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Examining the impact of student involvement and intercultural experiences on perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity

Aaron Klein Haight

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Examining the Impact of Student Involvement and Intercultural Experiences on
Perceptions of Institutional Commitment to Diversity

by

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Dissertation

Submitted to the Department of Leadership and Counseling

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of involvement in student organizations as it relates to perceptions of campus climate. The researcher conducted a cross-sectional, ex-post facto secondary data analysis of a 2005 institutional survey on diversity at Great Falls State University. The researcher utilized a Chi Square Test for Independence, as well as a Forward Thinking Logistic Regression Model to analyze the data. Although the main emphasis of the research was student involvement in student organizations, the researcher also analyzed data pertaining to background demographics and campus climate. The data results demonstrated differences in perception in demographics such as race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religious beliefs, and political views. The researcher also found a relationship between campus climate and perception.

The findings of this study enhance the body of knowledge in the areas of student involvement, student development, and campus climate. Although limited to one campus, this study gives institutions a better understanding of involvement, student backgrounds, and campus climate as they relate to student perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The population of racial/ethnic minorities in the United States is growing. According to the United States Census Bureau, 34% of the American population are persons of color (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). As the majority, the White, non-Hispanic population is shrinking from 75.1% of the overall population in 2000 to 66% in 2007 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Continued growth among Hispanic/Latino populations has contributed significantly to the overall percentage of people of color (Grieco & Cassidy, 2000). In fact, Hispanics (of any race) are 15.1% of the population while African American/Blacks account for 12.8%, American Indian/Alaska Natives 1%, Asian/Pacific Islanders 4.6%, and bi-racial/multiracial persons 1.6% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). It is clear that the growth of racial/ethnic minorities in the U.S. is changing the demographics of this country. As higher education is a microcosm of the larger society, institutions of higher education have also witnessed increasingly diverse student populations (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007).

Increased Diversity on Campus

In 2004, 32% of students enrolled in institutions of higher education were minority students (NCES, 2007). The increased presence of minority students is changing the culture of a majority of campuses. Traditionally, institutions of higher education enrolled a majority of White, male students, but the increase of minority students as well as female students has resulted in institutions changing curriculum, services, and financial resources to meet the needs of the changing environment. While many studies have identified the benefits of a diverse environment, including cognitive development (Astin, 1999), there are also recent

studies that suggest a diverse environment decreases levels of trust and retention of minority students (Putnam, 2007). Institutions must balance the benefits of diversity but also identify ways to decrease some of the issues (i.e. bias, negative climate, etc.) that arise with increased diversity.

Educational Attainment across Race

The majority of students enrolled in higher education have traditionally been White students. Concurrent with the population shifts in society at large, an increasing number of students of color are now attending college (Broido, 2004). Case in point: the percentage of racial/ethnic minorities on campus was 15% in 1976; by 2004, the number of students of color grew to 32% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). The U.S. Census Bureau (2009) reports that 33% of White adults have a bachelor's degree while 20% of Black adults and 13% of Hispanic adults have completed a four-year bachelor's degree. Less than 1% of American Indians have achieved a bachelor's degree. Asian Americans are the outlier with 53% having completed a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Despite rising attendance rates and greater representation of students of color over the last three decades, there is an educational attainment gap between racial/ethnic groups. Institutions of higher education are seeing a higher number of minority students come to campus, but they are not persisting to graduation at the same rate as White and Asian students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). This gap is of concern for institutions as they identify issues facing minority students on campus, but also as they recognize the importance of a diverse student population to all students. Institutions as well as researchers (Antonio, 2001; Chang, 1996) have recognized the positive effects diversity can have on all students, including personal development and academic attainment.

Statement of the Problem

As the racial diversity on college campuses grows, a sense of belonging and institutional commitment to diversity is essential to the retention and success of students, particularly students of color attending predominantly-White institutions (PWIs). The vast majority of students of color are not attending special population institutions (e.g., Historically Black Colleges and Universities [HBCUs], Hispanic Serving Institutions [HSIs], or Tribal Colleges) but attend PWIs (Aragon & Zamani, 2002). Hence, it is critical that a PWI is committed to diversity, as it bears some influence on students' perceptions of the college, their satisfaction with the institution, their retention, and ultimately their degree completion. As institutions of higher education are recognizing the importance of diversity, societal influences and environments are contradicting the institutional beliefs and efforts.

Many communities are seeing a shift in support for many of the vehicles that promoted access to higher education for students of color. Efforts in California (Proposition 209) and Michigan (Proposal 2) to end affirmative action in college admissions have been successful, leaving institutions struggling to maintain and/or increase diversity on campus (Hu-DeHart, 2009). Roger Clegg, President and Legal Counsel for the Center for Equal Opportunity, claims affirmative action encourages bigotry and socioeconomic problems. Clegg further argues that disproportionate numbers of African Americans in prison and the high percentage of African Americans "born out of wedlock" are the reason behind racism in our country (Clegg, 2008, p. 1). To this end, he ignores the history of discrimination and oppression and does not believe that African Americans or any other racial/ ethnic minority should benefit from affirmative action (Clegg, 2008). Interestingly, Clegg does not question other forms of nepotism that do not readily accrue to students of color such as legacy admits,

geographic/regional preferences in admissions, or alternative admissions for collegiate athletics (Zamani-Gallaher, Green, Brown, & Stovall, 2009). Arguably, if diversity were a compelling state interest as argued in the landmark *Grutter v. University of Michigan* (2001), without federal mandates for diversity, academia would harbor more hallways that are hostile and remain ivory towers (Hu-DeHart, 2009; Zamani-Gallaher, Green, Brown, & Stovall, 2009). In effect, the polarization of this line of thought bears considerable influence on campus climate as retrenchment of access policies create an impasse relative to postsecondary opportunities for many students (Hu-DeHart, 2009; Zamani-Gallaher, Green, Brown, & Stovall, 2009).

Historically, college campuses have been a place for change, struggle, and social justice in terms of affirming access, securing civil rights, and prospects for greater social mobility. Cohen and Neufeld (1981) describe schools as the “Great Theater in which we play out these conflicts in culture” (p. 86). Yamane (2001) identifies college campuses as a vehicle for multicultural understanding. As legislative changes occur, such as Proposal 2, the impact is felt directly on college campuses, and college administrators are scrambling to maintain diversity as well as inclusion efforts.

Institutions of higher education have realized the importance of diversity on their respective campuses. Many institutions are hiring a chief diversity officer to address diversity issues in enrollment, staffing, support services, and programs. Williams and Wade-Golden (2008) found that chief diversity officers are conducting climate studies, identifying goals and assessing their progress, looking at equity and inclusion issues, and creating diversity development programs. Administrators are finding diversity to be important not only to the

success of the internal campus community, but also to future employers seeking graduates exposed to diverse people and situations (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008).

Campus-diversity efforts are no longer important simply because they are morally right, a continuation of the civil-rights movement. Diversity efforts are important because they are fundamental to the quality and excellence in the world in which we live today. Moreover, diversity is more than a black and white binary; it now includes race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, nationality, religion, and a host of other dimensions (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008, p. B44).

Diversity permeates all aspects of the campus, from recruitment of students, retention of staff, support services, training, community connections, and development.

Purpose of the Study

Institutions of higher education are attempting to meet the needs of a diverse student population with a variety of services, support groups, educational programs, and co-curricular experiences. One way institutions have promoted co-curricular involvement is through the promotion of registered student organizations and clubs. Campuses sponsor a variety of student organizations including academic and professional, fraternities and sororities, sport clubs, student government, and special interest groups. Minority students, specifically racial minority students, often use these formal groups to support their personal and social needs (Yamane, 2001). Organizations such as the Black Student Union/Association or the implementation of campus departments (e.g., Black Studies Department) have been instrumental in many racial movements (Yamane, 2001) but have

also been important to the perception of campus climate and whether or not the institution is perceived as supportive of racial/ethnic minority students (Yamane, 2001).

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of student involvement in registered campus organizations on student perceptions of the campus climate for diversity, specifically regarding racial matters. Perceptions and thoughts of students allow researchers to understand their perspectives about diversity. There are three reasons this study is important. First, in this era of performance-based funding, accountability, and outcome-based assessment, demonstrating the positive impact of diversity because of student involvement in student organizations helps to promote and expand these experiences. Second, part of the educational experience includes the sharing of ideas. Meaningful experiences in higher education incorporate diversity. Determining the impact of student organizations on student experiences may assist administrators in fostering diversity efforts on their respective campuses; finally, institutions need to identify alternatives to Affirmative Action programs that in the past assisted in the recruitment and retention of minority students.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of student involvement in student organizations on student perceptions of the universities commitment to diversity. To gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, the researcher asks the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between student perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity based on involvement in student organizations?
2. To what degree do student background characteristics (i.e., residential status, gender, race/ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, religious

affiliation, and political ideologies) alone predict the odds of favorable student perceptions of an institutional commitment to diversity?

3. To what extent do student background characteristics, intercultural experiences, and student involvement; contribute to the prediction of student perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity?

Significance of the Study

As stated previously by Williams and Wade-Golden (2008), diversity is important on many levels to institutions of higher education. The majority of minority students attend PWIs (Aragon & Zamani, 2002). There is limited research in regard to perceived institutional commitment to diversity, specifically focused on student involvement in registered student organizations, from a student's perspective. Astin (1999; 2004) identifies student involvement as a key component to retention and persistence. Further, Hurtado (2001) identifies campus climate as a key component of minority students' academic success and personal development as well as the ability to persist to graduation.

As institutions of higher education are trying to increase retention and persistence rates, specifically those of minority students, student involvement and the impact it has on climate could be a vital link to achieving success. Campus climate is shaped by a myriad of factors including institutional response to diversity (e.g., Do colleges/universities care about racial/ethnic minority students and their success? Does the university support programs and services that foster cross cultural understanding and cross-racial socialization and yield acceptance and belonging across divergent learners?). This study explores student perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity at Great Falls State University. More specifically, the study examines the extent to which involvement in registered student

organizations affects perceived institutional commitment to campus diversity. Utilizing the work of scholars such as Astin, Hurtado, and select others, the theoretical foundation for this study is anchored in student involvement theory and the conceptual underpinnings of the literature on campus climate. In sum, the researcher endeavors to add to the existing literature by identifying whether demographic variables including race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, in addition to student involvement, influence perceptions of campus climate and subsequently shape student opinion regarding commitment to diversity on campus.

In this era of assessment, knowing factors that increase the retention of students of color can assist administrators in identifying programs, financial resources, and staffing to better support students of color. The researcher explored the interaction of student organization involvement on the students' perception of commitment to diversity, which in turn supports Antonio's (2001) work on climate and retention. Specifically, do student organizations increase the perception of institutional commitment to diversity?

Finally, as stated, the national movement to restrict methods of recruitment and retention of students of color is having a dramatic impact on enrollment numbers and the diversity of college campuses. Institutions need to identify ways to attract and retain students of color. Identifying whether student organizations are a way to positively impact the campus environment assists institutions in overcoming some of the gaps, which have resulted from legislation such as Proposal 2.

Definition of Terms

The following segment outlines the conceptual definitions of terms central to this study:

Campus Climate

Campus climate is difficult to define and understand (Crossen, 1998). Many institutions have taken the approach that increased numbers of diverse students create a climate fostering diversity; however, research has shown that the number of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds is only part of overall campus climate (Hurtado et al., 1999). Peterson and Spencer (1990) define campus climate as current perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institution and its members.

More encompassing is the definition provided by Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen (1999), where they define intersecting factors influencing campus climate towards diversity including historical perspectives, structural diversity, psychological environment, and behavior (Hurtado et al., 1999). Historical efforts focus on desegregation, inclusion efforts, mission, and current policies. The structural aspect includes enrollment diversity as well as diversity in faculty and staff. Psychologically, climate is influenced by perceptions of tension, discrimination, and attitudes towards prejudice. Finally, the behavioral dimension focuses on interaction between racial or ethnic groups, campus involvement, and diversity in the classroom (Hurtado et al., 1999).

Diversity

Diversity is a construct which encompasses identity and classifications including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and socioeconomic status (Banks & McGee Banks, 2004). For the purpose of this study, the term *diversity* is used as it pertains specifically to

race and ethnicity as well as gender, but acknowledges that it expands beyond race and ethnicity and encompasses gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, and socioeconomic status.

Gender

Banks and McGee Banks (2004) define gender as “a category consisting of behaviors that result from the social, cultural, and psychological factors associated with masculinity and femininity within a society” (p. 450). The tool associated with this study identified male and female as gender identity.

Intercultural Experiences

Chang, Astin, and Kim (2004) identified many experiences that enhance interculturalism. Living and dining accommodations are natural areas where students will informally interact with peers from different backgrounds or demographics. More structured experiences occur in the classroom where diversity is discussed (or ignored), a diverse faculty is present (or absent), and integrated work groups occur (or do not occur). Other areas that expose students to intercultural experiences are campus-sponsored, multicultural programs and out-of-class experiences such as athletics, study groups, and student organizations (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004). While athletics and study groups do not necessarily have a multicultural component, students from different backgrounds may be a part of these informal groups or activities. As applied in this study, intercultural experiences align with the work of Alfred, Byram, and Fleming (2002), who contend, "The extension of the concept of interculturality to the experience of other groups their conventions, their beliefs, values, and behaviors.... it is both the awareness or experiencing of otherness and the

ability to analyze the experience and act upon insights into self and other which the analysis brings" (p. 3-4).

Multiculturalism

Banks and McGee Banks (2004) emphasize the use of "multiculturalism" and define it as a philosophical approach where all aspects of diversity are interwoven into all elements of the institution including the mission, staff, and student population. Appiah (2006) defines multiculturalism as an environment in which cultures are celebrated and not hindered by majority values and beliefs.

Perception

Hurtado and Carter (1997) define perception as "the way one feels or senses the environment around them" (p. 327).

Student Development

Student Development is the process by which a student demonstrates cognitive and moral growth (Astin, 1999).

Student Involvement Theory

Alexander Astin (1984) is the leading expert in student involvement theory in higher education. He defines student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). He defines a highly involved student as one who "devotes considerable energy to studying, spends time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students" (p. 518). He notes that while motivation is important, the behavior of "being involved" is critical.

Astin (1984) identifies five components to student involvement theory: investment, degree of involvement, quantitative and qualitative features, quality of student involvement, and institutional commitment. Involvement, as defined, is the investment of “physical and psychological energy” (p. 518) and can range from planning an event on campus to studying for a midterm exam. He also notes that this involvement will vary with different experiences and at different times. The importance of quantitative and qualitative aspects can be reflected by test scores, hours studying, number of involvement activities versus the concept of understanding, value of friend groups, and relationships with faculty. The final two constructs are very important to the institutional aspects of this theory. First, the quality and quantity of involvement reflects on the student development outcomes. A student’s level of involvement determines the outcome. For example, a student who overextends themselves in involvement activities might have a negative effect. They may ignore academic work or other priorities to focus on that involvement. Finally, the institution’s commitment to increasing student involvement must be evident.

Race/Ethnicity

There is a biological and social meaning of race. Race is socially constructed generally focusing on physical traits (Banks, 2004). In contrast, ethnicity goes beyond race to describe the diversity within diverse groups. Banks (2004) defines ethnicity as “A micro cultural group or collectivity that shares a common history and culture, values and behaviors and other characteristics that cause members of the group to have a shared identity” (p. 449). In sum, the use of the terms *race* and *ethnicity* are commonly used interchangeably. While each can be considered mutually exclusive, there is overlap relative to shared cultural characteristics and biological traits. For the purpose of this study, the author acknowledges

that racial groups are not the same as ethnic groupings. However, race/ethnicity is used to describe racial characteristics taken together as opposed to distinct ethnic cultural characteristics (e.g., Whites and Students of Color).

Religion

Banks and McGee Banks (2004) define religion as “a set of beliefs and values” (p. 451) that specifically shape one’s culture and identity. It is very ritualistic and defines morality.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation refers to heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual, while transgender refers to gender identity (Renn, 2007). A person’s sexual orientation and/or identity are defined by physical, emotional, and spiritual connectedness.

Social Class

Social class refers to the socioeconomic status of an individual or family. It is linked with financial status, education attainment, and occupation (Banks & McGee Banks, 2004).

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

This study involves an ex post facto, secondary data analysis of the 2005 Diversity Study conducted by the Community Research Center at Great Falls State University. The study draws on previously collected data. Hence, this secondary data analysis draws on an original study, which did not focus on student involvement, but data were collected pertaining to the involvement of students.

One goal of this research is to study underrepresented minorities on college campuses, particularly African Americans/Black and Hispanic/Latino students. African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino students are large minority populations that have small representation, as well as low persistence, in higher education (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). For the purposes of this study, data specific to other ethnicities is coded as “other.”

The responses to survey items reflect self-reported information and are limited to the categories assigned. No definition for the descriptor of race/ethnicity was provided, so the researcher must trust that the students reported demographic background information accurately (e.g., student of mixed racial background may identify with one ethnicity). In addition, the extent to which a student is involved (i.e., the student is involved in at least one organization or whether membership was in a formally registered student organization or an informal student group) could not be determined from this data set.

One limitation of the study is the absence of the degree to which the students are involved. While informative, this variable is limited, as we cannot discern the extent of the involvement (e.g., how many hours per week he/she is active in the organization, if the organization is an officially recognized group or the type of organization). Hence, the aforementioned limitations of the study in concert with the delimitations the researcher imposed on the study must be taken into consideration when analyzing the results.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Impact of Diversity on Campus

Increased racial diversity on college campuses has many benefits including cognitive growth, increased understanding of democracy, and positive social interactions (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). Chang (1996) concluded that racial diversity is a positive contributor to students' academic self-concept, social self-concept, retention, matriculation to graduation, and overall collegiate satisfaction. Chang also found that purposeful exposure to diverse peers fostered future unintentional interactions encouraging cross-racial socialization among collegians. The positive outcomes of a racially diverse campus are numerous, but they do not eliminate negative interactions that also occur. Unfortunately, diversity has also caused conflicts as cited by Yamane (2001).

As in previous decades, racism, sexism, and other biases continue to permeate society albeit they are more covert and private (Broido, 2004). American college campuses are not immune to displays of anti-sentiment and negative racial affect. The Bureau of Justice (as cited in Reaves, 2008) reports 60% of students who have interacted with campus safety offices are reacting to a hate or bias incident, while over 51% of campus safety offices say they address issues of prejudice and hate. The individualized and undisclosed manners in which many hate crimes and prejudicial incidents occur make them appear isolated in nature. However, the harmful impact of racial antipathy as well as other forms of overt discrimination on the campus climate can detract from positive collegiate experiences, adversely affecting the academic and personal lives of students.

As demographics change, illustrating an increasingly diverse populace across postsecondary learning institutions, higher education administrators must find ways to support students via academic and student affairs services. For example, student support services including personal counseling, educational programs, diversity training, development for staff, and financial support for diversity programming support the academic success of racial/ethnic students (Yamane, 2001). Efforts to promote diversity and establish inclusive learning environments continue to be a challenge for institutions of higher education. The absence of support services can adversely affect retention and student success.

Abraham's 1988 study found that issues such as prejudice, financial support for minority programs, cultural programs and events, and support services were an important factor in the retention and satisfaction among 31% of White and Black students. While both White and Black students felt an open-mindedness to relationships between races and ability of different races to perform in the academic setting, differing opinions arose in regards to recruitment, financial support, and special considerations in admissions processes. White students felt that minority students should not receive special treatment in admission to college. Black students felt misled in the overall recruitment process. They felt that the campus life that was described to them was not the reality. Abraham also found that next to race, social status (i.e., involvement and acceptance into a peer group) was also important to collegians. Campus climate, including peer groups, are critical to the success of racial/ethnic minority students.

An increased population of more racially and ethnically diverse students can alter a campus's superficial appearance relative to the numerical representation of diverse groups,

but the number of diverse students does not change the organizational structures or support systems that welcome, educate, or promote diversity. Minority students' perceptions of climate, including organizational support, internal feelings of marginality, and educational environment are essential to retention and persistence (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Institutions that promote and celebrate diversity via academic and co-curricular programs for racially/ethnically diverse students have an increased positive perception of campus climate (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1999).

Hurtado et al. (1999) identified support services such as offices of multicultural affairs, integration of diversity into academic coursework, student social groups, and faculty interaction as ways to promote an inclusive climate. Organizational/structural systems must be in place for racially/ethnically diverse students to be supported, accepted, and involved.

Given that faculty and staff greatly impact the learning environment for diverse students, efforts to hire more diverse faculty and staff is an important factor in the retention and success of racial/ethnic minority students. Other services, including educational programs and offices of support such as multicultural affairs, women's centers, and services for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students (LGBT), are all tools utilized by institutions to support students. However, overall perceptions from students and staff are a more accurate assessment of the campus climate in regard to diversity. Student perceptions of faculty/staff, support services, social networks, and institutional demographics communicate a great deal regarding whether the campus climate is inclusive of diverse learners.

As the racial diversity on college campuses grows, a sense of belonging and institutional commitment to diversity is essential to the retention and success of students,

particularly students of color attending predominantly-White institutions (PWIs). The vast majority of students of color are not enrolled at special population institutions (e.g., Historically Black Colleges and Universities [HBCUs], Hispanic Serving Institutions [HSIs], or Tribal Colleges) but attend PWIs (Aragon & Zamani, 2002). Hence, it is critical that a PWI be committed to diversity, as it bears some influence on students' perceptions of the college, their satisfaction with the institution, their retention, and ultimately their degree completion. As institutions of higher education are recognizing the importance of diversity, societal influences and environments are counteracting the institutional beliefs and efforts.

Banks and McGee Banks (2004), although focusing on K-12 educational institutions, encourage integration of multicultural education into the curriculum. There are four levels of this integration: the contributions approach, the additive approach, the transformation approach, and the social action approach. The approaches range from “discrete” introductions to students acting on important social issues. The contribution approach identifies learning opportunities with regard to holidays, historic people, and small cultural events. The additive approach expands on concepts in the curriculum. The transformation approach asks students to view issues and events from a different perspective. Finally, the social action approach incorporates social decision-making by the students (Banks & McGee Banks, 2004).

Access to Higher Education

The foundation of American higher education is teaching, learning, and character development (Thelin, 2003). Colonists developed colleges based on the “Oxford-Cambridge” model of quaint campuses that offered students a residential learning experience which acted “as a civilizing experience that ensured progression of responsible leaders for both church

and state” (p. 5). Early institutions included Harvard (1636), The College of William and Mary (1693), and Yale in (1701). Historically, participation in colonial institutions of higher education was defined by race, religion, and social class.

A founding principle of early American education was to preserve the Anglo-American culture. Not only was it believed that it must be preserved, but it also must eliminate outside influences, specifically the Native American culture (Spring, 2009). Mirroring the laws of the newly formed colonies, white, Protestant males were the only participants in the earliest institutions of higher education (Spring, 2009).

Religion often defined these early institutions. Many colleges were founded in a specific religious denomination, and many of the faculties were men trained in theology (Thelin, 2003). In fact, in the original four institutions, Harvard, Yale, William and Mary, and Princeton, the primary function was to train clergy. The University of Pennsylvania was the first state school and university in the country. Benjamin Franklin was a key player in its founding and sought a non-sectarian faculty (Friedman, 1996). For most institutions at this time, however, religion was rooted in the institutions foundation, curriculum, and culture (Marsden, 1992). The mission of most colleges was not to complete a degree of specialization, but to train the leaders of the dominant class (Thelin, 2003). Enrollment numbers were small and the primary function was to attend, not necessarily to persist. The curriculum during this time included recitations and religious teachings. There was no expectation of professional studies. Some attempts were made at developing new curricula with marginal success (for example at Brown University). However, students did express interest in learning outside the classroom and began forming literary societies and other clubs (Thelin, 2004). Ultimately, social class determined participation in higher education. Wealthy

colonial families sent their sons to college to “confirm social standing” (p. 7). At its infancy, college was for the elite and ensured the status quo.

Discrimination is an unfortunate foundation of our country. Racist beliefs and discriminatory acts towards Native Americans and Black slaves were evident in the colonial era. (Komives & Woodard, 2003). The passage of The Naturalization Act of 1790 speaks to the racist beliefs of our government. It stated that citizenship was not available to “nonwhites” (Spring, 2009). These attitudes hindered educational opportunities for Native Americans and African Americans.

There are key events throughout the history of higher education that created opportunities for women and minority students. Although founded to enhance the white, Protestant, wealthy men in society, institutions grew and adapted to be more inclusive to underrepresented groups (Thelin, 2003). Many of these opportunities became available through federally funded programs and case law.

Women were the first major group to break down the walls of academe with the creation of “finishing schools” in the early to mid-nineteenth century (Thelin, 2003). Most curricula focused on etiquette and home economics but did include basic courses in math and the sciences. Oberlin College and Cornell were the first to open their doors to a male and female student body. The doors were opening, but persistence to graduation was not encouraged.

In 1848 at the Seneca Falls Convention, a group of women led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott created a list of demands challenging the status quo. The list of demands included the right to own property, gain an education, support for children, and, most notably, to vote (University of Rochester, 2009). Although the right to vote would not

happen until the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920, women became actively engaged in the educational and political process (University of Rochester, 2009).

Opportunities for women, African Americans, and Native Americans increased in the mid-nineteenth century due to the increase in the number of institutions and a decrease in male enrollment due to the Civil War (Banks, 2004). Less than 5% of traditional college-age people were enrolled at this time (Thelin, 2003). Government contributed little funding to institutions of higher education until the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 (Kaplin & Lee, 2006), which also expanded government's role in higher education. While HBCU's date back as early as 1837, the Land Grant Act of 1890 increased the number of HBCU's (United States Department of Interior, 2009). Also known as the "Second Morrill Act," the Land Grant Act of 1890 financially supported over 70 institutions and required states to grant admission to students of color to state schools or to create institutions for students of color (also known as HBCU's; Kaplin & Lee, 1995). Native Americans also benefitted from federal programs during this time through the creation of special programs at existing institutions. Doors also opened for students who, in the past, could not have afforded or had access to higher education because of federal funding (Thelin, 2003).

While doors were opening, they were not always welcoming. The 1866 Civil Rights Act, 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments did provide equality and protection language for women and African Americans, but there was little enforcement. Ultimately, *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896) legally justified segregation and again limited broad access to African Americans (Sykes, 1995).

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century brought growth in higher education. Johns Hopkins University opened its doors as the first "German Model" institution. The

German model encouraged freethinking, seminars, and research. This was a significant difference from the English model and one that many institutions began adopting (Thelin, 2003). Government realized the importance of higher education and continued to increase funding to state schools. The number of private schools increased as well. The number of institutions of higher education drastically increased between 1800 and 1860, from approximately 25 to over 240. While the majority of students enrolled were males from upper class families, members of other socioeconomic classes gained access to college life during this time (Thelin, 2003).

Flagship state institutions began to define themselves as research institutions, using undergraduate programs to fund doctoral studies and research. The development of the junior colleges, normal schools, and technological institutions also created access to students who could not afford to attend a four-year institution. Enrollment grew during the Great Depression due to the increased efforts to train professionals in the areas of science and engineering. World War I and II increased access to higher education for women and minorities. Women were encouraged to enter the workforce and participate in educational opportunities while men were serving in the Armed Forces (Thelin, 2003). Although access to women and minorities was at an all-time high, equality in access, treatment, and quality of education left something to be desired (Thelin, 2003).

Thelin (2003) defines the years 1945 to 1970 as the “Golden Age” of higher education. The creation of the G.I. Bill (The Serviceman’s Readjustment Act) offered financial assistance to returning war veterans to pursue a post-secondary degree. This included African Americans, but few took advantage of the opportunity due to financial

resources as well as the discriminatory practices supported by *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896; Thelin, 2003).

“Separate but equal” as defined by *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896) did not provide equal education. In 1951, Oliver Brown fought for the right for his daughter to attend a white neighborhood school as opposed to a school 21 blocks away from her house (Spring, 2009). *Brown v. Board* (1954) overturned *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896) and supported the language of the 14th Amendment (Supreme Court of the United States, 1954). It called for integration of public schools. Reaction to this ruling was slow and sparked *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) to increase the timeline for integration and ultimately, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Spring, 2009).

By 1960, fifty percent of people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two were enrolled in some form of higher education (Thelin, 2003). The increase in students forced state governments to expand existing institutions with the addition of graduate degrees, but also to create regional schools, including many community colleges. Native Americans and their struggles were still present, but movements for rights of women and African Americans dominated policies. In addition, the immigration of Mexicans, Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese infused the culture and confused Black and White America by adding other ethnicities and a pyramid of levels of acceptance (Spring, 2009).

The Civil Rights Movement affected higher education socially and organizationally. Following *Brown v. Board* (1954), students of color wanted more access to higher education. The federal government expanded its involvement and commitment to higher education by the enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and other financial aid programs (Thelin, 2003). College campuses became ground zero for protests and activism for the Civil Rights and Free

Speech Movement and against the Vietnam War. The Black Power Movement helped to integrate institutions by becoming active organizations on campus and demanded equality and services for African American students (Wolf-Wendel et al, 2004). The Civil Rights Act of 1964, specifically Title VI, prohibited federally funded institutions to discriminate based on race, color, or national origin in programs and activities (United States Department of Justice, 1964). The 1965 Voting Rights Act addressed racial discrimination in voting practices (Sykes, 1995).

President John F. Kennedy initially proposed Affirmative Action in his Executive Order 10925 to end the practice of discrimination based on race, creed, color, or national origin in federally funded contracts and employment (Zamani-Gallaher, Green, Brown & Stovall, 2009). President Lyndon Johnson expanded it to include women (Executive Order 11246) in 1967 (Sykes, 1995). In 1972, Title IX emphasized access and opportunity for women. Ultimately, Title IX banned the practice of sex discrimination in academics or athletics (NOW, 2009). Unfortunately, the fight did not end with the passage of laws. Challenges to affirmative action were evident and are notable in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978). This ruling ended in a split decision but ultimately supported Affirmative Action. Justice Harry Blackmun stated, “In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. In order to treat persons equally, we must treat them differently” (United States Supreme Court, 1978, p. 34).

Negative changes in the economy between 1970 and 1990 created problems for institutions that had just expanded facilities, staff, and resources. Institutions were hit financially as inflation rose and enrollment dropped. State revenues were on the decline, and, in turn, financial resources once provided were cut. Institutions were forced to “do more with

less.” The positive aspects of this era were the creation of Educational Opportunity Grants (Pell Grants), Title IX, and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, all of which provided opportunities for underserved populations. Pell Grants offered financial assistance that made it possible for students of all economic statuses to have access to pursuing a postsecondary education. Students with disabilities were first granted access and support via the Vocational Rehabilitation Act. These programs offered support and services to a new and diverse student population (Thelin, 2003).

Student activism played an important role on college campuses and in American history (Franklin, 2003). Thompson (2004) highlights the culture and support networks established during these movements as a way for institutions to “develop meaningful learning experiences” for today’s student (p. 434). While most students are familiar with the activism of the 1960s and early 1970s, students continue to use these practices to encourage change. The 1980s proved an active time for student movements on college campuses. Yamane (2001) highlights the University of California-Berkeley and the University of Wisconsin-Madison as examples of student activism in support of course requirements in diversity. At the University of Wisconsin – Madison, racist incidents that occurred on campus spurred the movement. UW Madison had a small minority population, and many thought the campus was not welcoming to students of color (Yamane, 2001). Students thought that the administration was not taking swift and proper action in dealing with the incidents. The Black Student Union organized and began discussing issues they believed needed to be addressed. They staged a sit-in and made specific demands. The administration appeared to meet student demands. Nonetheless, students were concerned with the direction the administration was taking. The students did not back down and stayed on course with their demands. Ultimately,

the students were able to work with administration (although difficult at times) and were able to implement change within a year (Yamane, 2001).

The student population at the University of California at Berkeley was a very diverse campus in regard to ethnicity, but students believed that learning about different cultures was just as important as having diverse faces on campus (Yamane, 2001). Students also thought that although they had been fortunate enough not to have racist incidents on their campus, they could not ignore what was happening on other campuses including the University of Wisconsin – Madison. As at Madison, students protested and presented a list of demands (Yamane, 2001).

Change at Berkeley was not quick, and faculty seemed resistant to change, voting down the implementation of an ethnic studies department. Finally, the statewide council encouraged its campuses to develop ethnicity education. The development of the curricular aspect took years, but the Academic Senate finally passed the requirement in 1989. The students' continued efforts are responsible for this change (Yamane, 2001). While these are only two institutions, they are examples of events that were occurring on campuses all over the country.

Institutions of higher education are greatly impacted by what occurs outside the walls of academe. Social movements, war, the economy, and legislative acts influence who has access to higher education. Today, there are over 4,200 degree-granting institutions of higher education across the country (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009), and they have changed drastically since their inception in the early 1600s when white males

dominated the campus. Today, over half of all students are female and over 32% are minorities (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007).

Campus Climate

Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Hagedorn (1999) conducted a study investigating college readiness and adjustment with over 1,400 Black and White participants from 18 colleges and universities. They found that the perceived racial bias and negative interactions with majority (White) students and staff negatively influence the commitment of the student to the institution including retention, stress, and behavioral issues (Cabrera et al., 1999). Other research by Reid & Radhakrishnan (2003) confirmed that African-American students specifically linked racial incidences with negative classroom environments and chilly campus climates.

However, in another study conducted at the University of Maryland, College Park, by Sedlacek and associates (1997), student perceptions of diversity were linked with their experiences in the classroom. Students who identified a positive diversity experience such as interaction with faculty and staff, participation in diverse programs, and support services, stated they did not perceive bias in the classroom and had positive interactions with people of different cultures on campus (Sedlacek et al., 1997).

The benefits of exposure to diversity are clear in Hurtado's 2001 study of over 4,000 students at predominantly White institutions that link collegiate involvement to student development and growth because of exposure to diversity, which stated that:

The educational benefits of diversity may accrue as a result of a combination of opportunities to engage in a diverse curriculum introduced by a diverse faculty and to

study and interact with racially/ethnically diverse students inside and outside of the classroom (Hurtado, 2001, p. 14).

Hurtado's focus was primarily on academic activities (e.g., studying with someone of a different race or participating in a diversity course); however, other studies have expanded on this interaction to include other activities and socialization, including co-curricular learning, social groups (formal and informal), and study groups.

Hurtado and Carter's 1997 study on Latino college students suggested that a hostile racial climate directly affects a student's sense of belonging. Deterrents for a negative sense of belonging include interactions outside of the classroom. Hurtado and Carter (1997) specifically identified academic conversations, religious affiliation, or belonging to a social organization as ways to positively integrate Latino students into the campus environment.

With regard to gender specifically, Pascarella (1996) conducted inquiry on the impact of campus climate on cognitive outcomes for women. Negative faculty behavior, lack of participation in class, offensive or degrading behavior by peers outside of the classroom, and male dominant roles and traditions all contribute to a poor campus climate. It was reported that a negative climate adversely affected the cognitive development of women in their first year of college (Pascarella, 1996).

Overall, climate is a key aspect to diversity efforts and, ultimately, student retention and persistence. Schmidt (2010) suggests that admission of minority students is not indicative of the success of a diverse campus. Support programs and formalized interactions need to take place. While most students have some sort of intercultural experience prior to attending college, it may be very limited or segregated. Tatum (1997) discusses the stages

that children go through on their journey of racial identity saying, “We need to understand that in racially mixed settings, racial grouping is a developmental response to an environmental stressor, racism” (p. 3). Further, Tatum added, “Joining with one’s peers for support in the face of stress is a positive coping strategy” (p. 3).

Intercultural Experiences

Similar to student involvement, the range and level of intercultural experiences varies. Intercultural experiences have been linked to positive cognitive development, graduation rates, and cultural understanding (Astin, 1993a, 1993b; Chang, 1999; Hurtado, 2001). Hurtado (2001) specifically notes that just putting diverse students in a classroom is not effective and can be detrimental. “Merely encountering differences can promote feelings of superiority or inferiority among students rather than growth and development” (p. 189). Chang, Astin, and Kim (2004) studied interactions varying from studying, dining, and classroom interactions between racial/ethnic groups and found that these experiences enhanced the climate of campus as well as increased retention rates. Further, Chang (1996) noted that courses in multiculturalism are enhanced by social experiences outside the classroom. Students are more familiar with cultural differences and more comfortable discussing multiculturalism (Chang, 1996).

Cross-racial interactions such as living on campus, dining experiences, and working on campus enhance cognitive, social, and civic development. Work by Gurin and Nagda (2005) aligns with Chang, Astin, and Kim (2004) as intergroup dialogue in and out of the classroom, participation in social activities, and participation in intramural activities was found to foster multicultural learning.

Extra-curricular activities are as old as American higher education. Eating clubs and literary societies were often used as a relief from the core educational curriculum at colonial institutions (Thelin, 2004). Intercultural experiences as defined in this study refer to encounters that occur in and out of the classroom. Intercultural experiences in the classroom can include faculty interaction, study groups, group projects, and course content. Student experiences can include living on campus, eating in on-campus dining facilities, membership in student organizations and athletics, participation in campus programs, and on campus employment influencing their overall cultural experience (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004). Hence, the informal interactions experienced by students shapes their cross-cultural socialization. In addition, intercultural experiences include meeting with faculty members, attending a play or performance, social interactions at the student union, club participation, and recreational activities.

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement

Astin (1999) stated, "It is easier to become involved when one can identify with the college environment" (p. 524). One means by which students feel cultural congruence with their collegiate environment to campus life and involvement in student activities. Astin (1999) defines student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). Astin (1975) discovered the importance of involvement while researching college dropouts. He found that students living on campus, participating in fraternities, sororities, or other organizations, assisting professors in research, holding an on-campus job, and athletic participation all contributed to retention (1975).

Astin (1999) also identifies involvement as participation in student organizations as well as interaction with faculty and staff, which gives students the opportunity to actively engage in campus life and further their personal and cognitive development. Astin's research (1999) also identified campus demographics, accessibility, learning environment, and sense of belonging as key characteristics of institutional culture that engage students as well as curb attrition.

Astin describes today's student as more knowledgeable about diversity and culture (2004). He believes students must invest time, cognitive thought, and personal involvement in order for learning to be meaningful and transformative. Exposing students to a curriculum including the liberal arts does not guarantee understanding and learning. Engagement, such as interactive conversations, exposure to new ideas and thoughts, and meeting people from diverse backgrounds contributes to making these experiences meaningful and personal. Students, by getting involved in and outside of the classroom, create ownership, understanding, and critical thinking (Astin, 1999). Ultimately, students invest in the learning process if exposed to new people, ideas, and experiences.

It is through association with registered student groups that many collegians can connect with others from different backgrounds from themselves and take part in cross-cultural exchanges they may have not otherwise experienced (Antonio, 2001). Antonio (2001) added to Astin's student involvement theory by incorporating the work of Chang (1996) and Hurtado (2001) by examining the impact of student involvement on interpersonal relationships in diverse campus settings. Antonio's research is significant as it adds to our understanding of how student interaction in campus-sponsored activities promotes the development of friendship groups, particularly cross-cultural socializing. Antonio's (2001)

study illustrates how involvement in student organizations offers “amicable and interethnic relationships” (p. 81), particularly when the campus climate promotes students taking part in extracurricular activities.

Other researchers have also identified student involvement as key to collegians being academically and socially successful (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Pascarella (1987) studied critical thinking skills of collegians and found that the levels of student involvement, such as residential living, attending campus events, participation in extra-curricular activities, and interaction with faculty outside the classroom have a positive impact on critical thinking skills. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) have examined many aspects of a college student’s development including cognitive outcomes, identity, and moral decision-making.

Research by Hu and Kuh (2003) explored diversity issues in student involvement. Their study showed positive interactions between White students and students of color in living centers in which social exchanges in student organizations led to increased cross-cultural knowledge and understanding. Student interaction outside of the traditional classroom environment is critical to positive exchanges between White majority students and students of color (Hu & Kuh, 2003).

Flowers (2004) applied Astin’s theory of student involvement in examining longitudinal data from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire. Flowers delimited his analysis to African American students solely in an effort to determine the impact of student involvement on their cognitive, social, and vocational development. He found that connecting with faculty, social interaction with peers, participation in music and art

programs, and membership in registered student organizations positively affected the cognitive and social development of African American collegians (Flowers, 2004).

Finally, Tinto (1993) has identified four components to students' success: high expectations, support (academic, social, and financial), feedback (early and often), and involvement and engagement in and out of the classroom. Tinto cited involvement and engagement as critical factors in producing successful student outcomes. For instance, frequent contact with faculty, staff, and peers in and out of the classroom is essential for student persistence. Tinto asserts that formal and informal features in the academic system as well as those in the social system are key components in successfully integrating students on campus. Extracurricular activities are a value-added formal institutional experience (Tinto, 1993).

In conclusion, minorities and women have struggled to gain and maintain access to higher education. Once access is achieved, more challenges to persist to graduation arise, including overall campus climate. The work of Astin, Chang, and others has identified involvement as a way to create a positive climate as well as increase persistence rates.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The overall aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of students regarding institutional commitment to diversity. This study endeavored to generate information regarding levels of agreement with institutional support for diversity among undergraduate students in correspondence with their background characteristics, intercultural experiences, and student involvement. This chapter is presented in the following sequence: a) conceptual framework, b) research questions, c) research design, d) population and sample, e) instrumentation and data collection, f) variables of interest, g) data management, and h) methods of analysis.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework outlines the path the researcher will take to conduct the study. Perception of institutional commitment to diversity is the area of interest and dependent variable. In order to determine the participant's perception, the researcher will analyze independent variables separately and in relationships to see how they affect perception. The first research question focuses on one independent variable (involvement) and the dependent variable of perception. As we continue to the second research question, additional independent variables are added, specifically the demographic background variable. Research question three then adds the components of climate to the model. Ultimately, all independent variables are analyzed. The following figure demonstrates the conceptual framework for the study (see Figure 1). This framework applies the concepts of student involvement and intercultural experiences in explaining the odds ratio of agreement or disagreement regarding institutional commitment to diversity. Figure 1 contends that the

impact of student background characteristics, along with student involvement and intercultural experiences, may affect perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity.

The researcher's initial interest was on the relationship between student involvement in campus organizations and perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity; however, the researcher would be remiss in ignoring other demographic components. Demographics of the participants were important for perspective. Correlating the student's background including race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation assisted the researcher in understanding any cultural differences in outcomes.

Contextual Factors

While the assessment of student organization participation as it relates to perception of commitment to diversity gives the researcher an overarching perspective, understanding how student demographics influence students' perception is telling of the campus climate. For example, do Black students have the same perception of campus climate as White students? Do female students' perceptions differ from males? Does living on campus make a difference? These and more questions were asked and analyzed to gain a complete understanding of the context of perception.

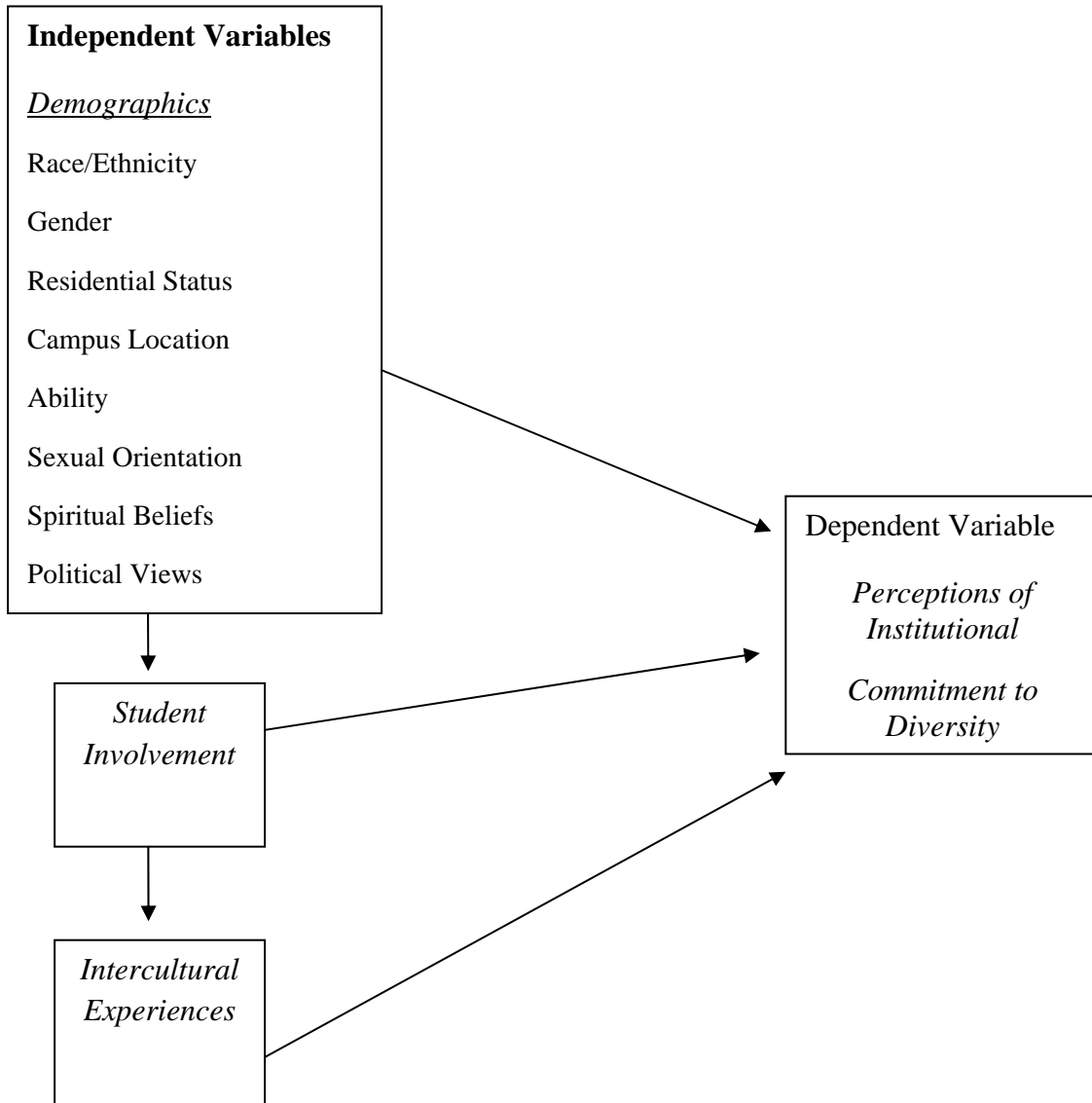


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Questions

As highlighted in Chapter 1, the following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What is the relationship between student perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity based on involvement in student organizations?
2. To what degree do student background characteristics (i.e., enrollment status, residential status, age, gender, race/ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and political ideologies) alone predict the odds of favorable student perceptions of an institutional commitment to diversity?
3. To what extent do student background characteristics, intercultural experiences, and student involvement contribute to the prediction of student perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity?

Research Design

The study is a cross-sectional (i.e., a single moment in time), ex-post facto study utilizing secondary data analysis of a 2005 institutional survey on diversity at Great Falls State University. The researcher analyzed student self-reported information to examine whether there is a significant difference in perceptions of the institutional commitment to diversity between students who are involved in student organizations and those not involved. Additionally, this study seeks to explore the impact of student background characteristics and intercultural experiences on perceptions of the institutional commitment to diversity.

Population and Sample

GFSU is a Midwestern, comprehensive university that focuses on undergraduate teaching. In recent years, an emphasis on liberal education, co-curricular activities, and increased diversity have been on the forefront at GFSU. GFSU is located in a conservative community with a strong religious presence. The community as well as the institution has a small minority population. GFSU has seen tremendous growth over the past decade due to strong leadership as well as ties to influential and wealthy members of the community. While their contributions have greatly benefitted the institution, their political and religious views have also been evident.

Enrollment during the Winter 2005 semester included 21,030 students, including a freshman class of 3,340. Eighteen percent of GFSU students are graduate level students. Seventy-three percent (15,366) are full-time students. Sixty-one percent of Great Falls students are female. Forty-nine percent of GFSU students are from the surrounding counties. Students from outside the immediate area make up 47.4% and 3.6% of the students are out of state residents. Over 80 % of GFSU students are of Caucasian race. Four point five percent are African American, 2.7 Hispanic, 2.3 Asian/Pacific Islander, and .6% Native American. Involvement in student organizations has increased in the last decade. In the fall of 2000, 124 organizations registered on campus. By the middle of the decade and time of this study, the number of organizations increased to 221 with over 11,000 student members. Organizations vary in interest but include academic and professional, cultural, fraternities and sororities, performing arts, faith-based, service, and sport clubs.

The target population for this study was full-time, undergraduate students at GFSU. The original survey targeted faculty, staff, and students during the 2005 winter semester. All

enrolled students (21,030) received an electronic mail with an invitation to complete the survey. Eighteen percent (3,832) of all students, (i.e., part-time, full-time, undergraduate, and graduate students) responded. While the percentage of responses is low, the number of responses gives the researcher a reasonable amount to assume it is representative of the population. For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on only undergraduate students, resulting in a total net sample of $N = 3,064$.

The reason for selecting this particular group is that undergraduate students make up the majority of students on college campuses (Hurtado, 2003); they shape the campus atmosphere by living on campus and participating in the majority of activities.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Surveys are used to gather information from a large group of people (Jaeger, 1997). Researchers who use surveys examine facts about present conditions from a well-defined group. The survey data were requested via electronic mail to gauge student attitudes and perceptions regarding the campus climate and their academic and social experiences. The instrument used for this investigation was distributed via electronic mail.

The survey tool was created by GFSU and was adapted from a climate survey created by the institution for the Women's Commission, a campus group addressing salary inequities and gender issues with faculty and staff (Pace, 2010). The initial survey identified a negative climate towards women and members of the LGBT community as well as pay equity issues. Because of the initial survey, pay equity was addressed and campus-wide conversations regarding domestic partner benefits occurred. The university committed to conducting a climate study every five years (Pace, 2010). Also during this time, the university experienced

an increase in reported bias incidents. These incidents included an anti-affirmative action bake sale and disparaging graffiti on campus (Kowalski-Braun, 2010).

The researcher utilized data collected in 2005 by the Johnson Center for Community Research at Great Falls State University. The tool used to collect the data was an electronic survey sent to all faculty, staff, and students via email. Questions were the same for all subjects, but student surveys had additional questions specifically pertaining to student organization involvement, campus programs, and classroom atmosphere.

Variables of Interest

The researcher identified a dichotomous dependent variable, student perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity, and independent variables consisting of various student background characteristics, intercultural experiences, and involvement in student organizations. The survey item serving as the dependent variable was recoded from a five-point Likert scale indicating strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree to dichotomous variable where 1 = agreement and 0 = disagreement. For the purposes of this study, the dependent variable conforms to the binary values of 0 and 1 to carry out a forward stepwise logistic regression to determine the odds ratio for institutional commitment to diversity.

Twelve predictor/independent variables were selected for this study. These predictor variables represent three constructs: a) student background characteristics, b) student involvement, and c) intercultural experiences. Table 1 illustrates the variables of interest in this study.

Table 1

Research Questions, Variables, and Methods of Analysis

Research Question	Constructs (i.e., IVs: demographic/background characteristics, campus climate, intercultural experiences, student involvement)	Items on Survey	Method of Analysis
1. What is the relationship between student perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity based and involvement in student organizations?	IVs: Background Characteristics, Student Involvement DV: Perception of Institutional Commitment to Diversity	Q. 18 Q. 25	Chi Square Test for Independence
2. To what degree do student background characteristics (i.e., residential status, gender, race/ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and political ideologies) alone predict the odds of favorable student perceptions of an institutional commitment to diversity?	Independent Variable(s) Student – Involved, Not Involved Demographic - Race/Ethnicity, Gender, Educational Aspirations, Residential Status, Branch, Ability, Sexual Orientation, Spiritual Beliefs, Political Views Dependent Variable Perception – Committed, Not Committed	Q. 18 Q. 1, 2b, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 Q. 25	Forward Logistic Regression
3. To what extent do student intercultural experiences influence their perceptions of the institutional commitment to diversity?	Independent Variable(s) Student – Involved, Not Involved Intercultural Experiences Dependent Variable Perception – Committed, Not Committed	Q. 18 Q. 10, 11, and 24 Q. 25	Forward Logistic Regression

Student Background Characteristics

The survey tool used asked respondents for a number of background characteristics. The researcher identified many of them as pertinent to this study to understand the perspective from which they were reporting their perceptions. The student background information included in this study is race/ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation, campus affiliation, residential status, spiritual beliefs, and political views.

Race/ethnicity was defined in the study as African-American, American Indian/Alaskan Native/Aleut, Asian/Pacific Islander, Chicano/Latino/Hispanic, Arab/Arab-American/Middle Eastern, White/Caucasian, and Multi-racial. Since the institution is a PWI, the number of minority respondents was limited. In order to assess the data effectively, the researcher combined race/ethnicity groups. Hence, racial/ethnic groups were coded in the following manner: African-American = 1, Hispanic = 2, Caucasian = 3 and Other = 4.

As defined by the design of the initial survey tool, gender was limited to male or female. It is important to note that there were no options for students to select transgender or other. The coding for this demographic item was Female = 1 and Male = 2.

Item six from the survey instrument asked if the participant had a disability that substantially limits a major life activity (seeing, hearing, learning, walking, etc.). The participant had a choice of Yes or No. For the purpose of this study, Yes will be coded as 1 and No will be coded as 0.

GFSU has a main campus and downtown campus as well as three satellite campus locations. Participants were asked to identify the campus where they spend the most time. After analyzing the frequency distribution for this variable, the researcher recoded the

responses, collapsing the three satellite campuses (i.e., Main Campus = 1 and Satellite Campus = 2).

Participants were asked to identify their residential status. They were given the option of University Housing and Off-campus Housing. On-campus housing was coded as 1 and Off-campus as 2.

The students were also asked to identify their spiritual beliefs. Participants were asked to select one of the following: Christian (Protestant/Catholic), Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Humanist/Atheist/Agnostic, or other. Again, a frequency test was conducted to determine the best model for analysis. Based on the outcome of the frequency test, spiritual beliefs were coded as Atheist/Agnostic = 1, Christian = 2 and Other = 3.

Similar to spiritual beliefs, participants were asked to identify their political views. Participants were asked to select one of the following: conservative, green, liberal, libertarian, moderate, socialist/leftist, or none. Again, based on the frequency test, some of the initial options were coded together for optimal results. For the purpose of this study, political views were coded as Conservative = 1, Liberal = 2, Moderate = 3, and Other = 4.

Demographic information is critical to understanding the overall perceptions relative to paralleling opinions or divergent viewpoints. As identified in the illustration of the conceptual framework, background characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) are important to understand whether students perceive the institution as being committed to a positive climate supportive of students across various demographics.

Student Involvement and Intercultural Experience Measures

Involvement in registered student organizations is captured in the item query, “Are you involved in at least one student organization on campus?” Participants were asked to select Yes or No. Coding for this question was Yes = 1 and No = 2. Intercultural Experiences indicated classroom experiences, sense of belonging, and attendance at multicultural events. Participants were given the statement, “The climate in the classroom is accepting of who you are” with the options of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Coding for this question was put into positive and negative terms, eliminating the neutral as they are not of interest to this study. Strongly Agree and Agree were coded as 2 and Disagree and Strongly Disagree were coded as 1. The second climate question used asked the participants about their sense of belonging or community. Participant options were largely, to some extent, not at all. All of these outcomes had a value and were coded as Great = 1, Some = 2, and None = 3. Finally, the third aspect of climate analyzed was whether the participant had attended multicultural events on campus. Options for the participants were never, 1-2 times, 3-6 times, and 7 or more times. Coding for this variable was Never =1 and 1 or More = 2. These variables will be measured separately as well as in combination with student demographic measures, involvement measures, and with other intercultural experience measures.

Again, all of these existing variables were determined to fit into the model proposed by the researcher. The dependent variable of perception was the last question on the initial survey, “GFSU is committed to diversity.” Participants responded strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Again, the neutral variable was dropped and the

answers were coded as follow: Positive (Strongly Agree and Agree) = 1 and Negative (Strongly Disagree and Disagree = 0)

Data Management

The Human Subjects Review Process is designed to protect the participants in a study. Federal regulations and institutional policies outline ethical use of human participants in research (Eastern Michigan University, 2010). One main component of using human subjects is to ensure that the participants experience no physical or mental harm. Two additional components are that that the participant gives consent to the study as well as that the researcher ensures confidentiality of the participants. The initial study conducted was approved by the Human Subjects Review Board at GFSU in 2005. Since the study was initially approved, the researcher was able to get an exempt approval based on the prior approval. However, the researcher was required to outline the study, its use, and again, ensure confidentiality. The current study was also approved through Eastern Michigan University.

Since the data set used was from another study, the researcher needed to get permission from the owner. Permission was granted and a confidentiality contract was signed. This contract was meant to ensure that the data would be used for the purpose stated as well as to protect the identity of the participants. The researcher used SPSS 16.0 to conduct the analysis. This was a large data set and the researcher identified participants that fit into the model of analysis based on the research questions. The data set was adjusted to exclude missing data from the study.

Method of Analysis

Data analysis for this study involved: descriptive analysis and chi-square tests, as well as logistic regression. The descriptive analyses addressed research question 1 and include percentage distributions. A chi square test is an “inferential test statistic that multivariate statistics can be transformed to in order to derive a probable level” (Grimm & Yarnold, 2001, p. 273). Utilizing a chi square test, the researcher determined the association of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The researcher also conducted a binary logistic regression since the criterion variable has two values (Grimm & Yarnold, 2001). The researcher found this form of data analysis to be useful in predicting the presence or absence of a characteristic or outcome based on the values of a set of independent variables. In short, the researcher sought to estimate the odds ratios for each independent variable in the model.

Prior to conducting the logistic regression, the researcher conducted a factor analysis to reduce the number of variables for intercultural experiences to a smaller number of factors that would be representative of this construct. Logistic regression is used with a predictor variable and a dichotomous criterion variable (Grimm & Yarnold, 2001). The criterion variable (dependent variable) is dependent upon the predictor variable also known as the independent variable(s) (Hair et al., 2006). The researcher conducted this study utilizing logistic regression techniques.

Validity and Reliability

Quantitative research is dependent on validity and reliability (Haller & Kleine, 2001). Validity asks the question, “Does the tool measure what it intended to measure?” Validity is often a judgment call, but the researcher should carefully review instructions, questions, and

concepts and make sure they are clear for the participant. Reliability refers to consistency, such as “Will the questions yield the same results if asked a second time?” (Haller & Kleine, 2001).

The researcher is utilizing a tool developed by the Community Research Institute (CRI) at Great Falls State University. The tool was adapted from a similar study conducted earlier at the university to measure climate for women. The tool was never tested for reliability or validity; however, it was reviewed by CRI as well as the President of the University. The tool was approved by the Human Subjects Review Process in 2005, and the researcher gained approval for the current study.

Strengths and Weaknesses

As previously stated, surveys are a good tool to use when you have a large participant pool. This survey was sent to all students. Three thousand and sixty-four full-time, undergraduate students completed the survey for a 21% response rate for undergraduate students. This gives the researcher a good sample size to conduct the research.

Another advantage of using this tool is that it asks additional questions that may influence the overall question of commitment to diversity. Merely analyzing the student organization involvement and commitment to diversity would limit the overall understanding of the outcome. Additional demographic questions such as race, gender, participation in multicultural events, and disparaging experiences help shape the understanding of commitment to diversity.

The study is not without its weaknesses. The tool does not assess the level of involvement in a student organization. Is the student a member, officer, or involved in

multiple organizations? This highlights Astin's (1984) theory of involvement that points to the level of energy exerted. Moreover, it does not define the type of organization in which they are involved. An additional question of type (fraternity, academic, cultural, service, etc.) would give the researcher a better understanding of the types of organizations that have a positive or negative effect on perception of commitment. Additionally, the impact of intercollegiate athletic participation and working on campus were not addressed. As with any mail survey, the personal aspect is missing as well as the opportunity for follow-up questions. Additional qualitative data would also have enhanced the overall understanding of the student population.

Chapter Four

Results

This chapter provides an overview of the exploratory analyses described in Chapter Three. Results of this study are detailed as follows: First, descriptive analyses of student background characteristics and other variables of interests are presented. Second, the results of each of the three research questions are presented and related to prior research. Finally, an overall summary of the findings is presented.

Descriptive Analysis

All students enrolled at GFSU were invited to participate in the initial survey. For the purpose of this study, the answers for all undergraduate students were analyzed. Three thousand two hundred and eighty-nine (N=3,289) undergraduate students completed the survey and are included in the analysis. Demographic information was collected in the following areas: gender, campus affiliation, student status (full-time or part-time), residential status, race/ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, faith identification, and political view. Table 2 outlines the demographic information for the participating students.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Information

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Female	2198	66.8	67.2	67.2
	Male	1075	32.7	32.8	100.0
	Total	3273	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	16	.5		
Total		3289	100.0		
Race	African-Am	201	6.1	6.1	6.1
	Hispanic	101	3.1	3.1	9.2
	White	2713	82.5	82.5	91.7
	Other	272	8.3	8.3	100.0
	Total	3287	99.9	100.0	
Missing	System	2	.1		
Total		3289	100.0		
Campus	Main	3210	97.6	97.9	97.9
	Other	68	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	3278	99.7	100.0	
Missing	System	11	.3		
Total		3289	100.0		
Residence	On-Campus	1476	44.9	45.0	45.0
	Off-Campus	1804	54.8	55.0	100.0
	Total	3280	99.7	100.0	
Missing	System	9	.3		
Total		3289	100.0		

Table 2 – cont.		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
Disability	Yes	89	2.7	2.7	2.7
	No	3196	97.2	97.3	100.0
	Total	3285	99.9	100.0	
Missing	System	4	.1		
Total		3289	100.0		
Sexual Orientation					
	Heterosexual	3153	95.9	96.4	96.4
	LGBT	118	3.6	3.6	100.0
	Total	3271	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	18	.5		
Total		3289	100.0		
Faith		355	10.8	10.8	10.8
	Humanist/Atheist/Agnostic	2565	78.0	78.3	89.1
	Christian - Protestant/Catholic				
	Other	356	10.8	10.9	100.0
Total		3276	99.6	100.0	
Missing	System	13	.4		
Total		3289	100.0		
Political View					
	Conservative	1020	31.0	31.1	31.1
	Liberal	1034	31.4	31.6	62.7
	Moderate	677	20.6	20.7	83.3
	Other	546	16.6	16.7	100.0
Total		3277	99.6	100.0	
Missing	System	12	.4		
Total		3289	100.0		

Research Question One

Question One sought to determine whether there was a relationship between student perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity based and involvement in student organizations. As coded for positive or negative perception, 1,983 students reported a positive perception, 399 had a negative perception, and 907 reported no perception. Overall perception of commitment to diversity is demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Participant Perception

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1983	60.3	83.2	83.2
Agree/Positive	399	12.1	16.8	100
Disagree/Negative	2382	72.4	100	
Total	907	27.6		
Missing System	3289	100		
Total				

The number of participants reported being involved in a student organization is 1,296. The number of students reporting no involvement is 1,033. (88 students did not answer the question.) While over 50% of the survey participants indicated involvement in a student organization, this is a higher percentage than those actually involved at the institution. While the majority of the participants identified as being involved in a student organization, this information is limited in scope. No questions were asked in regard to the level of involvement (member, officer, commitment level, etc.) or how many organizations of which

they are a member. There is also no identifying question pertaining to the type of organization in which they are involved (sport club, fraternity, service, faith, etc.) or if the organization is a registered, on-campus organization.

Table 4

Participants by Involvement

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Involved	1778	54.1	55.5	55.5
	Not	1423	43.3	44.5	100
Involved		3201	97.3	100	
	Total	88	2.7		
Missing	System	3289	100		
Total					

A Chi Square Test was used to measure the level of relationship between involvement and perception (see Table 5 and Table 6).

Table 5

Involvement in Student Organization by Perception of Institutional Commitment to Diversity

			Q. 25 Perception		
			Positive	Negative	Total
Are you involved in at least one student organization on campus?	Yes	Count	1051	245	1296
			81.1%	18.9%	100.0%
	No	Count	888	145	1033
			86.0%	14.0%	100.0%
	Total	Count	1939	390	2329
			83.3%	16.7%	100.0%

The Chi Square test found a .002 p value demonstrating significance, meaning that there is a significant difference between the perceptions of those involved in student organizations and those not involved.

Table 6

Chi Square Test Results – Involved/Not Involved

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.769 ^a	1	.002		
Continuity Correction ^b	9.423	1	.002		
Likelihood Ratio	9.886	1	.002		
Fisher's Exact Test				.002	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.765	1	.002		
N of Valid Cases	2329				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 172.98.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

There is significance in the relationship between involvement and perception. While both involved and non-involved students reported positive perceptions to institutional commitment to diversity (81.1% involved, 86% not involved), a p value of .002 was determined showing significance. Students involved have a more negative perception of institutional commitment to diversity. The findings for this are interesting because most of the literature reviewed for the effect of student involvement demonstrates a positive interaction. While Astin's (1999) findings explore involvement from many aspects (faculty interactions, living on campus, etc.), involvement in student organizations (as long as not overextending) have been identified as a positive way for students to develop. The outcome from Question One demonstrates a negative perception for students who are involved in

student organizations that may seem contradictory to Astin (1999). One reason for this outcome is that today's student is more aware of diversity issues (Astin, 2004). Astin also states that this awareness creates critical thinking and an investment by students (2004). In addition, Antonio (2001) found that although a high percentage of students are involved in interracial "friend" groups, they continue to view the campus as segregated.

Research Question Two

Question Two examines background characteristics of student and perception of commitment to diversity. Demographics evaluated were race/ethnicity, gender, residential status, campus, ability, sexual orientation, spiritual beliefs, and political views. A forward logistic regression was used to determine significance. Block 1: Model 1 (Table 7) of the forward logistic regression analyzed the student perceptions defined by demographic variables. All demographic variables were analyzed; however, residential status ($p = .102$), campus ($p = .127$), and Caucasian ($p = .058$) demographics were dropped due to lack of significance. While the researcher did not expect that all demographics would illustrate significance, the lack of significance with residential status is surprising. Astin (1999) found a distinct relationship between living on-campus and overall student development. In addition, Chang, Astin, and Kim (2004) found that students living on-campus are more likely to have positive interactions with other races. This may be attributed to the high percentage of first-year students who live on campus. The Hispanic ($p = .250$) and disability ($p = .133$) demographics also were not significant but remain in the model because significance was determined when measured for interaction with other variables. The Block 1: Model 1 demographic variables shown in Table 7 will be consistently used throughout the analysis.

Table 7

Predictors of Student Perception of Institutional Commitment to Diversity

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Block 1:Model 1					
Gender	-.317	.128	6.150	.013	.728
African American	.952	.210	20.503	.000	2.591
Hispanic	-.714	.621	1.323	.250	.490
Disability	-.982	.654	2.254	.133	.374
Sexual Orientation	-1.428	.252	32.219	.000	.240
Atheist	-1.876	.753	6.211	.013	.153
Christian	-.462	.178	6.758	.009	.630
Conservative	-.501	.200	6.260	.012	.606
Liberal	-3.932	1.070	13.504	.000	.020
Moderate	-1.605	.673	5.693	.017	.201
Hispanic by Liberal	1.713	.706	5.883	.015	5.543
Disability by Liberal	1.706	.759	5.056	.025	5.508
Atheist by Liberal	.888	.383	5.371	.020	2.431
Atheist by Moderate	1.735	.700	6.140	.013	5.670
Constant	4.737	1.183	16.033	.000	114.051

Note (n=2333). 0 = disagree that institution is committed to diversity; 1 = agree. df = 1; $p \leq .05$.

Block 1: Model 1 has a Nagelkerke score of .115 that fits in the desired range of $0 \leq R^2 \leq 1$; but, the score is low. This means that this may not be a strong model and other factors may be involved in the outcome. Block 1: Model 1 also demonstrates a Hosmer and Lemeshow Test of .772, which is greater than the .5, recommended, so the conditions of the

model are good. As demonstrated in Table 7, many of the demographic outcomes were significant.

Gender ($p = .013$) found that female students are less likely to have a positive perception than male students are ($\text{Exp (B)} = .728$). Pascarella (1996) noted many factors that contribute to a negative climate for women. Among the things that perpetuate hostile hallways are negative classroom experiences, degrading interactions with peers, and a lack of female leadership in the institution. While we do not know the factors that contribute to the perception identified in this study, women are less likely to have a positive perception of institutional commitment.

African American students were found to be more likely to have a negative perception of institutional commitment ($p = .000$, $\text{Exp (B)} = 2.591$). This outcome confirms research cited from Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Hagedorn (1999) and Reid & Radhakrishnan (2003) that identified negative interactions for minority students in and out of the classroom that greatly influence their perception of climate. While Abraham (1988) cited that race is not a determining factor in perception of climate, African American students felt that the institutions were not open to dialogue as it relates to race on campus. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) found that African Americans at PWIs often felt like they were the “token” minority in class and on-campus. Pike and Kuh (2006) found positive attributes to a diverse campus; however, even with the presence of diversity, perceptions many not be positive.

Although not the primary emphasis of this study, other demographics were analyzed. LGBT students are also less likely to have a positive perception of campus climate than

heterosexual students ($p = .000$, Exp (B) = .240). Atheist/Agnostic students are more likely to have a negative perception ($p = .013$, Exp (B) = .153) than students of other faiths, while Christian students ($p = .009$, Exp (B) = .630) are more likely to have a positive perception than Atheist/Agnostic students and students of other faiths. Astin (2004) differentiates between spirituality and religion, and defines spirituality as an inner human consciousness that correlates with our values and beliefs. Although today's students are more receptive in the areas of race, gender, and sexual orientation, students are much less engaged politically and academically. Magolda and Ebben (2006) study the impact of Christian student organizations on students. They found that students in Christian organizations gained the same benefits as other types of involvement including a sense of involvement, purpose, and cognitive development. Focus on internal needs for success and stability are important. Allowing academe to explore spirituality encourages the "conscious" to play an active role in their lives (Astin, 2004).

Conservative students are more likely to have a positive perception than those of other political views ($p = .012$, Exp (B) = .606). Liberal students are .020 times less likely to have a positive perception than other students ($p = .000$). The same is true of students with moderate political views ($p = .017$, Exp (B) = .201). While Astin (2004) states that millennial students are not as engaged politically as prior generations, one has to consider the political climate in the context of the study. In 2005, the Michigan debate over Affirmative Action in admission policies for higher education was heating up. *Grutter v. Bollinger (2003)* and *Gratz v. Bollinger (2003)* were affirmative action cases that ruled against the University of Michigan's admission policy. In addition, the efforts to get Proposal 2, the elimination of affirmative action, on the ballot were active throughout the state.

The outcomes from these additional demographic variables are interesting in that each group may be classified as a “minority” in their own respect. LGBT students are a very small population of the participants (3.6%) and are often identified as a minority group. The positive perception of Christians is in contrast to the Atheist/Agnostic negative perception. In addition, students with a conservative political view are more likely to have a positive perception, whereas liberal and moderate students are less likely. This may be attributed to the conservative climate in which the institution resides.

When looking at interactions between variables, Block 1: Model 1 found four interactions with significance. Hispanic students with a liberal political view had a more positive perception than other liberal students, and Hispanic students who are not liberal in political ideology are more likely to have a negative perception than other non-liberal students ($p = .015$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 5.543$). This is an interesting finding as Hispanics are a small population of the campus and are considered a minority population, but the interaction with non-liberal political view could account for this outcome. The Hispanic culture is very diverse within itself, and this may contribute to these findings. Disabled students who are politically liberal are more likely to have a positive perception, and disabled students who are not liberal are more likely to have a negative perception than non-liberal students without a disability ($p = .025$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 5.508$). Although the population of students with a disability is growing (Zamani-Gallaher, Green, Brown, & Stovall, 2009), they are still a marginalized group. This, in combination with the liberal variable, may explain this outcome. Zamani and colleagues (2009) note that many of the accommodations made for students with disabilities in K-12 education are not available in higher education.

The interaction between religious beliefs and political views also demonstrated significance. Atheist/Agnostic students demonstrated significance in both the liberal and moderate political demographics. Atheist students who are liberal ($p = .020$, $\text{Exp (B)} = 2.431$) or moderate ($p = .013$, $\text{Exp (B)} = 5.670$) are more likely to have a negative perception than their Atheist peers of other political perspectives. Again, non-dominant cultures are reflected in these outcomes.

Block 1 & 2: Model 2 added the variable of involvement to model (see Table 8). The model has a Nagelkerke of .115, which is in the accepted range. The Hosmer and Lemeshow is .762, also acceptable. The model demonstrates significance in the same areas in Block 1: Model 1 but also found significance in three additional areas. As noted in Question One, students involved in student organizations are more likely to have a negative perception of institutional commitment to diversity.

Involved students who are also African American are 4.486 times more likely to have a negative perception than other students are. More specifically, African American students who are involved are more critical than involved students of other identified races ($p = .002$), and African American students who are not involved are more likely to have negative perceptions than non-involved students of other races are ($p = .000$). Flowers (2004) examined different types of involvement and their impact on African Americans. While he noted a positive interaction between involvement and cognitive, social, and vocational development, other types of involvement such as out-of-class academic experiences were more significant (Flowers, 2004).

Finally, liberal students are more likely to have a negative perception of commitment than students with other political views ($p = .050$, $\text{Exp (B)} = 1.626$). Both involved ($p = .003$) and noninvolved ($p = .000$) liberal students have a more negative perception of institutional commitment to diversity than their peers of other political views do. Again, this may represent the political climate in the state at the time of the survey.

Table 8

Predictors of Student Perception of Institutional Commitment to Diversity – Block 1 and 2

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Block 1 & 2: Model 2					
Gender	-.335	.130	6.576	.010	.716
African American	.598	.251	5.653	.017	1.818
Hispanic	-.698	.623	1.255	.263	.498
Disability	-1.290	.767	2.824	.093	.275
Sexual Orientation	-1.419	.258	30.143	.000	.242
Atheist	-1.861	.761	5.980	.014	.156
Christian	-.435	.183	5.663	.017	.647
Conservative	-.425	.205	4.300	.038	.654
Liberal	-4.367	1.147	14.488	.000	.013
Moderate	-1.590	.678	5.497	.019	.204
Hispanic by Liberal	1.695	.710	5.696	.017	5.445
Disability by Liberal	2.003	.859	5.441	.020	7.409
Atheist by Liberal	.925	.396	5.466	.019	2.521
Atheist by Moderate	1.763	.707	6.224	.013	5.829
Involvement	-1.179	.470	6.278	.012	.308
Involvement by AA	1.249	.470	7.049	.008	4.486
Involvement by Liberal	.486	.248	3.843	.050	1.626
Constant	5.212	1.257	17.188	.000	183.487

Note (n=2333). 0 = disagree that institution is committed to diversity; 1 = agree. df = 1; p \leq .05.

Research Question Three

Research Question Three incorporates intercultural experience variables into the existing model, specifically, questions regarding classroom climate, sense of belonging, and participation in multicultural events. The Nagelkerke score is .254, which is stronger than the previous blocks. In addition, the Hosmer and Lemeshow are acceptable at .762. As shown in Table 9, many of the demographic variables from Block 1: Model 1 and Block 1 & 2: Model 2 became insignificant (African American, Hispanic, disability, Atheist, Christian, liberal, moderate, Hispanic by liberal, disability by liberal, Atheist by liberal, Atheist by moderate, involvement, and involvement by liberal). However, additional outcomes of significance were added to this model.

Classroom climate affects perception of commitment to diversity. Students who believe the classroom is accepting of who they are are significantly more likely to have a more positive perception of institutional commitment ($p = .000$, Exp (B) .162). Similarly, students who feel a sense of belonging are more likely to have a positive perception. Students with a great sense ($p = .003$) of belonging are over 187 times more likely to have a positive perception. Students with some sense of belonging also have a more positive perception ($p = .000$, Exp (B) = .280). Students who have never attended a multicultural event on campus are 7.717 times more likely to have a negative perception of institutional commitment to diversity. These outcomes confirm the findings of Sedlacek and associates (1997) and Hurtado (2001). Sedlacek (1997) found that classroom experiences and interactions outside of the classroom greatly affect the perception of diversity and ultimately the climate of the campus. Hurtado (2001) found that a positive interaction in the classroom greatly affects the

overall climate. Although focused on Latino students, Hurtado and Carter's 1997 study found that climate is directly related to sense of belonging.

Table 9

Predictors of Student Perception of Institutional Commitment to Diversity Block 3

Block 1, 2 & 3: Model 3					
	B.	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Gender					
African American	-.341	.158	4.649	.031	.711
Hispanic	-.349	.349	1.001	.317	.705
Disability	-.681	.793	.738	.390	.506
Sexual Orientation	.571	1.004	.324	.569	1.770
Atheist	-1.007	.343	8.605	.003	.365
Christian	-.496	.949	.274	.601	.609
Conservative	-.197	.228	.750	.387	.821
Liberal	1.267	.647	3.833	.050	3.549
Moderate	-1.221	1.507	.656	.418	.295
Hispanic by Liberal	.532	1.042	.261	.610	1.702
Disability by Liberal	1.410	.904	2.431	.119	4.097
Atheist by Liberal	1.032	.992	1.082	.298	2.807
Atheist by Moderate	.694	.512	1.837	.175	2.001
Involvement	1.146	.847	1.829	.176	3.144
Involvement by AA	-.959	.594	2.607	.106	.383
Involvement by Liberal	1.701	.598	8.095	.004	5.477
Classroom Climate	.055	.307	.032	.859	1.056
Belonging – Great	-1.820	.260	48.929	.000	.162
Belonging – Some	5.232	1.734	9.102	.003	187.180

	B.	S.E.	Wald.	Sig.	Exp.(B)
Events – Never	2.043	.521	15.362	.000	7.717
Events – 1 or More	-.392	.182	4.631	.031	.676
Belonging Great by Disab	-2.272	.921	6.091	.014	.103
Belonging Great by Lib	-2.253	.698	10.416	.001	.105
Belonging Great by Con	-1.867	.689	7.353	.007	.155
Belonging Great by Mod	-1.784	.718	6.170	.013	.168
Belonging Great by Never	-1.002	.334	8.975	.003	.367
Never by Atheist	-1.190	.459	6.727	.009	.304
Constant	1.031	2.103	.240	.624	2.803

Note (n=2333). 0 = disagree that institution is committed to diversity; 1 = agree. df = 1; $p \leq .05$.

The final climate variable involved student attendance at multicultural events. Students who had attended at least 1 multicultural event were more likely than other students to have a positive perception of institutional commitment ($p = .031$, Exp (B) = 6.76). Students who have a great sense of belonging but have never attended a multicultural event on campus are less likely to have a positive perception ($p = .003$, Exp (B) = .367). Finally, Atheist/Agnostic students who have never participated in a multicultural event on campus are more likely to have a negative perception to institutional commitment to diversity ($p = .009$, Exp (B) = .304). The findings here confirm the intercultural experiences research addressed in Chapter Two as well as Astin's (2004) perspective of the important role spirituality plays in the development of a student's whole self. Out-of-classroom experiences that expose students to diversity enhance the development of students and create a positive campus climate (Chang, 1996, Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004, & Hurtado, 2001).

Chapter 5

Findings, Recommendations, and Future Research

This study examined the influence of student organization involvement on student perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity. The researcher identified key demographics beyond involvement that could influence overall perception including involvement, race and ethnicity, gender, residential status, sexual orientation, spirituality, and political views. Also noted were issues involving overall campus climate including classroom climate, sense of belonging, and attendance at multicultural events.

The study was an ex post facto, secondary data analysis of the 2005 Diversity Study conducted by the Community Research Center at Great Falls State University. The study drew from previously collected data. The researcher used a chi square test and forward thinking logistic regression to analyze over 2,300 undergraduate participants.

Summary of the Findings

In general, the findings of the study are consistent with the existing research outlined in Chapter Two; however, some are negated. This section will review the findings as they relate to the research presented. Implications of these findings are discussed.

Question One asked if there was significance in the perception of institutional commitment to diversity between students involved in a student organization and those who are not. Overall, both variables had a high percentage of positive perception; however, a chi square test determined that there was significance difference. The results demonstrated that students involved are less likely to have a positive perception of institutional commitment.

Astin (1999 and 2004) stresses the positive impact involvement has on overall cognitive and social development of students, an outcome which confirms Antonio (2001) suggesting that while students are more aware of diversity, students still feel disconnected when it comes to issues such as climate. In addition, Flowers (2004) found that involvement in student organizations was not as positive as other types of involvement. While this could be seen as a negative aspect of student involvement, it could also mean that involved students are more critical or have higher expectations than students who are not involved in a student organization.

Question Two looked at demographic information regarding perception institutional commitment to diversity. Block 1: Model 1 analyzed demographic variables and perception of institutional commitment to diversity. This model demonstrated significance in many of the demographics; however, there were differences in perception based on those demographics. Participant demographics that identified a positive perception were Christian, conservative, Hispanic liberal, and liberal with disability. Those with negative perceptions were female, African American, LGBT, and Atheist, liberal, moderate, and liberal and moderate Atheist. Demographics who identified a more negative perception fall into the historically marginalized categories: women, African Americans, LGBT, Atheist, and liberal and moderate in political view. This confirms much of the research about climate and diversity in higher education (Pascarella, 1996; Cabrera et al., 1999; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003; Gurin et al., 2002; Pike & Kuh, 2006). This also confirms Astin's (2004) findings that demonstrate the significance of spirituality and how it affects development.

Question Block 1 & 2: Model 2 added the variable of involvement to the existing model of demographic and perception. This model reiterated the findings from Block 1:

Model 1 but also identified more interactions of significance. Involvement, involvement by African American, and involvement by liberal are significant. Students who identified as being involved in student organizations are more likely to have a negative perception of institutional commitment to diversity. African American students who are involved are 4.486 times more likely to have a negative perception, again confirming Flowers (2004). Finally, students who are liberal in political ideology are more likely to have a negative perception of institutional commitment.

Question Three incorporated variables of intercultural experiences into the model. This model identified 11 areas of significance. Variables with a positive perception were classroom climate, great sense of belonging, some sense of belonging, participation in 1 – 2 multicultural events, and conservative by great sense of belonging. Students who identify the classroom as being accepting of who they are more likely to have a positive perception of commitment. Students who feel a great and some sense of belonging have a more positive perception. These findings again confirm the relationship between the classroom experience, perception of diversity, and campus climate cited by Sedlacek (1997) and Hurtado (2001). Students who have attended 1 or more multicultural events are also more likely to have a positive perception. This confirms research that out-of-classroom experience has a positive impact on the development of students and ultimately the climate (Chang, 1996; Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Hurtado, 2001). Finally, students who are conservative and have a great sense of belonging are more likely to have a positive perception than students who have other political views.

Variables that are identified to have a more negative perception to institutional commitment to diversity are never attending a multicultural event, disability by great sense of

belonging, liberal by great sense of belonging, moderate by great sense of belonging, great sense of belonging by never attended a multicultural event, and Atheist by never attending a multicultural event. Participants who have never attended a multicultural event are more likely to have a negative perception. Some participants may have a great sense of belonging but in contrast to their peers (participants with a disability, liberal and moderate participants, and students who have never attended a multicultural event) are not as likely to have a positive perception. Finally, Atheist students who have never attended a multicultural event are more likely to have a negative perception than students of other faiths.

There are notable implications from the data in this research, specifically with involvement, religious beliefs, African Americans, women, political views, classroom climate, sense of belonging, and attendance at multicultural events. First, student involvement, including involvement in student organizations, has historically been linked to positive student development and exposure to diversity. This study found that students involved in a student organization are less likely to have a positive perception of institutional commitment to diversity. Again, while this seems contradictory, this may contribute to Astin's (2004) findings of involvement leading to strong critical thinking skills. Second, religious beliefs were an important variable in this study. Christian students are more likely to have a positive perception of commitment than non-Christian students are. In addition, students identifying as Atheist/Agnostic consistently had a more negative perception than students with other spiritual beliefs did.

African Americans, women, and students identifying as LGBT were found to have a more negative perception of institutional commitment to diversity. While this confirms other research, this also confirms the continued struggles these students face. Political views were

also factors in many of the findings. This could be reflective of the political climate at the time of the study – an ongoing statewide debate over affirmative action. Finally, the classroom climate, sense of belonging, and participation in multicultural events demonstrated great significance. The findings of this study align with other research that has documented how student perceptions of institutional climates supportive of diversity vary by race/ethnicity and differ in relationship to student involvement in cross-cultural interactions (Laird & Niskode-Dossett, 2010). Students who have experienced a positive classroom environment, have a strong sense of belonging, and/or have participated in multicultural events all have a more positive perception of institutional commitment to diversity.

Suggestions for Policy and Practice

Astin (1993) and Tatum (2000) identified ways to create change in the area of multiculturalism and campus climate. Astin (1993) identified three areas to measure diversity: institutional diversity emphasis, faculty diversity emphasis, and student diversity experiences. Tatum (2000) summed up her efforts into the ABC's: affirming identity, building community, and cultivating leadership. Based on the results of this study, the researcher has identified the following recommendations for practice: outreach to student organizations, formal methods of communication for minority populations, continued and enhanced multicultural experiences for majority students, address issues of classroom climate and community, enhancement of co-curricular, multicultural events, and the implementation of diversity in all aspects of the institution.

Outreach to Student Organizations

The study showed that students involved in student organizations are less likely to have a positive perception of commitment to diversity. Antonio (2001), Chang, Astin, and

Kim (2004), and Astin (1999 & 2004) found exposure to diversity outside of the classroom positively influences cognitive development and retention, one of which is involvement in student organizations. While Flowers (2004) noted that involvement in student organizations was not as significant as other types of involvement for African Americans, there was a positive relationship. In addition, Abraham (1988) emphasized the importance of communication in the perception of climate. Making efforts to communicate with student organizations on diversity efforts could change these perceptions. In addition, supporting student organizations and their respective events demonstrates commitment to students.

Formal Methods of Communication for Marginalized Populations

African American, female, non-Christians and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender participants were less likely to have positive perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity. Institutions need to do outreach to these groups. Reid & Radhakrishnan (2003) and Flowers (2004) found that African American students benefit from involvement outside of the classroom. Pascarella found that climate, in and out of the classroom, greatly affects female students (1996). A process needs to be established where communication is encouraged. Formal and informal methods by which students can address issues, share experiences, or report incidents of bias must be recognized. The formal aspect of this process needs to be established in institutional policy. The process must be transparent and communicated with students upon entering the university. In addition, there needs to be a process by which the university reports the outcomes of incidents on campus.

Acknowledging that incidents occur and demonstrating action is essential in order for this process to be trusted by students. Finally, establishing a method to share current institution diversity efforts and seeking input for future efforts could improve perceptions.

Continued and Enhanced Multicultural Experiences for Majority Students

Male, Christian, and conservative participants have a very positive perception of institutional commitment to diversity. While this is a positive outcome, these groups may not be aware of diversity issues that affect their peers and how diversity can have a positive impact on their growth and development (Abraham, 1988; Gurin & Nagda, 2005). Ewert (2000) identified five components of intercultural understanding. First, one must consciously observe and understand the circumstances of a situation. Second, one must be open to dialogue and engage in conversation. Third, one must identify and examine past and current bias. Fourth, one must be able to construct logical explanations for all interactions and observations. Finally, one must be able to reconcile between the bias and the logic. One method to achieve this is through service learning. Astin (1993) identified service learning as a great way for majority students to relate to diversity issues.

Diversity efforts cannot be lost on majority groups. Deliberate efforts by the institution to create dialogue and understanding are necessary. Intergroup dialogues, campus-wide programs, curricular requirements in the areas of diversity, and multicultural programs in residence halls need to be established. Communicating with majority students on why diversity is important is necessary. Information and programs that emphasize the importance of diversity will benefit these groups as well.

Address Issues of Classroom Climate and Community

Institutions need to make sure all classrooms are inclusive and offer a welcoming and supportive climate. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) note that the classroom environment is essential to the success of all students. They note that White and Hispanic students benefit greatly from a diverse environment in the classroom. Diverse environments

add to the level of engagement and academic outcomes (Gurin et al., 2002). African American students also benefit from a diverse classroom environment. Gurin and colleagues noted that if an African American student is the only African American in the classroom, feelings of being the “token” student negatively affect that student’s success. Institutions need to enhance efforts to increase the minority population on campus (Gurin et al., 2002). Creating outreach efforts to minority-based K-12 schools and identifying a recruiting and admissions program focused on minority students are essential. However, the institution must also be honest with minority students about the environment. Creating an image of diversity that does not accurately reflect the campus distorts the reality of the student. While many institutions have made conscious efforts to make sure there is the “brown” and “black” student smiling on promotional materials, there should also be communication about the actual campus demographics. Training admissions counselors to accurately describe the environment as well as discuss the support services for minority students could defuse the reality when students arrive on campus.

The issue of the diversity (or lack there) of faculty and staff is also important to address. The 1990s have brought a decade of institutions committing to increasing the numbers of minority faculty and staff (Gose, 2008). Goals and strategic plans were established; however, many institutions fell short of achieving the desired outcomes. Trower (2002) found that in regard to race and gender, the glass ceiling is still covering academe. Over 75% of faculties at research institutions are male, with 91% of full professors being white. The gap between tenured men and women has not changed since the sexual revolution, and blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans only make up 5% of full-time faculty (Trower & Chait, 2002). Issues of support for hired minority faculty and the shortage

of minority faculty candidates, especially in specific fields of study, made institutions rethink their initial ideas of diversity in the classroom (Gose, 2008). While these efforts should not be discarded, other efforts can be established including diversity training for all faculty and staff, creating effective communication and reporting methods, and incorporating diversity into the evaluations process. Training and development opportunities need to be created so that faculty and staff can develop cultural competencies that they can take into the classroom or as they interact with students. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) state that having faculty who have an understanding of cultural competencies creates a positive learning environment for all students. Gilbert (2008) says that most departments operate in silos and this impacts the overall efforts on campus. The sharing of knowledge as well as communicating about diversity issues can create an atmosphere of awareness to cultural issues (Gilbert, 2008). O'Rourke (2008) notes that if diversity is a central mission and/or goal of the institution, it should be reflected in all faculty and staff evaluation processes. There should also be a system for rewarding departments and individuals who are excelling in this area (O'Rourke, 2008).

Reid & Radhakrishnan (2003) and Sedlacek (1997) found that climate, as it relates to diversity, is essential in the success of students, specifically minority students. Institutions need to look at every aspect of the campus in and out of the classroom (Hurtado, 1999). This study found that sense of belonging impacts student perceptions. Hurtado (1992) found a link between incidents on campus and overall perception of campus climate. In addition, Hurtado (1992) found that a strong institutional commitment to diversity could improve race relations. Beginning with orientation, administrators need to look at all aspects that can affect climate and ultimately the sense of community including residential experiences, co-curricular

activities, and social activities. There also must be a policy established that allows students to report chilly classroom climates and experiences. A plan needs to be developed that specifically addresses issues of climate.

Enhancement of Co-curricular Multicultural Events

Institutional support of multicultural events needs to be highly visible. The variable “never” attending a multicultural event was apparent in negative perceptions. Astin (1993), Chang (1999), and Hurtado (2001) all demonstrate the importance of intercultural experiences outside of the classroom. Formal as well as informal interactions are important. Planned multicultural events are important to demonstrate this commitment. The creation and enhancement of traditional cultural programs is recommended. Institutions need to go beyond the hour-long MLK Day program. Identifying all areas of diversity and how they can be incorporated into the campus environment is essential. Traditionally, these programs are planned by an office that is charged with diversity. Subsequently, recommendations to institutionalize diversity campus-wide would cultivate events that emphasize the importance of cross-cultural socialization and cultural competence, particularly for majority students. Before the planning of these events, there are important questions to be considered. Who plans the events? Who is included in the planning process? Who is invited? How is it financed? These questions need to be addressed so that an emphasis of the importance of these events is obvious.

Implementation of Diversity in All Aspects of the Organization

Diversity efforts need to be visible on all levels of the organization (Silver, 2002). The leadership within an institution plays an important role in the overall climate and culture of an organization (Beckner, 2004; Greenleaf, 1977; Silver, 2002). Leaders who should

ultimately have a student's best interest in mind shape the organizational functions and priorities. Diversity must be considered in all aspects including financial support, hiring, training and development, curriculum, and outreach efforts. Silver (2002) states that recognition and appreciation of diversity by leadership is vital to the climate of the institution. He identifies six key climate characteristics the organization must instill. First, diversity must be prevalent institutionally and organizationally. It must be supported by all levels of administration and leadership. It should be transparent and reinforced. Second, it must be articulated in the mission. It must be evident in hiring, appropriations, programs, and educational content. Next, it must be visible in the hiring of the leadership. Diversity cannot be marginalized. It cannot be limited to one person or one office. Fifth, diversity must be appreciated and dialogued. Finally, it cannot be mystical. It must be evident in the students, books, staff, and culture. (Silver, 2002)

Senge (1990) and Silver (2002) provide two organizational frameworks relevant to diversity in higher education. Institutions of higher education must operate as learning organizations as defined by Senge (1990) if they are truly going to be committed to diversity and campus climate. Diversity initiatives cannot be a "top down" initiative but must be reflective in all aspects of the organization. It cannot be a program, person, or office, but must be a framework of all that the institution does.

Many institutions are creating a senior level management position that focuses on diversity efforts. It is arguable whether the creation of positions such as Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) furthers diversity efforts or defeats infusion of diversity at all levels of an institution by relegating diversity matters to a single department (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008). While there is debate over the creation of a Chief Diversity Officer, there are many

benefits and specific ways a senior level diversity position can create a positive atmosphere of diversity on campus. The CDO is the singular person when it comes to diversity efforts and is instrumental in creating institutional diversity goals and raise visibility of diversity efforts. The CDO also works to increase the success of minority students, faculty, and staff. The CDO is the likely leader for developing training programs for faculty and staff in the areas of diversity as well as implementing diversity components to evaluation processes. Finally, the CDO often works with faculty to create general education courses that encompass diversity-learning outcomes (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008). It is advisable, based on previous research and the findings of this study, that educational leaders are knowledgeable about the sociopolitical context that bears influence on the overall campus climate. Political issues such as affirmative action, LGBT rights, and funding can greatly affect the overall climate and perception of institutional commitment.

Finally, the researcher recommends that a committee be established that addresses all aspect of policy and their implications on issues of diversity. This committee would look at the process of reporting incidents of bias, work with the CDO on assessing campus climate, offer recommendations for practice, and be an established place for all faculty, staff, and students to address concerns.

Implications for Future Research

Due to the nature of this study, a secondary analysis of pre-existing data, there is more research needed regarding student perceptions of campus commitment to diversity and involvement. All research has limitations. The following section outlines implications for future inquiry based on the findings of this study.

First, additional demographic information should be obtained to gain a better understanding of the participants. Not readily discernible is whether or not any given participant transferred to the institution (e.g., two-year to four-year transfer or lateral transfer). Additionally, information on the residential background of each participant relative to degree of urban city, suburban dwelling, or rural hometown may shed light on the nuances of student opinion of institutional commitment to diversity and intercultural experiences.

Not included in this investigation was information on class level and total years enrolled, coupled with in-depth information about student experiences garnered via qualitative research approaches. In addition, more inclusive wording of the demographics could be used, especially in the area of gender, to include transgender.

Future research should look at differences in student perception across institutional type and control (i.e., two-year, four-year, comprehensive, doctoral granting, research, publicly and/or privately controlled) as student involvement and campus climate is contextual. For instance, a major form of student involvement is Greek life during the collegiate years; however, certain college campuses may not have this component of campus activities. Additional research should identify the type of student organization and the level of participation. For example, is the student involved in a service organization, sport club, fraternity, or academic organization? In addition, is the student involved in multiple organizations, and how does the participant define that involvement (officer, general member, etc.)?

Attendance at multicultural events is one form of student involvement that many collegians, particularly students of color, frequent. However, based on the findings of this study, identifying the type of event as well as why the participant attended is important to

gauge. Was it required for a course or was it of interest to the participant? Was the event sponsored or hosted by the university, housing and residence life, or a student organization?

An additional study identifying other types of involvement that include student employment on campus and intercollegiate athletics may lend interesting filters on student opinion. Feeling a sense of belonging was common in the outputs. The researcher would like to understand what underlying factors affect sense of belonging. Is it due to peer interaction? Have students identified a staff or faculty member who enhances their connectedness?

Replication of the study with more recent data (i.e., the study was originally conducted five years ago) to contrast with the current investigation could be gathered. Of note, the study was conducted prior to the passing of Michigan Proposal 2, which eliminated Affirmative Action in admission processes. It would be beneficial to assess outcomes since this change. New studies are challenging the importance of affirmative action (Schmidt, 2010). While many researchers agree that admission is only the first step to a diverse climate, it is important to creating an environment of inclusion (Gurin et al., 2002). Overall, this study does build on the existing literature on student involvement and campus climate. However, there are a few omissions in this investigation that should be explicit in future work. One such suggestion is to include socioeconomic status as it was not included the logistic regression model (i.e., operationalized as annual family income and parents highest level of education). Class as a function of diversity is important as differences relative to quality of life, academic, and social engagement of colleges. Class differences among students, particularly students of color, are disproportionately higher. Latino and African Americans compose the working-class poor and higher percentages living at the poverty level.

Consequently, social class is tremendous as it can affect students' sense of belonging and connection to the campus.

An interesting finding from this study was the very strong bivariate relationship among African Americans and perceived institutional commitment to diversity. However, when adding the control variable of student involvement, the model weakens, and when intercultural experiences was added, African Americans drop from the model altogether. Therefore, additional study should go beyond the logistic regression model and conduct comparisons of the coefficients that would answer whether there is a direct relationship with the demographic variables and perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity. Furthermore, testing for this relationship can provide useful information on student opinion on the climate for diversity, and this plays out when you enter involvement and intercultural experiences. In sum, it is possible that the real relationship for African American students may be with perceptions of the institutional commitment to diversity and intercultural experiences, not student involvement.

Finally and unfortunately, race is still a factor in our society. Even after the election of Barack Obama as the first African American president of the U.S., this country cannot be considered post-racial America. By extension, college campuses mirror society in its struggles with the spectrum of difference. More in-depth examination on how race among other student characteristics coupled with student involvement impact educational attainment is important. Even more critical to their educational attainment is for students to experience collectivist collegiate contexts as opposed to hostile hallways to go out into the world with cultural competencies and the ability to connect across differences.

Conclusions

In the book, *The Mismeasure of Man*, Gould (1998) references a line from Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*, "If the misery of our poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin" (p. 124). He concludes with this thought, "We learn about diversity in order to understand, not simply to accept" (p. 424). The aforementioned is relevant to the importance that institutions of higher education must place on diversity. In turn, organizational commitment and activist leadership must occur in promoting culturally congruent campus climates (Zamani-Gallaher et al., 2009).

Many variables contribute to a student's perception of institutional commitment. Demographic variables including race/ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and political views all affect perception in some manner. Some had positive relationships with perception (male, Christian, conservative, and heterosexual), but these variables must be analyzed through a majority lens. Intercultural experiences were found to have a significant impact on a student's perception to institutional commitment to diversity. Attendance at one or more multicultural event can have a positive impact on a participant's perception. Finally, involvement (the initial variable of interest) was found to be significant in perception. Unfortunately, that perception goes against prior research and tends to be more negative.

These variables separately or in combination with each other influence overall perception. Variables such as positive classroom experience and participation in intercultural experiences do have a positive impact on perception; however, having negative experiences in the classroom can be detrimental to the overall perception. All of these variables are important in understanding but also in identifying ways to keep students invested in their

education. Katz (2009) asked, “Is diversity the end, or is it the means to achieving the campus civil society in which liberal education can truly thrive?”

Leaders and administrators have an ethical responsibility to create an inclusive environment where all students can learn and be successful in that learning process. The Dalai Lama encourages leaders to seek justice and not be limited by self-centeredness (1999). As higher education leaders, we have a greater responsibility to act in seeking social justice for all learners.

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Appendix A: Human Subjects Approval

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Education First

February 16, 2010

UHSRC Initial
Application Determination
EXEMPT APPROVAL

To: Aaron Klein Haight
Educational Leadership

Re: UHSRC #100208 Category: EXEMPT
Approval Date: February 16, 2010

Title: "Examining the Impact of Student Involvement and Intercultural Experiences on Perceptions of Institutional Commitment to Diversity"

The Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee (UHSRC) has completed their review of your project. I am pleased to advise you that **your research has been deemed as exempt** in accordance with federal regulations.

The UHSRC has found that your research project meets the criteria for exempt status and the criteria for the protection of human subjects in exempt research. **Under our exempt policy the Principal Investigator assumes the responsibility for the protection of human subjects** in this project as outlined in the assurance letter and exempt educational material.

Renewals: Exempt protocols do not need to be renewed. If the project is completed, please submit the **Human Subjects Study Completion Form** (found on the UHSRC website).

Revisions: Exempt protocols do not require revisions. However, if changes are made to a protocol that may no longer meet the exempt criteria, a **Human Subjects Minor Modification Form** or new **Human Subjects Approval Request Form** (if major changes) will be required (see UHSRC website for forms).

Problems: If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems, adverse events, or any problem that may increase the risk to human subjects and change the category of review, notify the UHSRC office within 24 hours. Any complaints from participants regarding the risk and benefits of the project must be reported to the UHSRC.

Follow-up: If your exempt project is not completed and closed after three years, the UHSRC office will contact you regarding the status of the project and to verify that no changes have occurred that may affect exempt status.

Please use the UHSRC number listed above on any forms submitted that relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the UHSRC office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 734-487-0042 or via e-mail at human.subjects@emich.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,



Deb de Laski-Smith, Ph.D.
Interim Dean
Graduate School
Administrative Co-Chair
University Human Subjects Review Committee

University Human Subjects Review Committee · Eastern Michigan University · 200 Boone Hall
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197
Phone: 734.487.0042 Fax: 734.487.0050
E-mail: human.subjects@emich.edu
www.ord.emich.edu (see Federal Compliance)

The EMU UHSRC complies with the Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations part 46 (45 CFR 46) under FWA00000050.

Appendix B. **Diversity Study, Intercultural University Experiences - STUDENT**

First, please tell us about yourself:

1. At which campus do you spend the most time?

XXX

XXX

XXX

XXX

XXX

2. What degree are you currently seeking?

(Please mark only one)

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Other: (Please specify) _____

2a. What is your current student status?

(Please mark only one)

Full-time undergraduate student (12 or more credits per semester)

Full-time graduate student (9 or more credits per semester)

Part-time undergraduate student (less than 12 credits per semester)

Part-time graduate student (less than 9 credits per semester)

Non-degree seeking

Other: (Please specify) _____

2b. What is your current resident status?

(Please mark only one)

University Housing

Off-campus Housing

2c. How many semesters, including the current semester, have you been enrolled at XXX University? _____

3. What is your current age?

18-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

60 and above

4. What is your gender?

Female Male

5. Please indicate the **primary** racial/ethnic group with which you identify.

African-American/Black

American Indian/Alaskan Native/Aleut

Asian/Pacific Islander

Chicano/Latino/Hispanic

Arab/Arab-American/Middle Eastern

White/Caucasian

Multi-racial

Other: (Please specify) _____

6. Do you currently have a disability that substantially limits a major life activity (such as seeing, hearing, learning, walking, etc.)?

Yes (Proceed to question 6a before answering question #7)

No (If you marked this response, skip to question #7)

6a. Please specify your disability below.

(Mark all that apply)

Hearing impairment

Learning disability

Mobility impairment

Speech impairment

Visual impairment

Other: (Please specify) _____

7. What is your sexual orientation?

(Please mark only one)

Heterosexual

Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender

8. How would you describe your spiritual beliefs / practices?

(Please mark only one)

Christian (Protestant/Catholic)

Hindu

Jewish

Muslim

Buddhist

Humanist/atheist/agnostic

Other: (Please specify) _____

9. How would you describe your political views?

(Please mark only one)

Conservative

Green

Liberal

Libertarian

Moderate

Socialist/leftist

None of the above

10. The climate in the classroom is accepting of who you are: **(Mark one)**

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

11. To what extent do you experience a sense of belonging or community at GFSU University? (**Mark one**)

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Not at all

12. How many times **in the past year** have you heard a GFSU University student make an insensitive or disparaging remark about:

Never 1-2 times 3-6 times 7 or more

times

A person's racial/ethnic background	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A non-native English-speaking person	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender person.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's economic background.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's religious background	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's political viewpoint.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's age.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12a. In what setting have these remarks occurred:

- Informal conversation
- GFSU University housing
- GFSU University sponsored events
- GFSU University food service areas
- Classroom
- Other location at GFSU University, please specify_____

13. How many times **in the past year** have you heard a GFSU University faculty member make insensitive or disparaging remarks about:

Never 1-2 times 3-6 times 7 or

more times

A person's racial/ethnic background	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A person's disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A non-native English-speaking person	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender person.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's economic background.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's religious background	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's political viewpoint.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's age.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13a. In what setting have these remarks occurred:

- Informal conversation
- GFSU University housing
- GFSU University sponsored events
- GFSU University food service areas
- Classroom
- Other location at GFSU University, please specify _____

14. How many **times in the past year** have you heard a GFSU University staff member make an insensitive or disparaging remark about:

	Never	1-2	3-6	7+
A person's racial/ethnic background.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A non-native English-speaking person	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender person.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's economic background.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's religious background	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's political viewpoint.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person's age.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14a. In what setting have these remarks occurred:

- Informal conversation
- GFSU University housing
- GFSU University sponsored events

- GFSU University food service areas
- Classroom
- Other location at GFSU University, please specify _____

15. How many times **in the past year** have you been present at GFSU University -affiliated general campus community events where you **did not** feel welcome because of your:

	Never	1-2	3-6	7+
Racial/ethnic background.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disability.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
English speaking skill.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual orientation.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Economic background.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religious background.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Political viewpoint.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Age.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. **In the past year** have you had a negative experience of being treated differently from others at GFSU University?

- Yes (If you marked this response, proceed to question 16a)
- No (If you marked this response, skip to question #17)

16a. What do you believe was/were the reason(s) for the differential treatment?

(Check as many as apply)

- Because of my race/ethnicity
- Because of my gender
- Because of my disability
- Because of my sexual orientation
- Because of my economic background
- Because of my religious beliefs
- Because of my political beliefs
- Because of my age
- Other: (Please specify) _____

17. Have you felt harassed at GFSU University **in the past year**?

Yes (If you marked this response, proceed to question 17a)

No (If you marked this response, skip to question #18)

17a. What do you believe was/were the reason(s) for the harassment?

(Check as many as apply)

Because of my race/ethnicity

Because of my gender

Because of my disability

Because of my sexual orientation

Because of my economic background

Because of my religious beliefs

Because of my political beliefs

Because of my age

Other: (Please specify) _____

17b. In what form was the harassment expressed?

(Check as many as apply)

Actual physical assault or injury

Non-verbal signs of disdain – glances, hand-signals, etc.

Being Ignored

Stalking

Threats of physical violence

Verbal comments

Written comments

Email

Other forms: (Please specify) _____

17c. Where did this harassment occur?

(Check as many as apply)

- In a classroom
 - In a university office
 - In GFSU University housing
 - At a GFSU University sponsored event
 - In a GFSU University food service area
 - Other location at University: (Please specify)
-

17d. To which group did the person who was the source of harassment belong?

- Administration (University Executive Leadership)
- Staff
- Faculty
- Residence assistants
- Security or campus police
- Students
- Others: (Please specify)_____

17e. Have you ever filed a complaint about different treatment or harassment?

- Yes (If you marked this response, proceed to question 17f)
- No (If you marked this response, skip to question #18)

17f. Was the complaint process explained to you?

- Yes
- No

17g. Was the complaint investigated?

- Yes
- No

17h. Was the complaint investigated in a timely fashion?

- Yes
- No

17i. Did the investigator (s) carefully listen to you?

Yes

No

17j. Did you feel the investigation process was fair?

Yes

No

18. Are you involved in at least one student organization on campus?

Yes

No

19. Do you feel comfortable expressing an opinion in class?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

20. Have you feared for your physical safety at GFSU University in the past year?

Yes (If you marked this response, proceed to question 20a.)

No (If you marked this response, proceed to question 21)

20a. What do you believe was/were the reason(s) for your physical safety being endangered?

(Check as many as apply)

Because of my race/ethnicity

Because of my gender

Because of my disability

Because of my sexual orientation

Because of my economic background

Because of my religious beliefs

Because of my political beliefs

Because of my age

Other: (Please specify)_____

20b. Have you ever filed a complaint about different treatment or harassment?

Yes (If you marked this response, proceed to question 20c)

No (If you marked this response, skip to question #21)

20c. Was the complaint process explained to you?

Yes

No

20d. Was the complaint investigated?

Yes

No

20e. Was the complaint investigated in a timely fashion?

Yes

No

20f. Did the investigator(s) carefully listen to you?

Yes

No

20g. Did you feel the investigation process was fair?

Yes

No

21. **In the past year**, has someone assumed that you were admitted to GFSU University primarily because of your:

(Check as many as apply, OR if this question does not apply to you skip to the next question.)

Race/ethnicity

Gender

Disability

Sexual orientation

Economic background

Religious beliefs

Political views

Age

Other: (Please specify) _____

22. **In the past year**, have you felt isolated or left out when work was required in groups because of your:

(Check as many as apply, **OR** if this question does not apply to you skip to the next question.)

Race/ethnicity

Gender

Disability

Sexual orientation

Economic background

Religious beliefs

Political views

Age

Other: (Please specify) _____

23. **In the past year**, have you felt that you were expected to present a viewpoint that is different from the majority because of your:

(Check as many as apply, **OR** if this question does not apply to you skip to the next question.)

Race/ethnicity

Gender

Disability

Sexual orientation

Economic background

Religious beliefs

Political views

Age

Other: (Please specify) _____

24. Have you attended multicultural events on campus?

Never

1-2 times

3-6 times

7 or more times

25. GFSU University is committed to diversity:

(Mark one)

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. The items in the survey may have missed a number of issues about diversity for you to consider. If you would like to offer your own suggestions on how the university may move forward to improve the campus environment for people of diverse backgrounds, please use the space below.