doctoral program gave a clear insight into data collection and analysis and required certain procedures to be in place in order to assure credibility. Finding the best method to support my hypothesis of the sense of belonging in order to empower the voices that wanted a solution to a problem that was of ethical concern put things into perspective.

Theoretical Framework

Abraham H. Maslow (1943) developed a widely recognized theory of motivation based on the consideration of human needs. This theory, known as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, categorizes human needs into a hierarchical structure from the most fundamental to the highest aspirations. Starting from the bottom, these needs include physiological needs (such as food and clothing), safety needs (such as health and security), love and belonging needs (such as friendships and relationships), esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Maslow's theory, proposed in 1943, is based on three key assumptions. Firstly, humans are inherently unsatisfied and continually seek fulfillment. Secondly, human behavior is driven by the desire to satisfy these needs. Lastly, needs can be ranked hierarchically, with lower-level needs taking priority before higher-level needs can be addressed. According to Maslow (1943), individuals must first fulfill their lower-level needs before progressing to higher-level ones. The theory, although criticized in modern research for certain limitations, remains an important and straightforward motivational framework that educators can use to gain insight into human motivation.

A description of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory in the lens of student affairs is as follows:

Stage 1: Physiological. This state consists of the most basic life needs for survival. Students should focus on having adequate housing on or off campus where they find rest and safety. Students should be provided fresh water and healthy food available on campus.

Stage 2: Security needs. In these modern times, safety needs go beyond physical safety, and this includes mental well-being and financial security. A student will find it difficult to progress if there is a lack of safety or they feel unsafe, which will cause them not to engage or excel.

Stage 3: Belonging and love needs. This is the need that student affairs departments on every campus aim to address. If the feeling of acceptance and belonging through friends, family, religion, or type of community is not met, the student may feel lonely or depressed and can become withdrawn or angry; thus, having supportive relationships with faculty and staff are important. Having student organizations is a way for students to connect with their peers.

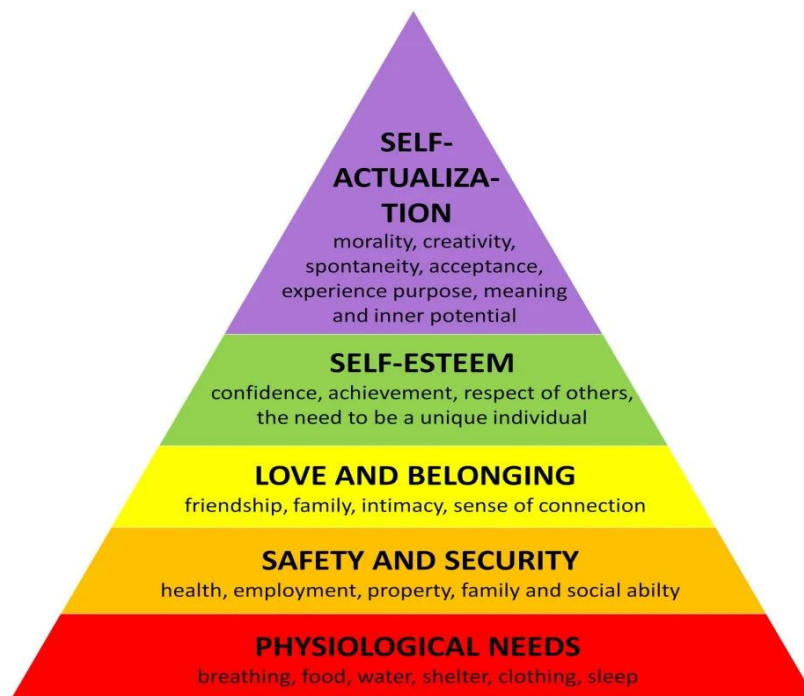
Stage 4: Esteem. This phase is specifically aimed at higher education institutions. Colleges and universities strive to equip students with the necessary skills and resources to secure fulfilling careers upon graduation. This objective necessitates fostering students' confidence and self-assurance. Student affairs professionals can play a crucial role by offering leadership opportunities that allow students to hone their abilities and practice relevant skills in these domains.

Stage 5: Self-actualization. Maslow (1943) described this as achieving one's full

potential. Self-actualization will look different for each student since their worldviews, values, and interests differ. Some will seek to create social change; others will look to create new inventions. The goal of the student affairs professional is to help students narrow down what priority they care about most. Sometimes, it is a continual work that most seek to reach, and for others, it is a quality that people develop over time (Modern Campus, 2022).

Figure 2

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod, 2020)



The Pyramid is not Maslow's original work but an interpretation of the Hierarchy of Needs that has been adopted. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod, 2020).

As this study explores establishing a feeling of being a part of the campus community for Black students at a PWI, the primary origin and foundational framework

is from Maslow. Maslow's (1943) framework described belonging as an emotional connection a person feels in a relationship. According to the hierarchy of needs, the moment that the person feels safe and sound, people can move towards satisfying a sense of belonging. The subsequent fulfillment of the hierarchy is the individual's self-esteem and self-actualization, which is the need to feel accepted and valued. This awareness of how students feel cared about within the campus community significantly impacts them emotionally and academically. Strayhorn's (2012) framework emphasizes that without belonging, student success suffers, particularly among students of color in White college environments. The impact of the lack of student success results in less-anticipated outcomes, such as student satisfaction, persistence, and graduation rates (Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn's (2012) work provides an ethnic perspective of Black students' college experiences, which is essential to this dissertation in practice.

Strayhorn's (2012) theory of a college student's awareness of belonging is based on a model that provides literature on the impact of belonging on academic success. Strayhorn (2013) defined belonging as the feeling of community and support on campus, which is a minimal need that motivates people, steers student behaviors, and facilitates educational success. A sense of belonging develops in response to the degree to which an individual experiences respect; acceptance; and being valued, concerned about, and essential to the group (i.e., campus community, faculty, and peers). Strayhorn's (2012) theory is primarily guided by Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation and belonging on educational outcomes for college students. There are seven theoretical elements that Strayhorn (2018) used that are reflective of Maslow: (a) feeling that you belong is a minimal human need; (b) it is a means of meeting others and making friends;

(c) it takes on obtaining status among certain groups of people; (d) it is a feeling of importance to others; (e) social characteristics; (f) brings about positive outcomes; and (g) condition change which leads to continual changes (Strayhorn, 2012).

The theoretical framework of Maslow (1943), combined with the conceptual frameworks of Hurtado et al. (1998) and Strayhorn (2013), allows for examining how Black students at SCC experience the campus racial climate. The research and findings within the qualitative data showed how their experiences at SCC have impacted their feelings of belonging on campus and their persistence to graduation. According to Maslow's theory of human motivation, the desire for friendship, being in a group, and acceptance of others centers around belongingness as an emotional and psychological need. After one's physical needs of food, water, safety, and shelter are met, it is essential to establish safety and stability, defined as achieving one's goals or personal potential. The fourth level includes self-worth and accomplishment, gaining respect from others while finding autonomy of independence. The fifth level refers to the person's actualization of their full potential and achieving goal setting. In regard to education, Maslow's theory reflects the challenge of educators to achieve a holistic approach to meeting the basic, psychological, and self-actual needs of students.

Sense of Belonging

The concept of belonging pertains to an individual's cognitive and emotional responses to their environment, which in turn affects their actions within that context. Various internal and external factors can shape these experiences for each person. Strayhorn (2018) highlighted that an individual's background and prior experiences contribute to their sense of belonging, alongside the characteristics of the environment

itself. Understanding the intricate nature of belonging is a subject of ongoing research, with scholars investigating its dynamics in diverse populations and settings.

The intricate occurrence involving an individual's cognitive and emotional processes brings forth perspectives that endorse its relevance to college students. Baumeister and Leary (1995) concurred that the sense of belonging represents a fundamental human drive. Their data review suggested people have the urge to form and make relationships that are lasting, significant, and positive (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Also, a sense of awareness of inclusion impacts not only behavior but health and wellness and has been a significant factor in human thought, cognition, and emotion, or in regulating behavior to form and maintain social bonds (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Hurtado and Carter (1997) offered a viewpoint on the intricate nature of the sense of belonging, highlighting its connection to a student's cognitive and emotional processes. They argued that the sense of belonging encompasses both cognitive and affective elements, as the individual's assessment of their role within a group influences their emotional response (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). This notion suggests that a student's thoughts and feelings regarding belonging play a role in their decision to remain, leave, or persist until graduation. Strayhorn (2012) supported this perspective by asserting that cognitive evaluation is a determining factor in producing an effective response.

Student Involvement Theory

Research has shown that involvement in college matters and data have proven the impact that involvement has on various educational outcomes. One of the most notable is Astin's (1985) student development theory which is based on student involvement (Astin, 1984). This theory evolved from the Astin (1975) longitudinal study of college dropouts.

Astin (1984), a former clinical psychologist, suggested that students involved in student organizations will develop and learn more by studying, participating in student activities and organizations, and interacting with the campus community. The non-involved student has spent little time studying, missed class, and not engaged with on-campus activities or the campus community. They have merely lived on campus and engaged in activities that were not the sole intended purpose of higher education. Astin (1984) defined involvement as more than just an act of doing; it is the invisible psychological state of motivation. Student involvement encourages educators to use strategic ways to create an environment of learning that will foster a process that encourages active participation, with the focus being how the student is engaged.

Astin's (1984) theory presents five areas of involvement. The five areas suggest assessing the amount of time and level of energy students apply to learning and measuring student behavior regarding participation. Astin's (1984) theory of involvement is used to address the importance of student-faculty interactions and how meaningful interactions can be beneficial to student mental development.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) elaborated on Astin's (1984) involvement theory proving that student involvement and the culture of the institution have an impact on student learning development outcomes. Gellin (2003) explored how critical thinking increases as students are more involved on campus as compared to students who are not involved. Gellin mentioned participation in Greek life, clubs and organizations, faculty interactions, peer interactions, and campus employment as a sample of involvement.

This study focuses on how affinity organizations can be a conduit to student involvement as it results in retention and persistence. Cooper et al.'s (1994) research

design looked at the developmental changes of growth of involvement student organizations and the academic impact on the members involved. The results showed that the student's academic experience directly correlated to the positive effects of student organization involvement.

Student Engagement

Kuh's (2009) development of the student engagement theory encourages student learning and development during college that impacts learning and personal development. This function of practices and policies induces higher levels of engagement across various purposeful educational activities in class and out of class (Kuh et al., 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Student engagement affects the first generation, those from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and the less academically prepared for college (Kuh, 2009). Compared to White students, students of color with risk factors of under-preparedness and low-income backgrounds are less likely to participate in time-consuming activities in college due to the educationally effective activities the institution makes available (Kuh et al., 2011).

Harper and Quayle (2007) concluded with data from their qualitative study that Black male student leaders believed that the influence of Black affinity organizations attributed to their understanding of how to achieve a sense of purpose as a college student and persistence toward the goal of completion to graduation. Harper and Quayle found that ethnic student organizations and cultural centers contribute positively to filling the gaps between communities from home and the campus environment as students work in affinity-oriented organizations and are exposed to diverse educational outlets for learning about multiple cultures.

Student Identity Development

Student development is significant in student engagement; finding the balance between managing academic success and developing how to build relationships. How college students develop is important to persistence and the social networks in which they participate. There are a number of theories developed that categorize the nature of change that is both behavioral as well as psychosocial that occurs in college students. Chickering (1969), a student affairs researcher, developed a systematic framework for student development modeling seven vectors (tasks). The seven vectors were designed to demonstrate how a student's growth can impact their emotions, social interactions, physical well-being, and intellectual development, especially when it comes to shaping their identity (Chickering, 1969). Chickering noted that establishing identity means that the student develops a sense of self. When the student feels supported, accepted, and influenced by the services offered, the student will master the remaining vectors in the following areas: improved cognitive development, emotional intelligence, navigating towards interdependence, learning to develop relationships, and developing integrity. Among the seven vectors of development identified by Chickering, the central of these is identifying development.

Strayhorn (2018) centered on an element of belonging that the person identifies as influences within their community. The interconnected nature of identities that a person presents has an influence on the experiences they have in college. Participation in activities outside of class is a way students can take responsibility for their learning and help others become more engaged in life on campus (Kuh et al., 1991). This involvement contributes to finding belonging that contributes to the retention of students. Statuses

such as first-generation, gender, and socioeconomic impact the belonging of Black students. For students to find comfort in a new environment, they must understand the culture from which they come (Pascarella & Terezini, 2005).

Kotter and Change Management

A leader in change management, Kotter's (1995) framework was designed carefully to strategize change in an organization. Kotter developed eight steps for effective organizational change through various lenses that evaluate the change process. Kotter's eight steps in change management are as follows:

1. Establish a sense of urgency. Show precise data to support why change must be made soon.
2. Form a guiding coalition: Bring together a powerful team to lead the change effort. Bring together a team that will begin the effort to lead change.
3. Create a vision to directly map out the direction in which the organization needs to move.
4. Communicate the vision with priority and importance to the team.
5. Empower others to act on the vision: Remove barriers to change and encourage risk-taking within the organization.
6. Anticipate and plan for short-term wins: Recognize visible and measurable achievements.
7. Put the change into action: Continue to plan efforts and hire employees who are open to embracing change.
8. Establish a culture that is open to new changes by incorporating change and beginning the process of implementing a clear message and by planning for

leadership development and succession (Kotter, 1995).

Bolman and Deal's (1992) Four Frames Model

In 1992, Bolman and Deal introduced a four-frame model that offers leaders a comprehensive perspective on organizational change by examining it through four distinct lenses. These lenses, known as frames, include the structural frame, human resource frame, political frame, and symbolic frame. The primary objective of this model is to encourage leaders to approach the organization's circumstances from multiple angles, allowing for a more thorough assessment of the challenges and opportunities at hand (Bolman & Deal, 1992). By considering these different frames, leaders can identify and address issues that may have otherwise been overlooked. The Bolman and Deal (1992) four-model frames uncover the perspectives of future students and employees to determine the relevance of investing their education and career into SCC's mission. These frames apply to organizational situations and allow the leader to view them from different perspectives.

Structural: This frame prompts the leader to consider the hierarchy and chain of command, roles, rules, and goals of the organization.

Human Resource: This frame is for understanding the people who make up the organization; their strengths, emotions, fears, and desires.

Political: A frame for viewing the organization's competing interests and struggle for power, negotiation, politics, and conflict.

Symbolic: The meaning of the organization and the mission and vision at the core. The frame holds the symbols, rituals, beliefs, and culture of the organization.

Community of Strangers

Like a foreigner in a strange land, a stranger is an unknown person entering unchartered territory. For students entering higher education, the transition involves an adjustment to an unfamiliar academic and social environment. In America, higher education has historically catered to the culture of whiteness via representation, traditions, policies, and values (Reason & Evans, 2007). Conley and Hamlin (2009) described the transition experience of first-generation college students as being “caught between two worlds” (p. 48) with no means to reconcile how to navigate through. The student’s inability to find balance and adjust to this new reality often causes them to drop out. In addition, a student’s divergence is exacerbated by maintaining White spaces and ignoring multiculturalism (Brunsma et al., 2012).

Most students of color are sometimes unsuccessful at recognizing social college norms set by colleges and universities, especially when they are first-generation students. These college norms are unfamiliar to many of these students and may be often revealed through the values, behaviors, and perspectives that operate within the collegiate space. Black students entering a faith-based college like SCC are entering into religious traditions and expectations to integrate into the norm without guidance. Students who are unfamiliar with institutional norms and values have trouble adjusting, experience high anxiety, and feel isolated from the college setting (Banks-Santilli, 2014). Under those circumstances, students may not feel connected to the campus community. According to Strayhorn (2018), a sense of belonging is closely linked to perceptions and mindset, as it involves the understanding that true membership in a community influences one's perceptions and emotions.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) posited that the absence of belonging yields significant negative consequences and provided compelling evidence to support this assertion. Instances of discrimination or bias can disrupt a person's sense of belonging, leading to a decrease in their satisfaction levels (Hussain & Jones, 2021). Strayhorn (2018) emphasized the dynamic nature of a student's sense of belonging, highlighting that it is not a constant state and can change over time. As Strayhorn (2018) suggested, a student's sense of belonging today does not guarantee that they will continue to feel the same way tomorrow. Students yearn to feel valued and appreciated, yet these sentiments can fluctuate due to positive and negative experiences. The sense of belonging may diminish as a student's involvement in impactful activities and relationships diminishes, such as when the initial excitement of student orientation weekend fades away.

Potential Controversy

The treatment of LGBTQ students at private religious colleges and universities is a growing topic of debate. Faculty and staff are not exempt from this treatment either. Religious colleges and universities are important to the nation's educational system. Some religious colleges have limited admission only to those students who share in their particular faith, while others have a handbook on conduct that requires the student body to adhere to religious-based values and rules. Not only does this infringe upon First Amendment rights, but it also incites challenges to Title IX exemptions granted to religious schools that receive tax dollars through scholarships and grants. The Department of Education cites that under federal civil rights law, colleges and universities that are tax-payer-funded schools should treat all students equally. Title IX and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act have been amended to recognize the rights of

students, but they fall short of religious exemptions at private colleges and universities.

The creation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission aimed to ensure the enforcement of civil rights and protection against discrimination in the workplace. In 2012, a ruling was made to prohibit federal employers and agencies from engaging in discrimination based on gender identity, change of sex, or transgender status; however, it was not until 2020 that the Supreme Court determined that this form of discrimination would be deemed illegal in the workplace under federal law (Minter, 2022).

With this law being in effect, conservative colleges prevent this law from protecting its students. There are employees hired by religious institutions of higher education who have been discriminated against due to the assumption that they are part of the LBGTQ community (Brennen, 2022). If the employees are not protected at religious institutions, then it is evident that the rights of students are not protected either.

Social Justice

For religious, faith-based colleges, social justice is a term of commitment to alliances with pro-abortion, Black Lives Matter, Planned Parenthood, LBGTQ+ rights, and other organizations that promote liberal views (Hendershott, 2022a). Religious colleges that use the term social justice differ from how non-religious colleges define it. Money, the root of all evil, is the motivation behind Catholic institutions of higher education to either uphold their Catholic identity or sway towards secular ideas to stay in the good graces of their stakeholders.

Yeshiva University in Manhattan, New York, is an Orthodox Jewish school that serves approximately 6,000 students. In 2021, students and alumni filed a lawsuit that tried to get approved recognition for the student organization called Yeshiva University

Pride Alliance. The state judge ruled in the plaintiff's favor, declaring that Yeshiva is not a religious institution and so must follow the law and recognize the club (Seltzer, 2022). On September 14, 2022, the Supreme Court ruled that an LGBTQ student organization, YU Pride Alliance at Yeshiva University must be recognized. As a private college, Yeshiva University is not obligated to abide by the U.S. Constitution to provide the same freedoms. The only contract between students and the college is found in the student handbook, which is created and interpreted as the board of the college sees fit. Religious exemptions are not uncommon; however, there is a fine line between exemptions and discrimination. As with *Yeshiva v. YU Pride Alliance*, the argument is that the LGBTQ student organization conflicts with the teachings of the Torah. In response to the decision, Yeshiva University canceled all undergraduate club activities until further notice.

Yeshiva's administration argued that its status as an Orthodox Jewish school exempts it from New York City's human rights law (Stack, 2022). The spokesperson on behalf of Yeshiva argued that the values of the Torah are what the college is founded on. Yeshiva provides a stellar education and allows students to live as Jews and noble citizens with conviction (Stack, 2022).

Kaplin and Lee (2014) noted that colleges should adhere to the following regulations and principles when considering denying student organization requests:

- Require that all groups comply with rules concerning conduct. Compliance with institutional policies so the student organization aligns with the established policies and rules of the institution.
- Safety and security. Institutions have a responsibility to ensure the safety and security of their students and the campus community. If a student organization

is a risk factor, they may be denied if the organization does not follow local, state, and federal laws.

- Education mission and vision values. Each institution considers whether a student organization's goals, purpose, and activities align with the educational mission and vision. This evaluation may involve assessing the organization's contribution to the student's development.

Student organizations will continue to hold importance for students due to their legal rights to organize, freedom of expression, and the educational benefits they provide (Camputaro, 2017). Colleges and universities should use best practices when deciding how to protect themselves from liability regularly (Camputaro, 2017).

Religious Identity

Faith-based institutions are organizations that identify with a religious doctrine that aligns with tradition and culture based on specific beliefs according to the values and principles of the doctrine's teachings. In 1990, Pope John Paul II addressed Catholic campuses out of concern for the loss of religious identity for Catholic colleges by writing *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, translated as "from the heart of the Church" (Hendershott, 2023). In this document, the Pope called for Catholic colleges to obtain a certificate from the presiding bishop attesting that their teachings were consistent with the official Church doctrine (Hendershott, 2023). This document of Pope John Paul II alluded to Catholic colleges being aware of any attempt to consider any secularism in ideologies that go against the teachings of the Church. His requirement was that Catholic institutions stay within their Catholic identity, where it has been since its founding in the Code of Canon Law (Vere, 2000). The Pope outlines requirements for Catholic institutions to require its

programs, ideals, and activities to uphold all principles of the institutions based on Catholic ideals and principles. Catholic colleges and universities firmly stand by their Catholic identity. They are expected to safeguard, preserve, and promote the Catholic identity in the mission and vision of the college (Vere, 2000).

Ex Corde Ecclesiae expounds on the requirement of Catholic university faculty and instructors to respect the Catholic doctrine in their research and morals per the mandate received from the Church. Pope John Paul II instructs Catholic colleges to oblige to tradition as mandated by the Church in regard to what is offered and taught with all students having a right to a Christian education (Vere, 2000). Three decades since this letter was written for Catholic colleges and universities to adhere to, most of the Catholic colleges and universities resist *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (Hendershott, 2023), with faculty and staff who were required to adhere to its requirements now feeling as though it is a threat to academic freedom. Notre Dame, a religious institution in Indiana, faculty unanimously ignored Pope John Paul's document due to the danger it would potentially cause to the Catholic institution in America due to his call for bishops to have more governance than college presidents (Hendershott, 2023).

Hendershott (2023) argued that Catholic colleges have now taken on the "fads" of their secular academic peers by teaching Black studies, gender studies, and LGBTQ studies, which in their opinion, no longer embrace the truth of Catholic beliefs. While there are still many Catholic colleges that support the teachings of the Catholic Church, they are not immune to the controversy that criticizes their refusal to progress the curriculum to embrace the focus of social justice issues in the Western world. Jesuit colleges like Loyola University, Boston College, Georgetown University, and Fordham

University have been key in partnering with nonreligious colleges in an effort to bring light to the Catholic church, but through a non-traditional path by discussing anti-abortion laws and considering President Obama's Affordable Care Act that provides birth control for employees that was banned by religious colleges.

Policy

Institutions and other entities have a responsibility to carefully consider the level of separation they maintain between themselves and the organizations they support, taking into account professional, legal, and ethical considerations. It is essential to address the degree of distance established to address potential legal or ethical concerns. There have been numerous cases where institutions have been implicated as additional defendants in lawsuits opposing student organizations (Camputaro, 2017).

One of the challenging legal issues that arises concerning LGBTQ students is found in conservative religious schools that aim to foster a community based on specific beliefs (Minter, 2022). For instance, some religious schools have policies that prohibit students from engaging in premarital sex or homosexual behavior (Minter, 2022). Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 is a federal law that prohibits discrimination based on sex, including pregnancy, sexual orientation, and gender identity, in any educational program or activity that receives federal financial assistance. The responsibility for enforcing Title IX lies with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. There is a current situation where the federal appellate courts have issued conflicting rulings regarding whether to apply Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or Title IX or both when there is alleged discrimination against a student at a federally funded college or university (Brennen, 2022). In this case, the circuit split

pertains to whether Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or Title IX, or both, should be applied when addressing allegations of discrimination against a student at a federally funded college or university.

While stakeholders understand the importance of student organizations as an extracurricular experience, some institutions have made the decision to distance themselves from student organizations to avoid any potential legal responsibility that could happen. Camputaro (2017) stated that risk is a normal expectation of student organizations, and it is the debate of how much risk can throw off the balance of the institution and result in potential liability.

Racial Campus Climate

Hurtado et al. (1998) proposed a framework for examining the racial campus climate, which encompasses various dimensions representing the outcomes of educational programs and practices. This practical dissertation focuses on uncovering the mental and behavioral aspects that contribute to an institution's reputation of inclusivity or exclusivity towards racial and ethnic groups on campus. The psychological climate dimension relates to attitudes and perceptions among different groups, while the behavioral climate dimension pertains to the behaviors exhibited within these groups on campus. According to Hurtado et al. (1998), it is crucial for colleges to continually enhance their capacity to serve all students and foster an environment of understanding. Prospective students should gain an understanding of the college's values and beliefs before applying and enrolling, as this allows them to assess the significance of diversity and inclusion at the institution. Examining the college's history of racial incidents and its responses to such incidents can provide valuable learning experiences for students,

enabling them to think critically and navigate diverse environments effectively (Kuk & Banning, 2010). Administrators and student organizations should collaborate in setting diversity-centered goals that facilitate the social and academic integration of students within the campus community (Kuk & Banning, 2010).

Hussain and Jones (2021) conducted a study that revealed racial discrimination and bias directed toward students of color affect their sense of belonging. The research supports the notion that students of color experience a diminished sense of belonging compared to their White counterparts, particularly in environments where instances of discrimination and hostility occur (Hussain & Jones, 2021). However, when institutions demonstrate a commitment to diversity initiatives, students of color tend to have a more positive perception and experience fewer adverse effects (Hussain & Jones, 2021). The negative consequences of discrimination and bias can lead to student withdrawal, as they may develop negative sentiments towards the institution, exhibit class absences, and ultimately drop out. To address these issues, Hussain and Jones (2021) suggested that postsecondary institutions should actively cultivate a campus climate that supports students of color through concrete policies and practices.

From the moment the student club is considered an organization, it has the rights and privileges of the organization to assemble, receive benefits from the resources of the college, and host events like other student clubs. Most institutions' policies regarding registered student organizations outline the process for recognition, the expectations of the student organizations, and the benefits the institution grants upon recognition. The traditional practice of many institutions has been to provide the same type of recognition to all student organizations; that is, they treat all student organizations equally, have the

same expectations, and afford the same benefits upon recognition (Camputaro, 2017).

These policies provide legal protection to both the institution and the student organization by describing what will be acceptable. Some institutions outline behavior expectations that may result in discipline or loss of recognition. For instance, in Wheaton College, a private Evangelical Christian college, the handbook states that students are expected to refrain from publicly (including on social media) advocating for beliefs and/or behaviors clearly prohibited in the Wheaton College Community Covenant since students annually affirm its vision as a life-giving aspect of their voluntary membership in the college community and because the Community Covenant forms the foundation of the Student Handbook's expectations (2022-23 Wheaton College Student Handbook, 2022).

History of Student Organizations

Since Harvard's first University Club, the first established student organization in America, it is not uncommon for students to seek recognition, acceptance, and freedom of expression as registered organizations on its campus. Court cases involving First Amendment rights for private and public college students have had various outcomes that have impacted students to have the rights of their organization to be seen and heard. In the early beginnings of student societies, secret or otherwise, the historical context of student organizations enacting the First Amendment or the freedom of speech has varied. Student organizations have been participants in relevant case law, and the approaches the courts have taken on the issue of student rights have even reached the U.S. Supreme Court. There is a nationwide debate over the extent of limitations of religious freedom in places of worship, religiously affiliated businesses, and organizations being allowed to

provide accommodations to people whose views differ (Stack, 2022). Stack (2022) argued that these rights should extend to student organizations that seek the same rights; however, private colleges do not fall under the same First Amendment protections as public colleges that impose limits on free speech.

After thoroughly reviewing and analyzing more than 35 articles concerning the influence of the sense of belonging on college students, it becomes apparent that students of color have distinct experiences in comparison to White students during their college journey. This chapter reviews a combination of literature from scholars' perspectives of students of color at PWIs and theories that focus on student involvement, all having the foundations of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Higher education institutions in the United States date back to the 1600s, categorized as public and private institutions, HBCUs, or 4-year and 2-year institutions. According to Altbach et al. (2016), the distinct purposes of how higher education institutions serve students are to set them apart from one another with how each lives out the college's mission. A diverse student body, faculty, and staff bring challenges that affect the environment socially and intellectually (Altbach et al., 2016).

Fostering an environment where students can share their beliefs and ideas creates a safe space for students to have mutual conversations and understand their culture (Altbach et al., 2016). For institutions to make this type of progress, they must continue to build learning communities that will allow their students to grow academically, socially, and inclusively and be solution-oriented in identifying problems that hinder their progress (Strayhorn, 2012).

The 2018-2019 six-year graduation rate for institutions that graduated students of

color is much below that of White students, whose graduation rate is consistently above the national average. The graduation rate is 62.3% for White students, 14.9% for Hispanic students, 10.3% for Black students, and 8.2% for Asian/Pacific Islanders (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). The equity gap causes many institutions to seek solutions that will recruit and retain students from underrepresented backgrounds (Strayhorn, 2012, 2018). Institutions seek to implement various programs to identify why Black students are not retained and graduate at the same rate as White students. These programs are attempting to address the factors that researchers say influence the retention and persistence of Black students, including income status, high school educational resources and academic preparation, and institutional environments (Strayhorn, 2018).

Affinity Organizations

The policies of most institutions concerning registered student organizations typically outline the process of recognition, the expectations placed on these organizations, and the benefits they receive upon recognition. Traditionally, institutions have treated all student organizations equally, with the same expectations and benefits (Camputaro, 2017). These policies serve to provide legal protection to both the institution and the student organization by establishing acceptable guidelines. Some institutions also include expectations regarding behavior, which, if violated, may result in disciplinary action or loss of recognition. For example, Wheaton College, a private evangelical Christian college, states in its handbook that students are expected to refrain from publicly advocating beliefs or behaviors that are clearly prohibited in the Wheaton College Community Covenant. This expectation is reinforced as students affirm the vision of the Community Covenant annually, considering it an integral part of their

voluntary membership in the college community. The Community Covenant forms the foundation for the expectations outlined in the Student Handbook (2022-23 Wheaton College Student Handbook, 2022).

Participation in ethnicity-based affinity organizations can have a significant impact on Black college students. Kimbrough et al. (1996) noted that many Black students form their social values based on group interactions with other Black students. While White students may perceive this as antisocial separation, Black students view it as a coping mechanism (Kimbrough et al., 1996). Strayhorn (2008) examined the correlation between engagement in educational programs and activities and social involvement. The results concluded that social engagement and interaction between students and peer groups they identify with significantly impacted student growth and development.

Student Support Systems

According to Hausmann et al. (2007), it was suggested that when students experience a sense of belonging, it directly and positively influences their commitment to their institution, as well as indirectly impacts their persistence. However, Hausmann et al. discovered that experimental interventions had no effect on Black students. While the sense of belonging is similarly crucial for both White and Black students in terms of persistence and retention, it is essential to tailor the practices that enhance the sense of belonging to the specific needs of each ethnic group. Hausmann et al. proposed that strategies aiming to strengthen the sense of belonging for Black students should confront stereotypes and biases and promote positive attitudes that affirm their intellectual abilities. Additionally, Hurtado et al. (1998) highlighted how students who enter college with strong family and community influences tend to have a clearer sense of their values

and identity.

Religious Exemptions

According to Brennen (2022), close to 400 religious colleges claim religious exemption from Title IX. Students often argue that these exemptions violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment as they grant special privileges to faith-based institutions while excluding secular ones, despite both receiving federal funding. Numerous students who attend these colleges benefit from federal aid programs like Pell Grants. They assert that they too have rights and should be protected against bias in areas such as housing, athletics, financial aid, and student organizations. One significant issue highlighted by Brennen (2022) is the connection between many honor codes at religious institutions and their Title IX offices. It is not uncommon for students at religious schools to suppress their sexual orientation and conform to honor codes for the sake of safety. In some cases, if faced with the possibility of losing federal funding, certain schools opt to fine the student or deny them financial aid rather than penalizing the college itself.

Review of Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this consultancy project, I used Qualtrics to develop a survey. The participants were randomly selected and sent a QR code to access the survey. The self-reported survey data were collected from 250 participants (30% of the enrolled on-campus population) who are students currently enrolled at a private, faith-based PWI in the south that varied by student ethnicity. The analysis produced reliable measures of belonging: social belonging, academic belonging, and institutional support. One week after the survey was dispersed, 81 responses were received.

Data Collection Method and History

The data collection method used in this research is a quantitative survey and focus group interviews (qualitative). Surveys seek to inquire about feedback from a group of participants on their opinions and experiences for a set of predetermined questions from researchers. In the convergent mixed methods design, both quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed and then compared to see if the data confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis (Creswell, 2015). According to Creswell (2015), qualitative research is understanding the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to a problem. This process of collecting data for qualitative and quantitative research involves asking the right question to build a theme surrounding the researcher's hypothesis. The researcher typically collects this data in the individual or group setting, collects the data via interview or survey collection, and interprets the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2015). Self-administered surveys are those given to a participant in writing via a hard copy or in an electronic version, and the participant is expected to respond on their own.

Strengths

Surveys provide researchers with a variety of benefits; one being the number of individuals who can be reached in a short period of time. Depending on the distribution method, email, for example, a standardized questionnaire with simple, easy-to-understand questions, can result in reliable data. Topics can be guided by the group, and there is not just one voice but a conversation of contrasting opinions (Smithson, 2000).

Limitations

Although focus group methods are commonly used, this does come with a lack of details regarding the techniques for analysis and interpretation. The opinions and

reactions can impress upon others in the group. Focus groups have the tendency for socially acceptable opinions to dominate the process of gathering information (Smithson, 2000). On the other hand, members of the focus group may not give an honest opinion to the questions the researcher asks. Individuals who participate in a focus group give up their time and, in some cases, look for compensation.

There are limitations to the use of quantitative surveys. Participation is optional, and the recipient can choose whether or not to participate. If the questions are not articulated in a clear format or if the survey is too wordy, full participation is not to be expected.

Summary

As the country has become more politically charged with rights and freedoms, student voices have been just as politically charged as well. To the public, colleges and universities are one entity as a whole to those outside of the realm of higher education. There is no distinguishing separation between academic and student affairs when it comes to guiding the holistic student. From the moment the student club is considered an organization, it has the rights and privileges of the organization to assemble, receive benefits from the resources of the college, and host events like other student clubs. Having a risk management plan in place for all student organizations can minimize the risks of litigation for institutions. Kaplin and Lee (2014) outlined four methods of risk management with different levels of protection:

1. Risk avoidance: eliminating the dangers of risky activities by having programs through event services offices to approve activities.
2. Risk control will reduce the number of risky activities student organizations

do on the condition that they have a trained professional staff to advise the organization as they plan events.

3. Shifting the burden of risk: This practice occurs by transferring liability to third parties via releases or waivers and putting all risk on the organization.
4. Accept the risk completely: when the methods of the other levels will be too costly or there is no conceivable risk.

It is appropriate to financially penalize private religious schools by denying them tax-exempt status when discriminating against a person's rights. Civil liberties are rights that every American should have, especially when their tax dollars support institutions that use these dollars to fund the civil liberties of others. Having the right and freedom to exercise religion and speech and to assemble is liberty, and within guidelines, it should be given to each student, no matter the institution.

Transparency is on the table. Colleges and universities that stand by their mission, vision, and values should do just that. However, the same stance that faith-based colleges stand firm on should be transparent throughout the administration admissions, athletics, residence life, and other college departments. Be forthcoming with the values and traditions of the type of education that the student will receive. If it is a religious-based education, say just that. Stop recruiting students for their academic prowess or athleticism, knowing that the college will give them access to compete and win honors and championships, but leave the student not feeling as though they belong. College is not a one-size-fits-all; there has to be accountability for what is offered to incoming students and what is not. This would allow the student to make an educated decision on what fit would be best for them.

For students of color on PWI campuses, there are student organizations that were created to be a place of community centered around academics, sports, common interests, or service. A sense of belonging consists of social acceptance, support, community, connections, and respect for their own identity, development, mental health, well-being, and academic success (Strayhorn, 2018). Extending the scope of relationships and building community is an important incentive for students seeking to join a student organization. Qualitative data collected were analyzed for themes and compared to the quantitative data to determine if any significant relationships existed between them.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, the convergent mixed method design was used to outline the data for this project. The focus of this consultancy project is to examine the contextual perceptions of Black college students at a faith-based PWI in the South. Strayhorn (2012) noted that diversity on college campuses helps challenge the stereotypes of groups and organizations. Diversity enhances intellectual and social abilities in higher education and provides settings that help students work together and share beliefs and opinions (Altbach et al., 2016). I utilized a mixed methodology approach referred to as using both qualitative and quantitative data that were collected to analyze from different viewpoints and allow for a more personalized interview to obtain a more detailed account of their experiences. The qualitative data were collected while conducting a focus group with students who shared their experiences. Shortly after, a quantitative sample was collected from the student population over the span of a week to gather information on belonging. The use of themes and the chi-square test of independence was used to compare the data results. This chapter describes the convergent research design and analysis, research questions, and data collection process and analysis.

Research Design

Convergent Design

The mixing method is referred to as the interrelating of the quantitative and qualitative data and combining and integrating them by the process of a mixed methods study (Creswell, 1999). This model of concurrent approach compares the two variables to determine if there is a convergence, difference, or a combination when compared

(Creswell, 1999). Also, the results of both the qualitative and quantitative research emerged similarities and differences from the data analysis that posed more questions during the development of the analyzing process. I decided to begin with a qualitative phase with a focus group to interview students interested in developing a Black student organization. The details of conversations preceding the focus group interview uncovered the student concern to compare with that of the general student body. The convergent mixed methods design was chosen to obtain a different data set on the topic of belonging. The intent for using a convergent design was to show the direct comparison and contrast of the quantitative results with the qualitative findings.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is what researchers like Merriam and Tisdell (2015) referred to as qualitative inquiry, asking questions about others' habits, lives, thoughts, and opinions. Anthropology and sociology are careers where the researcher would observe the happenings and collect and analyze notes on interactions and habits of people in their natural settings. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people understand and share their experiences and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative research expanded from the work of anthropologists and sociologists to the applied field of journalism, law, education, and the medical field (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Focus Groups

The students were provided with an agenda and a consent form, which conveyed information about the topic, the researcher's identity, and the option to leave the study at any point. Creswell (1999) recommended incorporating guidelines such as refraining

from interrupting others and expressing honesty even when opinions differ from other group members. The consent form explicitly acknowledges the protection of participants' rights throughout the data collection phase, as outlined by Creswell (1999).

To gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of Black students at SCC, the central question guiding this study was, “How do Black students interpret their experiences at a predominantly White, faith-based institution in their own words?” In formulating the interview questions, I reviewed scholarly articles to identify the most effective approach for obtaining data that address the research question adequately. It is important to limit the number of questions during the focus group session, as overcrowding with inquiries is a common mistake made by novice facilitators (Royse et al., 2015). It is recommended to have no more than 10 participants of similar status in a focus group, lasting approximately 1 hour (Royse et al., 2015). Recording data through notetaking by someone other than the facilitator is advisable (Royse et al., 2015). Commencing with open-ended questions is suggested, as they invite expansive ideas and opinions rather than simple one- or two-word responses (MacKechnie, 2018). Focus groups provide an opportunity to explore why individuals hold certain opinions and aim to capture the perspectives of the entire group (MacKechnie, 2018). When incorporating quantitative questions, it is important to consider capturing the opinions of the entire group, as vocal attendees can often dominate the conversation (Royse et al., 2015). Universal opinions across participants or significant variations can provide valuable insight (Royse et al., 2015). Focus groups typically consist of 10 or fewer voluntary participants who gather to discuss a specific idea and provide feedback on a topic, product, or service (Creswell, 2015). They offer an opportunity to engage in

conversations with individuals to understand their viewpoints and opinions. A skilled facilitator can ask appropriate questions, delve into details, and encourage discussion among focus group members. Asking the right questions is a fundamental aspect of a successful focus group (Royse et al., 2015).

Focus groups were widely used in the marketing field in the 1950s to test consumer preference and receive feedback on products (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Using focus groups as a social science research method can be traced back to studies of group dynamics in the early decades of the 20th century by sociologist Robert K. Merton (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). These data are collected in a group setting and facilitated by a representative. Collecting data in a focus group is a method of qualitative research that interviews a group of people on a topic with knowledge of that topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

In focus group discussions, participants share their views and experiences as students at SCC. Focus groups work best for topics people could talk to each other about in their everyday lives but do not due to the sensitivity of highly personal and culturally inappropriate topics to talk about in the presence of strangers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I invited students interested in creating a student organization for students of color, and they asked me to serve as an adviser. The instructions were to share experiences in the classroom, on campus, and as a residential student. The focus group composition catered to the students of color who were fully enrolled and were residential students at SCC. Ten students of color were selected and invited to the focus group.

When conducting a needs assessment, a process evaluation, or an outcome evaluation, once you have gathered all the information you intend to collect, the next step

is to examine it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I met with the consultancy program host to lay out the survey questions and the intention to interview a focus group. I invited the students who inquired about organizing a student organization and asked each one to invite another person. This would keep the focus group to no more than 10 participants. The planned participation of this focus group involved eight to 10 people between the ages of 18 and 21. The group consisted of four men and four women, all enrolled as SCC students.

Quantitative Research

Creswell (1999) defined quantitative research as using variables and measured numbers and as an inquiry into a social problem. The problem is best understood by knowing that factors influence the outcome (Creswell, 1999). Using a quantitative survey to collect research provided insight into understanding problems and its ease of use for data collection. This type of collection uses data that are accurate and representative and allows the researcher to study events as they happen (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The sample of the population reflected the demographics of the ethnicity of SCC; however, the survey was distributed in a non-bias format and randomly emailed to a random sample population. The limitations came when the data lacked sufficient evidence to determine whether the findings were accurate.

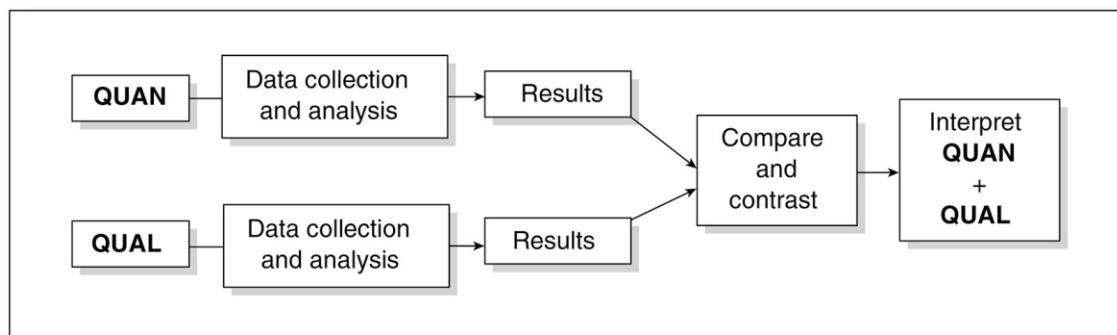
The survey instrument was adapted online using Qualtrics. This survey instrument is designed for research to extract data to determine which statistics test best analyzes the data. An email flyer was created and sent to each potential participant randomly in the sample with an explanation of the goal of the research. A QR code was available on the flyer guiding participants to complete and submit the survey instrument electronically.

All potential participants who received the flyer were allowed to opt out if they did not want to participate in the survey. The online survey instrument was closed 1 week following the mass email to participants. The raw data were retrieved to be analyzed. A research limitation included the sample size of the student population that responded to the survey was less than 30%. A 19-question survey instrument was developed to collect demographic information, information about the students' opinions on belonging in general, and their sense of belonging on campus.

Data were collected from 81 students out of 250 potential participants, with a 32.4% response rate. The quantitative questions ranged on a 4-point Likert scale. The study was based on student self-reporting and the time it took to comment on whether the questions interested the students. Another limitation was the method used at the time of the survey distribution. Future research should recruit samples that are more representative of the overall college student population. More longitudinal data collection would be a great help, in the long run, to establish better findings to determine what is known about college student belonging.

Figure 3

Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design (SAGE Research Methods, 2019)



Chi-Square Test

The chi-square test statistic serves as a tool specifically designed for examining differences among groups when the dependent variable is measured at a nominal level. Its purpose, as described by McHugh (2013), is to determine the likelihood of the expected results and whether there exists a relationship between the variables. The chi-square test is applicable under certain conditions: (a) when the variable being analyzed is nominal, (b) when the sample sizes of the groups are uneven, and (c) depending on whether the data distribution is skewed or if the data violate assumptions of equal variance, in which case the original data are measured by internal or ratio scales (McHugh, 2013). The null hypothesis assumes that no relationship exists between the two variables.

In this study, the chi-square test of independence was utilized to assess whether the distribution of one variable is contingent upon the distribution of another variable. Specifically, the chi-square test of independence was employed to investigate if there existed a meaningful relationship between the variables of race and sense of belonging. In Chapter 4, I show a contingency table that displays the observations that were analyzed.

Research Questions

The focus group research questions were formed in an attempt to explore lived experiences of students at SCC. The questions for the focus group were derived from questions of belonging from researchers in the literature review and sorted into themes of general belonging, social belonging, and academic belonging. The guiding question for this project was, “In what way(s) do you feel you belong to this campus community?”

Student Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself and how you identify ethnically.

2. Tell me commonalities you have experienced between living at home and on campus?
3. What differences have you recognized between living at home and living on campus?
4. Please share an experience on campus where you felt your racial identity was most salient, as you are comfortable.
5. How easy has it been to make friends on campus?
6. In what ways do you feel like you belong to this campus community? What would having a cultural student organization on campus mean for you?

Setting

The process of organizing and managing the data posed some challenges. To tackle this, I consulted Merriam and Tisdell (2015) and employed coding, which involves assigning abbreviated labels to different aspects of the data. This enables easy retrieval of specific pieces of information when needed. During the focus group interview session, I had a consent form. The participants of the focus group were full-time, residential students of SCC. They were invited to meet in an empty classroom in the freshmen residence hall. I distributed consent forms to the group and provided ground rules of respect and listening to hear one another and not talking over the person speaking. To make the focus group invitation enticing, I provided pizza at my personal expense to compensate the students for their time. In my data collection, I kept the respondents' identities anonymous; however, there were identifying factors such as race, age, and academic major. After the focus group concluded, I transcribed the responses and coded the data so each person's response could be documented.

For the collection of quantitative data for this consultancy project, I used Qualtrics to develop and disseminate the survey. The 250 participants were randomly selected and sent a QR code to access the survey; there were 81 responses received. The respondents were given a 1-week deadline to return the 18-question survey. The analysis produced reliable measures of belonging: social belonging, academic belonging, and general belonging.

Participants

Abraham

Junior sports management major, a varsity basketball player who identifies as Black, and is a twin.

Benjamin

Freshman who identifies as African, speaks Arabic, and is LBGTQ.

Cenecia

Freshman biology major who considers herself to be “pretty boring.” She says her dad is of mixed race, and her mother is Black.

Dani

Sophomore biology major who likes cheese pizza. She identifies as Black. She added that she does not do well with saying “no” and giggling.

Erica

Sophomore, undeclared/undecided major, Black (giggled after saying “Black”), and shares that she is ambidextrous.

Fitz

Junior, basketball player, [redacted for anonymity – student staff member on

campus], identifies as Black/African American (shrugged when saying this), and used to play the violin.

Gennifer

Freshman business management major, scared of whales, dad is half Black, and mom is Mexican and identifies as LGBTQ and mixed race.

Harrison

Junior who identifies as African, runs track, and likes talking to people due to [redacted specific position for anonymity – student staff member on campus].

Irish

Freshman who wants to major in forensics, but SCC only has criminal justice – doing that now, described themselves as African American and sometimes awkwardly goofy.

Data Collection

To complete this project, I had to learn how the students perceived their experience as it related to the sense of belonging on campus. The guiding question was, “In what way(s) do you feel you belong on this campus?” The data collected from the college included student ethnicity, gender, and their opinion on belonging in general, socially, and academically. The study analyzed data using Qualtrics. The data collection method used in this research combined surveys, interviews, and focus groups. A convergent method was used to compare the results of quantitative and qualitative results where data were collected and analyzed to note if the data confirm or disconfirm. A convergent mixed methods research design analyses and compares both qualitative and quantitative surveys. The quantitative survey should pose a series of questions prepared

for distribution to random persons and focus group questions to a group of student participants (Creswell, 1999).

The utilization of mixed methodology refers to the integration of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods in a single study, as described by Creswell (1999). In my research, I employed a mixed methods approach to comprehend the sense of belonging experienced by Black students in a PWI. Qualitative methods, as outlined by Royse et al. (2015), are empirical and systematic, relying on meticulous documentation and data-driven analysis. According to Royse et al. (2015), certain aspects of a program are challenging to capture and quantify, such as staff morale, cross-cultural misunderstandings, and client perceptions.

According to Creswell (1999), the instrument-building model involves transforming qualitative observations, interviews, documents, and other forms of data into variables and specific questions to develop an instrument. In qualitative data analysis, the process entails thoroughly reading the text, condensing it into a manageable set of themes, further refining them into a smaller number, and providing evidence for each theme (Creswell, 1999). In this study, I adopted the approach of exploring which type of qualitative data collection would be most suitable for supporting the hypothesis and assessing students' thoughts and emotions regarding SCC.

Social and human services programs have been created to determine needs and explore other areas of how to help society (Royse et al., 2015). Those who work in human services must refer people to programs that people may or may not want to go to for the chance of succeeding or doing well (Royse et al., 2015). To deem these programs effective, program evaluations involved the client's perspective, the service, and the

program as a whole. Because the approach to a needs assessment for students' sense of belonging on a college campus involves assessment strategies and perspectives, the tools used in this survey assisted in identifying where to either confirm the hypothesis or recommend other findings to share with stakeholders (Royse et al., 2015).

I noted Royse et al.'s (2015) advice on diverse cultural norms, keeping in mind that although this consultancy was to determine the sense of belonging for students, it was to determine how minority students perceive this concept. Evaluation studies that are culturally sensitive when ethnic or other diverse groups are involved risk harm by excluding members of ethnic minority groups without cause (Royse et al., 2015).

Data Analysis

There were 48 White (59.26%), 17 African American/Black (20.99%), seven Hispanic (8.64%), four Asian (4.94), and 12 others (6.17%) with a 32.4% response rate. I collected quantitative and qualitative data obtained using two different methods: focus group interviews and survey responses. The data were analyzed using the chi-square test of independence. According to McHugh (2013), the chi-square test of independence is a useful statistic for testing hypotheses when the variables are nominal between two variables. The test determines whether the distribution of one variable is dependent on the distribution of another (McHugh, 2013). When analyzed, the test compares frequencies within the contingency table to determine if there is an assumption of independence between the variables (McHugh, 2013). Students were asked for responses that took no more than 5 minutes. Prior to administering the quantitative survey to the SCC general student body, nine students of color gave suggestions in a focus group with statements about their experiences on campus, in the classroom, and in general. The quantitative

survey choices were strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Survey choices were intentionally selected so that traditional college-age students would spend as little time as possible giving their responses. Using the 1-minute feedback to understand how students identify with their belongingness may help the students when asked for post-survey interview data which can make the experience more pleasurable for them and beneficial for the consultant (Frankland & Harrison, 2016).

Conclusion

According to Royse et al. (2015), qualitative method limitations are not well suited for large numbers of respondents. In this case, I limited the focus group respondents to less than 10 students. Although more were invited, only half showed up for the focus group. The qualitative method was useful but needed to fully support the hypothesis from the qualitative study.

I found it difficult to focus on asking the questions as well as recording the responses at the same time. This could have been thought through better. Qualitative methods are time- and labor-intensive in their implementation (Royse et al., 2015). Lengthy in-depth interviewing and transcription of the words made this process need to be redone in my opinion. The interactive data analysis process, combined with making the environment comfortable, was difficult. Royse et al. (2015) had strategies for time-sensitive qualitative methods and data collection, including an audio recording device.

Having students with similar experiences made for a “piggyback” experience. Students in the focus group kept “piggybacking” on each other, and I found it difficult to get the initial person’s response. During the solo interviews, I was more able to get individualized phrases and present a thought pattern theme.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the consultancy project. The purpose of this convergent mixed methodology was to get firsthand experiences of Black students at SCC as well as a glimpse of the experiences of the general student body. This chapter includes findings to support my hypotheses: (a) Black students experience a lower sense of belonging on campus than their White peers at SCC; and (b) Black and minority students experience less inclusion on campus than most of their peers. This chapter provides tables and responses from interviews that share the student experiences and a discussion of themes that emerged from the interviews.

The literature review in Chapter 2 described how feelings of belonging for Black students and minority students at faith-based SCC could negatively affect students. The lack of inclusiveness and belonging can result in harming a student's psychological well-being and have a negative impact on academic persistence. Colleges that have recognized student affinity organizations that are formed around a shared interest can promote positive experiences for students who share that interest. Working with students to organize BSA will add value to the campus community for Black and minority students seeking inclusion and belonging and building connections with other people with similar experiences.

Through the interviews in the focus group, each participant responded to the questions and described their experiences. I followed up with data from the quantitative surveys that confirmed my hypothesis. In many ways, the finding of this research reflects prior research done regarding the challenges Black students have faced at faith-based

PWIs in America. Furthermore, from the majority of the Black students' perspectives, it was suggested that there are limited opportunities for leadership, campus involvement, and recognized academic achievement at SCC. Administration at faith-based schools focus on the religious perspective of "all are welcome" but neglect any opportunity to engage in diversity initiatives that provide insight into cultural differences that set them apart from students who would make minority students feel genuinely welcome.

Review of Methodology

The research was a convergent study at a faith-based PWI in the spring of 2021. A focus group with nine student participants and a survey instrument were the convergent data sources. The student's information and anonymity are protected, and pseudonyms are used to protect their identity. A 19-question survey instrument was developed to collect information about students' feelings towards experiences at the college, including their race, safety, and sense of belonging on campus. Data were collected from 81 students out of 250 potential participants, with a 32.4% response rate.

Participants

Participants for the focus group portion of this consultancy project included nine residential minority students enrolled at SCC. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 22 years of age. Of the nine participants, four identified as male, and five identified as female. Of the nine participants, seven identified as Black or African American, and two identified as mixed race. Of the nine participants, one shared their religious practice. Of the nine participants, two self-reported as LBGQTQ+. The names of the participants have been changed to protect their anonymity. All other information was based on self-report at the time of the interview.

Qualitative Themes

The focus group was comprised of students with diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. The focus group interviews yielded several overarching themes, which encompassed the following:

1. **Racial and cultural differences:** The participants came from different racial and cultural backgrounds, and they observed and experienced differences from home and on campus. They commented on the friendliness of some and timidness of others, which may be due to cultural or racial differences.
2. **Stereotyping and profiling:** Abraham shared his experience of racial profiling, which suggested that he faced negative stereotypes due to his race. Irish also shared her experience of finding White people stand-offish initially, which could be interpreted as a form of stereotyping or prejudice.
3. **Need for familiarity:** The participants suggested that it took time and familiarity to build relationships with people from different backgrounds. They expressed that people can be friendly, but it took some time to break down barriers due to cultural or racial differences. Being intentional about diversity in recruitment and hiring could bring more awareness to students seeking peers and mentors with similar experiences.

Figure 4

Qualitative Themes From Focus Group Interviews

Qualitative Themes



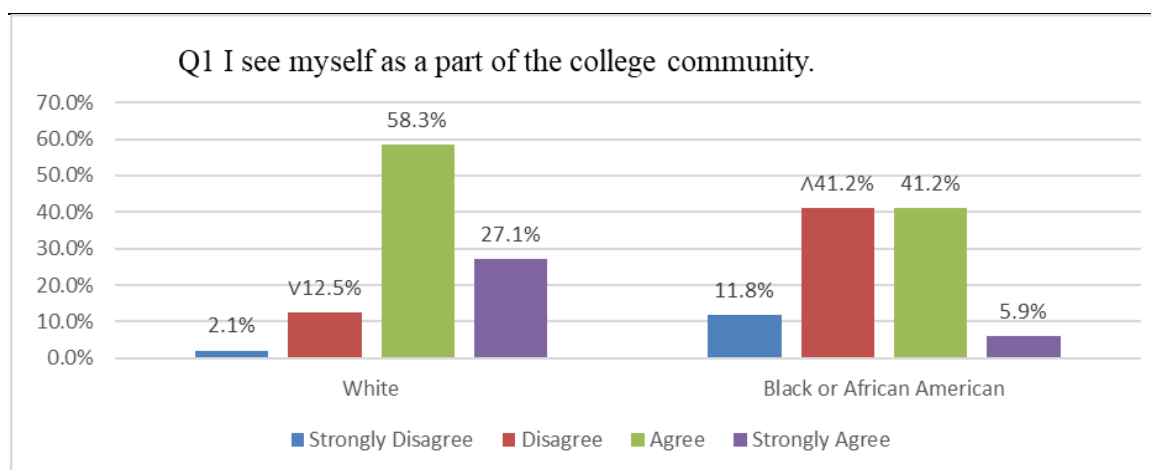
Overall, the focus group revealed that individuals from different backgrounds experience and observe differences in racial and cultural interactions. They suggest building relationships with people from different backgrounds requires time and familiarity, and stereotypes and prejudice can be barriers to forming these relationships. Furthermore, keywords were themed from participant responses from the focus group and individual interviews. The substantial connections derived from the combined research approach will offer proof that reinforces the assumptions stating that Black students perceive a diminished sense of belonging in comparison to their White counterparts and that Black and minority students encounter lesser inclusiveness on campus compared to the majority of their peers.

Figure 5*Chi-Square Test of Independence for Survey Question 1*

 Chi-square Test of independence Q1. I see myself as a part of the college community.

Race	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
White	2.1%	12.5%	58.3%	27.1%	100%
Black	11.8%	41.2%	41.2%	5.9%	100%

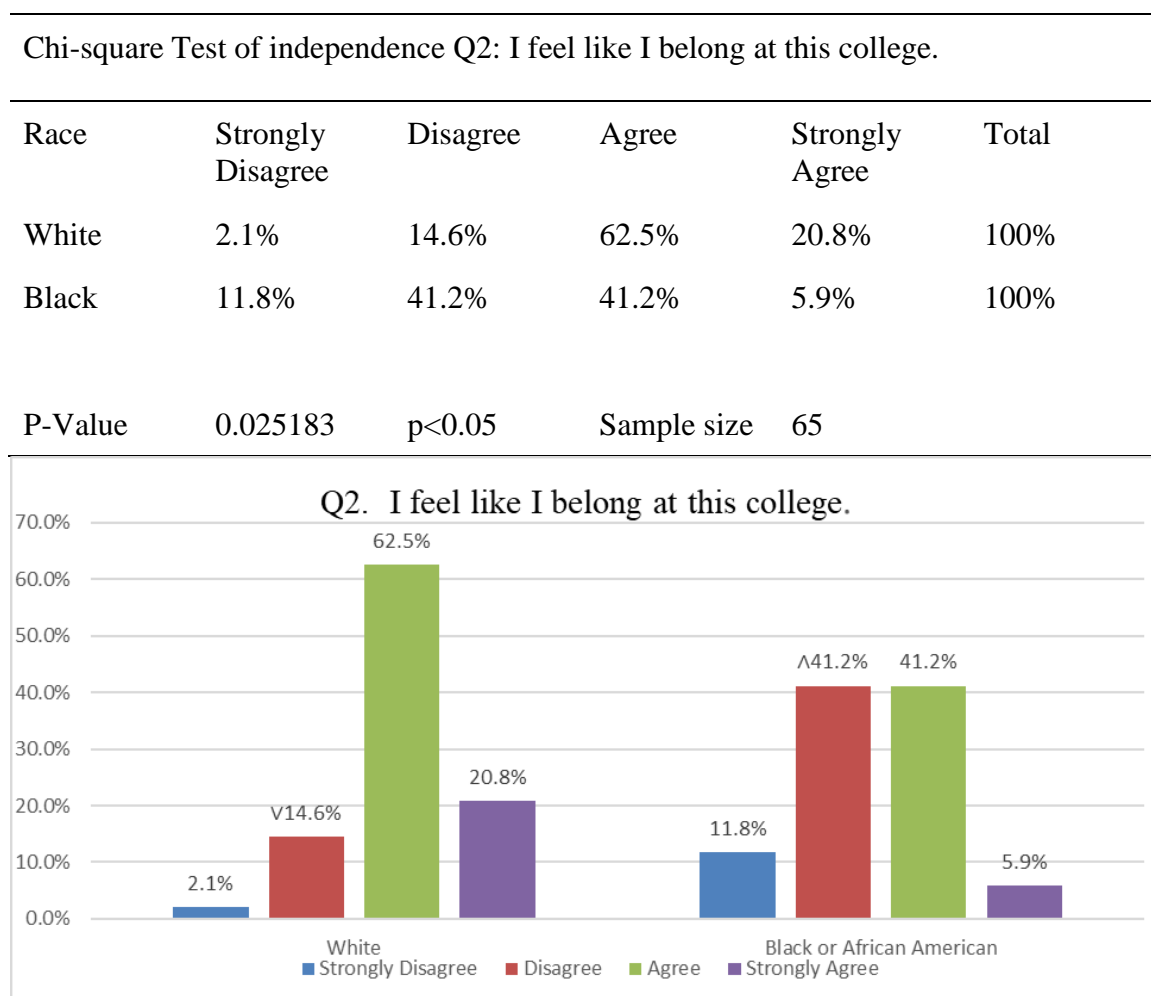
P-Value	0.01163268	p<0.05	Sample size	65
---------	------------	--------	-------------	----



The data conclude that in the chi-square test of independence in Question 1, the p value is less than .05, which means there is sufficient evidence to state that there is a relationship between these two variables of race and Question 1, “I see myself as part of the college community.” Findings indicated that Black respondents disagreed by 42% with that statement as opposed to 12.5% of White students who disagreed. These results are important because they appear to indicate that Black students perceive that they do not feel as though they are a part of the college community.

Based on the focus group responses, Fitz mentioned how the racial composition of the campus is primarily White, which is different from where he grew up. Gennifer

stated that SCC has friendly people, but there is a distinct feeling that sets her apart. There is a lack of cultural awareness, and the focus is more on students' faith than other parts of their diverse makeup. Abraham shared an experience he had with racial profiling shortly after arriving on campus during his freshman year. He also shared another experience of how his roommate's family watched as the roommate hung a Confederate flag in their room on move-in day. He requested a room change. The feedback from the focus group responses further indicates sufficient evidence that aligns with the quantitative data that suggest there may be differences in how Black and White students have experienced belonging and inclusion as students at SCC.

Figure 6*Chi-Square Test of Independence for Survey Question 2*

The data conclude that in the chi-square test of independence in Question 2, the p value is less than .05, which means there is sufficient evidence to state that there is a relationship between these two variables. The data conclude that in the chi-square test of independence, the p value is less than .05, which means there is evidence to show that there is sufficient evidence to state that there is a relationship between these two variables of race and Question 2, “I feel like I belong to this college.” Findings indicated that Black respondents disagreed by 41.2% with that statement compared to 14.6% of White

students who disagreed with that statement. These results are important because they appear to indicate that Black students perceive that they do not feel as though they are a part of the college community.

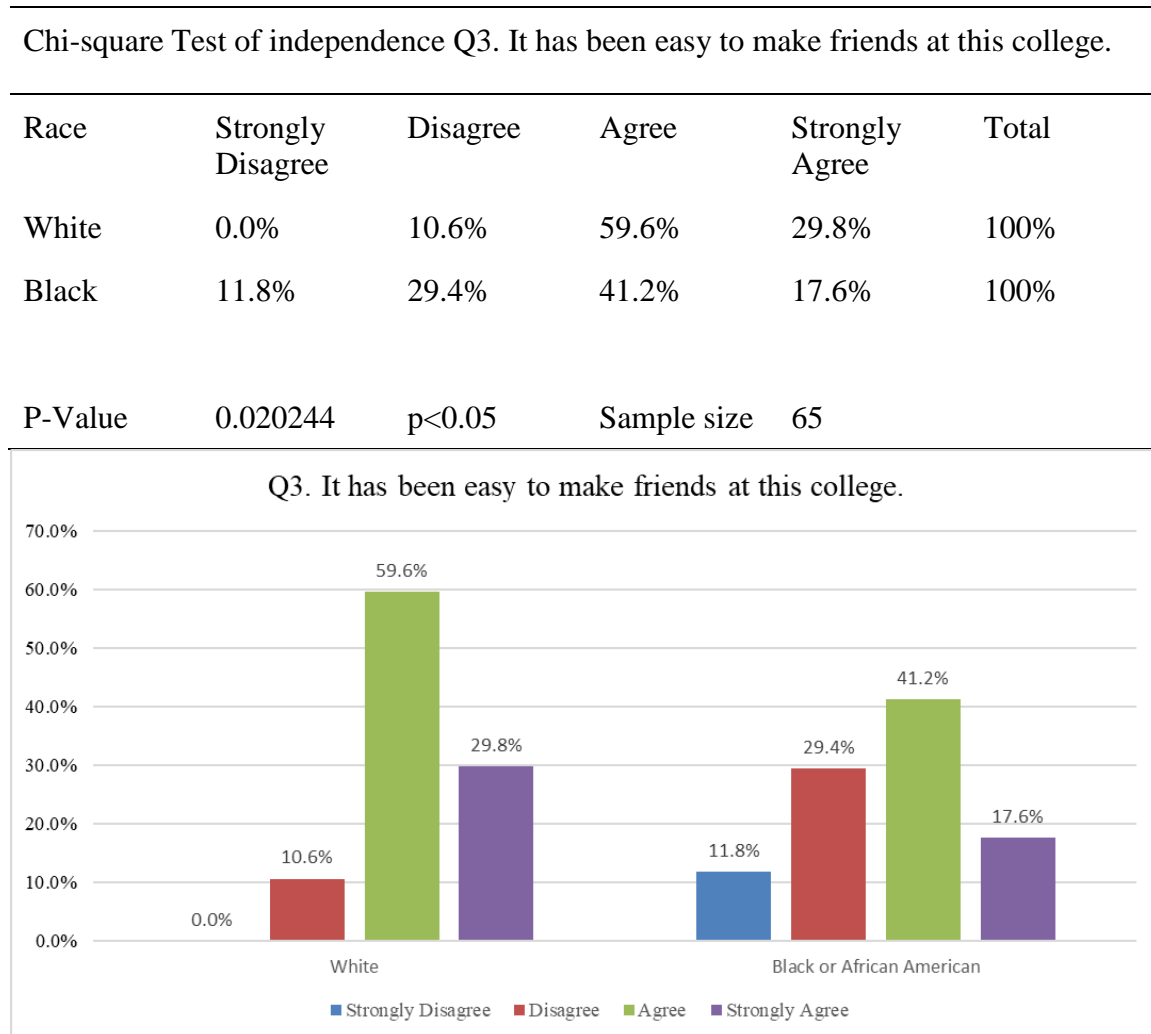
Based on the focus group responses that focus on the sense of belonging and participant experiences, Dani and Cenecia shared the feeling of being alone as the only student of color in their classes, and faculty and students have at times asked questions about race that they are expected to answer on behalf of the Black race. Cenecia shared that she feels isolated when she attends events on campus where she does not feel welcome in the environment due to the nature of the topic of discussion and not having enough students of color present to adequately defend or challenge the discussion. Erica added that she experiences a lot of loneliness inside and outside of the classroom. She has lived in a suite with seven other students for 6 months, and two of them have yet to speak to her. Fits noted that the cafeteria is the most diverse place on campus because of the diversity of the employees. He noted the racial cliques in the cafeteria, further reinforcing racial divisions within the campus community. Abraham mentioned that in the past, the division in the cafeteria was more athlete/non-athlete, but currently, it is based on race. Black athletes often form friendships within athletic teams and have created a sense of unity among themselves.

The focus group experience response indicates that race is a focal point for them in the classroom, residence halls, and cafeteria. The focus group participants have experienced challenges of racial isolation and the formation of affinity groups on campus based on race. The feedback from the focus group responses further indicates sufficient evidence that aligns with the quantitative data that suggest there may be differences in

how Black and White students have experienced belonging and inclusion as students at SCC.

Figure 7

Chi-Square Test of Independence for Survey Question 3



The data concluded that in the chi-square test of independence, the p value is less than .05, which means there is sufficient evidence to state that there is a relationship between these two variables of race and Question 3, “It has been easy making friends at this college.” Findings indicated that Black respondents disagreed by 29.4% with that statement compared to 10.6% of White students who disagreed with that statement. These

results are important because they appear to indicate that Black students have a harder time making friends at this college.

Based on focus group responses, making friends has not been easy for the participants. Irish's perspective on forging friendships is that she has tried to talk to and meet other students, but the social setting and experience are much different compared to high school. Fitz noted that being involved on a sports team makes it a lot easier to make friends since there is more support from the campus community and not just people within a specific friend group. Dani mentioned that being on a sports team provides more interactions with others, but having a network of friends would be less forced due to team expectations. Erica expressed her dissatisfaction with the available activities on campus that would be ideal for meeting new people. This has contributed to the lack of engagement and connection with others. Benjamin has attended numerous events but still lacks connections with peers interested in similar ideals, music genres, or hobbies. This lack of connection impedes his ability to make friends. Overall, the participants of the focus group shared the challenges of their experiences in making friends on campus. Factors such as a different social environment from high school, limited opportunities to connect with like-minded individuals, and a lack of engagement in campus activities contribute to their experiences of difficulty in forming meaningful friendships. The feedback from the focus group responses further indicates sufficient evidence that aligns with the quantitative data that suggest there may be differences in how Black and White students have experienced making friends at SCC.

The lack of diversity in social events and activities on campus also contributes to the feeling of isolation and loneliness. The participants express their struggles to connect

and form friendships, with some relying on athletic teams or student worker roles as a source of community and belonging. They also mention the comfort and ease of talking with other people of color who share a similar cultural background. Overall, the themes that emerge from this focus group discussion include experiences of racial segregation and isolation, difficulties in forming connections and finding community, and the role of sports and student work as a source of social support.

This consultancy project has confirmed the theory found in the literature regarding the importance of cultural centers, diversity, equity, and inclusion training, and recognizing Black and minority student organizations to foster a sense of belonging and to reenergize students to progress toward completion (Harper & Quaye, 2007). It is important that Black students need to find trust in people they can be transparent with and spaces where they can be authentic in the PWI. This can be difficult when the college does not see the benefit of providing safe spaces. Lack of engagement with classmates, employees, and teachers can lead to detrimental encounters that instigate a feeling of exclusion, where one perceives a lack of fairness and equity (Strayhorn, 2018).

Limitations

Quantitative survey collection captures a general overview of the objective and standardized results of the respondent data to provide insight to better understand the problem. This type of collection uses data that are accurate and representative and allows the researcher to study events as they happen (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The sample of the population reflected the demographics of the ethnicity of SCC; however, the survey was distributed in a non-bias format and emailed to a random sample population. The limitations came when the data lacked sufficient evidence to determine whether the

findings were accurate.

The research limitation included the sample size of the student population that responded would have been above 32.4%; however, some participants did not fully complete the survey tool and left questions unanswered. The survey was distributed to 250 students randomly, and the response rate was 32.4%, with fewer numbers of students of color participating in the survey. This smaller number reflects the diversity at SCC; however, I was hopeful that more students of color would have received the survey and participated so that the data from the population sample would be distributed to gather more significant data. The study was based on student self-reporting and the time it took to comment on whether the questions interested the students (Frankland & Harrison, 2016). Another limitation was the method used at the time of the survey distribution. Future research should recruit samples that are more representative of the overall college student population. More longitudinal data collection would be a great help, in the long run, to help establish better findings to determine what is known about college student belonging.

Findings

The data analysis supports the hypothesis that Black students feel a lower sense of belonging than their White peers. The data also reject the null hypothesis that Black students feel a lower sense of belonging to the campus community. This study was to identify how the students are connected to the campus in general, in the classroom, and in the environment. The sample population scored strongly in agreement with connectedness. When I tested the chi-square test of independence, the Black student qualitative data to the Black student quantitative data, the hypothesis that Black students

feel a lesser sense of belonging than their White peers was found to be true.

Many of the Black students were recruited for an athletics sports team. Their responses indicated they were among the most isolated students on campus due to their schedules. These results suggest that athletic involvement, like academic involvement, isolates students from the peer group effects that normally accompany college attendance (Astin, 1997). I pulled the data for students who identified as Black/African American, and the data were somewhat skewed. The results showed that while there were no significant differences in Black students' sense of belonging, there did appear to be a slight decrease in agreeing that there was a sense of belonging on campus.

Conclusion

The shared experiences in the qualitative responses of Black students at SCC support the Black responses from the quantitative responses that examined their sense of belonging. The study found that the Black students at SCC encountered racial microaggressions, racial discrimination, and discrimination in their residence halls and on campus. Due to the lack of support from the administration and staff, the responses of the focus group noted that some Black students do not report many racial incidents. This project found that participants sought to create and join a student organization that opened doors for leadership opportunities, provided a safe space, offered support outside of the classroom, and provided a sense of comfort to students who were active in the organization.

Although students at SCC were aware of resources like counseling services, spiritual adoration, and security, they were hesitant to participate due to skepticism and lack of trust in the persons available. Despite being aware of resources and supports

across campus, many of the participants believed those resources and supports could not effectively address their needs. Participants shared that the support provided should be intentional and culturally relevant while helping them overcome their experiences. Therefore, it is concluded that PWIs should work to understand African American student experiences and provide intentional and relevant support to address those experiences. Furthermore, this study highlighted the importance of faculty, staff, and administrators engaging in and developing positive trusting relationships with African American students. This study contributes to the field of education, specifically higher education, by reinforcing that race, racism, and racial microaggressions contribute to African American students having college experiences that differ from those of their White peers.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter includes a conclusion, discussion, and recommendations for incorporating change using Kotter's (1995) Change Theory. The data collected from interviews, focus groups, and my questions were analyzed and presented in Chapter 4 as findings and are used to conclude with an action plan. This research aimed to examine the sense of belonging for Black students at a faith-based PWI. This research stemmed from students seeking connectedness to the college community and building a support network for Black and minority students through developing a recognized affinity student organization. The lack of connection and involvement for Black and minority students resulted in significance that proved that Black students feel a lower sense of belonging than their White peers.

Summary of Findings

As noted in Chapter 2, Literature Review, we know that belongingness is a basic human need and that all people share a strong need to belong (Maslow, 1943; Strayhorn, 2008). Additionally, the literature review denotes a direct relationship between student experiences lacking important outcomes of belonging, such as achievement and adjustment, and plans to stay enrolled (Strayhorn, 2008). The connectedness that refers to belonging is described as a sense of rejection, social isolation, loneliness, and marginality (Hagerty et al., 2002). This rejection and isolation have been linked to adverse long-term outcomes such as dissatisfaction, depression, substance abuse, and suicide (Hagerty et al., 2002). Recommendations for future practice and policy relating to retention and persistence for Black students at a private, faith-based institution will be shared.

Researchers support the themes of this research discovered from the focus group interviews, quantitative data analysis, and convergent mixed methodology: (a) racial and cultural differences, (b) stereotyping and racial profiling, and (c) the need for familiarity.

Hausmann et al. (2007) outlined strategies that should be implemented by organizations to increase the sense of belonging for Black students that need to address the stereotypes and biases to prove their place in higher education. The themes and results from the previous chapter were used to form my conclusions as they relate to the conceptual framework and Strayhorn's (2012) sense of belonging theories.

Conclusions Organized by Significant Challenge

The significant challenge is that Black students feel a lower sense of belonging than their White peers at SCC. As stated in Chapter 1, faith-based colleges are committed to academics and spiritual development, but few have noted a commitment to diversity (Paredes-Collins, 2013). Faith-based institutions have suggested Christian institutions, which can often promote typical White theologies, create environments unsupportive to Black and LBGQT students but have offered little empirical evidence supporting this position (Paredes-Collins, 2013).

Lack of Belonging

Participants in this study who represented the Black student population concluded that they felt that the degree of belonging was noticed in the lack of involvement, isolation, and the desire for an organization to be the vehicle for their culture. The quantitative data indicated that Black students did not feel like they were a part of the college community.

Respondents interviewed for the focus group were recruited and enrolled at SCC

for various reasons and became aware that there was no purpose for the college outside of athletics. The silent voices of Black students at SCC were heard, giving them a seat at the table to voice their experiences and realities and to share stories. Furthermore, the lack of diversity at SCC led students to question where they fit in and where to seek out others who also felt alone in the residence halls and classrooms.

Lack of a Feeling of Inclusivity

The challenges faced by participants identifying as students of color included how they are perceived. The majority of the students of color are recruited for Athletics teams. Black students are featured on the athletics webpage, on billboards around the city, and in marketing materials, but their voices go unheard. Black student experiences are loud yet muffled by the college's administration. The participants from the focus group were aware that they would be attending a faith-based PWI; however, admissions and recruiters did not prepare them for the reality that racially Black students would make up 13% of the student population. A challenge for students of color who are first-generation is that entering a new environment is different from home and is void of familiar cultural connections of friends and family. The participants stated that marketing materials for SCC portrayed diversity and happy Black students and athletes, but this was not the reality.

Racial Campus Climate

Challenges of microaggressions shared by participants varied differently by each participant yet still yielded negative results of feeling unwelcomed, indifferent, confused, and discomfort. Participants in this study shared that the campus climate at SCC did not do well at addressing stereotypes of confronting microaggressions from peers, faculty,

staff, or administrators. Research emphasizes the value of safe spaces for students of color. Harper and Quaye (2007) supported cultural/ethnic organizations and cultural centers as essential spaces for finding support and affirmation for their identity. The lack of diversity training for faculty and staff explained the disappointment in addressing reported incidents effectively. Of over 200 faculty and staff, only five were Black. The lack of trust in the administration resulted in students not reporting racial incidents or seeking counseling services. Addressing stereotypes for the participants can create added pressure on them to excel in order to dispel negative beliefs about the academic capabilities and learning potential of Black students. In regard to confronting racial microaggressions, African American participants in this study explained how they, at times, felt they could not be their authentic selves on campus. These experiences caused participants to question who they were indeed.

Discussion

The study participants spoke about how they experience challenges as Black students at a PWI and the campus racial climate that was previously discussed. Students spoke about the isolation and feeling alone as the only or one of a few Black students in class. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are still not a priority at many college campuses in the United States, and they need help defining the terms according to their standards and principles. Although diversity, equity, and inclusion conversations are ongoing, there is limited research on the campus climate of faith-based higher education institutions. In recent years, higher education institutions have sought consultants to find solutions and resolutions to address the need for more diversity discussions. Students of these institutions struggle with feeling included and their place to belong among peers and the

campus community. Black students at SCC seek out others who look like them, can relate to them, and understand how to navigate successfully in a place not created for them to thrive.

The research concluded that the intersection of identity was where they were often expected to present as spokespersons for their race. Black students responded to the challenge of not relating to places of refuge that religious students seek. They acknowledge that they seek out places and people who will give them the support that they seek.

Recommendations for the Organization

Recommendations to address the lack of sense of belonging and inclusivity for students of color align with theories of culture change within organizations. This consultancy project examined the sense of belonging for all students on the SCC campus, emphasizing students of color. Ways to foster a sense of belonging can begin with supporting the organization applications of affinity organizations with the same recognition process as all student organizations at SCC. Students should feel supported and confident to want to create a student organization based on culture and race. Moreover, with diversity and cultural training, SCC will see the significance of student retention by allowing students to find a space where they can feel safe and heard.

The consultancy project aims to create, organize, and recognize a student organization that celebrates Black students and their culture, taking into account the positive impact of campus involvement and a sense of belonging on student satisfaction. The project aligns with the student involvement theory proposed by Astin in 1985, which suggested that student involvement positively influences various aspects of the college

experience, including adjustment to college life, academic gains, relationship building, progression, and persistence.

By establishing a student organization that focuses on celebrating Black students and their culture, the project sought to provide a platform for Black students to connect, engage, and feel a sense of belonging within the campus community. This sense of belonging, as highlighted by Strayhorn in 2018, has been found to have a significant impact on student satisfaction and overall well-being.

The process of creating and organizing the student organization involves several key steps. These steps may include

1. **Identifying the need:** Recognizing the need for a student organization that specifically caters to the experiences and culture of Black students. This could be based on existing gaps or feedback from the Black student community.
2. **Building a foundation:** Establishing a vision, mission, and goals for the student organization. These should align with the purpose of celebrating Black students and fostering a sense of belonging.
3. **Recruitment and membership:** Actively recruiting interested students and promoting the organization to the broader campus community. Encouraging students to join and actively participate in the organization's activities and events.
4. **Programming and events:** Organizing a range of events and programs that celebrate Black culture, history, and achievements. These may include cultural showcases, workshops, guest speakers, and community service initiatives.
5. **Collaboration and partnerships:** Seeking collaborations and partnerships with

other student organizations, academic departments, and community organizations that share similar goals and can enhance the impact and reach of the student organization.

6. Recognition and support: Working with campus administration and student affairs departments to gain official recognition for the student organization. This recognition can provide access to resources, funding, and support from the institution.

Throughout the process, it is important to maintain a focus on inclusivity, respect, and open communication within the organization. Creating an environment where all Black students feel valued, heard, and supported is crucial for the organization's success in positively impacting student satisfaction and fostering a strong sense of belonging.

By following the principles of the student involvement theory and understanding the significance of campus involvement and a sense of belonging, this consultancy project aimed to contribute to the overall well-being and success of Black students within the college community.

Here are my recommendations for beginning to use Kotter's (1995) 8-Step Change Process. Here is an action plan for promoting inclusivity and creating an inclusive environment for students of color in predominantly White religious schools:

1. Create a Sense of Urgency: A third-party diversity, equity, and inclusion certified consultant will be contracted to create and conduct a comprehensive assessment to grasp the current state of diversity and inclusivity in the campus community. Have a third-party entity collect and analyze data through focus groups, student, faculty, and staff experiences. The survey tool should gauge

campus climate, awareness of the need for change, and insight into what changes the stakeholders believe the college would benefit from with a more inclusive environment.

2. **Form a Coalition:** Stakeholders in student affairs create a task force with representation from the student body, faculty, staff, and alums who are diverse and are allies for diverse communities. This task force will be members committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within the school. The task force should plan on a 1-year commitment term.
3. **Create a Vision for Change:** This task force will develop a clear vision statement articulating SCC's commitment to inclusivity and its desired outcomes. Furthermore, demonstrate their commitment by engaging the students, staff, and faculty of color to seek input and ensure an inclusive vision. The marketing team will communicate the vision via a campus-wide campaign using various means to communicate the vision over an academic year.
4. **Communicate the Vision:** During the rollout year of change, the task force will facilitate monthly town hall meetings in various locations on campus to provide the vision, document feedback, and answer questions. This will provide a safe space for all students at SCC to be present when the task force fosters open and honest dialogue, actively listening to concerns and addressing questions from all community members.
5. **Remove Obstacles:** Changing the "this is how we have always done things here" type of culture will need change agents from the task force to support

this new initiative. Kotter (1995) suggested intentional conversations during this step to meet people in opposition where they are—addressing the barriers to inclusivity to create an inclusive environment. The third-party consultant group will provide resources, training, and professional development opportunities for faculty and staff on cultural competence, bias awareness, and inclusive teaching practices.

6. **Generate Short-Term Wins:** Kotter (1995) affirmed that creating short-term wins differs from hoping for them. Gain wins by implementing visible and tangible changes such as celebrating the academic achievements of students of color, recognizing their student organization and its programming, and reinforcing the importance of diversity and inclusivity efforts. Be intentional to highlight success stories and share testimonials from students, faculty, and staff who have experienced the positive impact of the changes outside of just Black History Month. There should be weekly spotlights on social media platforms.
7. **Build on the Change:** The task force will continue to lead in the momentum by implementing inclusivity initiatives by assessing progress, collecting feedback, and making necessary adjustments to keep the change process on track. The third-party consultant will work with the administration to evaluate and revise policies, procedures, and structures to create systemic change where needed.
8. **Anchor the Changes in the Culture:** In this step, Kotter (1995) focused on the results of this step, taking sufficient time to ensure that it continues to change

the culture. It is up to the college to continue to embed inclusivity in the school's culture, values, and practices. Policies and guidelines should be developed and added to the faculty and student handbooks that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion at all institutional levels. The task force will ensure that new practices and initiatives are sustained and integrated into regular operations beyond the initial change process.

Final Conclusion

Faith-based White liberal arts colleges must consider fair and equitable experiences for Black students enrolled in their institution compared to what White students in the same environment experience. The research presents Black student experiences at SCC as negative encounters with the campus climate, which interferes with Black individuals' desires to belong and their achieving persistence to completion. Not only does this negatively impact outcomes for Black students, but this also negatively impacts the outcome for the college.

The findings suggest that faith-based institutions, primarily attended by White students, should make a concerted effort to understand and acknowledge the experiences of Black students, recognizing the genuine need for it. Additionally, this consultancy project emphasized the importance of providing diversity and inclusion training to campus stakeholders. These educational programs aim to enhance understanding of the experiences of underrepresented students and offer intentional and relevant support to address their needs. While it is true that Black students in higher education may have distinct experiences compared to their White peers, it is crucial to recognize that racism, racial microaggressions, and lack of support should not be the prevailing factors

contributing to these differences.

The conclusions demonstrate the relationships between the findings and Strayhorn's (2018) sense of belonging. The strength of community brings people together. Community can also have a negative effect when polarized into groups that separate into cliques of discrimination (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). It is imperative that colleges be transparent with the students and families they serve. First-generation students lack the same level of knowledge and understanding as their peers regarding a college's mission and the nature of education it provides. The Black, first-generation student receiving an offer letter has a sense of achievement that they can achieve a goal no one in their immediate family has done. This achievement, weighted by the hopes and dreams of parents, grandparents, and siblings, often overshadows the type of college community in which they are about to embark. Once the student commits to the college, moves onto campus, and realizes that they do not feel like they belong, as though they are strangers in a foreign land, the weight becomes so heavy that they voluntarily leave or academically are dismissed. Black and minority students are being disserved when they are welcomed to a college under the guise that all are welcomed, only to enroll and pay tuition fees, room, and board, yet not find their niche in the campus community that does not value diversity and inclusion.

After the focus group interviews, I spent 7 months interacting with the majority of the students who shared their experiences with me for this research to continue helping them establish a student organization. From concept until official recognition, we met weekly to develop the mission and vision of the student organization BSA. Nine students of color formed BSA and five served on an executive board. The students and I held

workshops on stereotypes, biases, and diversity training. In May 2022, eight members graduated and were presented with kente cloth stoles representing the student organization.

My experiences at the college were similar to those of the Black and minority students. Being the only person of color in my division, I often felt left out and awkward at events to the point where I felt a sense of dread having to attend. I was not included in the conversations on faith and tenants, as it was assumed that I had no input to add. It became my norm to avoid attending staff or campus-wide events, because it was a constant, uncomfortable reminder that I was one of the handful of diverse employees in attendance. It was difficult being reminded of this at every large faculty and staff gathering.

If it were not for the students who sought me out and became frequent visitors in my office at SCC, I would not have lasted as an employee much longer. My impact of encouragement and tough love is for all students who receive it. At SCC, so many students had an impact on me. In their presence, I felt what belonging and inclusivity are. The familiarity of our culture initially introduced new and returning students to our student organization each week, seeking to make friends, to join a teammate or classmate who heard about BSA. However, it was acceptance, respect, and the feeling of being valued that kept them coming back.

In the safe space of inclusion, the students of the organization felt heard, welcomed, and at home. The 90 minutes the students spent in the space gave awareness to issues that they faced in class and at home, and the advice and encouragement they shared with each other gave them hope to work hard to finish to graduation. The

comraderies of friendship that flourished within that first year of the student organization dwindled after I left the college. No one picked up the advisor role, and just like the past organizations, it was sadly discontinued due to a lack of student involvement. Although the student organization is not active, I hope that SCC will have more town hall dialogs with students to discuss what they need and how they feel and work to make their experiences at the college worthwhile.

When student affairs administrators become aware of students who are seeking to feel a part of any institution, it is my recommendation to refer them to a student organization that will aid in connecting them to the campus community. If there is not a student organization, provide a guide on how students can join forces with other peers to create a student organization and make the process equitable for all. Providing support for student organization staff in terms of processes and procedures to streamline the club and organization process, providing training for students who hold executive positions, and making the process equitable for each type of diverse student organization will give holistic value to students as well as the organization.

I chose this consultancy project because student persistence is dear to my heart. The difficulty in navigating the disparities of minority student support as a staff person was quite difficult. SCC is an amazing liberal arts college. Students receive a quality education and are set up to successfully achieve greatness. Belonging to a community and feeling valued would have made a vast difference in my experience and those of the students in my research. My final recommendation is to demonstrate the love of Christ. Jesus's life demonstrated how He was accepting and loving to everyone he met from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and religions. Be the supporting body for students to

learn about themselves so they can be open to knowing about others. Celebrate each other's differences through educating and connecting through the love of Christ.

References

- 2022-23 Wheaton college student handbook. (2022).
<https://www.wheaton.edu/media/student-development-related/wheaton-college-student-handbook.pdf>
- Altbach, P. G., Berdahl, R. O., & Gumport, P. J. (2016). *American higher education in the twenty-first century: Social, political, and economic challenges*. JHU Press.
- Astin, A. W. (1975). *Preventing students from dropping out*. Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A development theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 518-529.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2066334>
- Astin, A. W. (1985). Involvement the cornerstone of excellence. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 17(4), 35-39.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.1985.9940532>
- Astin, A. W. (1997). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. Jossey-Bass.
- Banks-Santilli, L. (2014). First-generation college students and their pursuit of the American dream. *Journal of Case Studies*, 5.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1060615.pdf>
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
- Benedict, S. (1998). *The rule of Saint Benedict*. Vintage.

- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1992). Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership. *Public Productivity & Management Review*, 15(3), 389.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3380621>
- Brennen, K. (2022, June 17). *Lawsuit challenges religious colleges' exemption from gender equity laws*. Syracuse.com. <https://www.syracuse.com/syracuse-university/2022/06/lawsuit-challenges-religious-colleges-exemption-from-gender-equity-laws.html>
- Brunsmas, D. L., Brown, E. S., & Placier, P. (2012). Teaching race at historically White colleges and universities: Identifying and dismantling the walls of whiteness. *Critical Sociology*, 39(5), 717-738. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920512446759>
- Camputaro, J. (2017, March 7). *Distancing universities from student organizations: A look at public institutions in Virginia*. Acui.org.
<https://www.acui.org/resources/bulletin/bulletin-detail/2017/03/07/distancing-universities-from-student-organizations-a-look-at-public-institutions-in-virginia>
- Chickering, A. W. (1969). *Education and identity*. Jossey-Bass.
- The College of St. Scholastica. (2018). *Student handbook*.
<https://resources.css.edu/academics/edu/grad/graduateprogramsstudenthandbook.pdf>
- Conley, P. A., & Hamlin, M. L. (2009). Justice-Learning: Exploring the efficacy with low-income, first-generation college students. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 16(1), 47-58. <https://doi.org/10.37333/001c.29628>

- Cooper, D. L., Healy, A. M., & Simpson, J. (1994). Student development through involvement: Specific changes over time. *Journal of College Student Development, 32*(2), 98-102.
- Creswell, J. W. (1999). Mixed-method research. *Handbook of Educational Policy*, 455-472. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-012174698-8/50045-x>
- Creswell, J. W. (2015). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. SAGE Publications.
- Denison, D., Hooijberg, R., Lief, C., & Lane, N. (2012). *Leading culture change in global organizations: Aligning culture and strategy*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Dewitt, M. (2021, September 23). *The psychological toll of George Floyd's murder*. Stanford News. <https://news.stanford.edu/2021/09/20/psychological-toll-george-floyds-murder/>
- Frankland, L., & Harrison, J. (2016). Quantitative methods intervention: What do the students want? *Psychology Teaching Review, 22*(1), 69-71. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsptr.2016.22.1.69>
- Gellin, A. (2003). The effect of undergraduate student involvement on critical thinking: A meta-analysis of the literature 1991-2000. *Journal of College Student Development, 44*(6), 746-762. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2003.0066>
- Hagerty, B. M., Williams, R. A., & Oe, H. (2002). Childhood antecedents of adult sense of belonging. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 58*(7), 793-801. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.2007>

- Harper, S. R., & Quaye, S. J. (2007). Student organizations as venues for Black identity expression and development among African American male student leaders. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(2), 127-144.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2007.0012>
- Hausmann, L. R., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among African American and White first-year college students. *Research in Higher Education, 48*(7), 803-839.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-007-9052-9>
- Heifetz, R., & Linsky, M. (2010). The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world by Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky. *Personnel Psychology, 63*(1), 255-258. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2009.01168_4.x
- Hendershott, A. (2022a, September 2). *Can the state force a religious university to violate its religious beliefs?* Catholic World Report – Global Church news and views. <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2022/09/02/can-the-state-force-a-religious-university-to-violate-its-religious-beliefs/>
- Hendershott, A. (2022b, March 17). *Catholic universities and colleges continue to ignore ex Corde Ecclesiae.* Catholic World Report – Global Church news and views. <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2022/03/17/catholic-universities-and-colleges-continue-to-ignore-ex-corde-ecclesiae/>
- Hendershott, A. (2023, March 23). *Taking the Catholic out of Catholic universities.* City Journal. <https://www.city-journal.org/article/taking-the-catholic-out-of-catholic-universities>

- Heracleous, L. (1998). Strategic thinking or strategic planning? *Long Range Planning*, 31(3), 481-487. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0024-6301\(98\)80015-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0024-6301(98)80015-0)
- Hughes, R. L., Beatty, K. M., & Dinwoodie, D. (2014). *Becoming a strategic leader: Your role in your organization's enduring success*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, 70(4), 324. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2673270>
- Hurtado, S., Clayton-Pedersen, A. R., Allen, W. R., & Milem, J. F. (1998). Enhancing campus climates for racial/Ethnic diversity: Educational policy and practice. *The Review of Higher Education*, 21(3), 279-302. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.1998.0003>
- Hussain, M., & Jones, J. M. (2021). Discrimination, diversity, and sense of belonging: Experiences of students of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 14(1), 63-71. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000117>
- Johnson, D. R., Wasserman, T. H., Yildirim, N., & Yonai, B. A. (2013). Examining the effects of stress and campus climate on the persistence of students of color and White students: An application of bean and Eaton's psychological model of retention. *Research in Higher Education*, 55(1), 75-100. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-013-9304-9>
- Kaplin, W. A., & Lee, B. A. (2014). *The law of higher education* (5th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

- Kimbrough, R. M., Molock, S. D., & Walton, K. (1996). Perception of social support, acculturation, depression, and suicidal ideation among African American College students at predominantly Black and predominantly White universities. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 65(3), 295. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2967346>
- Korn, M. (2022, September 22). *Yeshiva University LGBT group says school can hold off granting club status*. WSJ. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/yeshiva-university-lgbt-group-says-school-can-hold-off-granting-club-status-11663859959>
- Kotter, J. (1995). *Leading the way: Why transformation efforts fail*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/1995/05/leading-change-why-transformation-efforts-fail-2>
- Kuh, G. D. (2009). What student affairs professionals need to know about student engagement. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(6), 683-706. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0099>
- Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., & Whitt, E. J. (2011). Fostering student success in hard times. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 43(4), 13-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2011.585311>
- Kuh, G. D., Schuh, J. H., & Whitt, E. J. (1991). Some good news about campus life. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 23(5), 48-55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.1991.9939880>
- Kuk, L., & Banning, J. H. (2010). Student organizations and institutional diversity efforts: A typology. *College Student Journal*, 44(2), 354-361.
- MacKechnie, C. (2018). *How to develop questions for a focus group*. Chron.com. <https://smallbusiness.chron.com/develop-questiions-focus-group-1248.html>

- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>
- McHugh, M. L. (2013). The chi-square test of independence. *Biochemia Medica*, 23(2), 143-149. <https://doi.org/10.11613/bm.2013.018>
- McLeod, S. (2020, December 29). *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*. SimplyPsychology.org. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>
- McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14(1), 6-23. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(198601\)14:13.0.co;2-i](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:13.0.co;2-i)
- Memrick, M. (2014, May 3). *45 years ago, Abbey students issued a call for change*. The Gaston Gazette. <https://www.gastongazette.com/story/news/2014/05/03/45-years-ago-abbey-students/34345567007/>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Minter, S. P. (2022, June 5). *LGBTQ students at religious educational institutions*. American Bar Association. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/intersection-of-lgbtq-rights-and-religious-freedom/lgbtq-students-at-religious-educational-institutions/
- Modern Campus. (2022). *A modern student affairs guide to Maslow's hierarchy of needs*. <https://moderncampus.com/education-center/student-affairs-guide-maslow-needs.html>

- National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). *COE - Undergraduate enrollment*.
<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cha/undergrad-enrollment>
- Paredes-Collins, K. (2013). Cultivating diversity and spirituality: A compelling interest for institutional priority. *Christian Higher Education*, 12(1-2), 122-137.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2013.739436>
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Pathak, R. (2020). *What is PESTLE analysis? Factors, advantages and disadvantages of PESTLE analysis*. Analytics Steps. <https://www.analyticssteps.com/blogs/what-pestle-analysis>
- Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity. One's own. *Educational Researcher*, 17(7), 17. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1174381>
- Reason, R. D., & Evans, N. J. (2007). The complicated realities of whiteness: From color blind to racially cognizant. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2007(120), 67-75. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.258>
- Royse, D., Thyer, B. A., & Padgett, D. K. (2015). *Program evaluation: An introduction to an evidence-based approach*. Cengage Learning.
- SAGE Research Methods. (2019, December 20). *Convergent parallel mixed method design*. <https://methods.sagepub.com/book/an-applied-guide-to-research-designs-2e/i1174.xml>

- Seltzer, R. (2022, September 19). *Yeshiva University shelves undergraduate clubs instead of recognizing LGBTQ group during legal battle*. Higher Ed Dive.
<https://www.highereddive.com/news/yeshiva-university-shelves-undergraduate-clubs-instead-of-recognizing-lgbtq/632171/>
- Smithson, J. (2000). Using and analyzing focus groups: Limitations and possibilities. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 3(2), 103-119.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/136455700405172>
- Sorin-George, T., Paul, R., & Caftaflin, D. (2016, February 2). *Strategic planning and strategic thinking*. Economics and Finance Research | IDEAS/RePEc.
<https://ideas.repec.org/a/blg/reveco/v68y2016i5p168-175.html>
- Stack, L. (2022, September 26). *Amid court fight, L.G.B.T.Q. Club proposes a compromise to yeshiva*. The New York Times.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/21/nyregion/yeshiva-university-lgbtq-club.html>
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2008). How college students' engagement affects personal and social learning outcomes. *Journal of College and Character*, 10(2).
<https://doi.org/10.2202/1940-1639.1071>
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). College students' sense of belonging.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203118924>
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2013). *Theoretical frameworks in college student research*. University Press of America.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2018). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. Routledge.

Tillman, M. K. (2021). A Benedictine education, John Henry Newman: The mission of St. Benedict & the Benedictine schools ed. by Christopher Fisher. *Newman*

Studies Journal, 18(1), 157-167. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nsj.2021.0004>

Title IX Education Amendment of 1972, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681-1688.

Vere, P. J. (2000, November 2). *Ex Corde Ecclesiae: A brief look at its canonical implications*. Catholic Culture.

<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=3342>

Wells, K. N., & Kloppenborg, T. J. (2018). *Project management essentials* (2nd ed.). Business Expert Press.