

Be Loud Behind Me, Show Me That You Care: Conducting Campus Climate Focus Groups with Undergraduates at a Predominantly White Institution

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For students with marginalized social identities, it can be challenging to navigate undergraduate experiences at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). To better understand lived experiences, ten focus groups were completed with students that represented various marginalized social identities and roles on campus. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was used to guide the analysis of ways that individuals navigate interactions within the microsystem that either create a greater sense of belonging for the student or do just the opposite. Findings indicated that student identities shape their entry into this system, the ways that they navigate spaces to survive the system, the complexity of social relationships with faculty and peers in classrooms and through affinity spaces, and the ignorance, neglect, and harm endured during the process. It is critical that higher education institutions, particularly PWIs, hear students' lived experiences in order to better facilitate inclusive and equitable educational experiences where students feel supported and cared for.

Introduction

Campus climate has been a significant area of study in higher education over the past few decades. Scholars define campus climate as “the current attitudes, behaviors, and standards and practices of employees and students of an institution” (Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 264). Campus climate has been associated with student persistence and retention (Doan, 2011; Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008) and academic success (Edman & Brazil, 2009; Garvey et al., 2018). Campus climate includes different dimensions such as the institutional history as well as the elements of structural diversity, psychological perceptions, and behaviors (McClain & Perry, 2017). Generally speaking, campus climate is important.

Much of the research focuses on the racial climate of the campus, which may be defined as “part of the institutional context that includes community members' attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations around issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity” (Hurtado et al., p. 205), but researchers also promote an examination of campus climate for students from different identity groups. These identity groups may include race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, immigration status, and disability (Garvey et al., 2018; Mwangi et al., 2018; Muñoz & Vigil, 2018; Wilson et al., 2000). It is imperative to assess campus climate and understand how various constituency groups experience a campus in order to facilitate the process of developing more inclusive practices.

The purpose of this research was to learn about undergraduate students' authentic lived experiences at a predominantly white institution (PWI) in the Midwest. The goal was to gain a deeper perspective of equity on campus including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, country of origin, religion, socio-economic status, and intersectional social identities. The main research question framing this study is "How do undergraduate students describe their lived experiences regarding equity and inclusion and overall campus climate while attending a small predominantly white college in the Midwestern United States?"

Setting the Stage

During the summer of 2020, as a result of the social unrest in response to police brutality and a campus petition for greater accountability on race issues, the College President recommitted to the priority of disseminating a campus climate survey. The Diversity Equity Inclusion Task Force at our institution formalized the Campus Climate Survey working group in September 2020. The membership of the working group included faculty and staff along with two student representatives. With the working group's support, the college administered the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS) Diversity and Equity survey in October 2020 and all students, faculty, and staff were encouraged to participate and provide their perspectives. The survey was an anonymous tool to assist the college community in gathering information that can be utilized to help achieve a more inclusive, equitable, and diverse college. With over 1000 responses, the College had a 27% response rate for undergraduate students, 18% for graduate students, 48% for faculty, 53% for staff, and 31% for administrators. While findings from this survey are not the focus of this paper, the process and information gleaned from the survey study have informed our process with the current study.

During preparations for the campus climate survey, the working group discussed the benefits and possible limitations of collecting only anonymous survey data as provided by the HEDS survey. While campus climate surveys are important to understand experiences across the population, Hart and Fellabaum (2008) advocate for using a mixed method approach to develop a more holistic view of campus climate. They stress that qualitative data provides "a deeper understanding of lived experiences of members of an institution's community" (p. 229). In order to understand campus climate fully, it is important to center the voices of the community and work to engage in processes that facilitate transparency and trust. As a student serving institution, we prioritized voices of our community through the facilitation of focus groups of students from various identity groups. Doan (2011) made a case that student organizations provide an opportunity for students to express and embrace their identities in safe spaces with individuals who share common interests and identities. Therefore, we developed our initial sample primarily through established student organizations then expanded based on recommendations of students.

We purposefully engaged students as co-researchers in this research in recognition that "community members are able to examine their problems more critically and identify potential solutions based on their local needs" (Salazar, 2021, p. 1). While many campus climate and school improvement initiatives seek student feedback, their involvement may be marginal or tokenized (O'Brien et al., 2021). The inclusion of student participation in ten focus groups provided the space for deep listening. Engaging students as co-researchers provided the

opportunity to students to be co-creators of knowledge rather than just sources of data (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2016). As co-creators, students have been involved in presentations on campus to discuss the process and disseminate findings. These processes allow this work to be both *for* students and *with* students.

Theoretical Framework

We utilized the theoretical framework of Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a lens to organize themes and findings from the data. While originally developed for child development in educational settings, Bronfenbrenner's theory has also been tapped for higher education (e.g. May & Bridger, 2010; Willems, 2013). For example, a study about the experiences of Black students in higher education, utilized Bronfenbrenner's theory in order to shape an understanding of the influence of structural systems and on the lived experiences of students because "it considers multiple systems and contexts as well as whether and in what ways structural, contextual and other related factors impact the educational experiences and outcomes of Black students at PWIs" (Mwangi et al., 2018, p. 6-7).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) identifies multiple systems, which are simultaneously influencing the developing human. The microsystem addresses entities that the individual student directly interacts with on campus during their time as an undergraduate and especially while being part of this study. Larger systems, including social and cultural contexts, shape how students navigate the microsystem. Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem, which refers to the element of time, was imperative as we collected data during an unprecedented global pandemic and racial revolution in the U.S. and around the world.

While we hope to address all levels of Bronfenbrenner's theory in future papers, in this paper, we focus only on the microsystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines this system as "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced by the developing person," p. 22). He emphasized the importance of how this system is *experienced* by the individual, stressing the developing person's perception of the system. Therefore, it is critical to understand the lived experience of the microsystem. For college students, this includes the ways that they enter into the system of the college, navigate these spaces, and interact with people within this system. While higher education strives for goals of diversity, true inclusion and belonging can only occur when there are internal structures that support individuals, especially individuals with marginalized identities who often bear extra burdens of navigating the cultural space of higher education at a PWI.

Positionality

The subjectivity and perceptions of authors also matters in this research and we want to share who we are in an effort to be transparent. Both authors were part of the Campus Climate Survey working group described earlier and were involved with the focus group research. The first author is a senior faculty member who identifies as a white female, non-immigrant who was a first-generation student from a working class background. The second author is a junior faculty member who identifies as a female of color, relates to the immigrant experience, and comes from a minoritized religious background. As scholars who are committed to the values of equity and

justice, we fully recognize that our own social identities play a role in this research. For this reason, we have strived to center student voices as best as we possibly could at every step. Often, the result has been students leading us.

Methodology

From November 2020 to April 2021, we conducted a series of ten focus groups in order to develop a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of students associated with various social identities and constituency groups. As faculty researchers who were part of the campus climate survey working group, we developed the focus group protocol, which was approved by the College's Institutional Review Board. Our goals were to explore students' broad perceptions of campus, experiences in and outside of the classroom, and experiences with diversity, equity and inclusion programming through the lens of their social identities and/or roles on campus (Appendix A). The larger campus climate survey working group, which included student voices, also provided feedback on the focus group questions asked.

Participants

Students were engaged as research assistants (RAs) and co-facilitators of the focus groups and were either recruited because of their affiliation and leadership of a constituency group or they responded to open positions advertised on campus. After completing research ethics training, student RAs received stipends to assist with recruiting, facilitation, data preparation, and initial analysis of the focus group data. The student RAs worked collaboratively with one of the faculty researchers to facilitate their focus group. Internal and external funding sources, including a student government association, helped support this research financially.

Each focus group was held in a secure virtual meeting space. Sessions were attended by three to ten participants, the RA, and one of the faculty researchers. Sessions were recorded with participants' permission and lasted 90-120 minutes. The RAs facilitated the discussion and the faculty researcher was available to provide support and add any clarifying questions.

The focus groups represented 64 students from various social identities and constituency groups. Participants were recruited through relationships with student organizations or through student RA's personal networks. We did not collect other demographic data from the focus group participants other than the social identity group that they identified with in order to be a participant within that group. The majority of the groups were identified by the faculty researchers, but two of the groups were proposed by student research assistants. The focus groups included the following social identities and areas of focus:

- Students supporting issues related to immigration status
- Students supporting disabilities rights and advocacy
- Muslim students
- International students
- Latinx students
- LGBTQIA2S+ students
- Student athlete leaders

- Student athletes of color
- Commuter students
- Mixed-race group of students

Efforts were made to engage the Black Student Association, but the group declined. Members of the group did participate in other focus groups.

Data Analysis

After completion of the focus groups, the RAs were provided a copy of the meeting recording and transcript either through a virtual platform or a transcription website. Student RAs worked to reformat and de-identify transcripts to prepare them for data analysis. Once the transcripts were prepared, one of the two faculty researchers reviewed the transcript for accuracy and de-identification. Then both the student RA and the faculty researcher independently completed open coding of the transcript. After the coding was completed, the pair met to review codes. The intent of the meeting was to clarify codes and discuss emergent themes. For the final step, the research assistants were asked to develop a data table with 4-5 emergent themes, related codes, and direct quotes that represented the theme. In order to help with the literature review, student RAs were also asked to locate two research articles related to the emergent themes and present annotations for those sources.

Initial open coding and data tables were completed for the focus groups by the student RAs. The themes that emerged from the analysis completed by the student RAs represented a first round of axial coding or refining of thematic categories (Williams & Moser, 2019). Themes across the ten focus groups served as a guide to develop structures for further analysis. Subsequent analysis was completed to examine themes that emerged across the data set. Two additional student RAs, who had not been involved in the focus groups, assisted the faculty researchers with the broader thematic analysis. They worked through the data, helped to identify themes, and provided feedback to us as we worked through the development of themes.

Credibility and Validity

In the fall of 2021, we invited the original 10 student RAs to attend a meeting with the two faculty researchers during which student RAs shared their individual processes and reviewed the developing thematic analysis. The student RAs provided feedback on the first four themes and suggested an additional theme that we then developed for this paper. Throughout this process, we have shared findings from these focus groups at our working group meetings and campus forums to promote transparency and gain additional feedback. Student researchers also assisted with two campus forum presentations open to anyone at our institution. This process of engaging students and the campus community in the analysis and getting their feedback has served as a validity check to guide our on-going interpretation of the results (Maxwell, 1996).

Findings

While there is much to uncover within this particular data set, we have identified five major themes: 1) Entering the system 2) Masking to navigate the system 3) Role of professors 4) The

importance of affinity spaces, and 5) Ignorance, neglect, and harm still endured. First impressions and becoming part of the college community are discussed quickly followed by the need to fit within that system. The role of the professor is seen as imperative as are affinity spaces on campus with either one affecting a student's sense of belonging, positively or negatively. The final theme discusses what students with systematically marginalized identities continue to face at a PWI. We hope that these insights prove useful to other institutions doing this work and fully acknowledge the retraumatization this may have caused some of our focus group participants and research assistants. Recognizing this burden, we conversed with our research assistants regarding the emotional labor involved in this work and encouraged our RAs to reach out to us when they needed emotional support. We noted that there were many conversations regarding emotionalities around this work before, during, and after the focus groups.

Entering the System

When asked about their first impressions of the college campus, the majority of the participants commented on the small size of the school and the sense of community. Some participants focused on the aesthetics of the campus and available resources such as new buildings and access to certain experiences such as athletics. While some students, especially those from dominant identities, described the camps as “homey and comforting”, students of color often noted that they were quickly aware of the lack of representation on campus. For some students, this created a feeling that there was a “superficial kind of welcoming” that led to people feeling “like an outsider”.

Overall, there was a strong sense of excitement for students related to their anticipated experience in college. One white, male student reflected on his experiences with diversity through a leadership role on campus. He stated, “...we get the chance to interact with so many other freshmen and sophomores and you get to hear about other people's experiences...you can just be open about how you feel about certain things”. This student valued the opportunity to get to know people from different backgrounds. Other white students recognized how their identities provide them privilege on campus and they shared their expectation of being able to have a secure sense of belonging and bring aspects of their outside interests into campus spaces. As students enter the campus, they must make decisions about their level of comfort with sharing aspects of their identities. For some students with identities that are less observable (i.e. disability and sexual orientation), they may choose not to disclose their identities as they enter the system. Some students indicated they felt their disability was not relevant to certain aspects of campus life or they were concerned about judgment.

For students of color, there was also variation in their entry to the system. There was a notable difference between students who came from high schools that had a similar demographic make-up to the college as compared to students who came from institutions that were minority serving. Students that came from predominantly white spaces described the familiarity and sense of knowing how to navigate the space. Others became immediately aware that they were “the only one” in given situations which led to some students being very cautious about sharing aspects of their identity. One participant stated, “...I feel like I can't be myself near white people because

they don't understand the things that my family have gone through." This quote clearly shows the dissonance that some students experience when entering our campus.

Masking to Navigate the System

Throughout the focus groups, participants shared about the ways that their social identities impacted their interactions within the system. Students with non-dominant social identities reported challenges. When their social identities were observable, they reported a heightened awareness of self that sometimes made them feel unwelcome or tokenized. When their social identities were less obvious, however, several participants described, "one of the things we do is masking, where you kind of like try to make yourself seem--for the lack of a better word, normal...".

The culture and practices of a department or discipline sometimes cued this need for masking. One participant argued, "Well, the thing about my major is that there's quite a bit of kind of this facade of how you're supposed to present yourself". This student felt pressured to conform to norms related to gender identity. The participant's concern about how professors would perceive them as less capable also led to masking. Participants shared concerns about letting faculty or advisors aware of their struggles for fear that they might not offer strong recommendations or support opportunities such as research and scholarships.

Participants described the need to mask with not only faculty and staff, but also with peers. One participant shared, "There have definitely been times when I felt like my mask slipped off and that my behavior was kind of like odd or abnormal or something like that. And honestly, I felt like I faced a lot of rejection from peers." These concerns included both academic and residential spaces. Participants shared concerns about sharing their authentic selves in residence halls for fears of judgment from peers and staff.

By contrast, it is also important to note that there were spaces where participants felt safe in sharing their authentic selves. Individuals described examples in the classroom where they could fully express themselves and feel that their perspectives were respected. They talked about trusted communities such as athletic teams, fine arts groups, and student organizations. Often this trust grew out of common interests and lived experiences.

Role of Professors

During each of the focus groups, participants across all social identities and constituency groups identified the role of the professor as a factor tied to belonging on campus. A professor's actions either increased or decreased a student's sense of belonging. Some actions took little time on the part of the professor while other intentional actions required deeper effort; both were important according to students and made students feel like "more than an ID number here."

There were several actions that took little time and effort from the professor's end that were appreciated by students. Professors could welcome students into office hours to talk about academics or life itself and show humility regarding their own mistakes or misunderstandings while interacting with students. Students also appreciated when professors shared cultural events on or off campus that students were involved in with the rest of the class, even when it did not

connect to the content they were teaching. Other actions included verbal positive reinforcement of student academics and effort, putting personal pronouns at the end of an email signature, and understanding the familial obligations of communal cultures for students.

Actions that required more sustained effort and commitment from the professor were similarly appreciated by students from all social identities. Students mentioned a deeper sense of belonging when professors put in time and effort to give constructive academic feedback on their work. Personal check-ins were also high on the list and included individual check-ins that were caring and non-judgmental. According to one student, “even five minutes goes a long way.” Professors noticing when a student was absent and sending a quick email to check on the student was also mentioned. Checking-in on the whole class is also important, especially when professors realize that some current events may take an emotional toll on some students more than others. Students positively mentioned that professors who normalized talking about current events in their classroom helped foster a deeper sense of belonging for them. Students mentioned that in order to do so, professors needed to be educated on terms, issues, and diversity training, including neurodiversity and disabilities. When professors utilized student-led instruction that involved listening to students when they voiced ideas, concerns, opinions, or needs and assisting students in being co-pilots of their own educational journeys, a sense of belonging followed. Finally, professor activism, whether that be their personal behavior in the classroom or the content that they choose to teach in their syllabus, was mentioned by students as they described a sense of belonging in the classroom.

The Importance of Affinity Spaces on Campus

Another area mentioned by students were the spaces available on campus outside of their classrooms and residential spaces. Affinity spaces included student-led organizations or clubs, athletics teams, other more structured extracurricular activities led by faculty, staff, or coaches, and programming such as diversity, equity, and inclusion training on campus. Student-led clubs and organizations were highlighted throughout the focus groups as spaces where students could feel seen, heard, and validated. Examples included specific events such as bonding trips, barbecues, or just weekly meetings where students were able to talk openly about issues they feel passionately about or just “act how I am” without worry. One student said, “I was in a group of people who really understood me and wanted what I wanted. We wanted to spread awareness. And I just felt so free to just show a side of me that sometimes I didn’t.” It was clear through the data that affinity groups related to social identity created a sense of belonging and acceptance and “more connections on campus.”

An issue that arose was the fear of attending affinity based social events on one’s own, especially if the event in question was unrelated to a student’s social identity. Students often mentioned that there was a “fear of imposing on a space that was not meant for me” or “needing a buddy” to accompany them. Another solution offered by students is to have more collaborative events where students from multiple social identity based clubs and organizations can promote the event together, even if only one club plans and executes the event itself.

Participants identified other faculty, staff, or coach led affinity spaces as asset-based. For example, one specific program geared towards orienting students to the college made a

commuter student feel included “as if I was a resident.” Many students also stated that the first generation programming at our college felt like a “really inclusive environment.” While those examples refer to fairly structured programs, other events such as a movie club on campus were also highlighted by students as it brought many diverse students, faculty, and staff from across our campus together to discuss the prison industrial complex and “did the job that it intended to.” Athletic teams that normalized conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion also assisted students in feeling a sense of belonging. One student athlete spoke directly about having “Mentality Tuesdays and Thursdays” regularly as a team. Others spoke about an event when their entire team attended a diversity, equity, and inclusion forum together and then discussed what they heard together as well. Overall, student athletes of color appreciated when their coaches and team members were “being open about instances that happened and saying these are wrong.” One area that student athletes thought could be elevated was incentivizing attendance at such events more by coaches.

Finally, structured but sometimes optional training on campus led by offices such as Multicultural Affairs and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion also created affinity spaces on our campus. Students mostly spoke positively about these spaces being informative, educative, and reaffirming. Trainings around sexual misconduct and other important topics such as supporting undocumented students were mentioned as heightening awareness and belonging on campus. Though students also lamented that there was a lack of attendance from students at large or faculty from the institution. In addition, students discussed the mandatory diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings sometimes having the opposite effect and caused some individuals on our campus to become “even more aggressive.”

Ignorance, Neglect, and Harm

This leads to the fifth and final theme identified by student RAs as a part of member-checking our previous findings. The insistence of the student RAs to include the following theme speaks to the importance of the findings that follow. This theme is identified as ignorance, neglect, and harm within the microsystem and includes members of the institution as well as peers. For the purpose of this research, ignorance is described as being uninformed or misinformation related to explicit or implicit bias, neglect is exclusionary, and harm describes the emotional, sociological, and psychological trauma endured as a result.

Ignorance was described in a variety of forms and included miseducated assumptions such as native language speaking abilities and misuse of pronouns to ignorance around topics such as affirmative action or instructors viewing students documented accommodations as optional. Many students also spoke about the topic of citizenship and the ignorance that seeped into their peers’ assumptions regarding their national identity. One student spoke explicitly about feeling frustrated about having to explain that her home was an American territory or that in other words that she too was American. Other forms of ignorance included implicit bias associated with stereotypes such as body type or the capabilities of certain ethnic groups to be successful in higher education. Issues around LGBTQIA2S+ also arose as students commented on stereotypes regarding gender norms and the lack of knowledge regarding certain groups within this category. Neglect was described in many ways by students with the commonality being that students from systematically marginalized backgrounds did not feel like their lived experiences or their needs

mattered. First off, students stated that diversity presentations on campus seemed to be geared for a white audience and mentioned the exclusion of DEI topics in their coursework, especially in STEM. Another example included a program being cut suddenly with students commenting that “our religion never comes up” in other spaces. Commuter students lamented that they did not have “places on campus to be fully relaxed” or any access to a meal plan that might help them feel at home while on campus, while neurodivergent students highlighted the lack of attention paid to invisible disabilities, including anxiety. A variety of students also pointed out that DEI conversations on campus lacked a focus on Anti-Asian hate. Black students discussed sharing their qualms over and over again with the institution and the disheartened feeling that came with slow or no tangible changes visible to them. One student commented that nothing to date has “changed the culture or the attitude of the actual campus.”

Students are retraumatized when they are asked about these lived experiences over and over again without tangible results, resulting in further harm. Black students at the institution reported being called the N word and being barked at while on campus and other student groups shared multiple examples of microaggressions from being told to “move it cripple” to being asked why they wanted to be a “terrorist translator” when they shared they were studying Arabic. Student perception is that the institution does not care about the harm they experience or care if they leave the institution. A sense of frustration was felt when bias incidents were reported, but then no information was shared with the victim regarding the steps that the college took to “be loud behind me.” Sadly, one student lamented, “If I had a penny for every single time a student on this campus has been disrespected based on their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or sexuality, my tuition would be free.” This quote so powerfully describes the ignorance, neglect, and harm that some students face regularly while on campus.

Discussion and Implications

While all parts of Bronfenbrenner’s theory are important, we focused specifically on the microsystem for this paper as we saw it as the most important factor due to daily direct student interaction and occurrences. We recognized through our research that onboarding students or their entry onto campus matters, classroom spaces and interactions with professors matter, and finding a niche within an affinity space is crucial. We also want to fully recognize that there continues to be harm done by ignorance and neglect by factors within the microsystem, especially for our students from systematically marginalized backgrounds.

This study echoes the value of partnering with our students discussed in the literature in order to research our campus climate in a way that does not tokenize, but instead offers an opportunity for students to examine problems within their own spaces and systems (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2016; O’Brien et al., 2021; Salazar, 2021). As Doan (2011) suggests, student organizations were a great resource for this study and a valuable starting point for student recruitment. The focus groups also created spaces for students to decontextualize their experience with others who shared one aspect (or more) of their social identity.

Knowing what we do now, we offer the following recommendations. Beyond increasing diversity on campus among student, faculty, and staff populations, which we acknowledge is important, we also believe that current students must feel heard when experiencing or reporting

microaggressions on campus and educated about the language of microresistance (Dunn, 2021). Diversity training on campus can also be differentiated and not served as a one size fits all approach, but rather can offer an educative experience as well as a space to find solidarity. Next, professors must be given the tools to become advocates for their students, which includes being informed about students' social identities and practices for more inclusive pedagogy. As faculty, we need to be able to demonstrate to our students that we can "be loud" behind them. Finally, we can increase our support of affinity spaces on our campuses.

While we are continuing to process these data, we have already seen that cross-campus partnerships are a critical part of the process from the beginning. Without support from administrators, commitment by faculty and staff, and trust from our students, our ability to even discuss the need for a survey would not have yielded results. Again, best practices recommend those with the most institutional knowledge to lead the way as they know the place and its procedures best (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008). Cross-campus partnerships align those with institutional memory and decision-making authority with broader constituencies committed to anti-racism and permanent cultural change on campus. Altogether, traditional boundaries of higher education hierarchies could get in the way; yet in our case, we show how collaboration fosters movement, and hopefully, change.

Next Steps

Our next steps involve exploring the factors that increase or decrease a student's sense of belonging within systems beyond the microsystem. We hope to address issues within the exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem in future publications. These factors put together may tell us more about what needs work.

We also recognize that this is not the full story and that our strategic sample of students did not include all student voices. For example, we did not focus on the lived experiences of our transfer students, but we hope to focus on this next. Nonetheless, we believe that our research has led us to these conclusions regarding the experience of undergraduates with varying social identities at our predominantly white institution.

Conclusion

The information gleaned from this study may generate knowledge about students' lived experiences that might be beneficial for other constituents on campus to hear and shape the understanding of student experiences on our campus. We also believe that the broader campus community will benefit from reporting of this data that will center the voices of students in order to promote more inclusive and equitable experiences on our campus. In addition, collaborating on this project may have provided solidarity in a time of solitude during the Covid-19 pandemic. Finally, we hope that our frameworks and findings provide a reasonable and tangible way to address issues related to equity and inclusion on our campus. Once our research has helped in identifying issues, we hope that action and sustainable change soon follow.

Beyond our own campus, we hope to inspire other institutions of higher education to conduct qualitative research through student focus groups after conducting their own standardized

campus climate surveys. By sharing our methods and processes here, we hope to inspire other institutions of higher education to also center student voices and allow students as insiders into the research, viewing them as important stakeholders and decision makers. This may be a way for us to show all of our students that we stand loudly behind them, that we care, and that we can work together to create change for them and for us all.

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Appendix

Campus Climate Survey Student Focus Groups

Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group today. Our goal is to learn more about your experiences on our campus and we believe that your voice is important. The purpose of this research is to learn about your authentic lived experiences (positive or negative) in order to gain a deeper perspective of equity on our campus including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, country of origin, religion, socio-economic status, and intersectional social identities. We realize that these topics may elicit an emotional response and we want to be transparent about that.

Before we start, I'd like to establish some ground rules for our time. I have a series of questions. Sometimes, I may go around and ask each person to respond and other questions may have more of a free flow. You are welcome to comment or expand on another person's ideas, but please avoid any judgment of other people's ideas. I may provide some structure in order to try to get everyone's voice included in the process. You don't have to answer every question. If there's something you don't want to talk about just say pass and we will have a chance at the end to return to a topic if you wish. You may also feel free to type in your answers to the chat feature, but please note that everything you type into the chat is also considered data for this study. Please remember that anything shared within this group should remain confidential. With your permission, we are recording the conversation so we can have a record of your ideas. When we transcribe the discussion, we will not include identifying information. Your name or other identifying information will not be included in any reporting of what we learn from these conversations. Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

- Please introduce yourself: name, year, and things you are involved with on campus.
 - Think back to the first time that you were on campus, can you describe your first impressions of [the college]?
 - Thinking about your social identities, can you describe a time when you felt seen and heard by your instructor?
 - Thinking again about your social identities, can you describe a time when you did not feel seen and heard by your instructor?
 - Can you describe a time when you felt seen and heard on campus outside of the classroom? Can you describe a time when you did not feel seen and heard on campus outside of the classroom?
 - Can you describe a time that you felt free to be yourself at [the college]?
 - Can you describe a time that you did not feel comfortable to be yourself at [the college]?
 - Do you feel empowered to speak up when you experience microaggressions on campus or when others experience microaggressions in your presence? Why or why not? (*ask if everyone is familiar with the term 'microaggressions'. If not, give a few examples. Microaggressions are a subtle form of discrimination and occur on a day to day basis*)
 - If you have engaged in the diversity and equity activities on campus, could you please describe an activity or event that you found meaningful? (*give a few examples – any event organized by the Office of Multicultural Affairs that talked about differences. Ex. Black History Month events*)

- What types of personal actions have you taken as a result of your attendance at diversity, equity, and inclusion events around campus? If you have not taken any action, could you explain why?
- What barriers can you identify that prevent you from attending more diversity and equity activities on campus?
- Is there anything that you would like to circle back to?
- Is there anything else we should consider?

Thank you for sharing your experiences and feedback today. If you have further questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact us.