TEXAS EDUCATION REVIEW

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TEXAS EDUCATION REVIEW

Welcome to Volume 12, Issue 2 (Spring 2024) of the Texas Education Review

We are pleased to announce the publication of Volume 10, Issue 2 of the Texas Education Review, featuring five open call pieces that explore: legislative trends affecting dyslexia identification in Texas (Simmons et al.), employment trends among Black teachers in Texas (Redwine Johnson et al.), teachers' perceptions of the role that children's literature plays in fostering neurodiversity awareness (Amador), a professor's experiences in making students' voices heard among faculty members (Cavazos), and an intervention to increase preservice teachers' confidence while discussing controversial identity issues (van Kessel et al.). Additionally, we present a Special Issue titled, *Academic Eclecticism: Celebrating the Life and Work of Dr. Patricia Ann Somers*, containing eight entries.

Information for Contributors

The Texas Education Review is an independent, peer reviewed, student-run scholarly publication based at the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin. The Texas Education Review was founded and is operated by doctoral students at The University of Texas at Austin's College of Education, which consistently ranks as one of the best public university graduate education programs in the United States. The Texas Education Review aims to advance scholarship by publishing an academic journal of the highest quality including works by graduate students, professors, and practitioners, focusing on education policy and related issues. This journal features articles, essays, notes, and reviews relevant to a national and international audience of scholars and practitioners.

The Texas Education Review focuses on analysis of education policy and related issues, with nonexclusive preference given to issues affecting the State of Texas. Each issue shall display unparalleled excellence in content and style. Further, The Texas Education Review fosters the academic and professional development of its members through participation in the editorial process and each member displays the highest standards of integrity and professional excellence in every endeavor. From Sweatt v. Painter and No Child Left Behind, to charter schools, curriculum policy, and textbook adoption, the State of Texas has played and will continue to play a critical role in shaping education policy in the United States. The Texas Education Review is located directly on The University of Texas's campus in the heart of downtown Austin. Its close proximity to the Texas Capitol, Texas Education Agency, and State Board of Education offers unparalleled access to the thought leaders, policy makers, and academics who are driving education policy in Texas.

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Dyslexia Identification: Texas Legislative Trends in Prevalence Rate of Students by School District Locale

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Dyslexia Identification:
Texas Legislative Trends in Prevalence Rate of Students by School District Locale

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Abstract

State legislation serves as a guide and critical influence on the evaluation and identification of students with dyslexia across the United States. The state of Texas has numerous laws and regulations concerning dyslexia, guided by the Texas Administrative Code, Texas Education Code, Texas Occupations Code, and the Texas Education Agency's dyslexia handbook (National Center on Improving Literacy [NCIL], 2021). This article is an analysis of publicly available statewide data to assess the impact federal and state legislative policies have had on the prevalence rate of students with dyslexia in 839 urban and rural school districts in Texas. 839 school districts from the 2016-2017 to 2022-2023 school years were extracted from the Texas Education Agency's Public Education Information Management System. Researchers focused on the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Corrective Action to the TEA (OSEP, 2018), the TEA state dyslexia handbook revisions (TEA, 2021), and the unique prevalence of rural school districts in Texas (Simmons et al., 2021). Analysis focused on implications for dyslexia evaluation and identification practices for school districts and evaluators within the state.

Keywords: dyslexia identification, education policy, school district locale

Introduction

Policy surrounding the identification of students with dyslexia and the provision of instructional support services to students identified as having dyslexia recently experienced critical public attention and landmark federal and state mandates for reform in the state of Texas. According to a review of current literature and existing education policy, 48 states have passed dyslexia-related legislation requiring dyslexia screening, dyslexia training for teachers, or dyslexia intervention (Rice & Gilson, 2023). State legislation serves as a guide and critical influence on the evaluation and identification of students with dyslexia across the United States. The prevalence of dyslexia (see Dyslexia Identification section for definitions) among students remains a current focus of researchers within the field, with estimates between 5% and 20% of the U.S. population has dyslexia (Rice & Gilson, 2023). Advocacy groups have pushed for the passage of state-level dyslexia legislation with the hope of addressing what many have viewed as the under-identification and under-treatment of dyslexia within school districts; however, current literature suggests this outcome may have not been achieved (Wagner et al, 2020). The state of Texas, has numerous laws and regulations concerning dyslexia, guided by the Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Texas Education Code (TEC), Texas Occupations Code (TOC), and the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) handbook for identifying and providing instructional services for students with dyslexia (National Center on Improving Literacy [NCIL], 2021). The state of Texas plays a role of national importance in dyslexia legislative trends as Texas-based decisions affects schools and children with dyslexia across the country in some cases (Odegard et al., 2020).

Researchers (Rice & Gilson, 2023) argue that the existence of these various laws and policies create confusion surrounding identification and interventions for students with dyslexia in the state of

Texas. Historically, in the state of Texas, school districts frequently identified and served students with dyslexia under Section 504 instead of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; IDEA, 2019), and identification rates remained below prevalence estimates based on national rates (Odegard et al., 2020). In 2018, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) began investigating and providing corrections for the TEA seeking to address the provision of special education services for all students, including students with dyslexia (OSEP, 2018). Furthermore, in 2021, the TEA updated the state dyslexia handbook with revised guidelines outlining the evaluation process, identification process and model for service delivery for students with dyslexia (TEA, 2021). The challenge of evaluation and identification of students with dyslexia in the state of Texas is further complicated by the percentage of school districts identified by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) as rural school districts (TEA, 2023a). Texas has more rural school districts than any other state in the United States; and rural school districts within the state face unique challenges in special education identification, such as access to service providers, funding, and resources (Simmons et al., 2021).

Dyslexia Identification

In the United States, dyslexia-specific processes for identification and instructional service delivery for students with dyslexia exist in at least 42 states; however, state-specific processes vary significantly in identification and practice (Petscher et al., 2019), leading to debate among school personnel over dyslexia-specific characteristics (Rice & Gilson, 2023). Results of previous studies suggest that differences in state dyslexia legislation across states and ambiguity within state legislation directly impacts 1) the number of students identified as having or being at risk for dyslexia, 2) the types of supports students with dyslexia receive, and 3) the implementation of dyslexia specific laws (Gearin et al., 2022). Nationally, three definitions of dyslexia are most recognized: 1) The First Step Action definition that originated in the U.S. Senate, 2) the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) Definition (Miciak & Fletcher, 2020), and 3) Vaughn and colleagues' most recent definition (Vaughn et al., 2024).

The First Step Act Definition states:

> Dyslexia means an unexpected difficulty in reading for an individual who has the intelligence to be a much better reader, most commonly caused by a difficulty in phonological processing (the appreciation of the individual sounds of spoken language), which affects the ability of an individual to speak, read, and spell. (Cassidy, 2019).

The IDA defines dyslexia as follows:

> Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (International Dyslexia Association, 2002).

Vaughn and colleagues define dyslexia as:

> Dyslexia is a learning disability that involves significant difficulties in reading and spelling single words accurately and with automaticity. These difficulties are observed despite the provision of generally effective reading instruction and supplemental interventions. Word reading and spelling difficulties in dyslexia are often associated with difficulties in phonological processing, but dyslexia is not identified when reading difficulties are the result of second language learning, problems with vision or hearing, or intellectual disability (Vaughn et al., 2024, p. 9).

In the state of Texas education evaluators are guided by TEC and the TEA's definition of dyslexia as outlined in the dyslexia handbook. TEC §38.003 defines dyslexia and related disorders in the following way:

> "Dyslexia" means a disorder of constitutional origin manifested by a difficulty in learning to read, write, or spell, despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence, and sociocultural opportunity. "Related disorders" include disorders similar to or related to dyslexia, such as developmental auditory imperception, dysphasia, specific developmental dyslexia, developmental dysgraphia, and developmental spelling disability (TEC §38.003(d)(1)-(2), 1995).

The TEA dyslexia handbook defines dyslexia below:

> Students identified as having dyslexia typically experience primary difficulties in phonological awareness, including phonemic awareness and manipulation, single word reading, reading fluency, and spelling. Consequences may include difficulties in reading comprehension and/or written expression. These difficulties in phonological awareness are unexpected for the student's age and educational level and are not primarily the result of language difference factors. Additionally, there is often a family history of similar difficulties (TEA, 2021, p. 1).

Legislative History in Texas

State-specific dyslexia laws exist among 48 states with the intent to support the identification and delivery of instructional support services to students with dyslexia; however, these laws may contribute to unintended consequences in schools related to dyslexia (Rice & Gilson, 2023). In Texas, dyslexia laws date back as early as 1986, with the first dyslexia handbook written in 1992 (Rice & Gilson, 2023). In 2016, a series of investigative news reports were published that revealed systemic problems concerning Texas's continuous delayed identification and denial of services to students with disabilities, including students with dyslexia (Simmons et al., 2021). This public media coverage spurred a federal investigation by the OSEP that resulted in OSEP's findings that the TEA was in violation of the IDEA (OSEP, 2018). OSEP cited three findings of non-compliance, the most relevant among these to identification of students with dyslexia was the assertion that TEA failed to, "ensure that all students with disabilities were identified and evaluated" (OSEP, 2018).

School personnel, researchers, and policy makers (Odegard et al., 2020) indicate that the OSEP correct of action letter to the TEA served as a catalyst to frequent and significant state-based legislative change over the past six years. Table 1 outlines seven legislative state amendments to the TEC, the TAC, and four recent committee approved Texas state House and Senate bills. In addition

to these changes, the TEA issued updates to the Texas Dyslexia Handbook in 2021 containing explicit guidance on the processes for evaluating and identifying students within the state with dyslexia (TEA, 2021). This trend in aggressive legislative changes was punctuated in July 2023 with the Texas House committee approval of Texas House Bill 3928 (Texas H.B. 3928, 88th Legislature, 2023), a bill that significantly impacted local education agencies' (LEA) processes for evaluating and determining the presence of dyslexia among students. Among other provisions, the most noted requirements of the bill specific to dyslexia identification require the following: 1) If a student is suspected of having dyslexia, an LEA must distribute to parents a form developed by the TEA, explaining rights under the IDEA that may be additional to those under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 2) an LEA must determine the qualifications and training requirements for a required admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee member when a student is suspected of, and is later identified with, dyslexia (TEA, 2023b).

Table 1

Texas State Dyslexia Legislation from 2018 – 2023

TEC §21.044(c)(2)	Outlines the curriculum requirement for teacher preparation programs to include the characteristics of dyslexia, identification of dyslexia, and multisensory strategies for teaching students with dyslexia (TEA, 2021).
TEC §21.054(b) 19 TAC §232.11(e)	Mandate continuing education requirements for educators who teach students with dyslexia (TEA, 2021).
TEC §28.021(b)	Establishes guidelines for districts when measuring academic achievement or proficiency of students with dyslexia (TEA, 2021).
TEC §38.003(a)	Requires students to be screened or tested, as appropriate, for dyslexia and related disorders at appropriate times in accordance with a program approved by the State Board of Education (SBOE). Screening must occur at the end of the school year for each student in kindergarten and first grade (TEA, 2021).
TEC §38.0032	Requires the TEA to annually develop a list of training opportunities regarding dyslexia that satisfy continuing education requirements for educators who teach students with dyslexia (TEA, 2021).
TEC §42.006(a-1)	Requires school districts and open-enrollment charter schools to report through the Texas Student Data System (TSDS) and Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) the number of enrolled students who have been identified as having dyslexia (TEA, 2023b).
Texas House Bill 3, 2019	Increased rate of funding the LEA receives for placing a special ed. student in a general ed. setting (Texas H.B. 3, 86th Legislature, 2019).
Texas Senate Bill 500, 2019	Increased supplemental spending in response to decreased funding for special ed. students that occurred during 2012, 2017-2019 (Chevalier, 2019).
Texas Senate Bill 139, 2019	Required the TEA to provide notice to families of students receiving special ed. services detailing elimination of, "8.5% cap" (Texas S.B. 139, 86th Legislature, 2019)

Rural Education in Texas

According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, Texas has more than 2,000 campuses classified as being in rural areas (TEA, 2019). This state characteristic impacts access to service providers, funding, resources, and professional development, with special educators in rural school districts tending to have decreased access to post-baccalaureate education than their suburban and urban counterparts (Simmons et al., 2021). Researchers have revealed contrasting perspectives in assessing state funding and the impact of state funding on the provision of special education services in rural schools. In an analysis of data, Texas was found to use state formulas to allocate state financial aid to school districts that include several factors designed to support rural school districts when compared to other states with similar populations in rural areas (Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003). Overall, researchers found that the cost structure of rural school districts, including those located in the State of Texas, were comparable to that of non-rural school districts (Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003). Comparatively, rural school districts have similar cost structures as non-rural school districts with greater student populations.

Review of previous literature also indicated that Texas uses a "bounty system," in comparison to a "census system," to determine special education funding within the state (Stock & Carriere, 2021). Bounty funding systems base funding on per-pupil, per-staff, and cost reimbursements models, which incentivize increased special education enrollment, particularly among students with disabilities that have more subjective diagnosis criteria. Conversely, census or lump sum funding models distribute funding based on the total student population in the district rather than on special education-related metrics (Stock & Carriere, 2021). TEC §42.006(a-1) requires school districts and charter schools within the state to report through the Texas Student Data System and Public Education Information Management System the number of enrolled students who have been identified as having dyslexia (TEA, 2023b). This data aids in state funding allocation for instructional service delivery for students with dyslexia within the state. In addition to state funding formulas that consider high rates of rural areas and seek to increase special education enrollment, state commissioner, Mike Morath, established a Texas Rural Schools Task Force in 2016 charged with the focus of identifying current challenges and best practices for rural school districts statewide (TEA, 2019).

Rationale for the Present Study

Factors have led to a challenging landscape in dyslexia identification within the state of Texas including: 1) the presence of varied definitions nation and statewide of dyslexia, 2) the highest prevalence of rural school districts within the nation, 3) landmark legislative changes in a short period of time (i.e. seven years), and 4) funding systems aimed at supporting rural schools and special education service delivery. Researchers have sought to examine the impact of legislative changes on prevalence rates of students identified with dyslexia (Cassidy, 2019; Morgan et al., 2023; National Center on Improving Literacy, 2021; Odegard et al., 2020; Petscher et al., 2019; Rice & Gilson, 2023; Wagner et al., 2020) and evaluate the impact of rural education in Texas and similar states (Simmons et al., 2021; Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003; Stock & Carriere, 2021). However, research does not exist to examine the impact of state level legislative changes on dyslexia identification prevalence rates by school district locale settings. Against this background, researchers of the present study conducted quantitative data analyses of state dyslexia legislative updates by comparing dyslexia prevalence rates across school district locale within Texas.

The present study sought to provide new insights by investigating statewide enrollment trends of students identified as having dyslexia and by comparing the prevalence rates statewide of students identified as having dyslexia according to school district locale throughout Texas from 2016-2017 to 2022-2023 school year. Specifically, the following research questions guided the present study:

1. What are legislative trends in the prevalence rate of students with dyslexia in Texas from 2016-2017 to 2022-2023 school years?
2. How is the prevalence rate change of students with dyslexia over the last seven school years (i.e., 2016-2017 to 2022-2023) moderated by school district locale (i.e., city, suburban, town, or rural) in Texas?
3. What is the comparison between the prevalence rate of students with dyslexia in urban (i.e. city and suburban) and rural (i.e. town and rural) school district locales between 2016-2017 and 2022-2023 school years?

By conducting a Texas-focused analysis, researchers aimed to focus on statewide practices for identifying students as having dyslexia, guided by state-level laws, policies, and practices (i.e. TAC, TEC, TOC and the TEA's state dyslexia handbook). In response to the OSEP Corrective of Action to the TEA (OSEP, 2018), the TEA state dyslexia handbook revisions (TEA, 2021), recent legislative amendments to TEC, TAC and recent committee approved Texas State House and Senate bills, researchers used most currently publicly accessible data for selecting the seven years between 2016 to 2023 for investigation. Accordingly, findings from the present study inform current practices in dyslexia identification within the state of Texas and guide future legislative amendments that directly impact dyslexia identification statewide.

Method

Data Collection Procedure

To retrieve data for the present study, researchers followed a systematic data collection procedure. First, the lead researcher (i.e., the first author) created a master Excel spreadsheet that listed all public and charter school districts in Texas and their locale classification by consulting publicly available information on the TEA's (2023a) website. The TEA uses NCES's classification system (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2022) that categorizes school districts as one of twelve possible categories, composed of four basic school district locale types (i.e., city, suburban, town, rural). The lead researcher then filtered the master spreadsheet to sort school districts by basic school district locale category type (i.e., city, rural, suburb, town; see Table 2 for a listing of the four subcategories and corresponding definitions).

Table 2

NCES School District Locale Subcategories and Definitions

Locale	Definition
City: Large	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more.
City: Midsize	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.
City: Small	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 100,000.
Suburban: Large	Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population of 250,000 or more.
Suburban: Midsize	Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.
Suburban: Small	Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population less than 100,000.
Town: Fringe	Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urbanized Area.
Town: Distant	Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an Urbanized Area.
Town: Remote	Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is more than 35 miles from an Urbanized Area.
Rural: Fringe	Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.
Rural: Distant	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.
Rural: Remote	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.

Note. TEA's school district type data search yielded data sets for school years ranging from 2016-17 up to 2021-22. The most recent district type categorization data set available was from the school year 2021-22. Thus, all school districts categorized as city, suburban (i.e., large, midsize, small) and town, rural (i.e., fringe, distant, remote) listed on the district type dataset for the 2021-22 school year were included for analysis.

Next, the lead researcher consulted publicly accessible information on the TEA's (2023b) PEIMS website to retrieve data from the Student Program and Special Populations Reports for the school years under study (i.e., 2016-2017 to 2022-2023). Data summarized total student enrollment by school district name and the total number of students identified as having dyslexia in each school district. Although the total number of students receiving special education services were provided for each school district, the TEA available spreadsheets did not differentiate students identified as having dyslexia within the special education identification categories. Thus, students receiving special

education services were not considered in isolation in this investigation. The study focused on students with dyslexia only. After the lead researcher retrieved these reports, data were consolidated into a single report and matched by the school district name to the master spreadsheet where each school district name was already sorted by basic school district locale category type. As a result, the master spreadsheet housed data for 1,229 school districts in Texas that included total student enrollment by school district name identified as having dyslexia for the school years under study. To ensure accuracy and completeness with the master spreadsheet, the secondary researchers (i.e., the second and third authors) each performed systematic reviews of the data collection procedure.

Data Coding

The purpose of the analysis was to analyze the statistical and comparative trends among students who were identified and received dyslexia services during the school years under study and compare identified trends between school district locale, and rural and urban school districts. The researchers identified the following variables for the present analyses:

- the school years under study (i.e., 2016-2017 to 2022-23 school years);
- the basic school district locale type (i.e., city, suburban, town, rural); and
- the percentage of total student enrollment by school district of students identified with dyslexia (i.e. prevalence rate of students with dyslexia).

Charter Schools

A charter school is a type of public school. The Texas Legislature authorized the establishment of charter schools in 1995; some of the first charter schools in Texas have been in operation since Fall 1996. Charter Schools are subject to fewer state laws than other public schools. The reduced legislation encourages more innovation and allows more flexibility, though state law does require fiscal and academic accountability from charter schools. The state monitors and accredits charter schools just as the state accredits school districts (TEA, 2023c). Within the NCES system, charter school districts are assigned one of the twelve possible categories, composed of four basic school district locale types (i.e., city, suburban, town, rural); there is not a separate category for charter school districts (TEA, 2023a). Thus, charter schools were included in data coding according to the NCES system of basic school district locale type.

Data Analysis

Descriptive Analysis

Once data was consolidated by combining dyslexia totals for each school district by NCES district type descriptions for each year (i.e. 2016-2017 to 2022-23), the total percentages of students identified as having dyslexia were calculated by total student enrollment populations for each school district. Outputs and R (R Core Team, 2024) codes used for the two-level multilevel modeling are available at https://mshin77.github.io/dyslexia_prevalence. Data analysis scripts have been posted through an online data repository (Simmons et al., 2024). Initially, we had 8,426 data points across seven academic years nested within 1,229 districts. We included district data that met the following two criteria. First, we included the district's reported number of students with dyslexia, which was at least 5. For this criterion, the lead author reviewed combined data, noting school districts that did not report total students identified as having dyslexia for every school year included in the study. As

such, some values in the data set were masked to comply with requirements in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), where the TEA had replaced values greater than 0 but less than 5 with "-999" or "-9999999." This procedure resulted in 5,883 data points across seven school years within 842 districts. Next, districts that reported data for the specified seven school years were included in the data analysis. Any school districts with the absence of reported dyslexia totals for a given academic year were not included in the study. School districts that did not report dyslexia totals for all seven school years under review were excluded from study analysis, resulting in 5,873 data points within 839 districts.

Multilevel Modeling

We employed two-level multilevel models to account for the school year based on each school year (level 1) nested within school districts (level 2) and identify the changes in the prevalence rate of students with dyslexia and its relation to school years and school district locales. Researchers applied a piecewise growth model approach (Harring et al., 2021) in examining these trends over time across seven school years. We hypothesized there could be legislative trends in the prevalence rate of students with dyslexia in Texas from 2016-2017 to 2022-2023 school years. Given that a nonlinear change on the identification rate of students with dyslexia is expected across academic years, we considered this potential discontinuity in our model (Shin et al., 2024). A residual analysis was employed to check for normality distributed error. Residuals were not mostly normally distributed, not meeting the statistical assumption of normality. Based on this result, we hypothesized that intercepts vary between school districts and estimated a null model (Model 0). As shown in the online supplemental materials, 90.96% of the total variance in the prevalence rate of students with dyslexia can be attributed to school clusters. The Level 1 equation with no moderator (Model 1) is as follows:

$$Y_{ti} = \pi_{0i} + \pi_{1i}(t - T_{1i}) + \pi_{2i}(t - T_{2i}) \times (t > T_{2i}) + \pi_{3i}(t - T_{3i}) \times (t > T_{3i}) + \pi_{4i}(t - T_{4i}) \times (t > T_{4i}) + \pi_{5i}(t - T_{5i}) \times (t > T_{5i}) + \pi_{6i}(t - T_{6i}) \times (t > T_{6i}) + \pi_{7i}(t - T_{7i}) \times (t > T_{7i}) + e_{ti} \text{ with } e_{ti} \sim N(0, \Sigma e)$$

where Y_{ti} represents the prevalence rate of students with dyslexia at school year t (t = 2017, 2018, ··· T) in the ith district (i = 1, 2, ··· I). T_{1i}, T_{2i}, ··· T_{7i} denote seven segmented time points for the ith district data. The time variable, we replied on the end of each school year (i.e., 2017, 2018, ··· 2023) considering that each district data is based on the entire school year's information. ($t > T_{2i}$), ····· ($t > T_{7i}$) are logical statements and are considered 0 if false or 1 if true. π_{0i} indexes the intercept on the 2017 school year, and π_{1i} through π_{7i} index changes in trend compared to the previous school year. We modeled the first-order autoregressive model, AR(1), to the residual covariance structure, considering correlations among repeated measurement occasions, and further modeled heterogeneous residual variances across districts. Model 2 further tested the moderation effects of district locale, hypothesizing the prevalence rate of students with dyslexia over seven academic school years may be moderated by district locale types. For the initial analysis, two-level multilevel analyses were conducted using a *lme*( ) function from the *nlme* R package (Pinheiro et al., 2023).

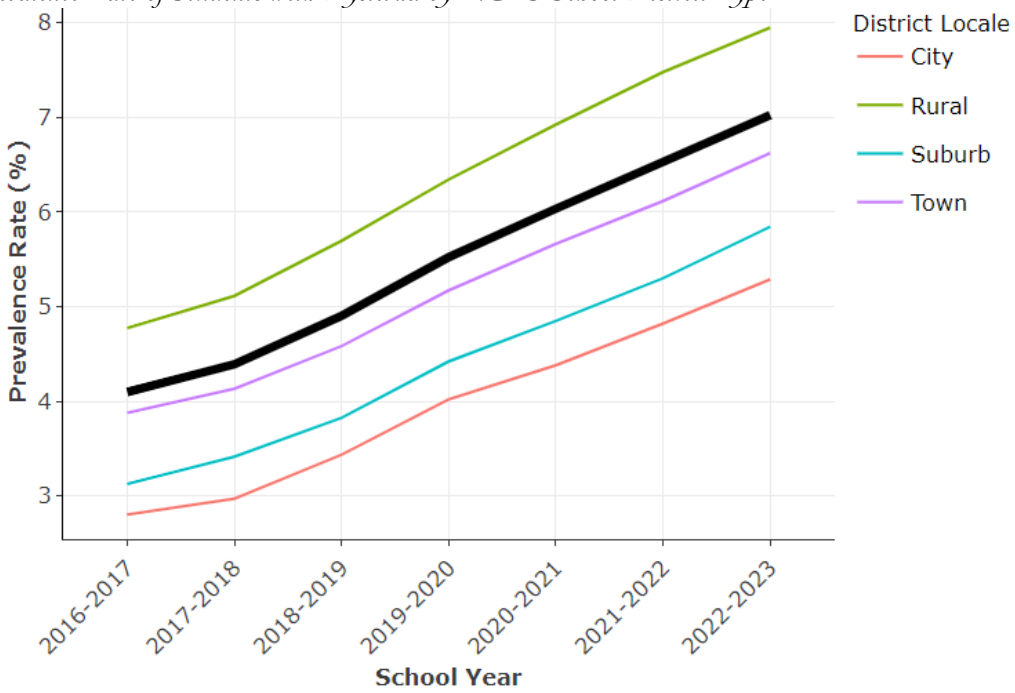
Results

Trends in Prevalence Rates

Based on 5,873 district data that met the study's inclusion criteria, researchers of the present study examined the trends in prevalence rate of students with dyslexia in Texas between 2016-2017 to 2022-2023 school year. Overall, the total number of students identified as having dyslexia in all school districts (city, suburban, town and rural) increased over time with a constant upward trend from the first school year (i.e., 2016-2017) to the last school year (i.e., 2022-2023; see Figure 1). To illustrate, the prevalence rate of students with dyslexia during the 2016-2017 school year was 4.10% of the total student population. The total prevalence rate of students across the state of Texas identified as having dyslexia by the 2022-2023 school year was 7.03% of the total student population.

Figure 1

Prevalence Rate of Students with Dyslexia by NCES School District Type



As shown in Table 3, the multilevel modeling results indicated that in the 2016-2017 school year, the average prevalence rate of students with dyslexia in Texas across 839 districts was 4.10% (t = 49.58, p < .001), which was statistically significantly different from 0. In the 2017-2018 school year, there was also a statistically significant increase in prevalence rate by 0.29% (t = 10.03, p < .001). In the following years of 2018-2019 and 2019-2020, the increase in the slope of prevalence rates was statistically significant by 0.22% (t = 4.60, p < .001) and 0.11% (t = 2.21, p = .03) respectively. In the 2020-2021 year, the slope change in prevalence rate significantly declined by 0.11% (t = −2.14, p = .03) compared to that in 2019-2020. Then, in the years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, the slope changes were minimal (ps > .05).

Table 3

Parameters for the Two-Level Multilevel Model

Parameter	Model 1	Model 2
Fixed Effects		
Average in 2016-2017	**4.10*** (0.08)**	**2.80*** (0.17)**
Slope in 2017-2018	**0.29*** (0.03)**	**0.17** (0.06)**
Slope change in 2018-2019	**0.22*** (0.05)**	**0.30* (0.13)**
Slope change in 2019-2020	**0.11* (0.05)**	0.12 (0.12)
Slope change in 2020-2021	**−0.11* (0.05)**	−0.23 (0.12)
Slope change in 2021-2022	−0.01 (0.05)	0.08 (0.10)
Slope change in 2022-2023	−0.01 (0.05)	0.03 (0.12)
Suburban		
Average in 2016-2017		0.33 (0.25)
Slope in 2017-2018		0.12 (0.08)
Slope change in 2018-2019		−0.18 (0.16)
Slope change in 2019-2020		0.06 (0.14)
Slope change in 2020-2021		0.06 (0.15)
Slope change in 2021-2022		−0.06 (0.17)
Slope change in 2022-2023		0.07 (0.16)
Town		
Average in 2016-2017		**1.08*** (0.24)**
Slope in 2017-2018		0.09 (0.08)
Slope change in 2018-2019		−0.10 (0.15)
Slope change in 2019-2020		0.02 (0.14)
Slope change in 2020-2021		0.13 (0.14)
Slope change in 2021-2022		−0.13 (0.12)
Slope change in 2022-2023		0.03 (0.14)
Rural		
Average in 2016-2017		**1.97*** (0.21)**
Slope in 2017-2018		**0.17* (0.08)**
Slope change in 2018-2019		−0.06 (0.15)
Slope change in 2019-2020		−0.06 (0.15)
Slope change in 2020-2021		0.16 (0.15)
Slope change in 2021-2022		−0.11 (0.13)
Slope change in 2022-2023		−0.11 (0.15)
Random Effects		
Between-district variance (intercept)	0.11 (1.78)	0.11 (1.39)

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. The reference group was given to the city in the 2016-2017 school year. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Dyslexia Prevalence Rates Changes Over Seven School Years Moderated by School District Locale

Researchers evaluated how the prevalence rate changes of students with are moderated by school year (i.e., 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-22 and 2022-23) and school district locale (city, suburb, town and rural) in Texas (see Table 2).

As shown in Table 3, each school district locale type (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2022) was examined individually. The percentage of total students enrolled in city school district locales that were identified as having dyslexia was 2.80% in the 2016-2017 school year and 5.29% in the 2022-2023 school year, a 2.49% increase in the prevalence rate on average. This average prevalence rate of students identified as having characteristics of dyslexia was statistically significantly different from 0 ($t = 16.10$, $p < .001$). In the 2017-2018 school year, a statistically significant increase in the prevalence rate of 0.17% ($t = 2.84$, $p = .006$) was noticed in city districts. In the following 2018-2019 year, a statistically significant slope change of 0.30% ($t = 2.39$, $p = .02$) was also observed. Although the slope was increasing, and the increases in the slope changes were noticed every year except for 2020-2021, these prevalence rate changes were not statistically significant (ps > .05) in city district schools.

School district locales under the basic type, suburban, increased from 3.13% of the total student population identified in 2016-2017 as having dyslexia to a percentage of 5.84 during the 2022-2023 school year, a 2.71% increase in the prevalence rate on average. During the following school years, there were no statistically significant differences in most prevalence rate changes between city and suburban school district locales (ps > .05).

Town school district locales had a 3.88% average of the total student population identified as having dyslexia in 2016-2017 and a 6.62% dyslexia identification rate in the 2022-2023 school year, representing an increase in the percentage of student population identification of 2.74%. In 2016-2017, compared to the average prevalence rate in the city district areas, town district areas were statistically higher by 1.08% ($t = 4.56$, $p < .001$). During the following school years, there were also no statistically significant differences in most prevalence rate changes between city and town school district locales (ps > .05).

When isolating for time and each NCES basic category school district locale type, results indicate that suburban schools exhibited the greatest increase in the percentage of student population identified as having dyslexia over the past seven years (i.e., 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-22 and 2022-23). Specifically, school districts located in rural areas reported a 4.78% dyslexia identification rate in 2016-2017 and a 7.95% in 2022-2023, for an increasing percentage of identification of 3.17%. In 2016-2017, compared to the average prevalence rate in the city district areas, that in rural district areas was statistically higher by 1.97% ($t = 9.31$, $p < .001$). The slope of the prevalence rate in 2017-2018 was also significantly higher for rural district schools by 0.17% ($t = 2.27$, $p = .02$) compared to city district schools. Although statistically not significant, there were slight decreases in slope changes in prevalence rates during most of the following years for rural district schools compared to city schools (ps > .05).

Rural and Urban School District Locale Prevalence Rate Comparisons

Researchers examined the impact state dyslexia legislative updates had on dyslexia prevalence rates in four basic district locale types in Texas from 2017 to 2023. In doing so, researchers referenced again NCES's classification system (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2022) of TEA's four basic school district locale types: city, suburban, town and rural (see Table 2). Simmons and colleagues (2021) showed that the prevalence rate of students with disabilities can vary by district locale, in particular, urban versus rural. Thus, we hypothesized the prevalence rate of students with dyslexia in urban and rural school district locales between 2016-2017 and 2022-2023 school years could be deviated, in general. Data were aggregated into two larger basic binary categories (rural and urban). School

district locale types were simplified to allow for a direct quantitative comparison between urban and rural school districts in the state of Texas. School districts assigned NCES's locales city and suburban were classified as, "urban,"; whereas school districts assigned NCES's locales town and rural were classified as, "rural." Based on this classification analysis, a comparison between the prevalence rate of total student population identified as having dyslexia in urban and rural school districts was completed (see Figure 1). The percentage of total student population with dyslexia in urban school district locales (city and suburban combined) for the 2016-2017 school year was 3%. The percentage of total student with dyslexia in urban school district locales (city and suburban combined) for the 2022-2023 school year was 6%. This represents an average rate of change in prevalence rate of students with dyslexia within urban school district locales from 2016-17 to 2022-2023 of 3%. In comparison, the prevalence rate of students with dyslexia in rural school district locales (rural and town combined) for the 2016-2017 school year was 4%. The prevalence rate of students with dyslexia in rural school district locales (rural and town combined) for the 2022-2023 school year was 6%. The prevalence rate of students with dyslexia within rural school district locales from 2016-17 to 2022-2023 was 2%. Findings indicate the average rate of change in prevalence rate of students with dyslexia when compared between urban and rural district locales is greater in urban school district locales. The prevalence rate of students with dyslexia in urban school districts increased at a greater rate in urban schools when compared to rural schools.

Discussion

Most of all states within the United States have passed legislation concerning the education of K-12 students with dyslexia (Gearin et al., 2022). Texas has passed seven legislative state amendments to existing laws, four committee-approved Texas State House and Senate bills, and updated changes to the Texas Dyslexia handbook all within a short seven-year time frame. This study examined the impact of federal and state legislation on the prevalence rates of students with dyslexia across the state by school district locale type and time.

Finding 1: Overall Trends in the Prevalence Rate of Students with Dyslexia in Texas

The total number of students identified as having dyslexia in Texas school districts (city, suburban, town and rural) steadily increased 3% between the first school year (i.e., 2016-2017) to the last school year (i.e., 2022-2023) in the study. By the 2022-23 school year, Texas identified 6% of the total student population, across all school district locale types, as students with dyslexia. Comparatively, the most conservative estimate of the prevalence of dyslexia, nationally, is 5% (Odegard et al., 2020). This confirms OSEP's corrective action did have an impact on dyslexia identification rates in Texas. The increase in Texas during this period resulted in an additional 142,130 students across the state who qualified to receive dyslexia services. The increase in students needing evaluation and subsequent services was undoubtedly a challenge for districts to accommodate. To meet the mandate, districts largely accommodated the increased number of students needing diagnostic testing and intervention services using existing staff and resources (TEA, 2019).

Finding 2: Prevalence Rate Change of Students with Dyslexia Over Time

When examining the time included in the study (2016-2023) and school district locale type, findings indicate that suburban schools exhibited the greatest increase in prevalence rate of student population identified as having dyslexia (2.77%), followed by town schools (2.73%), city schools

(2.37%), and rural schools (1.5%). An explanation may be the recent population growth in Texas suburbs (Ratcliffe, 2022), which increases the number of students with and without disabilities enrolled in suburban school districts.

Finding 3: Comparison Between the Prevalence Rate of Students with Dyslexia in Urban and Rural School District Locales

Analysis from the impact of recent state legislative updates indicates that prevalence rates of dyslexia identification in Texas have disproportionately increased in urban districts. For this analysis, the four school district locale types (city, suburban, town, and rural) were aggregated into two larger categories (urban and rural). Findings show that the prevalence rate of students with dyslexia in urban school districts increased at a greater rate in urban schools (3% increase) as compared to rural schools (2%). This means that the greatest increase in dyslexia identification rates occurred in suburban and city school district locale types. There are several plausible explanations. One explanation is that there is an influx of students with dyslexia in suburban and city districts that isn't occurring in districts classified as town or rural school district locale type. Another explanation is that suburban and urban districts had relatively low levels of dyslexia identification as compared to town and rural districts. In this case, the OSEP corrective action legislation and recent state-based legislation enabled suburban and urban districts to "catch up" with their town and rural counterparts by identifying and diagnosing high numbers of students with dyslexia. A final explanation is that efforts to increase financial support for rural schools in Texas, such as the "bounty" system for district funding and the Texas Rural Schools Task Force, have had a positive impact on district types that historically have less access to qualified service providers, resources, and professional development (Simmons et al., 2021).

Recommendations

Need for Universal Definition of Dyslexia

The definition used for identifying dyslexia varies from state to state with previous research indicating 33 of the 50 states recognize the IDA definition of dyslexia, five recognize an alternative definition, and 12 don't recognize any definition (Gearin et al., 2022). Texas, specifically, follows the guidance of the TEA dyslexia handbook which contains both the IDA definition (TEA, 2021, p. 1) and TEC definition (TEC §38.003(d)(1)-(2), 1995). Varying definitions for identifying dyslexia are further complicated within the state of Texas due to multiple legislative updates, amendments, and revisions over the past seven years (see Table 1). The complexity of guidance in evaluation criteria and identification leads to discrepant identification rates, particularly in scenarios where identification relies heavily on practitioner interpretation and judgments (Rice & Gilson, 2023), as is the case in the state-level analysis for this study. Furthermore, the lack of a universal definition for dyslexia suggests that the rates of students reported as having dyslexia by school districts within the state of Texas may not accurately represent the presence of characteristics of dyslexia, which may further complicate efforts to identify and serve these students.

Need for Continued Support for Rural School Districts

Although rural school district locales in the state of Texas are supported by models to increase funding for rural education and a state commissioner-established task force (Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003; Stock & Carriere, 2021; TEA, 2019), findings from this state-level analysis of publicly

accessible dyslexia identification data illuminate the need for continued and additional resources specific to dyslexia identification and delivery of instructional services for students with dyslexia (Author, 2021) for rural school districts across the state. Even though the increase in the prevalence rate of students identified as having dyslexia was greater in urban school district locales in comparison to rural school district locales, there was a measurable increase in the number of students identified as having dyslexia in rural school districts. This finding is of great concern as Texas serves more rural school districts than any other state in the nation (TEA, 2019), impacting state access to service providers, funding, resources, and professional development (Simmons et al., 2021).

Conclusion

State legislation continues to serve as a guide and critical influence on the evaluation and identification of students with dyslexia across the United States. Recent efforts to identify and serve students with dyslexia in Texas have been improved due to recent federal and state-based legislation, such as the TAC, TEC, TOC, and the TEA's handbook for identifying and providing instructional services for students with dyslexia (National Center on Improving Literacy [NCIL], 2021). Although the plethora of legislation may create confusion about how to best serve this population, findings from this study highlight the need for advocacy in state law making and the importance of school district funding and resource allocation to support the increased number of students with dyslexia in Texas.

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Towards Congruency? A Descriptive Analysis of Employed Black Teachers in Texas from 2011-12 through 2017-18

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Towards Congruency? A Descriptive Analysis of Full-Time Employed Black Teachers in Texas from 2011-12 through 2017-18

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Abstract

There was a period in U.S. history when Black teachers were heavily employed within the educational workforce and were leading examples of excellence (Anderson, 1988). Black teachers, teaching within their communities, were able to directly impact their students' achievement and behavior while also reinforcing shared family values.

As a result of the ramifications of implementing Brown v. Board of Education and strategies aimed at pushing Black teachers out, there has been a decrease in the presence of Black educators in the United States. This decline caused a ripple effect that is being felt throughout today's classrooms nationwide. Still, this topic requires more recent investigations of the data to determine if Black teacher attrition is current or a phenomenon of the past. This study examined Texas' teacher workforce data from the Texas Education Agency, highlighting the teacher demographics and identifying if there was an increase or decrease in Black teachers between 2011 and 2017. From the descriptive analysis, the researchers found that for most campuses based on urbanicity types, there was an increase in the average number of Black female and male teachers on campuses. Although racial congruency between the number of Black students and teachers appears to still be in the distant future, notably, campuses across Texas have implemented measures to draw Black teachers to their campuses.

Keywords: Black teachers, attrition, racial congruency

In the United States, approximately 79% of the teacher workforce is comprised of White females, while Hispanic teachers represent 9% and Black teachers account for 7% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). The national teacher population parallels with the state of Texas as they both employ a heavy concentration of White female educators. During the 2021-2022 school year, there were 376,086 teachers in Texas, with 57% identifying as White and 11% identifying as Black (Texas Education Agency Public Education Information Management System, 2022). Yet, the proportion of Black teachers has not consistently remained at such marginal levels. Several historical factors have influenced the lack of Black teachers in classroom spaces. The eventual expulsion of Black educators from the teaching profession, spurred by integration initiatives, initiated a prolonged pattern leading to a diminished Black teacher population (Oakley et al., 2009).

Despite the decrease in the presence of Black teachers in schools, there was a time when they represented the majority of the teacher workforce, predominantly teaching in their local communities (Anderson, 1988; Fairclough, 2000). Before integration efforts in the 1950s and 1960s, Black schools were staffed exclusively with Black teachers (Milner & Howard, 2004; Thompson, 2022). Black teachers aimed to contribute to their neighborhood schools by going away to college and returning to their communities to teach Black learners in hopes of helping students to advance in society (Walker, 2000). The effort to establish and maintain supportive learning environments for Black students by Black teachers persisted despite the imposition of Jim Crow policies in the United

States. Legal rulings allowed schools across the nation to segregate students based on race, provided that these institutions received equitable resources and opportunities. However, it's important to acknowledge that in the South, Black educators had been founding schools in Freedmen's towns and freedom colonies since emancipation, and segregation between white and Black students existed prior to being legally validated. Therefore, Jim Crow policies and the Plessy decision formalized existing segregation practices. Despite chronic under-resourcing, the very nature of schooling for Black students became a protected space where they could interact with educators who valued them as human beings and not potential threats. Under the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, schools were mandated to desegregate and develop organizational plans to integrate their classrooms with children from all races in the community. Although this court ruling was intended to move towards equal access to school resources for all schools, the reorganization of public education in the South offered little if any protection to the one resource Black children needed: Black teachers (Thompson, 2022). This mandate created conditions that resulted in the decline of Black teachers even with years of teaching experience. W.E.B. DuBois foreshadowed this decline, the plight of Black educators, and the resources needed by stating Black teachers would eventually be removed from education (DuBois, 1935). DuBois predicted that when Black and White students integrate, there would be several consequences such as the disappearance of Black universities, the erasure of curriculum that focus on Black history and content, and the eventual removal of Black teachers from the teacher workforce (DuBois, 1935).

The criticality of having a Black teacher as a resource has surfaced in recent years due to national attention on the lack of diversity in the teacher workforce. Black teachers have much to contribute and significantly influence all students, not just Black learners. Gershenson (2022) conducted a longitudinal study on academic outcomes for North Carolina students and stated that students that had at least one Black teacher during their kindergarten through twelfth-grade schooling experienced academic success in specific content areas. Students who encountered a Black teacher graduated high school and enrolled in courses for college at higher rates than students who did not have access to a Black teacher (Gershenson, 2022). As more schools and school districts experience a shift in demographics, the importance of having highly qualified teachers who can associate with the lived experiences of culturally, socially, and economically diverse students is important. Research suggests that highly qualified and effective Black teachers offer a level of protection, support, and social and emotional development that contribute to positive learning outcomes for students (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019). James-Gallaway & Harris (2021) contend that Black educators have long exhibited culturally relevant pedagogical practices in classes before the coining of culturally relevant pedagogy, but are often forgotten about due to revisionist offerings of history about the teacher workforce before desegregation. Black educators prior to and during desegregation offered culturally relevant practices which propelled many Black students to strive to become educators in the community (James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021).

The shortage of Black teachers in the workforce is well-known. However, further examinations are needed at different levels (campus, district, and state) to understand if the shortage of Black teachers is universal or if it varies by location or local context. Utilizing state-wide data from Texas across a span of several years (2011 – 2018), this study aims to determine if there has been an increase or decrease in Black teachers. In the following section, we present a literature review focusing on Black teachers over several decades and highlighting factors that contributed to their decline. Afterwards, the researchers discuss racial congruency as a lens to view teacher and student demographic data in Texas.

Literature Review

Black Teachers in the U.S. and Texas

How students are educated within classrooms and the factors that influence school operations have evolved over the last several decades. These changes have a direct correlation with various student outcomes (i.e., test scores, grades, discipline, teacher demographics, and more complex issues) and how legal opinions (law and policy) are enforced (Lewis, 2012). The 1954 decision in the landmark case *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* made it legally possible for all learners to attend the same school, yet Black students and teachers bore the collateral damage from the decision through a stratification of their learning communities. Prior to and even after the 1954 landmark decision, many Black teachers felt a strong impetus to offer high quality education to any student that would enter their classroom. The schools had a positive climate, sustained by support from their communities, and the educators were strong advocates for their students and emphasized both institutional and interpersonal caring (Heller, 2019).

Black teachers were revered by their communities as they were seen as caring adults who kept the needs of Black children as their central focus when instructing (Gordon, 2000; Madkins, 2011; Siddle Walker, 2001). The Black teachers managed to create and foster an environment infused with high expectations, discipline, and meaningful instruction during the pre and post Brown period and were not debilitated by inequitable circumstances (Dingus, 2006; Siddle Walker, 2001). Those who encountered these Black schools with Black teachers could visualize the conception of an educational infrastructure that was reinforced with hope, confidence, and integrity (Fairclough, 2001). Beyond the role of instructor, Black teachers supported the development of students in other roles as well. For example, research denotes that Black teachers were instrumental in developing the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and organized strikes against businesses during the Civil Rights Movement (Cunningham, 2021; Heller, 2019). Although their goal was to advance Black students' socio-mobility through learning and the acquisition of equal rights, the Red Scare propaganda stigmatized Black teachers in activist roles. Throughout the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S., Black teachers who taught in the southern portion of the U.S. were fired due to their affiliation with the NAACP or their refusal to comply with the anti-NAACP oath put forth by certain districts (Cunningham, 2021). As Black citizens fought for civil rights, their access to Black teachers declined drastically (Hudson & Holmes, 1994). The number of Black teachers drastically declined in just ten years (1954 to 1965), from 82,000 to 38,000. A significant portion of Black teachers lost their teaching jobs and could not easily get hired to teach in predominately White schools as there was little integration of faculty (Tillman, 2004).

In Texas, Black teachers lost their jobs or were forced to participate in cross-over programs (Tillman, 2004). For example, in Austin and various districts across Texas, Black teachers remained unemployed despite their education and experience due to Texas' reluctance to comply with court-ordered desegregation (Tillman, 2004). According to James-Gallaway (2022), school systems acted in a dual manner aligning with the refusal to follow the ruling resulting in calculated evictions. Texas districts also did not acquiesce to the *Brown v Board of Education* verdict (James-Gallaway, 2022). Through much resistance and efforts to support Black teachers during and after the Civil Rights Movement, a sizeable portion of Black teachers left the profession and potential Black teacher candidates in Texas stopped seeing teaching as a viable career option (Jones & Chappell, 2022). This repelling of Black teachers resulted in a lack of Black teachers that students and communities are

forced to contend with today. This is of critical importance in certain states such as Texas, which house some of the largest racially diverse school districts in the U.S.

As the second largest state in the U.S., which houses the fourth largest school district in the U.S. (Houston Independent School District), historically there has been a large concentration of Black teachers in large metropolitan areas. For example, Houston has a population of roughly three million people and educates nearly 200,000 students (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2022). Extant research denotes that Black teachers are typically employed in schools with a high concentration of students in poverty or in urban areas (Ingersoll & May, 2011). This finding corresponds with recent data in Texas. For example, 34.3% of the teachers in Houston Independent School District (HISD) are Black, which situates them as the largest racial/ethnic group in the teacher workforce (31.1% are Hispanic teachers and 26.5% are White; Texas Education Agency, 2022). According to the 2022 Snapshot of HISD, the student demographics of Black students was 22.1% aligning or showing similarity between Black teachers. However, the recent takeover of HISD and its potential influence on Black students and educators is a matter of major concern, carrying implications for educational equity and representation. The takeover raises questions about the preservation of culturally responsive teaching practices, the retention of Black educators who play pivotal roles, and the protection of programs tailored to address the needs of Black students. Prior to the takeover, this percentage was below the state average of White teachers of 57%, but above the average of Black teachers, by far, considering that the state average of Black teachers is 11% (TEA Public Education Information Management System PEIMS, 2022). As conversations regarding the state of Black teachers continues throughout the U.S. and in Texas, policymakers, school administrators, and teacher preparation programs are still left questioning if there will ever be a period where the percentage of Black teachers in schools accurately reflects the percentage of Black students in those classrooms (racial congruency). In an attempt to understand if such congruency exists between Black teachers and Black students, the guiding research questions sought to ascertain if there has been an increase or decrease in the number of Black teachers, by gender identity and urbanicity in Texas.

Conceptual Framework

Racial Congruence Framework

The framework of Racial congruence contends that when students – particularly historically minoritized students – are instructed by teachers whose cultural upbringing is similar to theirs, they will experience higher academic success in the classroom (Irvine, 1990; Milner, 2006). Numerous Black students find themselves enrolled in educational environments characterized by various disparities, including gaps in opportunities, experiences, expectations, and teacher quality (Ford & Moore, 2013). These gaps have always existed through the U.S. educational system, yet they have become more exacerbated as evidenced by various academic outcomes (i.e., graduation rates, school discipline disparities, a lack of access to post-secondary education, etc.). Regularly, these outcomes are due to deficit-based perceptions of Black students which contributes to their underperformance. Often many Black teachers set high expectations for Black student achievement while simultaneously offering the necessary supports to surpass those academic expectations (Irvine, 1990). Research suggests that White teachers have a greater tendency to devalue Black students or teach Black students from a deficit view, yielding to implicit and explicit biases (Grissom & Redding, 2015). Due to these biased dispositions and the lack of racial congruence, non-Black teachers may be more likely to use stereotypes about Black students causing relationship conflict, increased discipline, and affecting student outcomes (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019).

Shared identities (i.e., race and gender) have proven to have a significant impact on students and their classroom achievement, helping to curtail some of the existing educational gaps and disparities. Children benefit from a similar teacher-student match for various reasons. Previous research has indicated that teacher-student match is beneficial as the teacher may use different teaching methods, allow more participation chances, and provide praise to similar student groups (Eble & Hu, 2020). Studies have shown when the teacher and student match in race, students show increases in content area scores, attain better grades, and experience a more positive student evaluation of academics and motivation (Garner et al., 2021). Racial congruence has been identified as having a positive influence on curtailing school discipline and improving performance measures in subjects such as math and reading among students of color (Scott et al., 2022). In utilizing racial congruency as a framework to analyze the data, the research questions are as follows; How has the Texas Black teacher workforce increased or decreased based on urbanicity and gender between 2011 and 2017; and, is the Texas Black teacher workforce and the Black student population becoming more congruent during the same time span?

Method

The aim of this study was to descriptively analyze Black teachers in the state of Texas from 2011 to 2017, and through a racial congruency framework, ascertain if their growth (or lack thereof) mirrors Black students across Texas. Due to the differences in which Black teachers are recruited and remain in the profession based on gender, the researchers sought to understand the growth or decline in the number of Black women and Black men teachers in Texas. The initial dataset was retrieved from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS), which stores all student and school personnel data in Texas. Personnel data such as demographics, responsibility, tenure, experience, content instructed were provided in one file. This file was screened for any missing data and all personnel in the dataset who were not teachers (substitutes, assistant principals, and principals) were removed from the dataset. All data included in this file was masked with unique identifiers at the individual, campus, and district level to protect individuals' identity but allow for the merging of data over years. Secondly, student-level data was provided and analyzed to produce campus totals. Based on the district unique identifier and the campus unique identifier, student enrollment by campus was merged into the teacher demographic dataset. The initial sample was 5.9 million teacher employees, across multiple content areas and job responsibilities. All data were screened and analyzed in STATA 17.0 (StataCorp, 2021).

Next, the researchers created a unique id variable which accounted for duplicate entries per of individuals in the dataset. In creating this unique id variable, the researchers able to reduce the sample size. Following this step, the researchers removed all non-Black teachers from the sample, to arrive at a N = 68,366. The sample was screened again to ensure that a teacher was only represented once per year. Finally, campus means were created to understand the dispersion of Black teachers by gender, urbanicity, and year. This separation is critically important to assess as research underscores that certain hard-to-staff locales (urban and rural) typically struggle with recruiting teachers due to a myriad of work conditions in and around their campuses (Bottani et al., 2019; Jacob, 2007). In regard to locale, TEA utilizes the National Center of Educational Statistics to define the locale of schools. The overarching classifications are city, suburban, town, and rural. Within each of the classification are subclassifications that provide clearer definition based on the population size, location within or distance from a urban cluster (see Table 1). These classifications were used to disaggregate the data and offer a clearer image of where Black teachers are preferring to instruct at.

Furthermore, Black student demographic data was analyzed according to the classifications to assess if descriptively, the change or lack thereof, in school demographics is reflected in the retention or attrition of Black female and male teachers. In screening the data, it was determined that there were no outliers for each of the variables.

Table 1

Urban-Centric Locale Codes and Classifications

Term	NCES Classification	Dataset Code	Definition
City	Large	11	Territory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City with population of 250,000 or more.
City	Midsize	12	Territory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.
City	Small	13	Territory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City with population less than 100,000.
Suburban	Large	21	Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population of 250,000 or more.
Suburban	Midsize	22	Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.
Suburban	Small	23	Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population less than 100,000.
Town	Fringe	31	Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urbanized Area.
Town	Distant	32	Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an Urbanized Area.
Town	Remote	33	Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is more than 35 miles from an Urbanized Area.
Rural	Fringe	41	Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an Urban Cluster.
Rural	Distant	42	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urban Cluster.
Rural	Remote	43	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an Urbanized Area and also more than 10 miles from an Urban Cluster.

Note. Retrieved from the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.) https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Geographic/LocaleBoundaries

Findings

Black Student Enrollment Average by Gender and Urbanicity

In Figures 1-4, Black male students appear to be enrolled primarily in city locales at greater averages than all other locales. The average number of Black male students enrolled in schools classified as city increased from 2011 to 2017 across all sub-categories. Between the sub-categories, campuses designated as midsized saw the highest increase, with the average number of Black male students enrolled starting at M = 1,506.34 in 2011 and rising to an average of M = 2,622.84 Black male students per campus in 2017. Campuses designated as midsized educated on average 2,173 Black female students in 2017. However, the highest average number of Black female students educated was recorded in 2012, with approximately 2,500 students per campus in the state of Texas. Comparatively, campuses designated as suburban and large educated the greatest number of Black students across both genders. The highest averages for both Black female (2,972.91) and Black male (3,690.97) students occurred in 2012, and since that time each students' enrollment averages have decreased. Regarding rural campuses, those with a fringe location designation have a sizeable enrollment advantage compared to their distant and remote counterparts. Whereas the highest enrollment average for Black female and male students was well below 500 per school in distant and remote campuses, campuses with the fringe designation witness enrollments grow from around 500 in 2011 for both student groups, to well over 1,000 (1,028 for Black girls and 1,455 for Black boys) in 2017.

Figure 1

Black Student Enrollment by Gender, City Locale and Locale Subtype from 2011 to 2017

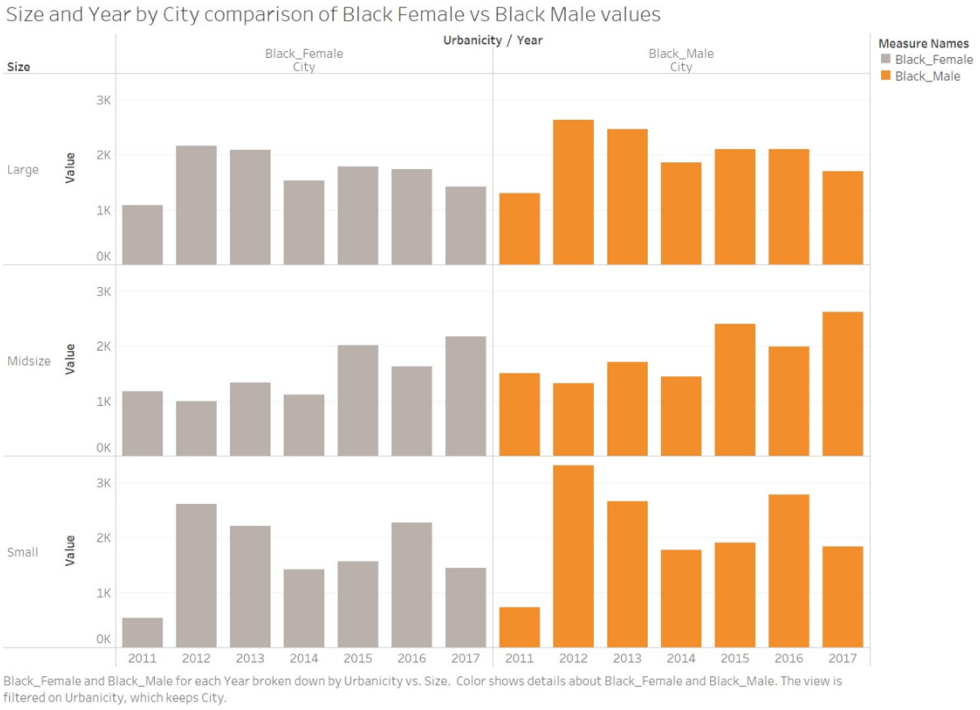

Figure 2

Black Student Enrollment by Gender, Suburban Locale and Locale Subtype from 2011 to 2017

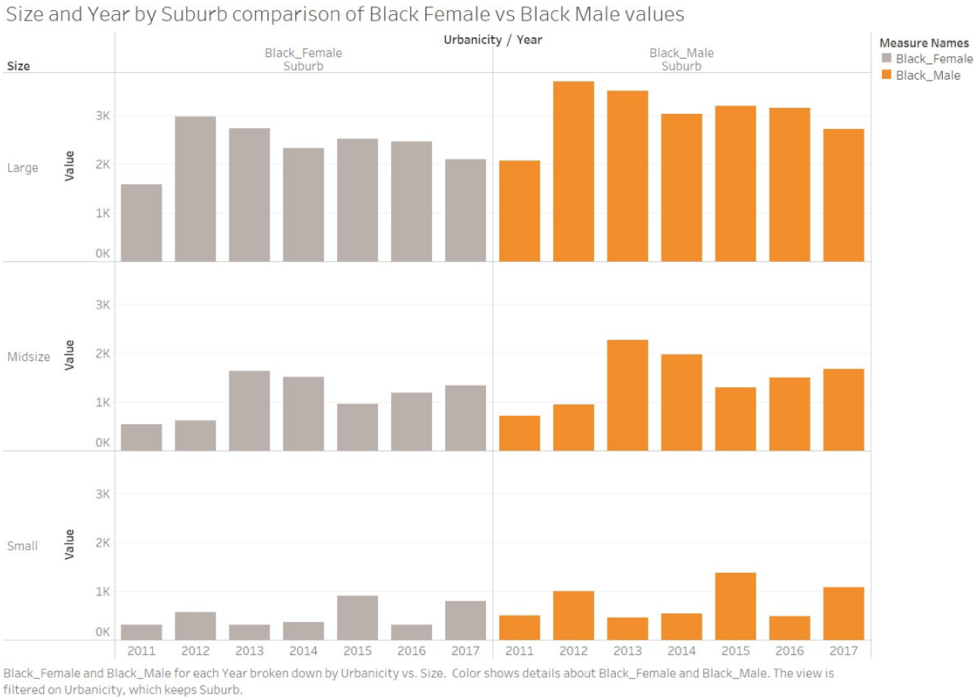

Figure 3

Black Student Enrollment by Gender, Rural Locale and Locale Subtype from 2011 to 2017

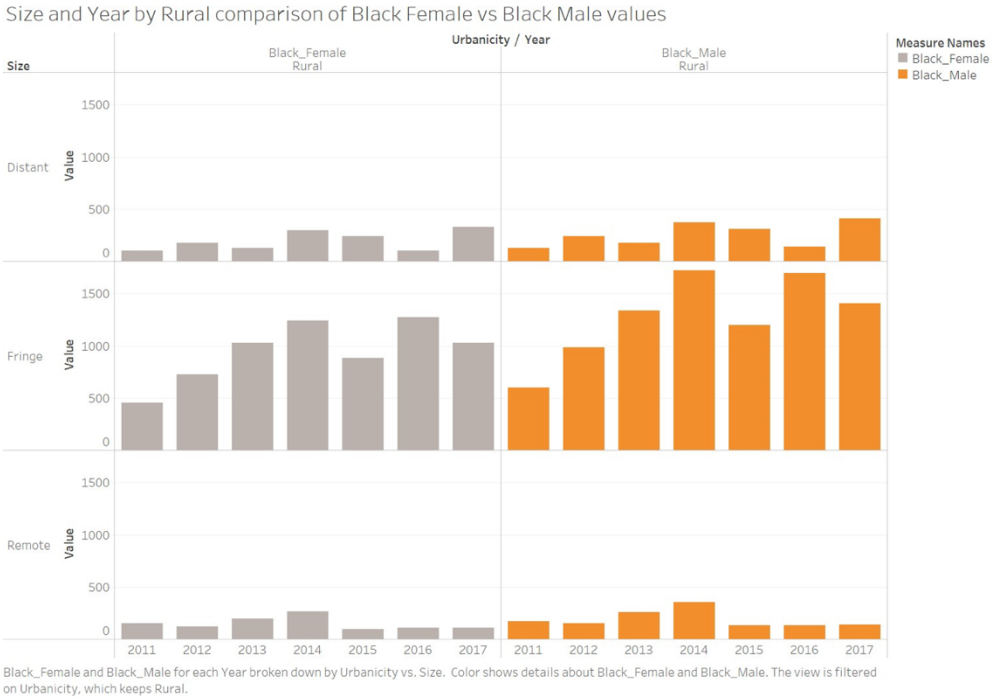

Figure 4

Black Student Enrollment by Gender, Town Locale and Locale Subtype from 2011 to 2017

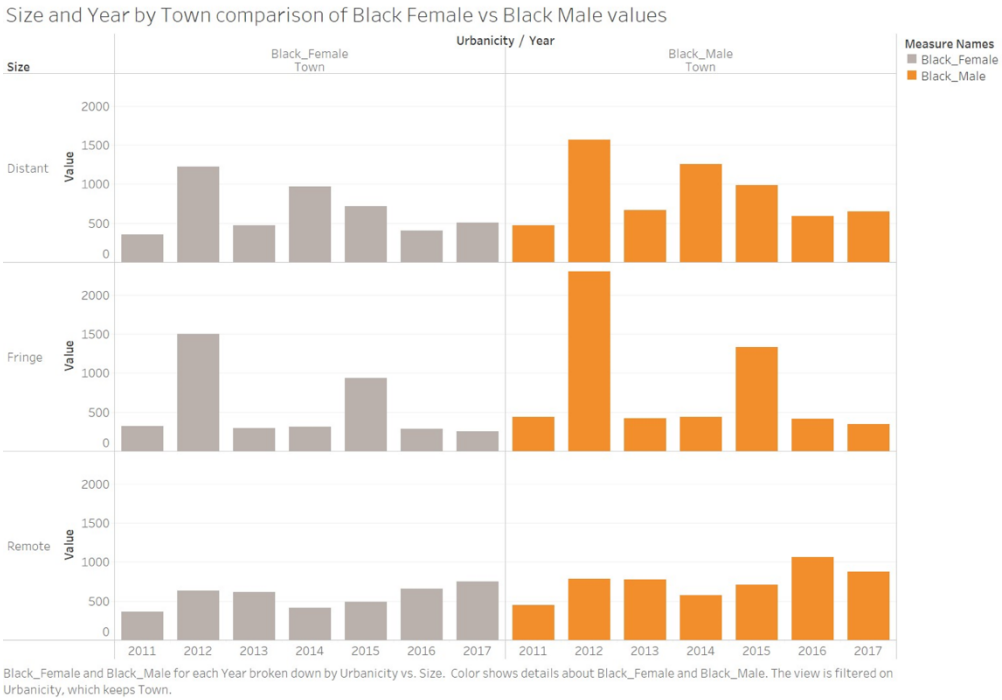

Table 2

Black Teacher Frequency, Means and Percent Change from 2011 to 2017

Year	Women	Men	Total	% Change from 2011 (Women)	% Change from 2011 (Men)	% Change from 2011 Total
2011	22,663	7,586	30,249	N/A	N/A	N/A
2012	23,108	7,943	31,051	2	5	3
2013	24,075	8,367	32,442	6	10	7
2014	25,223	8,988	34,211	11	18	13
2015	25,871	9,393	35,264	14	24	17
2016	26,622	9,872	36,494	17	30	21
2017	27,383	10,153	37,536	21	34	24

Changes in the Number of Black Teachers by Gender

Table 2 highlights the total number of Black teachers in Texas from 2011-2017. This data is disaggregated by gender and showcases the percentage from 2011 onward across the state of Texas. Texas employed 30,249 Black teachers in 2011 and that total rose to 37,536 by the 2017 academic year. For Black women teachers, there was a 21% increase in the number of Black women teachers

employed from 2011 to 2017. The number of Black women in the teaching profession in Texas increasing from 22,663 to 27,383 during the reported time span. For Black male teachers, this group also saw an increase over time. Campuses in Texas, overall, employed 24% more Black male teachers in 2017 than they did in 2011. Lastly, campuses designated as a town saw minimum growth of Black female and male students across the time span. Still, some of the highest averages for each subtype (fringe, distant, and remote) occurred in the 2012-2013 academic term which is similar to campus averages in city and suburban locales at that time.

Table 3

Black Male Teacher Means by School Locale from 2011 to 2017 Academic Year

Urbanicity	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
City: Large	3.72	3.46	3.82	3.51	4.22	4.11	4.10
City: Midsize	1.02	1.42	1.72	2.50	1.52	1.63	1.41
City: Small	3.02	2.78	1.48	1.43	1.51	3.73	1.60
Rural: Distant	0.45	0.32	0.56	0.43	0.78	1.04	0.31
Rural: Fringe	1.44	1.18	1.58	1.33	2.11	1.79	1.37
Rural: Remote	0.54	0.50	0.64	0.28	0.83	0.79	1.51
Suburb: Large	2.61	3.20	4.00	3.37	4.38	3.46	4.91
Suburb: Midsize	1.00	0.94	0.83	2.05	1.09	2.27	1.39
Suburb: Small	0.30	1.38	1.73	0.26	1.19	2.47	0.50
Town: Distant	0.92	0.71	0.96	0.71	1.26	1.11	1.68
Town: Fringe	1.07	2.41	0.38	0.94	0.66	1.02	1.68
Town: Remote	1.20	0.43	1.06	0.83	0.73	1.37	1.30
Overall Mean	2.47	2.65	2.83	2.62	3.24	2.96	3.33

Black Female Teacher Means by School Locale from 2011 to 2017 Academic Year

Urbanicity	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
City: Large	9.22	9.01	9.47	9.18	10.09	9.27	10.12
City: Midsize	3.53	4.10	4.64	6.68	4.81	5.18	5.55
City: Small	7.13	6.91	4.42	4.72	3.60	9.28	3.71
Rural: Distant	1.75	1.23	1.27	1.22	0.90	1.57	1.08
Rural: Fringe	2.25	2.58	2.46	1.77	2.51	2.78	3.85
Rural: Remote	0.64	0.68	1.66	1.24	0.36	0.56	1.12
Suburb: Large	6.80	7.78	8.01	7.43	8.19	8.79	10.09
Suburb: Midsize	0.81	3.22	3.57	3.56	3.20	5.33	4.45
Suburb: Small	1.44	4.27	3.20	1.96	1.02	4.39	1.77
Town: Distant	1.58	2.08	1.99	1.59	2.17	1.56	3.10
Town: Fringe	2.24	4.73	1.69	1.16	2.53	1.82	1.97
Town: Remote	1.83	1.91	1.12	1.55	1.76	2.13	3.82
Overall Mean	6.03	6.75	6.42	6.20	6.66	6.80	7.76

Average Number of Black Teachers Per Campus

When examining the data through the different urbanicity categories and subcategories, several findings emerge. For example, every category saw an increase in the average number of Black male teachers employed except for campuses classified as City and small (M = 3.02 to M = 1.60), Rural and Distant (M = *0*.45 to M = 0.31), and Rural and Fringe (M = 1.44 to M = 1.37), between 2011 and 2017. Notably, campuses labeled as Suburban and Large had the highest growth in the number of Black male teachers employed; employing 2.61 Black male teachers in 2011 and 4.91 Black male teachers in 2017. While small, campuses in rural areas tripled the number of Black male teachers employed from 0.54 in 2011 to 1.51 in 2017. In 2011, campuses labeled as City and Large on average employed more Black men than another campus type. However, since that time, Black male teachers were on average employed in Suburban and Large more in 2013 (M= 3.20), 2015 (M = 4.00), and 2017 (M = 4.91) than in campuses designated as City and Large. Although most campuses saw an increase in the number of Black male teachers over time, the average number of Black male teachers in campus across Texas grew marginally, from M = 2.47 in the classroom in 2011 to M = 3.33 by the end of the 2017-2019 academic year.

Campuses designated as City and Large maintained the highest employment mean for Black female teachers through each year in the dataset. In 2011, there were an average of M = 9.22 Black female teachers in campuses labeled as City and Large, and by the end of the 2017-2018 academic year that average increased to 10.12. Campuses designated as Suburban and Midsize employed the second lowest number of Black female teachers (M = 0.81) in 2011. However, by 2017 the average number of Black female teachers in this campus type increased five times (M = 4.45). The second highest growth can be seen in Suburban and Large campuses, which employed an average of 6.80 Black female teachers in 2011 and 10.09 Black female teachers in 2017. Three campus types saw a decrease in the average number of Black female teachers employed from 2011 to 2017, City and Small (M = 7.13 to M = 3.71), Rural and Distant (M = 1.75 to M = 1.08), and Town and Fringe (M = 2.24 to M = 1.97). The average number of Black female teachers employed across Texas during this time span grew from 6.03 to 7.76. Analyzing the data across gender and urbanicity, it appears that both male and female Black teachers are exiting campuses labeled as City and Small, and Rural and Distant. In contrast, Black female and male teachers are choosing to apply, based on the data, to work in campuses defined as Town and Distant. Collectively, the average number of Black teachers in Texas has grown since 2011.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the employment trend of Black teachers in the state of Texas between the academic years of 2011 through 2017. This research provides insight into the gradual progression of employing Black teachers at the elementary and secondary levels. We inquired about the increase or decrease of Black Texas teachers as it aligns to trends in student population. Although Texas has increased its percentage of Black teachers during the studied time span, the current school personnel is not racially congruent with the Black student population.

While the lack of congruency with the Black student population in Texas and across school types by urbanicity parallels current and extant research (D'Amico et al., 2017; Ingersoll, 2011), the growth in the number of Black teachers highlights national efforts to recruit and retain Black teachers, and Black teacher willingness to teach in certain favorable conditions (Sun, 2018). The recent increases in

Black teachers give some indication that Texas is in some ways responding to calls towards diversifying teaching to reflect the diversity of students (Goldhaber et al., 2019). What is not visible through the data is the number of Black teachers that obtained their teaching licensure through traditional or alternative certification routes. Texas is home to a large number of alternative certification route programs, which has resulted in 50% of all teachers in Texas being alternatively certified. Research underscores the reality that for many Black teachers, this route proved to be more effective to get them their licensure than going the traditional route (Guthery & Bailey, 2023). Potentially, the availability of these alternative programs in Texas could be contributing to the growth of Black teachers unexpectedly.

The findings also indicated that certain campuses saw larger increases in the number of Black teachers being retained on their campuses over time. Research on teacher shortages and urbanicity has illuminated that certain campuses, based on location, are harder to staff overall and struggle mightily to diversify their teacher workforce (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Campuses in urban and rural areas are presented with a myriad of challenging factors that impact teachers' ability to instruct. Still, studies of Black teachers by gender offer various reasons for why they work in these environments and why they choose to remain despite the challenges they face (Bristol, 2018; Farinde-Wu et al., 2016). Attempts to maintain and grow the number of Black male and female teachers must critically examine what support factors these groups need to stay in the classroom. Simply treating Black teachers as a monolithic group is detrimental to the efforts to produce highly qualified and effective Black teacher candidates and teachers. Additionally, establishing which factors are considered important to Black teachers (student demographics, salary, supportive administration, etc.) can aid school administrators in developing effective recruitment programs and supportive resources to keep them from leaving the school or the profession overall.

Limitations

This study contained a few limitations. For example, the data did not explain why Black teachers were choosing to enter and remain in specific schools or school districts. Additionally, the analysis does not include data immediately before, during, or immediately the COVID-19 pandemic. Potentially, the trend of Black teachers choosing to enter and remain in Texas schools could be different due the exodus of teachers overall during the pandemic. Furthermore, the data did not offer the opportunity to ascertain individual-level patterns; if Black teachers were remaining in the profession or if the rate of them leaving the profession was overshadowed by a higher number of Black teachers entering the profession.

Recommendations

Cultivating a scenario where Black teacher candidates are valued and recruited effectively requires a myriad of strategies both at the teacher preparation level and at the district level in Texas. School districts and teacher preparation programs need to recruit where there are a host of Black teacher candidates: Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Texas is home to nine HBCUs, the 4th most in the U.S. Working with HBUCs to establish pathways for new teachers and paraprofessionals can be an effective and collaborative effort between community partners and institutions of higher education (Williams & Lewis, 2020). Programs should be designed to exemplify relevant pedagogy and best practice frameworks that teacher candidates can immediately begin implementing in their field experiences. Districts geographically close to HBCUs such as Prairie View A&M and Texas Southern will benefit from a diverse pool of teacher candidates and

can host student teachers to prepare them to enter harder-to-reach campuses. This will allow college students to have first-hand experiences applying coursework, and may offer job opportunities upon completion of teacher preparation programs. Offering hands-on educator preparation in districts where these candidates may end up teaching would be doubly beneficial: novice teachers are supported in their professional development and may have more of a buy-in with their place of employment, and districts are supported in their goal of hiring more Black teachers for racial match.

Secondly, districts need to provide all teachers with incentives for obtaining a degree in education or furthering their education beyond their initial licensure. Substitute teachers are paid less than teachers and are not readily exposed to professional development or ways in which their education can be enhanced. The development of a program that will guarantee employment with the district for five years and pay for educational fees will allow substitutes the ability to advance their knowledge and obtain teaching degrees and training. In recent years, Texas state officials have pushed to reduce if not eliminate hiring practices that seek to ameliorate the historical barriers that discriminated against Black teachers and partially contributed to the current shortage of teachers overall. Still, districts should look to identify effective pipelines for teacher recruitment and promotion throughout the district – which would help in the hiring of more teachers overall and Black teachers. Finally, as districts identify Black teachers who are effective at instruction, they should develop scaffolded opportunities for these teachers to be mentors, teacher leaders, and regional representatives. Districts can utilize organizations like the Texas Alliance of Black School Educators (TABSE) and multicultural collegiate programs to identify teachers across school locales that can help recruit and support novice and veteran teachers. This creates subject matter experts and solicits their input on how to further develop the students in their program. It also sets the standard for high-quality Black teachers, where teacher candidates and future Black teachers can see people that look like them in the profession and strengthen their willingness to become a Black teacher. Future research should identify individual level patterns of Black teachers either remaining at their school, transferring within or outside of their district, or leaving the profession completely to get a more accurate picture of teacher retention. Using qualitative methodologies, future studies must explore the experiences of Black teachers and understand what factors are contributing to them choosing to be employed in certain types of schools and school districts. Another manner to understand how years of experience differ between Black men and women is through a mixed effects model, when the interaction between gender and race can be analyzed. This model should also examine the interaction effect of race and gender of the assistant principals and principals that supervise these teachers to understand if difference or relationships exist.

Conclusion

The recommendations offer a select number of salient approaches to be applied in conjunction with each other. It is possible that an increase in Black teachers may not lead to a reduction in disproportionate school discipline outcomes, an increase in the number of Black students in rigorous mathematics and science courses, or an increase in their academic performance in Texas, however, the findings give a clear indication that this option has not been fully explored due to the limited increase in Black teachers in Texas from 2015-16 to 2021-22. Black teachers are role models, cultural translators, and positive representations that counteract negative spaces that students experience. Black students deserve the opportunity to be afforded an adequate education reflective of their identity. Texas is making strides to increase Black teachers and it is vital to continue this approach to diversify the teacher workforce to help Black students in an effort to eliminate racial stereotypes, negative beliefs, and distrust.

Virginia Redwine Johnson is a doctoral urban education student at Texas A&M University. Her research focuses on teacher dispositions, investigating affirmative factors that support teachers' growth of culturally inclusive dispositions toward students in urban classrooms and examining teacher demographic trends in relation to changes in the PK-12 student demographic changes. During her time at Texas A&M-College Station, she has served as an officer for Bold Leaders in Urban Education (BLUE), a student-led organization dedicated to supporting the professional and personal growth of graduate students interested in advancing urban education research, pedagogy, and practice.

John A. Williams III is an assistant professor of urban education at Texas A&M University. He has a distinct focus on establishing affirming practices, policies, and procedures aimed at eradicating exclusionary school disciplinary measures for Black children. In tandem with this, his mission includes shedding light on more effective strategies for preparing and nurturing highly qualified teachers and teacher candidates for urban educational settings.

Micah Richardson is a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He specializes in data analytics in the areas of finance, research, and business operations.

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Breaking Barriers and Fostering Neurodiversity Awareness in Elementary Education Through Inclusive Children's Literature

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Abstract

Teachers are essential in ensuring children and society are aware of neurodiversity by actively incorporating inclusive children's literature into their classroom activities to promote understanding and acceptance of neurodiverse individuals. Integrating such literature may enhance children's awareness and acceptance of neurodiverse individuals. Many teachers encounter barriers to promoting neurodiversity awareness through this medium. This paper draws upon Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1962) to analyze teachers' perceptions and beliefs concerning neurodiversity and their practices for using children's literature to promote neurodiversity awareness. This qualitative research study investigated the barriers teachers face in promoting neurodiversity awareness. Data collection involved semi-structured face-to-face interviews with eight K-2 grade teachers. A thematic analysis was used for interpretation. The findings indicate inadequate teacher knowledge and understanding, lack of collaborative professional development, and limited access to appropriate educational resources are significant barriers to promoting neurodiversity awareness in classroom activities through inclusive children's literature.

Keywords: neurodiversity awareness, inclusive children's literature, inclusion, teacher preparation programs

Introduction and Background

As educators increasingly recognize the diverse ways students learn, understanding neurodiversity and implementing effective strategies to serve all students may be essential for creating effective learning environments. According to Acevedo and Nusbaum (2020), neurodiversity is a conceptualization that brain differences should be considered normal rather than deficits in the learning environment. It is vital to note that it is not a deficit because there is no "right" way of thinking, learning, and behaving (Souto-Manning, 2020).

According to several studies (Baio et al., 2018; Brugha et al., 2011; Van Naarden Braun et al., 2015), there was a significant increase in the prevalence of ASD and other neurodivergent conditions from 1996-2010. Consequently, there may be an increase in students who face sensory, social, and cognitive challenges in the school environment. Teachers have a critical role in creating optimal learning environments and promoting awareness of neurodiversity.

One avenue through which educators can generate awareness and exposure to neurodiversity is through children's literature. Research indicates that by incorporating books that feature neurodivergent characters or address neurodiverse experiences, teachers can cultivate empathy, foster acceptance, and enhance the overall classroom experience (Souto-Manning, 2020). It has been well-documented that this type of inclusive literature benefits both neurodiverse and neurotypical students. According to Overstreet (2022), children learn by seeing themselves and others reflected in books and other classroom materials, adding that books can serve as "windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors." When students see their own lives or others in the books they read or hear, they are

more likely to feel included in the classroom community and the world and appreciate the uniqueness of others. This may lead to more empathy, awareness, and acceptance of their peers who are neurodivergent.

Study Purpose

The increasing prevalence of neurodivergent conditions among children highlights the growing importance of addressing neurodiversity in educational settings. While the importance of promoting neurodiversity awareness and inclusive education is critical, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding teachers' specific challenges in promoting, accepting, and awareness of neurodiverse individuals through inclusive literature and the solutions to address the barriers. Pulimeno et al. (2020) emphasize the need for teachers to create inclusive learning environments and provide children with new information about the world that would compensate for what young people may lack using tools such as storybooks since they are easier to understand for all children compared to abstract notions or theories. However, many teachers face barriers such as inadequate knowledge and understanding, limited access to appropriate educational resources, and lack of collaborative professional development, which hinder their efforts to promote neurodiversity awareness through children's literature.

Furthermore, these barriers extend beyond the immediate classroom environment as neurodivergent students interact but may not entirely be accepted and included in our societies. This lack of acceptance could translate into social barriers and make it difficult for neurodivergent people to participate and contribute fully to various aspects of life, including education, employment, and social interactions (Scott et al., 2019). Failure to promote awareness of neurodiversity in early education could affect the future workforce. Neurodivergent individuals possess unique talents and perspectives that can contribute to a diverse and innovative workforce (Nakamura & Hara, 2020).

Stories reproducing fictional situations that coincide with children's real problems allow them to feel comfortable and safe in difficult circumstances, ensuring emotional safety and providing healthier ways to cope with internal struggles, life adversities, and stressors (Pulimeno et al., 2020). Pulimeno et al. (2020) also recognized that narratives have been and continue to be narrated in all societies and diverse contexts, serving to transmit experiences, traditions, social norms, and principles. These stories offer fun and new ideas to the audience. Children's stories occupy a distinct cultural realm that helps young people transition to existence, allowing them to understand their identity as individuals and their potential role in advancing global development.

Understanding the factors that influence teachers' decisions and behaviors in this regard is crucial for developing effective interventions and strategies to support their promotion and raising awareness and acceptance of neurodiversity through inclusive literature.

Research Question

This research aims to uncover teachers' main challenges in promoting neurodiversity awareness and acceptance by incorporating diverse children's literature. The central question guiding this study was:

1. What barriers prevent elementary teachers from promoting and raising awareness about neurodiversity through children's literature?

By addressing this question and analyzing teachers' perspectives and beliefs, my study aims to contribute valuable insights that provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in promoting neurodiversity awareness in elementary education. Ultimately, the findings from this research can inform the development of targeted interventions and policies for school districts, Universities, and teacher preparation programs to support teachers in creating inclusive learning environments that celebrate the diversity and acceptance of neurodevelopmental profiles and nurture the growth and development of all students.

Literature Review

The following literature review explores the critical role of embracing neurodiversity in fostering acceptance of an inclusive educational environment among students. The review also highlights how using picture books as educational tools can significantly reinforce understanding and appreciation of neurodiversity. Furthermore, this review addresses some challenges associated with a lack of neurodiversity awareness. It delves into some barriers educators face in integrating inclusive literature into their teaching practices. Despite these recognized benefits, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the specific and deeper understanding of barriers teachers face in incorporating inclusive literature into their classrooms. There is also a gap in the literature on solutions for the future.

Neurodiversity Awareness

Recognizing and supporting neurodiversity means fostering inclusive environments and promoting student understanding and acceptance (Souto-Manning, 2020). Listening to these pupils and teaching about neurodiversity helps raise awareness among students.

Within the context of elementary education, promoting awareness of neurodiversity through picture books has enormous potential to foster inclusive learning environments where all students can thrive. Souto-Manning (2020) finds that children's literature is critical in child development because it helps them develop language awareness and a literacy culture. In addition, when teachers intentionally choose books that reflect their students' backgrounds, stories can act as mirrors, recreating and reflecting students' personal experiences. (Souto-Manning, 2020). When students see their own lives in the books read to them, they are more likely to feel included in the classroom community and the world.

Despite the potential benefits of neurodiversity awareness, numerous barriers prevent elementary teachers from effectively integrating neurodiversity into their teaching practices. Some of these barriers are inadequate teacher knowledge and understanding, lack of collaborative professional development, and limited access to appropriate educational resources. When elementary teachers face barriers to promoting awareness of neurodiversity through children's literature, it may limit their ability to foster inclusive learning environments. As a result, neurodivergent students may not receive the support and understanding they need to thrive, leading to negative educational experiences and lower academic achievement (Brandsen et al., 2024). Nonetheless, with proper awareness and acceptance of neurodiversity, children may grow up with more understanding and empathy towards people with different neurological profiles.

Ortiz (2020) and Izuno-Garcia et al. (2023) highlight the barriers to teaching neurodivergent learners. The findings indicate that limited understanding and knowledge of neurodiversity,

including neurodevelopmental states such as learning disabilities and autism spectrum disorder (ASD), hinder class-based neurodiversity awareness among teachers. Meanwhile, Farroni et al. (2022) add that teachers have limited neurodiversity awareness due to limited access to appropriate materials and resources, such as children's literature books, that promote neurodiversity awareness. Without proper educational resources, teachers cannot incorporate neurodiversity themes into their teachings (Acevedo & Nusbaum, 2020; Vasquez, 2022). Moreover, Gobbo et al. (2019) found that teachers cannot encourage neurodiversity awareness without the necessary support and collaboration.

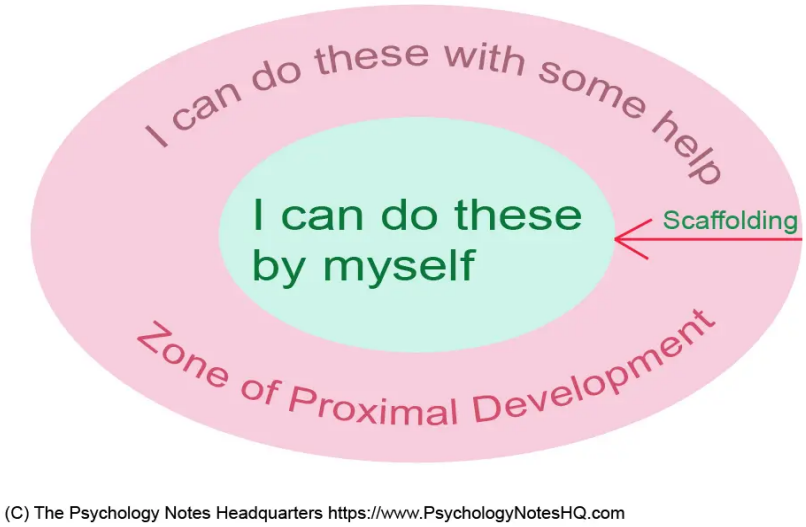
Addressing these barriers is critical to promoting equitable and inclusive education, ensuring all students reach their full potential regardless of their neurodevelopmental profiles. By understanding and overcoming the obstacles teachers face in promoting neurodiversity awareness, educational institutions may create an environment of more significant support and acceptance, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment for all students, including those with neurodivergent characteristics.

Theoretical Framework

This research draws on Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1962) as a conceptual lens to understand and analyze barriers teachers face in promoting neurodiversity awareness through children's literature. This theory emphasizes the role of cultural tools, social ties, and the environment in shaping human cognition and development (Choi & Lee, 2021). A few critical concepts include social learning from others through social bonds or interactions within a child's zone of proximal development, as in Figure 1 (Choi & Lee, 2021; Crosthwaite, 2013). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1962) also emphasized the value of collaboration, cultural context, and social relations in educational practices.

Figure 1

Infographic Representing Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development



Note. Reprinted from Psychology Notes HQ (2022).

Choi & Lee (2021) noted that Vygotsky (1962) believes learning occurs through interaction and collaborative activities. Vygotsky (1962) posited that human development is a socially mediated process in which children develop beliefs, cultural values, and problem-solving approaches through collaborative conversations with more informed people. Vygotsky (1962) notes that cultural tools such as books, language, and educational resources are integral to cognitive development and help children understand their sociocultural environment (Choi & Lee 2021). Through this theoretical framework, we will examine the teacher experience.

If elementary teachers have limited access to children's literature featuring neurodiversity, they cannot expose children to diverse perspectives and acceptance of class-based neurodiversity. Limited diverse and representative literature in children's classrooms may contribute to low awareness of neurodiversity among teachers and students (Vasquez, 2022). Applying Vygotsky's (1962) point of view, the model analyzes the identified barriers to show how they hinder teachers' awareness to create a neurodiverse and more inclusive classroom (Choi & Lee, 2021). In this sense, elementary teachers may promote and expose all students to the unique gifts of neurodiverse students by incorporating diverse literature that presents neurodiverse experiences and characters.

Method

This study explored kindergarten through second-grade teachers' lives, experiences, perspectives, educational preparational backgrounds, and practices concerning integrating neurodiversity concepts through children's literature. The data was collected using a qualitative research design. Qualitative research enables an in-depth exploration and understanding of complex phenomena within their natural contexts (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

Study Participants

Participants included kindergarten, first, and second-grade teachers at two Title 1 public elementary schools in Southeast Texas. After contacting 16 teachers through district email, 12 teachers were willing to participate in the research. A purposeful sampling method was utilized to select ten teachers for the study who had the experience and knowledge to offer information that addressed the research objectives adequately. After prescreening to meet the inclusion criteria, the number of participants was reduced to eight. The inclusion criterion stipulated that the teacher must have taught for at least two years in the same school. Another factor I considered was ensuring I had an equal number of teachers from a traditional educational preparation program and an alternative certification program. Including an equal number of teachers from both programs would allow me to conduct a comparative analysis to identify any significant differences or similarities in the challenges they encounter based on educational preparation programs. Teachers from traditional education preparation programs and alternative certification programs may have different training experiences and pedagogical approaches. Understanding these differences may provide a more comprehensive view of their barriers and allow me to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs in preparing teachers to address neurodiversity and promote inclusive literature. This could allow informed recommendations for improving teacher training programs. Five teachers were from one school, and the other three were from the second elementary school. A $20 gift card was offered to teachers who agreed to participate in the study to incentivize participation. The participant demographics are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Teacher Demographic Information

Participant	Gender	Years Taught	Teacher Preparation Program	Grade Level	Classroom Type
Participant 1	Female	18	Traditional	2nd	Dual Language
Participant 2	Female	2	Alternative Certification	2nd	General Education
Participant 3	Female	7	Alternative Certification	2nd	General Education
Participant 4	Female	11	Traditional	2nd	Dual Language
Participant 5	Male	18	Alternative Certification	1st	Dual Language
Participant 6	Female	24	Traditional	1st	General Education
Participant 7	Female	14	Alternative Certification	Kinder	General Education
Participant 8	Female	9	Traditional	Kinder	General Education

Data Collection

I conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the participants, which varied from 20 to 35 minutes each, and each participant was interviewed once. Semi-structured interviews allowed for an in-depth study of participants' experiences and opinions, collecting rich and thorough data (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

All interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's consent, and I asked the participants open-ended questions. The interview questions are included in Appendix A. During data collection, the participants were allowed to elaborate on their experiences and provide detailed narratives. Audio recording was chosen as the method for data collection as it may improve validity by retaining participants' precise words and capturing the nuances of their responses. It also may reduce the possibility of data loss or distortion during transcription.

Data Analysis

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1962) emphasizes the importance of social interaction and cultural context in the development of cognition (Choi & Lee, 2021). It provides a critical lens through which to analyze the data in this study. This theoretical framework was instrumental in understanding elementary teachers' barriers to promoting and raising awareness of neurodiversity through children's literature. The data analysis process, guided by Vygotsky's principles, focused on identifying barriers tied to teachers' perspectives, beliefs, and practices, within the school environment.

I used a thematic analysis approach to code the qualitative data. Qualitative coding is classifying and labeling data segments according to their content and finding trends and themes that emerge from the data (Linneberg, 2019). This study's qualitative coding procedure took place in 5 phases. The initial phase consisted of transcribing each interview using a transcription service. Each transcript was reviewed and cross-checked with the original audio files to correct errors. This step was crucial for capturing the authentic voices and experiences of the participants, aligning with Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory (1962), which emphasizes the importance of language and dialogue in understanding cognitive processes (Choi & Lee, 2021). The second phase involved underlining any words or phrases addressing the research question. According to Vygotsky (1962), cognitive development is deeply embedded in social contexts, so I focused on identifying phrases that reflected teachers' interactions with students, colleagues, and the broader educational environment. This helped me to pinpoint specific social and cultural factors that influence their ability to raise awareness of neurodiversity, and these became the names of my categories. I color-coded similar responses in the third phase and categorized the emerging patterns into sub-categories. I examined how cultural norms, school policies, and social dynamics within the school setting either facilitated or hindered teachers' efforts to incorporate neurodiversity into their literature curriculum. The fourth phase consisted of determining how the subcategories align with the relation of Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory (1962). The last phase was categorizing the themes into two sections addressing the research question. The barriers were divided into two sections: raising and exposing awareness.

By applying Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1962) throughout the data analysis process, I uncovered how social interactions and cultural contexts shape elementary teachers' barriers in promoting and raising awareness of neurodiversity through children's inclusive literature. This theoretical framework provided a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics, particularly highlighting that inadequate knowledge due to teacher preparation programs is a significant barrier.

Results

The first section focuses on teachers' barriers in introducing and raising awareness of neurodiversity concepts to their students. These include inadequate knowledge from teacher preparation programs and a lack of collaborative professional development. The second section highlights the barriers that impede the ongoing exposure and deepening of neurodiversity awareness. This includes limited access to relevant resources.

By understanding these barriers through the lens of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1962), we can gain insights into the sociocultural dynamics that impact teachers' efforts to foster an inclusive and neurodiverse-aware classroom. To provide a deeper understanding, the responses of two participants, Participants One and Five, were highlighted and analyzed, as seen in Table 1. Choosing these two participants may provide a contrast that might offer a deeper understanding of the barriers.

Participant One, a female with 18 years of experience, represents a traditional path in teacher training through a university education preparation program. Her experiences may show how conventional educational frameworks and theories like Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1962) have influenced her teaching practices and knowledge of neurodiversity.

Participant Five, a male with 18 years of experience, completed his teacher training through an alternative certification program. His perspectives highlight differences in training methodologies

and how these alternative paths may affect the promotion and awareness of neurodiversity in classroom settings.

Raising Awareness

Inadequate Knowledge Due to Teacher Preparation Programs

After digging deeper into the data from the two participants' responses, adequate training and support for teachers' educational preparation was identified as a significant barrier to exposing and bringing awareness to students through diverse literature. Some of the questions asked of the participants were about their familiarity with neurodiversity and the conditions that would fall under the term, along with describing their educator preparation programs. Participant One demonstrated limited knowledge of neurodiversity and its meaning, and she even asked me to explain what that means. I briefly described the term, and she stated *"I did not receive specific training in school or professional development in this area. I went to a traditional preparation program, but umm, I don't remember learning about this or hearing that term."* She continued by explaining how she felt when she first went into teaching. She explained how "unprepared" she felt and had to learn relevant things independently. She felt like even though she attended a four-year college, and her program was the traditional educator preparation with student teaching, she believes there are a lot of topics that are not covered, such as practical ways to foster acceptance of different learners and different abilities. Her responses show a gap in her training through her educator preparation program. Her program did not introduce her to neurodiversity, which hinders her from exposing and raising awareness of neurodiversity through children's literature.

Participant Five also demonstrated limited knowledge and inadequate training regarding Neurodiversity. Participant 5 emphasized, "*My certification program was more hands-on, focusing on classroom management and direct instruction methods, but we didn't delve deeply into special education or neurodiversity issues. I actually don't think we even learned about inclusive practices."* He continued describing his training and other areas the program focused on. He showed genuine concern about how his training didn't adequately train him for "real world" experiences. His responses emphasize he has practical skills but lacks theoretical grounding, underscoring the need for balanced training that includes theory and training related to neurodiversity.

The findings indicate how educational backgrounds have influenced the participant's limited perspectives on neurodiversity, and this suggests that teacher preparation programs are not adequately integrating these essential concepts and equipping teachers with cultural tools. This aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1962), which emphasizes the importance of cultural and educational theories in cognitive development and effective teaching practices. It is noted that learning is a socially mediated process, and theoretical knowledge serves as a cultural tool that helps teachers mediate learning effectively (Choi & Lee, 2021). Without a comprehensive training program and a solid theoretical foundation, teachers may not fully understand neurodiversity, limiting their ability to select and use inclusive literature that supports diverse learners. This stresses the need for comprehensive and robust theoretical training as part of the socio-cultural tools in teacher preparation programs that would prepare teachers to meet the needs of all their students.

Lack of Collaborative Professional Development

A second barrier that emerged from the findings that hinders teachers from raising awareness of neurodiversity through children's literature is the lack of collaborative professional development. This theme emerged from questions about the current types of training and professional development they participate in, collaboration with colleagues on teaching practices and book selection, and cooperation with the special education department. Participant One began talking about the support she receives when the inclusion teachers go into her classroom to support students with Individual Education plans. However, she expressed the need for more collaborative professional development to learn about inclusive practices and the best ways to support and promote awareness of diverse conditions. She stated, "*We have trainings, but rarely have opportunities to work together with other teachers. I would be willing to attend trainings focused on neurodiversity and collaborate with our counselor or other specialists who are more familiar with things like that."* This response shows the absence of social interaction, professional networks, and collaborative learning opportunities, which may be crucial for knowledge construction, and her willingness to learn from other knowledgeable educators. This barrier is critical because it may provide educators with opportunities for social interaction, professional networking, and collective learning, which may be essential for practical knowledge construction and the implementation of inclusive practices.

Participant Five briefly talked about the best ways he likes to learn and emphasized that he is very hands-on and likes to talk out his ideas and seek feedback from others, but he often must research different things independently. He'll talk with his teammates, but there's not much collaboration on learning new topics; it mainly deals with "small day-to-day issues." He also mentioned participating in weekly professional learning community meetings, but diverse issues such as neurodiversity never arise. His responses imply that there's a lack of collaborative professional development opportunities. He states, *"We don't have much interaction with other educators during PD. They focus on classroom techniques and it's like a refresher, but nothing new, and we don't collaborate. It's sit and get kind of trainings. Sometimes, we talk to a partner."* This statement highlights educators' significant lack of interaction during professional development (PD). This isolation may prevent teachers from benefiting from their peers' collective knowledge and experiences.

The findings reveal that educators collaborate, grow, and network minimally. The lack of collaborative professional development presents a barrier to effectively promoting neurodiversity in education through inclusive literature. This aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1962), which emphasizes the role of social interactions in learning and development and through collaborative interactions with more knowledgeable others (Vasquez, 2022). Without ongoing collaborative professional development, teachers may experience stagnation in their professional growth. Continuous interaction with peers may foster a culture of lifelong learning, where teachers can be exposed to new ideas, research, and best practices. Teachers may be able to help each other move from their current level of understanding to a more advanced level, thus enhancing their ability to promote awareness of neurodiversity through children's literature.

Exposing Awareness

Limited Access to Relevant Resources

Limited access to relevant resources was a barrier to exposing children to neurodiversity through children's literature. The questions that helped uncover this barrier were related to how teachers

choose their book selection and other supplemental resources and the availability of books on their campus and/or district. Participant One talked about not knowing about neurodiversity to be intentional about choosing the right books. Still, she does like to use different books that will help students learn about the world and other people but emphasized, "*I've never seen books in my campus library that deal with issues like neurodiver*sity *and umm; most of our books are outdated. The fictional books have just regular characters, and most of them aren't really relatable to our kids."* This not only suggests a need for more targeted professional development but also for districts and campuses to update their libraries with relevant and diverse literature. She continued expressing how kids are usually more engaged in her classroom when it's a story that they like and can relate to. She said, "*my kids always point out to me whenever they can make a connection to the character."* This reinforces the importance of having diverse and relatable books, including those that address neurodiversity, to enhance student engagement and learning. She also mentioned that her book collection is vast due to all her years in education, but she usually must go out and buy books due to the limited variety in school. Her responses highlight the systemic issue of inadequate resource provision and a gap in knowledge and understanding, hindering her ability to select books that intentionally promote diversity.

The findings from both participants illustrate a significant barrier that teachers face in promoting and raising awareness of neurodiversity, which is a lack of mediation through "cultural tools." This aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1962). According to the theory, cultural tools such as books and educational materials are crucial for cognitive development and learning (Choi & Lee, 2021). The participant's struggle to find books accurately representing diverse neurodivergent experiences highlights a critical deficiency in school resources. This scarcity of inclusive literature in school libraries impedes teachers' ability to foster neurodiversity awareness effectively. Without access to appropriate cultural tools, teachers cannot expose students to diverse perspectives and experiences, which may be essential for building empathy and understanding.

Discussion

These findings shed light on existing challenges and areas for improvement in promoting neurodiversity awareness through children's literature in the classroom. They highlight the importance of increasing teacher knowledge and understanding through effective educator preparation, providing adequate school resources, and fostering collaborative professional development. The findings indicate that the barriers experienced by teachers compromise the role they might have in fostering an inclusive classroom by promoting and raising awareness of neurodiversity. These findings provide valuable insights into existing gaps and opportunities for improvement to promote inclusive learning environments that celebrate the diversity of neurodivergent students.

Inadequate Knowledge Due to Teacher Preparation Programs

Neurodiversity awareness is fundamental because it may increase the understanding of how the different learners' brains function and process information. Subsequently, educators may raise awareness and promote the acceptance of neurodiverse learners through inclusive children's literature. However, the findings in this study demonstrate a substantial lack of knowledge and understanding among teachers, which implies that they lack adequate ways to promote neurodiversity. This aligns with Ortiz (2020) and Izuno-Garcia et al. (2023), highlighting their findings that indicated that limited understanding and knowledge of neurodiversity hinder class-based neurodiversity awareness among teachers. The lack of proper training in neurodiversity limits

the teacher's professional capacity to respond to the learners' needs, especially where unique learning strategies are required. Although the two focus participants had contrasting experiences in their teacher preparation programs, it is evident that both types of programs require significant improvements to prepare teachers to understand and teach about neurodiversity adequately. To truly foster inclusive education environments and raise awareness of neurodiversity, it may be crucial for all teacher preparation programs, regardless of their format, to integrate comprehensive training on theoretical knowledge.

Lack of Collaborative Professional Development

Ortiz (2020) emphasized the importance of collaboration and communication among staff members for effective learning. This disparity highlights the need for increased collaboration and training among educators and aligns with the study findings. The findings indicated that the participants did not participate in collaborative professional development, which hinders their ability to learn from others' perspectives and knowledge. This is supported by the study by Gobbo et al. (2019) that found that teachers cannot encourage neurodiversity awareness without the necessary support and collaboration. Consequently, effective partnerships promote the development of inclusive teaching strategies and support neurodiversity awareness among educators (Acevedo & Nusbaum, 2020).

Limited Access to Relevant Resources

The lack of adequate insights and experiences in neurological differences in a diverse classroom implies that teachers face challenges in identifying, accessing, and advocating for the right resources to promote acceptance and awareness of neurodivergent pupils. Aligned with these sentiments, Izuno-Garcia et al. (2023) argue that learning differences among students complicate the teacher's role in teaching, which justifies the need to gain appropriate training and relevant instructional material.

Nakamura and Hara (2020) suggest that diverse learning strategies, such as incorporating inclusive literature, can help promote awareness of the needs of all students. However, adopting solutions that meet the neurodiversity needs of a diverse student population does not imply that some individuals should be privileged or disadvantaged by the learning process or materials. This means that the solutions adopted, including the learning materials, should be developed premised on the overall needs of all students.

The alignment of practical and relevant resources, such as diverse literature and practical training, fosters a supportive learning environment where teachers can prioritize students' self-determination through an ethical approach. However, the findings from the study highlight that a less inclusive classroom implies that although teachers seek to uphold ethical practices in the learning environment, their effectiveness in achieving neurodiversity in the classroom is influenced by underlying factors such as access to relevant resources.

Recommendations

The findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to address the identified barriers and promote neurodiversity awareness effectively. Integrating insights from the literature review and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1962), the following evidence-based recommendations are proposed:

Improve Resource Allocation

Allocating sufficient resources to ensure a diverse and inclusive collection of books, materials, and learning tools is a priority (Souto-Manning, 2020). Enhancing access to relevant resources may provide educators with the necessary tools to cultivate inclusive learning environments. Teachers and school administrators can collaborate to expand library collections to include a wide range of literature and materials depicting neurodivergent characters and addressing their unique abilities. This can consist of books covering various neurodivergent conditions, such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and more. Premised on Vygotsky's (1962) socio-cultural theory, the developments experienced in the learning and teaching processes rely on the resources teachers and students can access (Choi & Lee, 2021). Therefore, school administrators, teachers, and other school stakeholders should be committed to supplementing the available resources to improve the student's learning experience.

Restructure Teacher Preparation Programs

As we consider the implications that neurodiversity has for the educational system, it is becoming increasingly clear that in-depth training for educators is an absolute necessity. Develop comprehensive teacher training programs to improve knowledge and understanding of neurodiversity and equip teachers with practical strategies for inclusive teaching (Choi & Lee, 2021). Teachers must have a solid understanding of their pupil's varied neurological profiles, allowing them to devise suitable instructional methods, such as works of children's literature (Overstreet, 2022).

Provide Collaborative Professional Development and Networks

Facilitate collaboration between schools and educational institutions to establish resource-sharing networks for sharing best practices and resources (Pulimeno et al., 2020). Resource-sharing networks can amplify the impact of interventions and promote collective learning within educational communities. Professional development may also be essential for empowering educators to create inclusive learning environments that cater to diverse learning needs.

Promote Inclusive Curriculum Design

Encourage developing and adopting inclusive curriculum materials that embrace neurodiversity and reflect diverse perspectives (Acevedo & Nusbaum, 2020). Inclusive curriculum design fosters a culture of acceptance and appreciation for neurodivergent individuals.

Seek Community Engagement

Encourage the involvement of parents, caregivers, and the community to address limited access to relevant resources and support awareness about neurodiversity (Nakamura & Hara, 2020). Community engagement fosters a sense of collective responsibility and enhances the effectiveness of initiatives promoting neurodiversity awareness.

Advocate For Policy Changes

Advocate for policy changes that prioritize the needs of neurodivergent students and promote inclusive education programs and educational policies (Scott et al., 2019). Policy advocacy may be essential for driving systemic changes that advance neurodiversity awareness and inclusion in education.

Limitations

The current study has several limitations that future research should address. These include a relatively small sample size, which might affect the generalization of the findings. Additionally, the research method employed might not fully capture the range of teachers' experiences. Researcher bias might also influence data interpretation. Moreover, while recommendations emphasize promoting teacher awareness of neurodiversity and the benefits of using inclusive literature, future research could explore the long-term effects of these interventions on student learning outcomes and well-being.

Conclusion

Teachers face barriers in promoting awareness and exposure to neurodiversity through children's literature. Using Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1962) as a theoretical framework, I collected and analyzed data from teachers' perspectives, experiences, and beliefs and identified three main barriers. The barriers identified are inadequate teacher preparation programs, limited access to relevant resources, and lack of collaborative professional development. Addressing the challenges requires implementing recommended strategies so educators, policymakers, and stakeholders can work together to provide better teacher preparation and to address limited access to relevant resources to create inclusive and supportive learning environments that celebrate and accept all students' unique strengths and needs.

Comprehensive teacher training programs should be developed and implemented to enhance knowledge and understanding of neurodiversity. This training should equip teachers with practical strategies for promoting neurodiversity awareness in the classroom. This may enable teachers to effectively utilize available resources and support promoting awareness of neurodiversity in elementary education through children's literature, which may contribute to a more inclusive society that embraces the diversity of all individuals.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

A. Participant background

To better understand your perspectives, I would like to know more about your background.
What is your current job title and grade level?
How long have you been teaching?
What is your educational background? Traditional Program or alternative certification program?
What experience do you have in teaching students with disabilities?
How familiar are you with neurodiversity?

B. Cultural Awareness

1. Do you believe the book selections in your classroom make a difference? Can you please elaborate?

Professional Development

2. What professional development do you participate in concerning children's literature?
3. How often do other teachers or administrators encourage you to learn about people with unique and different abilities? How do your leaders accomplish this?
4. At your school, how valuable are the equity development opportunities?

Book Talks/Tasting

5. What are the barriers to being more proactive when choosing diverse books with disabilities and neurodivergent characters?
6. What would it look like if you had conversations and book talks with colleagues surrounding neurodiverse books and lessons?
7. How often do you spend time with students with unique and different abilities at school?
8. Tell me how comfortable you would be with incorporating new material and books about neurodivergent characters.

C. Barriers

Besides the above mentioned obstacles, tell me how the following affect your book selection.

9. Can you tell me about your experience or knowledge surrounding neurodiversity and disabilities?
10. Does your district curriculum affect how you expose your students to diverse literature? Can you elaborate?
11. Do the stories included in the curriculum represent neurodiverse characters?
12. How much autonomy do you have in selecting the topics you teach and the materials you use?
13. How often do you incorporate inclusive literature?
14. Does your knowledge or background on unique abilities affect how you choose books and conversations? Can you elaborate?
15. Can you identify what conditions or unique abilities fall under neurodiversity?
16. Tell me about the availability of books in your school and other resources to expose your students to diverse literature. Is the level of resources adequate?
17. What do you do if books and other resources are not readily available in your school?

18. What other barriers affect your book selection in your student's education? Can you elaborate?

D. School personnel actions

The following questions are about your experience with the school personnel at your current institution and how they support the inclusion of neurodiversity literature in the classroom.

19. Tell me how school personnel collaborate to help you choose the books you expose your students to.
20. Tell me how the special education department communicates and collaborates with the teachers.
21. Tell me about the school counselor and how they collaborate with you or students about diverse topics and ensure all students feel included and welcomed.
22. How is the collaboration among different grade levels when choosing literature for the classrooms and creating book lists?

E. Better school support

23. Based on your experience with the school institutions in this district, what can be done to support a more inclusive classroom by bringing awareness to neurodiversity and exposing children to neurodivergent characters?

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Tools to Increase Preservice Teacher Confidence While Discussing Controversial Identity Issues

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Abstract

This collaborative, descriptive research project in urban Texas looked at the at the development, implementation, and student perception of effectiveness of a multi-stage pedagogical intervention in a classroom to help preservice teachers become more confident during discussions of controversial identity issues; specifically, ableism, classism, heterosexism, racism, and sexism. Researchers developed classroom experiences based upon worldview threat and defense as well as mindfulness, using qualitative analytic strategies to "foresee" and "assert" the effectiveness of these experiences via mid- and end-point course evaluation surveys. Participants felt more confident and capable when talking to others with differing worldviews due to the experiences and tools provided.

Keywords: curriculum; identity, mindfulness, preservice teacher education, teacher education preparation, terror management theory

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the possibilities for combining tools and experiences with students to help them feel more confident about discussing race, class, sexual orientation, gender, and dis/ability. To that end, the teacher-researchers identified approaches to base classroom experiences upon—worldview threat/defense from terror management theory and mindfulness—and asked students at the midpoint (i.e., soon after the direct classroom experiences) and end of the course (i.e., after students have had more time to practice their skills) to evaluate the extent to which the experiences were effective in increasing their confidence about discussions that they might otherwise avoid or react overly strongly when they occur. The research question was: *To what degree can an emotionally informed approach based on terror management theory and mindfulness help students feel more confident when discussing race, class, sexual orientation, gender, and disability?*

There were six researchers on this collaborative project that took place at an urban university in Texas in 2023, a state well-known at present for its attempts to foreclose honest and open conversations particularly about race, sexual orientation, gender, and socio-emotional learning in schools and beyond. We take a cue from Journell (2017) who noted the difficulties of issues that relate to student identities that are epistemically settled but publicly open, specifically "controversial identity issues" (p. 339). Being in Texas and holding the view that educators must not claim neutrality when it comes to someone's life and dignity, we (the researchers) are acutely aware of the predicament of teachers here and want to help them find ways to continue working against injustices.

Most, but not all, of the undergraduate students participating in the study were undertaking a teacher education program, and the research site was a mandatory course that is part of that program, whose purpose is to place schools and curriculum in the context of society. Prior to team-teaching this

class, the researchers had heard anecdotally that discussions were known to become heated, and so we wanted to see what we might do about that situation.

Literature Review

Of most relevance to this article are tools for students (both preservice teachers and/or K-12 students) to build capacity for discussing controversial identity issues. Deliberation is a longstanding approach (e.g., Hess, 2009; Parker, 1997), involving discussion, informed judgments, and making choices in respectful ways, although even dedicated teachers can fall short of inclusive exchanges when disagreements are highly emotional (Bickmore & Parker, 2014). Pace (2019) observed several strategies that overlap and extend those of Hess and McAvoy (2015), and of particular interest to this research project is the call for cultivating warm, supportive environments as well as preventing and mitigating emotional conflicts.

Deliberation can invite students to engage with a perspective opposite from their own, but this is not necessarily a transformative experience. Beck (2019), for example, found that a student opposed to same-sex marriage silenced himself and was logically inconsistent during such deliberations. Deliberation is unhelpful in situations where there are not two valid opposite stances (e.g., in cases of injustice; Journell, 2017, see also Beck, 2013; Conrad, 2020). Thus, Hlavacik and Krutka (2021) offered civic litigation as an approach that avoids a deliberative, pro-con framing and instead calls into question unjust laws and the legislators who made them, while Barton and Ho (2022, 2023) have advocated for "collaborative deliberation" that emphasizes nuance and is designed to be non-adversarial and solution-focused.

It is vital to shield students from attacks on their identities and dignity. This position, however, does not necessarily mean that students uttering extreme statements are completely silenced, although by no means should that be done lightly (Lozano Parra et al., 2023). Reisman and colleagues (2020) noted how teachers can respond to troubling comments with the help of interpretive frames that can redirect, diffuse, contextualize, and otherwise unpack them. Such techniques are particularly helpful when that comment was without malicious intent. But, what about utterances that can be hateful? Again, such statements cannot be allowed to stand, but the statement itself can be labeled as promoting hate (e.g., racist) without making a student's whole identity as being racist (e.g., Kendi, 2019), and the teacher can use their professional judgment as to whether strategies from collective restorative justice are helpful, or perhaps if the situation calls for a more isolated intervention. Part of the project conveyed in this article is to exist in the messy space between condemning hate while providing opportunities for those with unacceptable views to change—but not at the expense of those positioned as targets of hate.

Centering justice feels more appropriate to the urgency of situations of life and dignity, and there are many different forms such an approach can take, including (but by no means not limited to): counterstories (e.g., Ender, 2021; Madden, 2019), critical historical inquiry (e.g., Salinas et al., 2015), critical Indigenous civics (e.g., Sabzalian, 2019), and testimonio (e.g., Rodríguez & Salinas, 2019). Teachers can, and should, engage with the voices and methods of those whom the white supremacist settler colonial heteropatriarchy silences; however, despite the ethical imperative of such approaches, some teachers nonetheless "worry that centering minoritized perspectives and histories would be biased" (Hlavacik & Krutka, 2021, p. 419) and are concerned about conflict (e.g., Reisman et al., 2020) and consequences (Lozano Parra et al., 2023). We (the authors) have heard similar

sentiments in our context of Texas and designed our research to look at processes related to contested discussions rather than the process of discussion in itself.

Addressing Controversial Identity Issues Beyond the Rational

The classroom is a highly emotional space with complex dynamics (e.g., Sheppard, 2023; Sheppard & Levy, 2019), and white supremacist settler colonial heteropatriarchal structures have had a deep effect on emotional worlds. Reisman and colleagues (2020) described vividly how teachers might address the emotional landscape after a troubling comment is made, giving examples of wording and phrasing to invite students to consider how they are feeling, and the importance of rehearsing those responses in advance. It is vital to note that these emotions are not glibly framed as a problem to resolve; rather, they are acknowledged and contextualized. Specifically in the context of those subjected to racism, they have had deep psychic and emotional effects in addition to more material forms of racial violence (Chimbganda, 2017). Even the conceptualization of emotions and communication styles can be affected, as emotions are culturally and racially coded (Jones, 2022; Kochman, 1981). Emotions of people with racial identities valued under white supremacism can be heightened while they are learning about racism (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013). Regardless of racial identity, talking about race and racism is a highly emotional affair—albeit in different ways and with different reverberations—and so educators need to acknowledge this emotionality and explicitly teach about it, which is what this study does.

Garrett and Alvey (2021) invited educators to consider political discussions beyond the rational and cognitive in a way that provides more context for the sort of student that Beck (2019) encountered where logical consistency does not prevail. Through insights from psychoanalytic theory, it becomes apparent that emotional processes drive engagements with controversial identity issues. It is clear that "emotions are constitutive aspects of classroom discussions, always present and circulating throughout the confrontation not just with the subject matter at hand, but also with the other people who comprise the classroom" (p. 20). The presence of this emotional landscape is not inherently negative, and thus the answer is not to avoid emotions and (supposedly) return to pure logic, which in contrast with deliberative approaches (e.g., Pace, 2019). Instead, Garrett and Alvey (2021) urged educators to acknowledge this presence of the non-rational and develop their vocabulary for the emotional terrain, which this project takes keenly to heart. Given that teachers set the tone for what emotions count or not (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2011, p. 1019), as the instructors for this class we wanted to name and destigmatize defensive responses in order to address them directly.

Addressing Controversial Identity Issues Holistically

Aponte-Safe and colleagues (2022) offered a way to take a multifaceted approach that directly addresses injustice. Importantly, this ethical thrust is done with attention to *la herida abierta* (Anzaldúa, 2012), the "great open wound" in our individual and collective "knowing/being/doing in the world" (Aponte-Safe et al., 2022, p. 76). In this way, an educator isn't just implementing a strategy or conveying specific information, they are *nepantleras*—cultural workers engaging with "psychic/spiritual/material points of potential transformation" (Keating, 2006, p. 8). Significantly, *nepantleras* recognize that they may be taking personal and professional risks because of *la herida abierta*, which is no easy situation, and Aponte Safe et al., (2022) offer the concept of *aspiring nepantleras* in the spirit of *becoming* rather than *being*.

Aponte-Safe and colleagues' (2022) framing invites aspiring and current educators to see injustices in the world as not an informational problem but an ontological problem, and in that way reminds us of Blackfoot teachings from the North. The Siksika viewed White settlers as deeply unhealthy, a notion Maslow (1942) learned from them. The source of this disease (and dis-ease) is a lack of balance between the mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical (Bastien, 2004). Those without that balance are incomplete people, and thus very dangerous to themselves and others (Blood & Heavy Head, 2011). Taking a cue from Saleh (2021), the people enacting dehumanization are the ones who have lost their humanity—not those who are being dehumanized by others. Part of the humanization process is to help them find balance, thus removing the disease within which hateful actions fester. Specifically, we wondered about the possibilities for an initial exploration of emotionality and tools to engage with that emotionality before attending to the regular course content as part of what Parkhouse and Massaro (2019) articulated as the "necessary groundwork so that all students are open to ideas that challenge their own" (p. 29). Perhaps the format of the discussion (e.g., deliberation vs. civic litigation vs. direct condemnation of injustice) would not be as much of an issue if some more holistic learning and community-building occurred beforehand. In our study we took a very direct approach to teaching injustice but not before doing self and community-building work alongside the students.

Theoretical Framework

The design of our classroom experiences was framed by both mindfulness and terror management theory (TMT), both of which nudged us toward the content we asked the students to engage with and our pedagogical choices in class. Mindfulness is a state of consciousness and a discipline that involves being present in the moment and developing an attitude of curiosity, openness, and acceptance of one's experience. In the context of this study, being mindful entails an awareness and contemplation of feelings and emotional responses. We paired this thrust of mindfulness with TMT, which is an existential- social-evolutionary theory that explains how the uniquely human awareness of mortality is a root cause of interpersonal and intercultural conflict. This theory provided some conceptual and pedagogical content knowledge while mindfulness centered our classroom practice. Together, they allowed the students space to acknowledge their emotions before, during, and after discussing contentious identity issues.

Mindfulness

The origins of mindfulness come from the teachings of Buddha, and it is important to pay tribute to those origins (Bodhi, 2021). Proponents of mindfulness need to recognize and respect how mindfulness evolves from its Buddhist roots, but mindfulness can be modified into suitable forms for different contexts (Kabat-Zinn et al., 2011). It is the ability to be fully present in the moment, focusing on how we feel physically and emotionally. Mindfulness is a dynamic process occurring inside of a person that focuses on his or her awareness of things as they happen (Brown & Ryan, 2003), enabling the brain to process, think about, and reflect on the thoughts and experiences it is having at the time (Hölzel et al., 2011). Through training and meditation, one can (re)construct their state of mindfulness, which is a dynamic and changeable variable rather than a fixed one (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). Practicing mindfulness reduces stress and anxiety, enhances focus, promotes compassion, and imparts a variety of other advantages (e.g., Jha et al., 2007), including control of emotions (Roemer et al., 2015). When in a challenging social environment, mindfulness can lessen stress as well as relieve anxiety and suffering (Hoge et al., 2013).

There are some important caveats to engaging with mindfulness. It cannot replace the need to change harmful systems. For example, if numerous high stakes standardized tests are causing stress and anxiety, it is important to change that system while helping students cope with the current situation with mindful practices. Importantly, mindfulness can be implemented thoughtfully—in ways that attend to interconnectedness and community. A case in point for such implementation is Montgomery (2022), where mindfulness is framed by Maxine Greene's call for wide-awakeness to attune to student experiences as well as their personal and community goals.

Terror Management Theory

Ernest Becker (1973, 1975) identified death anxiety as a root motivator of many aspects of human behavior. Although human motivation is complex and layered, anxieties regarding human mortality play a significant role in behavior: Were these anxieties to remain unchecked, they would interfere with many effective forms of thought and action. Consequently, humans have developed a defensive psychological system to keep thoughts of human mortality away from our consciousness.

Terror management theory was developed to test Becker's assumptions about human motivation and behavior (Greenberg et al., 1986; Pyszczynski et al., 2015), and over the last three decades there have been hundreds of experiments in countries with divergent cultural belief systems (e.g., Canada, China, Germany, India, Iran, Italy, Israel, Japan, the United States, and other countries), revealing various effects of *mortality salience* (i.e., the state of having death on our minds; Burke et al., 2010). These studies generally show that brief reminders of death cause people to become more favorable to people and ideas that support their worldview and become more antagonistic to people and ideas that oppose it. Studies have found similar effects in response to potent worldview threats because barriers against impermanence have been thwarted (Pyszczynski et al., 2015; Schimel et al., 2007)

According to TMT, cultural worldviews are shared conceptualizations of reality that provide people with a sense that human existence is meaningful, stable, and enduring. Cultural worldviews afford this comfort by answering big, important questions about the nature of human existence, questions about where we came from (e.g., divine creation, the Big Bang), what we are supposed to be doing with our lives, and what happens to us after we die. Importantly, cultural worldviews prescribe moral standards and values to live up to; and if people live up to these standards, they earn self-esteem, the feeling of being a valued and protected member of the cultural worldview. Moreover, believing in a cultural worldview and living up to its standards of value affords people a sense of death transcendence, or immortality. This hope of immortality can be literal or symbolic. In a literal sense, worldviews reassure us that our death is not an end (e.g., an afterlife, some form of reincarnation, or the recycling of our atoms). Symbolically, worldviews can function in the same way, such as researchers taking comfort that their published work will make a lasting contribution to the field (Schimel et al., 2018).

Worldviews are—to some extent—arbitrary, fictional assemblages about the nature of reality, and thus for them to serve as an effective buffer, worldviews require continual validation from others in the absence of critique or comparison (Schimel et al., 2007). We can feel anxiety or even panic when we are reminded of death or our worldviews are called into question, and we can become defensive. People defend their worldviews because of their important anxiety-buffering properties. Learning about oppressive systems and injustice can challenge the U.S. worldview myth of meritocracy as well the personal self-esteem derived from it. There is scant educational research with terror management theory. Extant articles have focused largely on theoretical explorations of how worldview threat and

defense might manifest in the classroom (Burke & van Kessel, 2021; Deschenes & van Kessel, 2023; Jacobs et al., 2021; van Kessel, 2020; van Kessel & Saleh, 2020; van Kessel et al., 2020; Varga & van Kessel, 2021; Varga et al., 2021a, 2021b), with the exception of van Kessel et al. (2022) where pre-service and early career teachers explored TMT. This article reports on a project that uniquely focused on students in an undergraduate classroom setting and revealed that such an approach increases student confidence when discussing controversial identity issues.

Terror Management Theory & Mindfulness

Engaging in mindfulness techniques can reduce anxiety and other effects associated with worldview threat. There is evidence that defensive reactions to existential threat are diminished by focused attention. In a number of studies, Niemiec and colleagues (2010) discovered that people with a tendency toward mindful attention suppressed their thoughts less after being exposed to a mortality salience induction and were less likely to defend their self-esteem in the face of existential threat. Inspired by that research, our project put such a blending of TMT and mindfulness into a real-world, non-experimental situation: an undergraduate classroom.

Mindfulness differs from other protective mechanisms against existential anxiety in that it regulates existential threat by how aware individuals perceive hazardous information rather than through reinforcing the ideals of a particular cultural worldview. Therefore, it does not seem like practicing mindfulness necessitates supporting one viewpoint at the expense of another (Hart, 2014). Consequently, mindfulness can help people persist despite discomfort during conversations across worldview differences.

Study Design & Procedure

Context and Participants

The study was embedded in the regular course procedures for this class. In other words, as teacher-researchers we developed lessons and activities from our theoretical framework and used course evaluations (standard institutional questions plus our own) at the mid and end points to evaluate the effectiveness of those experiences. Our research question was: *To what degree can an emotionally informed approach based on terror management theory and mindfulness help students feel more confident when discussing race, class, sexual orientation, gender, and disability?* Given the nature of the research context, an experimental design with a control group was not possible, and so we chose to take an approach based upon thick descriptions of experiences and student perceptions of the effectiveness of those experiences.

We conducted surveys with a sample of convenience (i.e., students enrolled in the class co-taught by Cathryn, Kelcia, and Lea). Participants were in a senior-level undergraduate class at a private university in Texas, although they were in a variety of stages of their studies (seven freshmen, two sophomores, five juniors, and two seniors). The course they were in explored the foundations of educational thought and practice through the works of influential thinkers from diverse philosophical, historical, geographical, intersectional, language, and cultural contexts. The driving questions for this iteration of the class were: *What must happen before the lesson begins? How might educators be unaware of the harm they are causing? What might an identity-conscious practice look like in my future classroom? What theories or thinkers help me wrestle with being an educator? How might we turn our plans into action in our classrooms?*

Sixteen of a possible nineteen students participated in the research, although not every participant completed all the surveys. Participants were aged 18 to 25 from a variety of home states: California, Colorado, Minnesota, New York, Texas, and Washington, DC. We asked students to self-identify themselves in relation to the content we would be focusing on in class (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Self-Identified Demographics

Gender identity	Female	11
	Male	5
Racial identity	Asian (Eastern), Asian American, or Pacific Islander	1
	Latine, Latina/o/x, or Hispanic	3
	White	7
	Asian (Eastern), Asian American, or Pacific Islander AND Black or African American	1
	Asian (Eastern), Asian American, or Pacific Islander AND White	1
Differently Abled or Dis/Abled?	Yes	3
	No	12
	Prefer not to say	1

Course Surveys

Mid-Semester Survey

As part of the regular administration of the class at roughly the halfway point (around lesson 13), students were invited to complete an anonymous midpoint survey designed by the Cathryn and Cassidy. They were asked five open-ended questions:

1. What is going well in the class so far?
2. What could be improved?
3. How comfortable are you with the challenging discussions we've had so far?
4. Can you think of anything that would improve the challenging discussions we've had in the class?
5. Do you have any additional comments?

Nine students participated in the survey, which was completed online.

Endpoint Course Evaluation Survey

Like the mid-semester survey, a course evaluation was administered as part of regular course procedures at the end of the semester. Students were asked standardized questions on a five-point Likert scale as well as three open-ended questions and two five-point Likert scale questions

generated by Cathryn. The standardized questions inquired about: initial interest in taking the course, student performance in the course, coursework helping learning, the instructor encouraging class involvement, the instructor treating students fairly, the instructor creating a civil/respectful atmosphere, the student feeling welcome to seek help outside of class, the preparedness of the instructor, the clarity of the instructor's explanations, and the usefulness of instructor feedback. The open-ended questions were:

- What worked well in class?
- What are your suggestions for improving class?
- Do you have any additional comments?

Using the strategy to "foresee" (Saldaña, 2014, p. 582), we anticipated a need to more directly ask participants about changes in their attitudes about discussing controversial identity issues, and whether their class experience influenced those attitudes. The two questions generated by Cathryn to these ends asked students to rate the following statements a five-point Likert scale:

- This class made me feel more confident about discussing race, class, sexual orientation, gender, and disability.
- This class provided me with helpful tools that I can use when discussing race, class, sexual orientation, gender, and disability.

Fourteen students participated in the survey, which was completed online, but class time was given for those in attendance during a particular class near the end of the semester.

Analyzing the Course Surveys

For both the midpoint and endpoint surveys were analyzed by Cathryn through the strategy "to assert" (Saldaña, 2014, p. 599). Although we were looking for evidence of the effectiveness of the class experiences, the goal of this analytic strategy is not to prove an assertion. Instead, Cathryn scanned the documents for confirming and disconfirming evidence, noting both numerical from the Likert scales and narrative data from any comments. Summative statements were developed for low-level (or micro) assertions about what the participants thought/felt happened due to their class experiences (e.g., the extent to which their identity consciousness had increased and/or been nuanced), and quotations were chosen for their helpfulness for "particularizability" to "magnify" the meaning for the unique perspectives each participant shares (Saldaña, 2014, p. 600). It should be noted, however, that absences and silences (i.e., those who did not complete the surveys or the comment section) may indicate disagreement.

Class Experiences

In this section, we are providing a thick description of what we designed with our research question in mind. The first six classes were heavily based in the theoretical framework of mindfulness and terror management theory. Subsequent classes are mentioned, but more succinctly, because those experiences would also impact the endpoint survey.

The first day was an introductory class led by Cathryn for course information and community-building. In addition to a short lecture about the particulars of the class and assignments, participants took the first survey, introduced themselves to each other, and participated in a "sticker activity". Students were given a sticker: one of three different colors of stars and two different sizes. They were told to place themselves in groups. The students first organized themselves into six small groups based on size and shape (e.g., large red stars in one group, small red stars in another), next

into one large group, then by color (regardless of size), and so on. This activity was an entryway to a terror management theory-based discussion about how humans group themselves (somewhat arbitrarily) and the benefits and harms of such groupings.

The second class focused on learning about worldview threat and defense, and students' pre-reading was van Kessel and Saleh (2020). This class focused on what worldview threat is, what forms worldview defenses can take, and what they can look like in a classroom. The content included an Attitudes Toward Difference chart based upon Riddle's (1994) scale of homophobia (repulsion, pity, tolerance, acceptance, support, admiration, appreciation, nurturance) as well as a discussion of Maslow's hierarchy and its basis in Blackfoot wisdom (Blood & Heavy Head, 2007), both of which related to the overall discussion about how even well-meaning people can succumb to worldview threat and defense. Garrett and Alvey (2021) have pointed out the urgent need for teachers to "develop further [their] emotional vocabularies" (p. 22), and this class centered around that call. The lecture concluded with strategies to anticipate and mitigate worldview defenses, including: creating a shared language for emotions and worldview defenses, priming helpful values and self-esteem (Fairlamb & Cinnirella, 2021; Tesser, 2000), compensating for decreased reading comprehension, assessing the dis/advantages of self-segregation, and how a teacher might shut down derogatory and hateful comments and steering students away from assimilatory and appropriative engagements with opposing worldviews.

The third class was a mindfulness workshop led by Zahra. The objectives included defining mindfulness, considering the benefits, and practicing mindfulness exercises. Students were introduced to the following mindfulness exercises: pomodoro exercise, the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique, the S.T.O.P. exercise, and guided meditation. Of particular relevance to this research is the S.T.O.P. exercise (Stop what you're doing; Take a breath; Observe what is happening; Proceed with your task).

The fourth class was an intentional dialogue workshop led by Kelcia and one of her work colleagues. Intentional Dialogue Training is offered regularly on campus, and this training was a one-session modification of a two-part training aimed at equipping college students with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to have difficult conversations across identities. In part one of the training, the focus is placed on knowledge of key terms and identity work that students need to engage with to increase awareness of themselves and their positionality related to others. In part two, students begin to engage with practical skills to have intentional conversations. This includes effective listening skills, distinguishing between intention versus impact and culminates in students working through scenarios. Aspects of this workshop were connected back to terror management theory.

Pre-reading for this fourth class was the first chapter of Talusan (2022) where she shares her experience growing up as a Brown-skinned Filipino woman in the United States, as well as the evolution of microaggression theory (Torino et al., 2019) and the dangers of identity-blind approaches (O'Brien & Gilbert, 2013). The essential questions for this chapter are: "How does identity impact my teaching and learning? How do I build identity consciousness? What impact do I have on my students when I do not notice identity?" (p. 17). The chapter closes with a discussion about how identity-conscious practice (Plaut et al, 2018) involves uncomfortable conversations, especially for those socialized to avoid conflict and take identity-blind approaches.

The fifth class focused on Talusan's (2022) second chapter, which focuses on shifting "from avoiding conflict to inviting challenge" (p. 27). After personal anecdotes from her childhood and

professional life about her avoidance tactics, Talusan explains how social-emotional learning (SEL) is racially biased (e.g., "White supremacy with a hug," p. 29) and how instead we (as instructors and students) need to embrace the full spectrum of our emotions, including discomfort. Otherwise, anti-racist dialogue can be "silenced, ignored, diluted, and/or discussed in very superficial ways for fear of offending others or creating potentially explosive situations" (Sue, 2015, p. 17). Talusan then provides a scenario of a classroom lesson on voting: how discomfort can arise when the conversation becomes heated about opposing candidates. The teacher shuts down the discussion and pivots back to the main lesson. Talusan then offers an alternative: Leaning into the conversation by noting that some are feeling uncomfortable and checking in about the processes of conflict. A suggested prompt for this scenario is: "We've been talking about who gets a voice in democracy. What are you noticing about voice and participation even in this conversation right now?" (p. 31). Talusan is also careful to note that although this example is regarding older students, younger students also need opportunities to engage in the processes of conflict (Long et al., 2016).

Building from the reading and the terror management theory approach, the class considered the format of class activities (e.g., never using debates when the topic involves someone's life or dignity) and the pros and cons of different small group discussion formats. We then turned to the philosophy of Alexis Shotwell (2017), who invited people to embrace imperfection: No matter what they or their ancestors have done, they can (and ought to) do whatever they can to create a just world. For example, someone can fight climate change and still drive a car. Purity is "domain of the racist, nativist, and eugenicist right" (para. 6). A standard of purity demobilizes individuals and movements, whereas a politics of responsibility (despite imperfections, past and present) can help everyone to hold each other accountable. She writes:

> A politics of responsibility recognizes our relative, shifting, and contingent position in social relations of harm and benefit; it enjoins us to look at how we are shaped by our place in history. We can take responsibility for creating futures that radically diverge from that history, seriously engaging that work based on where we are located, listening well to the people, beings, and ecosystems most vulnerable to devastation. (para. 8)

In this way, everyone is invited to persevere, recognizing their imperfections and bravely continuing to mobilize for justice. After a discussion of Shotwell (2017), the participants were given the second intergroup anxiety survey and invited to have their data collected for this research study. At this point, informed consent was obtained by Kelcia, Lea, and Cassidy. The instructor of record, Cathryn, left the room in an effort to reduce students' sense of obligation to participate.

The remainder of our semester together focused on putting what we had learned together to work. We spent four classes discussing how educators can be unaware of the harm they can cause. Two controlling ideas were Jones' (2020) identification of "curricular violence" and Ladson-Billings' (2006) shift from framing an "achievement gap" to an "education debt."

Next, we spent six lessons explicitly addressing racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism predominantly via Talusan's (2022) book, and with a reminder during the start of each class about our vocabulary for defensive reactions. The lessons focused on the systemic nature of these problems, how they manifest in classrooms, and our personal responsibility as educators to subvert them. Using strategies from terror management theory and mindfulness, we paid careful attention to framing the problems as everyone versus harmful systems—instead of identity groups versus other identity groups; for example, we discussed how sexism hurts women, men, as well as gender non-

conforming people (and specific manifestations of these different harms for different identity groups). We also wanted to attend to the nuances of experience, such as a case study about how dress codes particularly impact young Black women (MTV Impact, 2019). We also sought stories of survivance, revitalization, and resistance, such as a lesson led by the Lea and another graduate student about Afrofuturism.

The subsequent section of the course focused on translating theory into practice. Theorists included: Butler, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, Dewey, DuBois, Foucault, Freire, Hall, hooks, Marx, Said, and Spivak. As students explored these theorists, activities invited contemplation of how these theories could help us wrestle with racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism.
The final six lessons were designed to complete the circular design of the course, focusing on putting together the knowledge and skills thus far. Returning to Talusan (2022), we discussed abolitionist teaching and the role of failure in identity work. Also, small groups worked through scenarios regarding how they might handle educational situations and facilitate difficult conversations about racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism. Throughout the entire course, mindfulness activities were both pre-planned and spontaneous as the need seemed to arise.

Researchers' Identities and Positionalities

All of us are striving to be good guests on the Lands of the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes. Cathryn is a White, female, cisgendered and heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class settler Canadian Associate Professor working at a U.S. university. Kelcia is a Caribbean female, heterosexual and cisgendered, able-bodied doctoral student from Dominica studying and working in the United States. Lea is a heterosexual and cisgendered, able-bodied Black woman born and raised in the Bible Belt of the United States, a doctoral student, a former K-12 public school educator, and a licensed professional counselor (LPC). Jeff is a cisgendered and heterosexual White male, able-bodied, and middle-class U.S. citizen who is a Professor at a Canadian research university working remotely from Texas. Zahra is a cisgendered and heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class Pakistani master's student studying counselling in the United States, and Cassidy is a White, cisgendered and heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class settler U.S. master's student in curriculum studies.

As an example of how our identities affected the study design and execution, Cathryn struggled when creating the demographic survey. She wanted to ask about sexual orientation and gender given the context of the class (i.e., discussions of heterosexism and transphobia), but given the anti-LGBTQ+ legislative context of Texas coupled with her own cis and heterosexual identities, she had to consider that this research could put participants in danger. The other researchers were consulted about wording, and we contemplated the issue before the demographic forms were given to participants. In the end, the researchers chose to give the options of "female," "male," "gender non-conforming," "other" (with a space to fill in), and "prefer not to say."

According to Alveson and Sköldberg (2009), Binder and colleagues (2012), as well as Finlay and Gough (2003), reflexivity entails continuously assessing how the subjectivity and preconceptions of the researcher or team of researchers may affect the comprehension and interpretation of the phenomena in the research process. Having multiple combinations of identities among the researchers helped with all phases of the study—from designing the questions for the surveys (e.g., pondering how to frame questions about identity markers) to the implementation of class experiences (e.g., pedagogical choices). We drew from each other's strengths and experiences to learn and co-create understandings alongside students in the class.

Findings

Mid-Semester Survey

On the mid-semester survey, students were asked a variety of open-ended questions, including: *How comfortable are you with the challenging discussions we've had so far?* Nine responded, all stating that they felt comfortable (e.g., "pretty comfortable," "very comfortable"), and three participants commented that this comfort was in relation to our class (rather than just being comfortable more generally):

- "I feel rather comfortable because of the environment that has been established in our class. The dynamic is very welcoming, understanding, and respectful of each other, and I feel that it promotes healthy learning."
- "I feel like I have only gotten more comfortable as we have had them. They have progressively gotten less challenging to think about."
- "At first they can seem awkward, but throughout the classes i [sic] think everyone seems to be more comfortable being open in class."

Participants also made some suggestions that we implemented, including more interaction with groups sitting at other tables. The room was set up into four table groups and students could choose where they sat. There was some movement, but most students sat in the same place. We had done some group work where people had to move to other tables, but this was minimal. After this mid-point survey, we more frequently created new groups for discussions and tasks.

Final Course Evaluations

Of most interest to this present study are the two Likert-scale questions created by Cathryn that were asked alongside the standard course evaluation questions (*This class made me feel more confident about discussing race, class, sexual orientation, gender, and disability. This class provided me with helpful tools that I can use when discussing race, class, sexual orientation, gender, and disability.*). All fourteen students who completed these questions agreed with the statements. Thirteen students strongly agreed, and one student agreed for both questions. Of perhaps some interest from the standardized Likert items were the extent to which the instructor created a civil/respectful atmosphere (here, again 13 strongly agreed and one agreed), and course work helping learning (11 strongly agreed and three agreed).

Some of the written feedback was also pertinent to this study and included statements that indicated that their identity consciousness had increased and/or been nuanced: "[the instructor] has helped me understand the multiplicities of our children, of our friends, and the layers we all carry with us. Mil gracias." They also felt better prepared for some of the difficult conversations they might encounter as teachers:

> I thoroughly enjoyed this class and the real world [sic] applications that really make me feel more comfortable for addressing tough topics. I loved each teacher and their role they played in our class. I felt valued in this class and [the instructor] really encouraged students to feel comfortable and fostered a classroom were [sic] it felt okay to share.

One student wrote a comment about pivoting away from avoidant behaviors:

> I really enjoyed this class, it helped me a lot on how to make me an effective teacher and encouraged me to bring inclusiveness of different identities into my classroom. It has helped me look at some of these identities that I would sometimes avoid, because it was difficult fro [sic] me to talk about…

The only suggestions for improvement recorded on the course evaluations did not relate to this research project, and instead focused on details about the assignments (e.g., more practice with APA 7 style).

Additional Data Collection

We also gathered participant responses to the Intergroup Anxiety Scale (IAS; Stephan, 2014; Stephan & Stephan, 1985) at the beginning of the course and repeated after three weeks of instruction (six classes). With such a small number of participants, however, we did not have enough statistical power to run inferential statistics in a meaningful way, and as a result, there is a substantial chance of committing a Type II error (i.e., finding something statistically significant when it really isn't), and so overall this data cannot be used. What is interesting, however, is how participants responded to a particular affective term from the IAS: "careful." We performed t-tests using each individual item (i.e., the adjectives, including "careful"). A reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.674; however, if we excluded the item "careful" Alpha increased to 0.703 (which would have been acceptable if our *n* was higher). We wondered if students were interpreting "careful" in a positive light (i.e., being attentive to respectful vocabulary, which was addressed during class). If so, such an interpretation of "careful" runs contrary to the original intent of the IAS. In support of this idea, the standard deviation for the "careful" item was higher than any other item ($sd = 3.04$).

At the end of the second survey, participants had an opportunity to comment on aspects of the class so far that have been helpful. Sixteen students completed this second survey. The comments included specific references to how terror management theory, mindfulness, and intentional dialogue helped them have "better conversations," "address topics without dismissing them," "improving oneself," "address things with a mature and thoughtful mindset," and "be more aware and conscious of others." Participants who did not comment on the helpfulness of specific strategies at that point in the course commented on the welcoming environment. There were no comments indicating that any aspects of class were unhelpful, but two students left the comment section blank, which could perhaps indicate that there were no experiences that they found helpful.

Limitations

Although we reminded participating students that negative feedback was just as valuable—and perhaps even more valuable—than affirming feedback, the power dynamic between instructors and students is such that they nonetheless might have felt uncomfortable providing negative feedback, even anonymously. This research project is meant to be an in-depth look in a particular context, and so generalizability was not achieved (nor was it the goal). Instead, this teacher-researcher project is intended to foster discussion about how educators might lean into controversial identities issues in ways that are helpful to communities.

Discussion

There can be a problem of logical inconsistency among students espousing tolerant views while they simultaneously uphold intolerant policies and laws (Beck, 2019), perhaps this inconsistency becomes less of an issue when non-rational aspects of discussions are considered. Of course, students can be non-rational because they are in a state of worldview threat, but perhaps mindfulness and emotional attunement provides them opportunities to be more metacognitive and less avoidant.

The hope for this study was for students to feel more confident (i.e., persist despite an urge to avoid or be combative) during discussions of race, class, sexual orientation, gender, and dis/ability. Student comments indicated that the class was helpful regarding controversial identity issues. Importantly, the "feel" of the classroom was affected by the research team. We developed a sense of community through a combination of the curricular plan we co-created and small (but significant) practices like daily emotional check-ins. As instructors, we still noticed some awkwardness at times, but importantly also perseverance through that awkwardness.

An emotionally informed approach seemed to help students navigate potentially uncomfortable conversations in the classroom and beyond. Participants felt that their class experiences gave them useful tools for navigating identity-conscious practice. Parkhouse and Massaro (2019) called for groundwork before views are challenged, and this research revealed that the pairing of mindfulness and TMT is effective to that end. Participants in the study saw value in this groundwork, and as instructors of the course we felt that the dynamic created in the class was exceptional in comparison and thus this research guides our future teaching. Navigating discussions about controversial identity issues will never be easy, but it helps to scaffold information and experiences about the roots of defensiveness and the various forms that defensiveness can take. Within and beyond the classroom, mindfulness and TMT can serve as a foundation for dialoguing across worldview differences.

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Cassidy Lindell is an elementary school teacher with a passion for fostering a love of learning in young students. She is a graduate of Texas Christian University, where she earned her Master's degree in Curriculum Studies from the College of Education. With her strong foundation in educational theory and practice, Cassidy continuously seeks innovative methods to enhance her students' educational experiences.

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Conocimiento through Spiritual Activism: A Self-Reflexive Approach to Challenging Deficit Beliefs and Reimagining the Value of Teaching in Higher Education

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Abstract

This testimonio, inspired by Anzaldúa's (2002) seven stages of conocimiento, is written in second person to highlight a series of counterstories aimed at guiding readers through the challenges of facilitating teaching conversations in higher education where deficit assumptions about students' potential are prevalent. Readers will gain insight into disparaging and derogatory commentary aimed at silencing voices and the harmful impact these words and behaviors can have on our well-being and students' holistic success in higher education and beyond. Through a journey of empathetic understanding and reciprocal learning, I share guided questions to encourage readers to self-reflect on the need for a shift in how teaching is valued in higher education. Ultimately, I advocate for a call to action that fosters a culture of collaboration and solidarity where student voices are at the center of teaching and learning innovations. Collectively, we can create opportunities where all students can succeed in ways that are meaningful to them while also creating a culture that values instructors' self-reflection, growth, and self-efficacy in teaching.

Keywords: teaching, higher education, self-efficacy, student voice, solidarity, conocimiento

After reading Gloria Anzaldúa's (2002) "Now let us shift... the path of conocimiento... inner work, public acts," you finally understood why a series of professional development activities on teaching effectiveness left you with emotional and physiological pain. In fact, you turned to Anzaldúa's words to find meaning, initiate healing, and resist harmful stereotypes. You embarked on a self-reflexive journey by drafting reflection questions to yourself at each stage of conocimiento, ultimately culminating in this testimonio. The stages of conocimiento are interwoven and call for deep introspection about our values, beliefs, identities, and the new realities we wish to create through spiritual activism and the knowledge we build with every stage. Like Eufracio (2022) whose testimonio "framework creates the critical awareness of the educational injustices that borderland educators and students experience" (pp. 50), you also aimed to build introspective tools to help educators and students remain true to their values and beliefs, prioritize their mental and physical wellbeing, and challenge the injustices of deficit assumptions that permeate higher education in borderland regions. By writing self-reflection questions informed by Anzaldúa's (2002) seven stages of conocimiento, you wrote this testimonio to "bear witness" (Reyes and Rodriguez, 2012, p. 532) to stories often left untold due to fear. One of the most meaningful self-reflexive questions you asked yourself during the sixth stage of conocimiento was: How do you feel when your ideals, values, beliefs, consciousness are questioned and used against you? How do you refrain from feeling a sense of defeat when the actions and behaviors of those in opposition cause physical and emotional hurt and illness?

As you wrote your testimonio, you understood instructors' deeply rooted differences in values and beliefs. But, you believed that, through your "connectionist sense of spirit" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 568), you could revert years of deficit assumptions about students' academic potential through reciprocal partnerships. Unfortunately, the "blow up" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 568) as in the sixth stage of

Conocimiento was imminent and the "clash of realities" revealed themselves in your body—inexplicable nausea, vomiting, and chest pain (see Figure 1). While you experienced emotional pain and were aware of your emotional labor, you discarded it as a normal part of the process—a necessary step toward transformative change in teaching. When you associated your physiological symptoms to the resistance you encountered, you had already been to the emergency room twice in the span of a single month. What was the medical doctors' diagnosis? Stress and anxiety. You know, however, that the resistance alongside the dismissive behavior by some faculty participants was the cause of your pain as they left you feeling angry, disappointed, discouraged, and confused. Like the medical diagnosis dismissively being attributed to stress, your workshops on teaching practices that center critical consciousness (Freire, 2000; hooks 1994) and student voices (Cavazos & Chapa, 2023; Cook-Sather, 2020) were also dismissed. Dominant voices in academia will discard your experience. The blame will be placed on you. You're too weak. You're too sensitive. You're not knowledgeable enough. You're not trained in conflict-resolution. You don't validate everyone. A series of you're nots...a series of deficit assumptions about your abilities, your potential as a leader.

Figure 1

Anzaldúa's Seven Stages of Conocimiento

Note: Reprinted from Mora (2021).

This journey taught you to reclaim your power so you can say, "I am a competent and empathetic leader" and "I am resilient and healthy" in your personal, professional, and health experiences. You learned to say and internalize a series of "I am" moments to combat destructive environments so that you can create new collaborative spaces that allow you to fully enact your spiritual activism (Anzaldúa, 2002; Flores Carmona & Rosenburg, 2021). With a renewed sense of your personal and professional values, you write a counterstory as "a method of telling stories by people whose experiences are not often told [...] to expose, analyze, and challenge stock stories of racial privilege and [...] strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (Martinez, 2014, p. 70). Moreover, your testimonio aims to "bring to light a wrong, a point of view, or an urgent call for action" (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012, p. 526). Through your counterstory testimonio, you reconstruct specific examples and refrain from referencing disciplinary backgrounds as your only hope is to bring awareness to marginalized voices so we can do better as educators and

administrators in creating spaces of belonging and success responsive to the needs of all our students.

Throughout your professional journey, you have been a reflexive educator who demonstrates your passion for growth by seeking student and peer feedback (Cavazos & Chapa, 2023; Rodriguez et al., 2021). Your passion for collaboration led you to develop a program, informed by established scholarship and similar programming (Cook-Sather, 2020; Cook-Sather et al., 2014), where you collaborate with and mentor dozens of undergraduate students to critically reflect on their learning experiences in the classroom, to critically observe student-instructor interactions in the educational space, and to engage in critical dialogue with instructors about teaching and learning (Cavazos et al., 2023). You imagined building a partnership—a bridge between student and instructor voices that will ensure all students have multiple opportunities to learn and succeed in higher education. Through your weekly interactions, you take note of their sense of agency over their learning and they, too, identify teaching and learning practices that seem to only empower the select few that the educational system has already dubbed as the "successful ones." Most importantly, students also identified the teaching and learning practices that help them learn, especially those that 1.) create a sense of social and academic belonging, 2.) heighten their self-efficacy in their ability to succeed, and 3.) foster relevance toward their aspirations and professional aims. Tinto (2017) has noted these as factors contributing to students' motivation toward learning and persistence in higher education.

Adverse Experience in Professional Development Workshops

You and your student co-presenters diligently prepared for teaching conversations that were a part of a professional development series—researched and read scholarship in the specific discipline, identified relevant examples in the field, reflected on the teaching observations conducted, and analyzed the learning experiences of students in the discipline informed by qualitative and quantitative research conducted. You were hopeful this teaching conversation could be the one that would turn resistance and ambivalence that we previously encountered into amicable dialogue. After all, faculty participants had multiple opportunities to volunteer to be a part of professional development efforts dedicated to teaching effectiveness. Collectively, you discussed how to place the instructors in small groups, and as they walked in, you assigned them to their team. You overheard them jokingly say, "I guess I'm on this side because I need more intervention." Although you felt and later confirmed that this remark was only the first expression of pessimism related to the workshops from the instructors, you chose to be optimistic and thought we all need light humor to get us through a Friday afternoon workshop.

When one of the student co-presenters shared the importance of providing context to otherwise isolated problems or philosophical theories, one of the instructors, mockingly and with a sarcastic tone, picked up a pencil, dropped it, and stated, "What does it matter if I describe where and how something was dropped? Students still need to understand theory, solve an equation, know technical terms with or without context." As you attempted to respond, another instructor jumped in and connected this moment to a previous example you shared informed by student interviews you conducted on learning experiences (Cavazos et al., 2024): "It's like the female student who said that only male pronouns are used in examples. That's just being sensitive to insignificant details. There is content to teach." You are shocked to know there is a lack of empathy in understanding students' needs, especially their desire to see themselves in the curriculum in relevant ways with real-life implications. So, you collectively asked, "If a problem exists in the real world with social, political, gendered, economic implications, why is the technical side of the problem explored and not the real,

social context where it takes place?" They claimed that they do it in specific classes only but adamantly argued this is not necessary across the curriculum. You noted the intriguing claim and referenced renowned scholars across academic disciplines (and specifically within their field of study) who claim the opposite—social contexts, especially those that are culturally relevant and gendered, should be embedded at every stage across the curriculum to build and enhance students' learning experiences and critical consciousness (Addy et al., 2021; Hammond, 2015; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; McGee, 2020).

They questioned you on the statement, but what do our students at our institution have to say about this? Who has done the research? You have done the research and shared multiple examples from the personal interviews you conducted with students at a Hispanic Serving Institution who noted they experienced more challenges learning in a course in which theories or problems were taught in isolation than when instructors taught issues in specific contexts with real implications (Cavazos et al., 2024). One of the student co-presenters jumped in to reflect on an experience in her discipline of when an example would have been helpful. One of the faculty participants asked, "But did you pass the class?" They dismissed, once again, the students' voices by infringing upon student academic privacy—the very voices they asked to hear when they initially challenged the scholarship. Furthermore, collectively we asked—do we know if everyone in the room is being heard? Are we listening to the student in lecture who feels the class is "intimidating and scary" because it is filled with men? Are we listening to the student who feels his questions are dismissed as something he should have learned in the previous course? As you noticed your students present, you were in awe of their confidence, posture, eye contact—a true inspiration. They are our future educators, scholars, professionals in our community. You thought this is incredible, and perhaps, what the faculty participants might need to connect and reassess their thoughts and implicit biases in teaching practices.

You asked about the assumptions we make about our practices and our students without listening to students' voices—without having the full context. One faculty member's voice stands out and before he spoke, he admitted that it may not be the best comparison, "What you all are arguing for is as if doctors at mental health clinics would listen to their patients for how to best treat them. Is that what we want? We want "our patients" to tell us, the doctors with years of experience and educational training, how to best treat them? To run the clinic." The rest of the faculty participants laughed; they nodded in agreement as to justify the statement. As facilitator, you were shocked and stated, "That is a horrible comparison." The tension is too great for you to bear. A comparison and a mindset like this not only dehumanize patients and students, but it also reifies a narrative of deficit assumptions about those we proclaim to serve, which ultimately hinders reciprocity and collective growth. In fact, you found this comparison only highlighted the relevance of collaborative partnership; medical scholarship argues for the need to integrate the patient into their care and treatment through narrative medicine and patient or person-centered practices (de Pinho et al., 2021; Selzer, 2016). Beyond these degrading remarks, you thought about the students who presented—what they must be thinking, how they must be feeling. You were about to break down into llanto. You couldn't bear one more minute in the room; you felt hot, sweaty. You tried to redirect the conversation; you stated that students should have a voice in their education and that the session's purpose is to reflect on how we grow as educators to ensure our students are successful.

To which an instructor abruptly responded, "The reality is that some students will be successful professionals, and some will not. Some students are not meant to be college students, some aren't meant for greatness." In disbelief, you introduced the next concept, critical consciousness (Freire,

2000; hooks, 1994). When you explored the concept within the context bringing awareness to our communities' needs and individuals' lived experiences to elicit change, you contextualized your own experiences as to why these practices matter when fostering students' self-efficacy and instructors own self-efficacy about their teaching dispositions. You shared your own struggles learning English as a second language and with the instructors who did not believe in your ability to succeed—those who claimed you should fail middle school English class because you learned English as a second language. This too is questioned and dismissed: "You are the exception," they claimed while others nod in agreement. Your attempt to build empathy is shunned and used against you: "You aren't validating the instructor's role; you're only defending the students." Another instructor claimed he too has experienced racism and discrimination—he claimed bias falsely as reverse racism as a White male living in South Texas. And others yelled across the room, "We shouldn't lower expectations for the students; I am teaching how I was taught...with high expectations." You sense a perspective of "If I had it hard, then you should too." While you attempted to empathize with their experiences, you also recognized that their statements come from a place of privilege and you did not hesitate to point out, "The system worked extremely well for you all; the system usually does not work well for marginalized students." Most importantly, the nature of these comments also negates the fact that even at a Hispanic Serving Institution, many students encounter barriers toward their success because institutions of higher education continue to privilege certain experiences and ways of making knowledge over others (Garcia, 2023). You felt they redirected the conversation away from the need to help our students feel a sense of belonging by linking content to relevant experiences and building on their strengths through asset-based approaches, thereby impacting their belief in their ability to succeed (Tinto, 2017). The dismissiveness toward critical consciousness in teaching is met with resistance mainly due to misconceptions that these practices lower learning and assessment expectations.

As questions around equitable assessments arose, you referenced Paul Kei Matusda (2012), a writing scholar who advocates for differentiated instruction and instructional alignment in the teaching of writing. You shared your belief, as informed by research (Cohen, 1987; Matsuda, 2012) that, we should only assess what we teach. If we are not teaching grammar, we should not penalize students for perceived grammar "errors." Instructors challenged and strongly opposed this statement. They questioned whether students deserve a college education while not abiding by grammatical standards or English-only expectations, and some instructors even claimed that we keep students in "literacy poverty" by accepting "mediocre writing" that lowers expectations. The language used conjured negative memories for you as a writer and as an English language learner. Memories of when English teachers questioned your writing abilities, when those who were supposed to be your mentors questioned your ethics as a writer and ability to earn a Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition and who even threatened your academic journey. If you felt this way as a tenured associate professor, how do our students feel when they receive feedback on their writing that tacitly or overtly dismisses their sense of self, identities as writers, and language histories?

As a writing teacher, you value your students' feedback and their agency as writers, so you also listened to your colleagues with an open mind. They have students' best interests in mind; they want them to respond to the social norms of writing and communication that align to a perceived standard because they want students to be successful. You also want your students to be successful writers and communicators in a variety of contexts, so you create varied assessments for students to demonstrate their learning (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017) as they respond to the needs of our communities and advocate for social change. You can't ignore the fact that some of the statements or questions come from a deficit model of education—our students lack something and we, as the

educators in this ivory tower, provide it (Bruton & Robles-Piña, 2009; Freire, 2000). You adamantly claimed, if we ask whether a student should be a college graduate while writing a perceived grammatically incorrect sentence implies that we have the "power" to decide who "should" or "shouldn't" be a college student based on a couple of perceived grammatical "errors." We don't have the power to deny anyone an education because their communicative practices don't align to our perceptions of the "norm."

Deficit Model of Education

If we use Standard American English grammar as a basis to judge and "correct" students' grammar and we severely penalize students by failing an assignment or failing the course, then this is a deficit model of education. A deficit model of education is not sustainable nor linguistically inclusive nor equitable in engaging conversations that challenge the norm (Bruton & Robles-Piña, 2009; Freire, 2000; Pineda, 2022). This model "ignores the learning incomes, in other words the sociolinguistic resources that students bring with them" as Juan Guerra (2016) reminds us. We need to build on our students' cultural and linguistic strengths (Yosso, 2005), so they can leverage their linguistic assets in varied communicative contexts as they make a difference in our communities. Most importantly, we must also build our students' self-efficacy and agency as writers while creating opportunities where they make informed rhetorical and linguistic choices in a variety of genres for different purposes and audiences and in diverse languages, which they will likely encounter within the context of local and global communities (Cavazos, 2019). There is often a misconception that we use "Standard American English" grammar all the time, in all contexts. This is not reality. Once again, your research-informed examples continue to be challenged, mainly because "you don't acknowledge students' responsibility as students, as learners in an English language setting."

You felt you let your students down and that you placed them in an unsafe environment. Students' voices, those who presented and those represented in research you conducted, were gaslighted to fulfill confirmation bias by diffusing responsibility as educators so that the onus is placed on students. While there was attempt after attempt to sabotage the conversation, you and the student co-presenters managed to continue. The workshop ended on a high note—or so you thought—you all advocated for the need to contextualize learning within a social framework relevant to students' learning experiences, prior knowledge, linguistic strengths, and future professional aspirations that will positively impact our communities. One instructor asked if he could make a final commentary. In the moment, you thought that perhaps this might be a glimmer of hope that would help connect perspectives for his colleagues in a meaningful way. The instructor shared, "What I have learned today is what I often experience at home with my wife." In this moment, you realized that what was about to be muttered would be another sexist remark rooted in deficit assumptions. "She has her way of doing things and I have my way of doing things. But, in the end, they still get done [pause, laughter among his colleagues] And, throughout it all, I have learned that most of the time, I do those things better than her. [more laughter]." In disbelief and utterly exhausted, you have nothing else to give. They have exhausted every inch of your patience, spirit, and belief in your ability to lead. They walked out of the room on a Friday afternoon in laughter—the same way they walked in and in the same way they dismissed each conversation, muttering under their breath something about the "needless intervention."

Aftermath of the Professional Development

Upon hearing these words, the glimmer of hope you experienced prior to the start of the teaching conversation slowly and steadily transformed into a dark abyss. Anzaldúa's (2002) words resonated with you more than ever, "Though they may pay lip service to diversity issues, most don't shift from positions of power. The privilege of whiteness allows them to evade questions of complicity with those in power; it gives leave to disrespect other peoples' realities and types of knowledge—race and soul remain four-letter words" (p. 565). How do you shift values so deeply rooted into one's being? Some challenges are expected in professional development where we are exposed to new perspectives. However, when consistent questioning is mixed with sarcasm, superiority, and passive aggressiveness in ways that dismiss, disparage, and disempower, you, no doubt, begin to question your self-worth. The weeks that followed were painful—shame, failure, guilt filled your heart. These emotions exasperated when you received a communication stating that if you could just be silent for once and not "interrupt" the instructors during a workshop, you might just learn something from them. When you read this, you were confused because those who consistently interrupted and even infringed upon student academic privacy were the instructors. You did what facilitators do, you rectified assumptions and misunderstandings, you redirected conversation to the objective of the lesson, you ensured that all student co-presenters had the time and space to share their experiences, knowledge, and expertise.

The blatant attacks were furthered, off record, by others who stated that your mistake was bringing students into the conversation and allowing them to facilitate the workshop with you. Why did they want you to be silent? Why didn't they want students in the room? And, why were they asking for your silence now after they demanded you present them with researched examples from their discipline? Were they afraid you and the students would expose racist, sexist, and entitled behaviors? You modeled for faculty participants the empathetic, respectful, asset-based practices necessary to engage students in a reciprocal conversation about teaching effectiveness. Of course, they didn't want nor expect that a mujer Mexicana de un ranchito que aprendio ingles como segundo idioma would share with them best teaching and learning practices. They didn't expect you would surpass their expectations and become passionate about teaching and learning through a critical consciousness in their discipline of study. This was the moment that led you to the emergency room a second time. This time, with nausea and severe chest pain radiating to your back. In this moment, you realized you would no longer stand by dismissive behaviors. You were deeply hurt. Certainly not because your knowledge as an educator was challenged and dismissed; you've had your fair share of educators questioning your worth and whether you belong in school or in academia for as far back as you can remember. One more set of educators questioning your intelligence only lights the fire within you and your "si, se puede" attitude and your, "I'll prove you all wrong" motto. You were deeply hurt because you felt you did not advocate for your students in the way you should have advocated. This is the real pain you feel. Did you hurt or let down your students?

Despite your attempts to phrase the conversation through an inquiry lens to elicit dialogue toward progress, your voice and students' voices were sabotaged in a myriad of ways to fulfill confirmation biases and defend deficit beliefs about students' abilities. Were you a fool to believe that you could rectify over 50 years of deficit assumptions in just 15 hours' worth of workshops over the span of a semester or two? Of course. Did you and your students deserve the treatment you experienced? Absolutely not. There is no excuse for the level of disrespect and lack of professionalism you encountered during these teaching conversations—on and off record. You refuse to make excuses for misogynist and empowered attitudes and behaviors.

Recommendations

Your connectionist spirit helps you understand the workload demands as well as how the value of teaching effectiveness is positioned in higher education that may have led to resistance. You understand the faculty participants because you, too, are an instructor with multiple, competing demands in higher education. Now, more than ever, you understand that higher education is in a dire need for genuine collaborations on teaching and learning. You understand that to redress over 50 years of deficit assumptions about students' prior knowledge and experiences as well as their potential to succeed, higher education institutions need to reimagine how to engage teaching redesign professional development activities in ways that we normalize the entire process of what it means to be good, empathetic teachers with strong self-efficacy. The following recommendations (see Table 1) are informed by my personal testimonio and the scholarship of notable scholars who have argued for the need to center marginalized voices through critical consciousness (Brown McNair et al., 2020; Freire, 1970; Garcia, 2023; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Love, 2019; McGee, 2020; Yosso, 2005).

Table 1

Recommendations for Building a Collective Culture of Self-Efficacy in Teaching and Learning

Teaching Growth in Solidarity	Recommendations
Ph.D. Coursework and New Faculty Workshops on Best Teaching Practices	An evidence-based best teaching practices course centered on critical consciousness should be implemented as a requirement in all Ph.D. programs across the disciplines and new faculty should be expected to participate in regular reflections on teaching through critical consciousness in a supportive, respectful, and guided environment.
Institutional Support and Funding	When instructors who participate in professional development have many responsibilities, they are unable to fully dedicate the time and effort required and expected when participating in a professional development series on teaching that require thoughtful reflections and revisions to the curriculum. Institutions of higher education must reassess where they place funds and value for meaningful impact on student success.
Time, Effort, Compensation	Transformative teaching practices and curriculum redesign should be given the time needed to engage beyond just six to ten hours per semester in a professional development space. Appropriate compensation for participating instructors for their time and effort beyond a stipend is necessary, especially if they are expected to engage in deep reflections and revisions of their teaching.

Embracing Reflexive Teaching and Learning Practices	- Teaching practices and curricular redesign support resources should promote the following practices on a regular basis: - Ongoing self-reflexive and analysis of personal and academic experiences influencing current values and beliefs about teaching and learning through evidence-based research in teaching and learning. - Receptivity to dialogue with our students that enables us to become aware, identify, and challenge implicit biases and deficit assumptions. - Openness to frequent feedback loops on teaching materials and observations of teaching from multiple perspectives, such as fellow colleagues, administrators, and students in and outside instructors' immediate field of study. - Validation of student voices, experiences, knowledge, assets, and perspectives is central to all professional development activities related to teaching and learning practices aimed at improving student success. - Contextualization of teaching and learning strategies within a critical consciousness framework enabling socio-cultural and socio-technical implications and applications of learning beyond the classroom.
Rigorous Tenure and Promotion and Rigorous Merit System Policies	Reflections on as well as revisions and redesign of teaching practices should be a part of annual review and tenure and promotion guidelines, expectations, and a rigorous merit system policy in ways that recognize the intellectual and emotional labor required from all participants and facilitators. Additionally, engaging in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) should be encouraged and supported, especially for faculty members in tenure-track/tenured positions where scholarly research is expected.
Collective Community Support	Facilitator(s) of professional development in teaching should receive consistent support, advocacy, and fair compensation for their time and effort in guiding curricular redesign, specifically support and collaboration from the leadership that requires and/or expects participation from instructors in their areas.

While you recognize that these institutional challenges need to be addressed in a more holistic manner, you also hold each individual faculty participant accountable for their actions and disparaging commentary that enables deficit assumptions about students and prevents meaningful reflection, collaboration, and transformative dialogue. Most importantly, engaging in professional development that helps us grow as educators should be an intrinsic motivator that is reflective of our own self-efficacy as well—our belief in our ability to teach and help our students succeed. The

universe has a beautiful way of bringing all beings into perfect alignment and synchronicity. We all deserve to tell our truth—this is your story that you hope brings about change and dialogue in meaningful ways that do not silence nor cause pain.

In what ways will you listen to your body, heart, mind, soul to guide your values, beliefs, practices? Where do you choose to draw the line where the clash of realities is so intense that it leads you to question your sense of self, purpose, and self-worth? How do you protect your body, heart, mind, and soul in ways that radiate harmony? You learned that you were working against an entire system—a system that refused change and demanded praise for practices that work for the privileged few. No wonder your body, mind, heart coherence fell apart. Remember Anzaldúa's (2002) words, "Relating to others by recognizing commonalities does not always serve you. The person/group with conflicting desires may continuously attack you no matter how understanding you are. But sometimes you need to block the other from your body, mind, and soul. You need to ignore certain voices in order to respect yourself" (p. 573). These words help you realize that this experience was never about the instructors' hurtful remarks nor them enacting change in their teaching. This experience revealed how you can take a more conscious approach to your health and professional endeavors in ways that you don't question your leadership abilities nor give up on your values. When you finally blocked the other, you realized that the journey was always about how you mentored, connected, and understood your students. They learned a new way to think about their disciplines and recognized the socio-technical disconnect that leads to inequities, and most importantly, they felt empowered to use their voice confidently to advocate for their learning through resistance. You saw and connected with your students under a distinct light by building a sense of solidarity and empathy that transcended time and space—a sense of connectedness that went beyond the professional development activity and impacted your personal lives and journeys. You remained hopeful—when you had the opportunity to engage similar conversations with a new group of instructors and students, you felt vindicated when you witnessed a glimpse of the impact that reflective openness to new ideas can have on identifying areas of growth in our teaching through collaborations with students.

While you hesitated to write your testimonio publicly out of fear, you learned that "[t]he testimonio is not to be kept secret but requires active participatory readers or listeners who act on behalf of the speaker in an effort to arrive at justice and redemption" (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012, p. 527). Now, you call upon your readers to reflect upon the conocimiento they wish to cultivate through spiritual activism—the spiritual activism that Gloria Anzaldúa called upon you when you read her words. Her words gave you the power and will to write about and share these experiences because we need change in how teaching is valued in higher education and how professional development in teaching is conducted. Most importantly, we need change in how we see the students in our classrooms as collaborators and partners in their educational journey (Cavazos & Chapa, 2023; Cook-Sather, 2020). Anzaldúa's (2002) words gave you the freedom to continue building your spiritual activist legacy because "the self is part of the vision a strong sense of personal meaning helps in identity and culture construction. By developing and maintaining spiritual beliefs and values la nepantlera gives the group hope, purpose, identity" (p. 573). Like other scholars (Flores Carmona & Rosenburg, 2021), you modeled for your students and fellow colleagues how taking care of the self and blocking the other was essential to give meaning, purpose, and hope for the collective values we hold to create spaces of belonging and build a culture of self-efficacy and relevance beyond educational institutions (Tinto, 2017). How will you share these experiences with your students to empower them to advocate for their education and cultural and linguistic worth? What will be the counterstories you will share to bring awareness to marginalized voices and perspectives—the stories

that we are too afraid to share with others? How will you center students' voices, experiences, and assets while fostering their cultural and linguistic wealth amidst a clash of realities? What will you do to normalize dialogue and frequent feedback loops on teaching effectiveness as an ongoing process reflective of growth and care?

Acknowledgements: I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the students who courageously advocate for teaching and learning practices that center belonging and growth responsive to all students' needs. Thank you for joining me on this journey with your critical and just insights; you are the change makers I wish my daughter will encounter in her educational and professional path. I also wish to express my appreciation to Marco Martinez whose timely words of support were crucial in my journey, and I am also grateful for his feedback and thought partnership on earlier versions of this piece. To the educators who have supported my journey, thank you so much for being open, receptive, and willing to consider different approaches to engaging all students in the learning process in and beyond the classroom; I am especially grateful for your willingness to engage in deep dialogue with our students as collaborators. Through your openness, I see the brightness of what is possible! Mil gracias! To mi hija, Alyxia, thank you so much for reminding me every day why I advocate, and to my husband, Javier, thank you for always being supportive. Muchas gracias a mis papas por siempre apoyarme y creer en mi.

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Introduction to the Special Issue

This special issue, titled *Academic Eclecticism: Celebrating the Life and Work of Dr. Patricia Ann Somers*, is dedicated to the memory and scholarship of Dr. Patricia Ann Somers. Dr. Somers was an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Texas at Austin. She enjoyed a decades-long career, fighting for social justice and contributing to the research and practice of higher education both in the United States and abroad. Amassing thousands of citations and publishing over 100 articles, chapters, and conference proceedings in her career, defining Dr. Somers' academic career in one word is impossible. However, given the breadth and depth of her work across over 40 years of scholarship, the word *eclecticism* comes to mind.

Dr. Somers' research foci include financial aid, language, community colleges, gender equity, first-generation college students, faculty affairs, executive leadership, internationalization, Affirmative Action, academic capitalism, student veterans, and most recently, campus carry. In her mentees, Dr. Somers also instilled a sense of curiosity and dynamism that eschewed academia's stereotype of the academic specialist. ***For Pat, everything was researchable because injustice is everywhere.***

The publications in this special issue represent the diverse collection of topics that interested Dr. Somers, from access to postsecondary education for all to analyses of statewide policies, and the comprehensive range of methodologies she used to analyze issues in education, including commentaries, qualitative studies, policy reports, and empirical studies. Each of the pieces in this special issue was written by friends, colleagues, and former students of Dr. Somers. The works include a dedication memorializing her role as a scholar and a mentor. Additionally, a pink backpack appears on each page of the special issue—a symbol for which Dr. Somers was well-known around campus.

The special issue begins appropriately with a thoughtful introduction to Dr. Somers titled *Co-Learning with Patricia A. Somers: Rising from Humble Beginning to Become an Academic Leader*, written by her longtime colleague, Edward P. St. John. It continues with five works that use critical lenses to examine postsecondary achievement for all. First, *Hearing Their Stories: A Phenomenological Study in Understanding Ed.D. Completion*, written by former students Tracy L. Demchuk and Elizabeth A. Rainey. Second, *"The Numbers Are There but the Attention is Elsewhere": An Analysis of The Boyer Report*, written by Saralyn McKinnon-Crowley, a former student, and Aaron W. Voyles, a colleague at UT. Third, *A Difference-in-Difference Examination of Tennessee Promise's Influence on Community College Enrollment by Student Adjusted Gross Income*, written by (a) Zachary J. Hyder and (b) Gresham D. Collom, current and former students of (c) J. Patrick Biddix, a former student of Dr. Somers at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Fourth, *Increasing United States College Access for Native Arabic Speakers: Applying a Simplification Intervention and Evaluating Machine and Human Translations*, written by former student Zachary W. Taylor and his colleagues, Brett McCartt and Tahagod Babekir. Fifth, *Navigating Ambiguity, Inspiring Career Pivots, and Engaging in Critical Action: Leveraging Critical Consciousness with Education Abroad Alumni*, written by former UT students and colleagues, Dana E. Tottenham, Juan C. Gonzáles, Rosa Maria Acevedo, Jennifer A. Lund, Richard J. Reddick, and Victor B. Sáenz.

Additionally, we include two working drafts authored by Dr. Somers herself. First, a completed work on the impact of 9/11 on academic freedom titled *The Nexus Between Patriotism and Censorship: The "New Normal" for Academic Expression*, written by Pat and her former students, Suchitra V. Gururaj, Jess Geier, and Curtis A. Brewer. Finally, a working paper by Dr. Somers that was not completed—but that we hope will be taken up by a scholar who shares her passion for equity in

education through legislation—titled *Affirmative Action in Brazilian Higher Education: Actors, Events, and Networks, 1992 – 2008*.

Pat Somers was an esteemed colleague and a devoted mentor to many. She is missed by even more. We thank her for her service to the field.

Acknowledgment

Survived by Susan Somers-Willett, her daughter and granddaughter, Elizabeth (Liberty) Cady Stanton Willett-Cline, Patricia A. Somers was a caring mother and grandmother and a remarkable mentor to doctoral students at three universities. We dedicate this volume to three generations of exceptional women and sincerely appreciate Susan's permission to publish portions of Patricia Somers's previously unpublished manuscripts.

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Co-Learning with Patricia A. Somers: Rising from Humble Beginnings to Become an Academic Leader

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Co-Learning with Patricia A. Somers: Rising from Humble Beginnings to Become an Academic Leader

EDWARD P. ST. JOHN & PATRICIA A. SOMERS
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Abstract

In 1990, Patricia A. Somers was a quick-witted and brilliant mid-career student affairs administrator who finally decided to complete a doctorate at the University of New Orleans. Before taking the position at the University of Texas, specializing in research on college access, Pat became an outstanding professor and mentor at the University of Arkansas-Little Rock and the University of Missouri-St. Louis. In a short reflective essay, Pat tells her family story of rising from humble beginnings to a career studying access and supporting students starting their careers through doctoral study. After her inspiring message, I reflect on our collaboration over more than three decades as professors in higher education.

Keywords: access, Affirmative Action, Brazilian higher education, co-learning, student aid

Dedication

Following Pat Somers's story, told in her own words, I share reflections on co-learning with her. Part I shares some of Pat Somers's life story. Written originally for *Co-Learning*, Pat starts with childhood, then tells readers how she became an engaged scholar conducting research supporting colleges as they adapted to new state and federal policies that stratified higher education in dramatically savage ways. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Pat studied at Michigan State, federal grants ensured access. Pat found college opportunities as a first-generation student from a low-income, single-parent family. As a student affairs administrator in the 1980s and a doctoral student in the early 1990s, she witnessed the shift to the high-tuition, high-loan market that challenged low-income students to community colleges. Her early career research documented campus-based strategies for improving financial access in these dire circumstances. Pat became one of the few higher education policy scholars who cared about and sought remedies for students left behind, a commitment she acquired in her childhood.

Part II shares three co-learning episodes that unfolded over more than three decades. Episode one follows up with reflections on the impact of Pat's dissertation. She encouraged enrollment managers to invest in need-based grants—a repeated research-based finding generated in early institutional studies using their student data—a pathway our doctoral students built on in the following decades. Episode two reflects on how our research pathways again intersected. Her research on affirmative action in Brazil contributed substantially to edited books on comparative studies of access in developed and developing nations across the globe and using actionable social research to promote education equity across nations. Episode three tells the story of working with her on a co-edited volume with international contributors. Zach Taylor stepped in to fill the gap as Pat prepared for a summer of surgeries that did not take place, as she left us too soon. These episodes portray Pat's dynamic and creative contribution to inquiry promoting social justice through education reform.

To the extent reasonable, the editors left her words as she wrote them. Pat would have insisted on perfect APA 7 compliance. She was an APA hawk! The editors converted to APA 7.

Part I: Families' Struggle to Achieve the American Dream: Paying it Forward

One of my earliest memories was moving day in 1953. With the help of my grandfather, family friends, and subcontractors my father built our new home in a modern subdivision far from the inner city. My father worked on the line at the local Coca-Cola factory and borrowed a delivery truck to make the move. Our neighbors were not sure what to expect when that red and white delivery truck pulled up.

I was the middle of three children who because of the age gap of 6 years between each child, had very different challenges accessing our dreams of social and economic mobility. My older sister and mother lived in Grandma's boarding house for several years after divorce from an abusive spouse. Cece struggled to attend college, sporadically registering for classes in three states and earning over 400 credit hours while not obtaining a degree. Ironically, Cece started attending Lansing Community College housed in what was Lansing Central High School, my mother's alma mater. Despite the lack of a degree, Cece became an accomplished computer network specialist in corporate and legal settings.

My life was shattered in June of 1958. My father, a survivor of the Bataan Death March and a POW, died. I suspected the worst that day when my mom and two uncles came to our house in the middle of the day. I threw my arms around my mother and said, "What will we ever do? Will we move into Grandma's boarding house?" At the age of 8, I knew that our lives would change. In a family headed by a woman, I thought we had little chance to attend college and we'd all end up working on the line in the auto industry. I quickly discovered the stigma of being raised by a single mother in the era of "Father Knows Best." I was quickly labeled an "other," just as if I were from another planet. I was seen with pity and disgust. However, as other fathers in our community died, their spouses sought out my mother since there were no resources for them. Mom was definitely a trailblazer.
My brother Gary attended a private, faith-based university as an undergraduate student. He has master's and doctoral degrees in Philosophy. For some time, we worked in career services in different areas of the country, sometimes attending the same conferences. He is now a computer consultant for a well-known student software company.

I was the first in my family to attend and graduate from college. I benefitted from the Higher Education Act of 1965, the National Defense Education Act loans, Social Security Survivor's Benefits, War Orphan's Benefits, and various Michigan and Michigan State University financial aid programs. As an undergraduate, I worked as a full-time administrative assistant to pay for my expenses. After this grueling schedule cut into my academics and limited my sleep to 4-6 hours per night, I found a 20-hour-per-week Federal Work-Study job on campus. I received a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish and then a Master of Arts in Portuguese from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, funded by a graduate assistantship helping the Director of the Year Abroad Program in Spain. I started my doctoral degree immediately following the completion of my master's degree and the birth of my daughter, who fortuitously arrived early.

My pursuit of the doctorate was interrupted several times due to career changes and moves that propelled my family from the Midwest to the South. I was in several doctoral programs – Romance Languages, Educational Foundations, Labor, and Human Resources, but none seem to capture my passion for studying the inner workings of the higher education system. However, my job as director of the career center at Denison University introduced me to the various doctoral programs in higher education. When I took a job as Assistant Dean at the Freeman School of Business of Tulane University, I was lucky to have landed in New Orleans at the moment the University of New Orleans (UNO) decided to revamp and reinvigorate the doctoral program in higher education by hiring Ed St. John to direct the program. Our bond was immediate, and we have been collaborating ever since the first day I stepped on the UNO campus.

The Research

During the second half of the 20th century, the U.S. codified policies for college access and financial aid. By the dawn of the last decade of the millennium, the policy debate had shifted from college affordability to a more sophisticated choice and price policy for middle-class students and their families, leaving first-generation and low-income students to struggle with understanding applying to and financing a college education. While we (and our graduate students) have written many dissertations and articles related to various aspects of applying to and affording college, we focus here on college knowledge/choice, how aid influences college choice and persistence, and the impact of student debt.

Hossler et al. (1999) researched the college knowledge that typical parents have as part of the Indiana Twenty-first Century Scholars Program. They found that first-generation parents and others with low levels of college knowledge thought elite colleges such as Harvard University cost about the same amount as the local state or community college. Further, these parents assumed they would pay the "sticker price" rather than the "net price," which was the sticker price minus the financial aid offered to the students based on their family's resources. Various types of loans (Guaranteed, Parent, Student), grants, and scholarships were available, and most students qualified for some aid. However, many students and families were unaware of what was available and confused about applying for financial assistance.

Close to 50% of all college students attend 2-year colleges. The common assumption is that students who choose 2-year schools do so because they are academically deficient or price-conscious. In Somers, Haines, Keene, Bauer, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle, and Sparks (2006), we interviewed 200 community college students who reported that sticker price, family encouragement, and location influenced community college attendance. We found six provocative themes from the students. In "Pushing the Boulder Uphill," first-generation students were more sensitive to financial aid and averse to student loans than their peers (Somers et al., 2004). So, even variables such as high incomes, high test scores, and high grade-point averages, which similar studies have found to be significant and positively associated with persistence, did not influence the persistence of first-generation students in this study. Further, first-generation students were also more likely to be affected by imposter syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978; Cokley et al., 2018; Cokley et al., 2013), survivor guilt (Piorkowski, 1983), and their existence in two worlds (Phelan et al., 1991).

As to persistence, Hippensteel et al. (1996) found high tuition had a negative influence on within-year persistence. Each type of aid package students received (any aid, grants, loans, and packages) was negatively associated with persistence. They concluded that need-based grant aid was not sufficient to promote persistence. St. John and Starkey (1994) used NPSAS:87 to study the impact of tuition charges and financial aid awards on the persistence of traditional-age students in two-year colleges. They concluded that there was a strong negative relationship between tuition charges and persistence. For each $100 tuition differential, the probability that traditional-age college students persisted decreased by 1.4% (as compared to 0.5% for traditional students in four-year colleges). The demographics of persistence shifted in the two-year college from 1993 to 1996. In this sample, the 1996 persisters were much more likely to be dependent, full-time students. Tuition, while still negatively associated with persistence in 1996, had a significantly smaller effect. All subsidy variables were positively associated with persistence, with a substantially higher effect size in 1996 than in 1993. We conclude that there is an interaction among these variables and that the increased availability of financial aid in all forms mitigated the effect of net price on two-year college students in 1996 (Somers et al., 2006).

The effect of debt on two-year college students presents an interesting picture. For 1996, low debt was significant and negatively associated with persistence, but high debt was significant and positively associated with persistence. In addition, the effect of high debt levels on persistence may reflect the bimodal distribution of persisters. Full-time, dependent students and students nearing completion are more likely to incur debt to continue enrollment because of their dependency status and limited incomes, or the proverbial "light at the end of the tunnel." Thus, for these students, debt may be positively associated with persistence. However, another group of students is debt averse. In any case, a small amount of debt is enough to discourage their persistence.

In 1993, in contrast, only high levels of debt were significant and had a negative effect on persistence. St. John and Starkey (1995) found a negative effect of subsidies on persistence. They concluded that financial aid was insufficient to positively impact the persistence decisions, echoing Hippensteel et al. (1996). The later findings confirm that theory in part. In 1993, before the effective date of HEA of 1992 and the unsubsidized loan program, there may not have been enough loan funds available for two-year students. Since tuition was, and still is, relatively low for two-year students, the need-based formula limited the amount of aid available for low-income students. Even at high levels of unsubsidized debt, it was not enough to positively influence persistence. It appears that in 1996, the situation had changed. The unsubsidized loan program and the increasing availability of loans helped the two-year students to persist.

There is also the possibility that the "reverse transfer" phenomenon may be at work. This supposition could explain the positive effects of high debt and the negative impact of low debt. Low-income students qualified for four-year students with higher tuition and debt dropped into two-year schools and then returned to the four-year campus. Students with academic difficulty in two-year institutions dropped out before accumulating substantial debt. Moreover, students concerned about cost and debt load may leave only to return when they have financial reserves. Two-year students motivated to persist, for whatever reason, are willing to assume larger amounts of debt to meet their goals. There is also evidence that the "whatever reason" may be to return to a four-year institution.

Along with St. John and I, our students measured price response to aid and tuition for graduate and undergraduate students, controlling for discipline, gender, race, ethnicity, and other variables (e.g., Cofer & Somers, 2000, 2001). Our models enable even novice researchers to examine how to best package aid to attract first-generation and low-income students at every university. The analyses allow administrators to set goals for students' admission and retention, making it possible for universities to target specific student groups to promote diversity.

[In a note at the end of the draft, Pat noted her intent] Quote to use in text:
"*Maya Angelou described the impact of impact of imposter syndrome, 'I have written 11 books, but each time I think, 'Uh oh, they're going to find out now. I've run a game on everybody, and they're going to find me out.'* (Richards, 2015)

Part II: Learning With an Inspiring Student, Colleague, and Global Leader

In addition to the note about Maya Angelou's quote a note in the draft, she also left the comment to include "Freeman, Cofer, DeAngelis, McCluskey, Settle, Bauer, Stokes, Martin, and Suchi," students whose good works she wanted to mention in a more extended essay If they read this paper, I hope they feel included. Indeed, they were in Pat's heart. She was a caring mentor indeed.

Pat's reflective essay was a quickly crafted response to my request for a 500- to 1000-word for a co-case in a book I was co-writing with more than 40 colleagues. Pat's eighteen hundred words were longer than I'd hoped, and she was just getting started. We recrafted. Eventually, *Co-Learning in Higher Education* (St. John, 2023) was published with three shorter reflections documenting Pat's inspiring leadership story. It took me a long time to complete that book, as I kept going back and forth with co-writers as I tried to figure out what the book was about. As it turned out, it took time to complete the book and pull together the themes with support from Pat and the critical eye of the publishing editor, Heather Jarrow.

Pat was not the only one who sped ahead as I lingered in uncertainty. As I tried to figure out the emerging themes, I set *Co-Learning* aside to collaborate with Luis Mirón on *Resisting Racism and Promoting Equity Through Community-Engaged Social Action*. This book idea grew from our co-writing at the University of New Orleans, where he (Lou), Pat, and I became activist scholars. However, as I worked with Lou the *Resisting Racism*, we found our voices were too different to feel comfortable completing that book together. Lou finished his book with Paul Green, and I collaborated on two chapters. Fortunately, after my struggle co-writing with Lou, I finally figured out how to finish *Co-Learning*, proposed it to the Routledge press, and published it about a month after Luis's, as the two books with the same publisher. In my experience, co-learning and co-writing are sloppy processes that take me time to figure out. Since they are collaborative, I avoided imposing my will and frame but let new, shared insights emerge.

Pat became a doctoral student at UNO as Lou and I were quickly redesigning and marketing the educational leadership doctoral program. Both quickly moved from thought to action, and I often learned in the wake of their work. Across the decades, I usually traveled down parallel paths with Luis and Patricia, and I frequently found ourselves traveling down similar paths. We also used different research methods to support and inform action. Lou had and pursued a clear vision, Pat shared insights and created new pathways, and I engaged, then pulled my writing out after the fact as

I sought to turn activism into contribution. Ironically, perhaps, they did not know each other well since Lou led the development of the K-12 leadership specialization, and Pat's concentration was in higher education. Still, Lou sent condolences when he heard Pat passed. With this background on our co-learning environment at UNO, I reflect on three episodes of co-learning with Pat and on missing her because of the collegial void left behind.

Collaborating with Pat was always an adventure. She was quick and full of great ideas. In addition to student aid, she researched gender inequality, affirmative action, Brazilian higher education, and numerous other social and political issues. Her bonds with students were strong. When they shared their ideas with her, they developed them in papers and frequently published them together. After her early work on student aid, Pat did not frequently publish in the leading higher education journals after going to UT. She published in many journals in multiple languages with her many students and colleagues. Pat was an engaged activist scholar who worked with others to write papers that inspired action. I share three episodes in our collaboration to illustrate how quick and inspiring she was.

Episode 1: Discovering Institutional Research on Student Aid

Most published research on access and student aid in the 1970s and 1980s used national longitudinal surveys. One day in my class on higher education finance, I commented that similar models could be crafted from institutional data, drawing from student records from admissions, student aid, and registration. Pat heard the comment and had found her dissertation topic during her first term as a student. She was quick, but there was still a lot of work to do!

Pat had completed her methods courses at Ohio State before coming to UNO, so she was moved fast through courses in doctoral core and higher education specialization. When she started exploring her topic, I worried there was no literature base for her envisioned study. I quickly wrote a paper that developed models and methods for examining the impact of student aid on enrollment and persistence within institutions (St. John, 1992), giving her an "in press" reference. Still, she went ahead and did it, pioneering a new pathway. Soon after my paper was published, Pat had completed her dissertation. Looking back humbly, I think Pat could have finished the dissertation without my paper, but I thought she needed the reference. To be honest now, I wanted to share credit for the leap taken in the research.

Pat found the campus had taken the wrong path when it offered large merit grants to any National Merit Finalist who would enroll; most transferred to campuses better aligned with their intellect and aspirations. After all, the case-study campus did not retain the academic elite because it did not offer a learning experience or living environment that met these high-achievers' learning needs and expectations. Pat's dissertation, *A Dynamic Analysis of Student Matriculation Decisions in an Urban University* (Somers, 1992), was awarded the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators' Melvene D. Hardee Dissertation of the Year Award. Soon after completing her dissertation, Pat took a position in student affairs at UNO, so we had some time to get started with a new line of inquiry. Pat's article, "Are 'Mondo Scholarships effective?" (Somers, 1993), captured much attention in the student aid community. We also collaborated on a study of the impact of aid on enrollment (Somers & St. John, 1993).

We were solicited individually for chapters in the student aid research handbook, so we collaborated on the two chapters, one assessing the impact of institutional aid on enrollment and the other on persistence (St. John & Somers, 1997; Somers & St. John, 1997). Pat conducted studies for several campuses, so we developed a paper comparing student price responses at campuses with various pricing strategies (Somers & St. John, 1998). These studies demonstrated the effectiveness of campus investment in need-based aid. Another graduate student in Pat's UNO cohort simulated the enrollment and revenue effect of failing to adjust aid when UNO implemented a mid-year tuition increase without changing need-based aid packages (Trammell, 1995). While some campuses began to reconsider the trend toward merit aid, most continued striving for prestige and revenue, which led enrollment managers to use institutional aid as a lever for generating revenue by emphasizing quasi-merit aid to attract middle-income, middle-ability students who could pay most of their college costs (Hossler, 2004). When elite public universities used this mode of prestige pricing in the context of declining federal grants, the tacit had a devastating impact, accelerating economic stratification, moving poor kids to two-year campuses, and keeping elite four-year colleges primarily white and middle class.

Based on her experience as a youth seeking opportunity, she helped illuminate pathways that partially mitigated the dire wake of inequality created by federal neoliberal education policies. She pioneered a path for campuses to study the impact of their aid packaging strategies. Unfortunately, too few campuses invested in need-based aid when high tuition and loans at four-year colleges were stratifying college opportunities. Pat relied on student aid to go through college, which explains her compassion for this research. Similar issues were also part of my passion for studying higher education finance.

Pat's research also inspired early studies of state grant programs' impact using student data stated agencies had collected. I extended Pat's approach to using institutional records as I worked in state studies of need-based grants in Washington (St. John, 1999) and Indiana (Hu & St. John, 2001), two states that reversed the trajectory. In Washington state, need-based improved minority enrollment in public four-year colleges. In Indiana, the Purdue and Indiana flagships resisted, instead using prestige-seeking pricing to maintain whiteness, as urban universities and private colleges took advantage of state grants and achieved greater diversity (St. John & Musoba, 2010).

Episode 2: Engaging in International Actionable Research

When I went to the University of New Orleans, I put aside my work on comparative higher education. I was involved in numerous projects and workshops starting in Australia and, as an outgrowth, conducted workshops on strategic planning and thinking for education ministries in numerous South Asian nations (e.g., St. John, 1986). This thought-provoking work resulted in ideas about the swift development of postsecondary education during the period. When I got to UNO, I left this work behind because I knew I needed to specialize to rise in the ranks, and my work on federal student aid policy was timely. Pat followed me into student financial aid research but also discovered the joy of international work when she participated in the Fulbright-funded visit to Thailand in the early 1990s. That experience opened the door for her, and she passed through it with vigor, especially after reaching The University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin).

When I got to the University of Michigan in 2005, I found a program actively recruiting international students with no faculty actively engaged in comparative higher education research. Consequently, students had limited opportunity to engage in comparative research. To help remedy this problem, I began collaborating with international graduate students, adapting our methods for U.S. policy research to international studies (e.g., St. John et al., 2013). Also, in response to a publisher's request, I started editing a monograph series on *Issues in Globalization and Social Justice*. I asked Heinz-Dieter Meyer, a consulting editor, to lead a monograph on "privatization and social justice" focusing on two conflicting issues. Heinz considered the topic oxymoronic instead of a challenging problem, so we collaborated on a book on fairness in access for a more prestigious international press (i.e., Meyer et al., 2013). Pat became a key contributor to that project and others that followed.

By the early 2000s, through recurring Fulbright Fellowships, Patricia A. Somers had become an academic luminary in Brazil, collaborating on action research supporting national efforts to expand and democratize access in Brazil. In addition to collaborating on a chapter about this research (i.e., Somers et al., 2013), she collaborated on a chapter comparing affirmative action in Brazil and South Africa in one of the concluding chapters (Meyer, et al., 2013). Her vision and voice were solid and evident. She was a star of our collective presentation at an international meeting of comparative education. Pat was not one to rest on a single topic but instead pushed for new forms of scholarship that made change happen. Her work increasingly focused on social justice issues.

Later, when I was collaborating with Chinese and European colleagues on a new book on actionable research support social justice initiatives in K-20 education, conversations with Pat conversations helped us refine the book's themes. Following her chapter on the history of activist scholarship in Brazil, Pat collaborated on the next chapter in the book's sequence, which framed engaged scholarship in alliance building (St. John et al., 2018). Pat was quick and insightful, as always, as she helped us pull together the organizing themes of the book. In this volume (Chen et al., 2017), we used Pat's collaboration in Brazil as a launching narrative and students in the US, Ireland, and England to develop an agenda for activist research in China. As a small group of internationally engaged scholars, we sought to foster international exchange.

Episode 3: Missing Patricia A. Somers

Although Pat and I were friends and colleagues over decades, we never co-edited or co-wrote a book. While she had hundreds of articles and chapters, she did not have many books. Books take a lot of time; in my experience, they are not quick. Edited books take even more time to put together than co-writing. Perhaps because she was so quick-thinking and drawn to so many subjects, she seldom slowed down enough to do a book. After *Co-Learning*, I started a new collaborative book with my Chinese colleagues. At the start of the project, I asked her to co-edit the new volume and to make sure she got credit this time. She planned to pull together a section of social action initiatives in South America and Africa, regions she worked with after her years as a Fulbright scholar. The book volume, *Education Improvement Promoting Human Capabilities Development in Post-Neoliberal Period* (St. John et al., 2023), but Pat was not part of it. She passed away too soon and too young.

After a few conversations with Pat about this project, I learned about her multiple pending surgeries during the summer. I expressed concern about her carrying the additional workload, the articles she

was committed to, and other responsibilities for the collaborative venture. She said not to worry; she was used to writing in a hospital bed. However, I asked for her suggestions for a backup in case she did not make it through the summer of surgeries. In addition to soliciting articles, she had agreed to take on the role of managing relations with the press. Since I had never worked with open-access publishing, I knew I could not handle that part of the editorial process. Zach Taylor made the *Education Sciences* special issue—and the book of reprints—possible as he took charge of the open-access editorial functions, and I learned how to do it from him.

Conclusion and Caution

Patricia A. Somers passed too early for those who enjoyed working with her. She struggled for years with health issues that culminated in an acute event that took her out of teaching and mentoring. Her story is compelling, providing a model for her students and readers to emulate. My only caution to her students for UT Austin is to *stick to a specialization, at least as long as it takes to get to where you want to be*. Pat wanted to live in Texas, near her daughter and granddaughter. I am sad that UT Austin did not recognize her talent and contributions by restoring her full professorship soon after she got there, as was promised. I am happy that so many Texans had the chance to get to know and appreciate Patricia A. Somers's quick brilliance. She shines like a light in the lone star state's sky and beyond.

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Patricia A. Somers was an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Texas at Austin. A prolific scholar and supportive mentor, Dr. Somers also held faculty affiliations with the UT Center for Women & Gender Studies and the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies.

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[1] The name "St. John, E. P." is often referenced incorrectly by computers (think: AI? Really?). In some reference citations above, I converted the computer generated "John, E. P. S." to the correct "St. John, E. P." Being cited as "John, E. P." in a citation of a recent book chapter in my most recent book is particularly outrageous.

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Hearing Their Stories: A Phenomenological Study in Understanding Ed.D. Completion

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Abstract

This study illuminates the rich and unique experiences of alumni who successfully completed a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.). During two open-ended interview sessions, eight participants revealed the barriers they encountered and successfully navigated to complete their doctoral programs. Some findings align with previously known barriers from extant literature, such as competing demands and academic integration. Participants' stories also reveal that negative experiences from their habitus and self-sabotaging thoughts created additional factors to their completion. This study describes how these alumni overcame the barriers by using their social capital, relationships with their faculty and chairs, and self-awareness to persist. This study is important because scholarly research has traditionally focused on undergraduate (rather than graduate) persistence, yet, only half of all doctoral students in the United States complete their programs. We discuss implications for graduate student retention research and practice based on eight successful doctoral students.

Keywords: barriers, doctoral degree, Ed.D., graduate students, persistence, graduate persistence

Dedication

We owe our collaboration to Dr. Patricia (Pat) Ann Somers, our doctoral advisor, chair, and professor at the University of Texas at Austin while we were in the first cohort of the Executive Doctorate program in Higher Education. Pat believed deeply in our success as adult learners and college leaders. Pat and Tracy shared a passion for graduate student persistence and success. Pat's steadfast belief in Tracy's research interests powered her to graduation. Liz and Pat bonded over New Orleans, where Pat completed her doctorate and Liz lives. They first met for lunch at Gabriel's and talked neighborhoods, local weather celebrities, and education in the Crescent City. Pat often emailed at all hours of the night, so some mornings brought a new spark of wisdom. We dedicate this study to her and her love for collaboration, advocacy, reflection, and insightfulness. Thank you for bringing us together, Pat.

Introduction

In the United States, a doctorate is the highest degree a student can achieve (Labaree, 2017). Graduates who hold a doctorate play a fundamental role in the U.S. labor force as innovators, thinkers, and creators who drive the economy (Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2011; Seidman, 2012). While benefits vary in doctoral fields, in general a doctorate imparts individual benefits (e.g., higher salaries, low unemployment, social and professional mobility), societal benefits (e.g., economic development, increased civic engagement, knowledge dissemination), and furthers the missions of teaching and research in higher education (Boud et al., 2021; Jobe & Lenio, 2014; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005, 2016; Seidman, 2012; Wendler et al., 2012). Every year, however, a significant number of

students drop out of their doctoral programs without earning the terminal credential (Wollast et al., 2018).

Dropout rates in doctoral programs, including education fields, are estimated at 50% and higher (Benshoff et al., 2015; Cohen & Greenberg, 2011; Gittings et al., 2018) and have remained unchanged over the past four decades (DeAngelis, 1998; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Lovitts, 2001; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Further, universities in the United States continue to focus more on graduate degree programs, including doctoral degrees, often in response to declining undergraduate student enrollment (Kelchen & Barrett, 2024).

This study aims to understand the factors that can negatively influence persistence to doctoral degree completion. In examining these factors, we gain new knowledge about graduate student persistence, with an emphasis on understanding how these doctoral students navigated and overcame a variety of obstacles on the path to graduation. To understand the lived experiences of eight Executive Doctor of Education alumni through a phenomenological framework, this study explored how these alumni successfully navigated obstacles they faced in their pursuit of a doctorate. The following research question guided this study: *What are the barriers and persistence strategies that influence or contribute to Ed.D. completion?*

Existing literature on the barriers to doctoral persistence is robust; however, there is limited understanding of how alumni of doctoral programs overcame these barriers to reach degree completion. Therefore, this study expands the scholarship of graduate persistence through the perspective of successful alumni.

Literature Review

This literature review examines previous studies on graduate student attrition, including the variables that affect doctoral persistence that fall into two overarching factors: individual/personal and institutional/organizational (Hardré et al., 2019). Successful transition to academic learning, which also correlates with degree completion (Graham & Kim, 2011), relies on how graduate students view, react, and overcome variables that impede persistence.

Graduate Student Persistence

Historical theories about adult learning assist in understanding graduate student persistence. These theories explore reasons for how institutional factors affect graduate student persistence. Lindeman's (1926) foundational research on adult learners theorized that adults learn best when learning is self-directed, the topics are related to life experiences, and the pace and modality of learning fit their personal needs. Knowles' (1990) theory of andragogy positioned that adults learn through self-direction, experience, readiness to learn, motivation, inner desire to know, and willingness to learn. Students' aspiration to persist fails when these factors are bombarded with continuous disruption.

There are congruent personal and institutional variables that affect graduate persistence. Personal variables include support, time and financial constraints, and emotional difficulties such as stress, guilt, and anxiety related to accommodating varying demands (Benshoff et al., 2015; Cohen & Greenberg, 2011). Institutional variables include integration, performance, and program

compatibility. Personal and institutional variables are incongruities of the higher education system and graduate students' degree completion realities (Brus, 2006).

Graduate students often are out of academic environments for some time before returning; therefore, age can affect persistence (Braxton et al., 2011). Palmer and Wright (1996) suggested age is a negative factor in academic performance due to weakened study skills from time away from educational settings. In addition to study skills, the added demands of work and personal obligations, and stress can lead to low persistence (Bergman et al., 2014; Brus, 2006; Cohen & Greenberg, 2011).

Men are less likely to persist than women, according to Hagedorn (1999), who studied women graduate students over thirty years of age. For women, the interaction between family and persistence correlated with the drive and urgency to complete a graduate degree. Taniguchi and Kaufman's (2005) quantitative study supported Hagedorn's (1999) position, reporting divorced women persisted at higher rates than divorced men. Women thrived in part-time enrollment, and women who possessed high-level professional positions persisted at a higher rate than their male counterparts. Hagedorn's (1999) study of 81 women, who were predominantly white and over the age of 30, found that being married increased the probability of persistence by 84%, and external pressures—socioeconomic status and family and professional responsibilities—were not conducive to degree completion.

Low persistence of minoritized groups due to low socioeconomic status (SES), social integration, psychosocial factors, and academic preparation of minority or marginalized and underrepresented populations of all educational levels are documented in numerous studies (Hagedorn, 1999; Manos et al., 2005; Naidoo, 2015; Posselt, 2018; Rogers-Shaw & Carr-Chellman, 2018; Tinto, 1993, 2006). Minority students from low socioeconomic statuses experienced more stress related to financial difficulties, health problems, and family and relationship issues, which affected their ability to remain in school (Karimshah et al., 2013). University cultures that are not diverse (e.g., faculty, staff, administration) or do not embrace diversity are reasons why minority students do not integrate successfully; therefore, it increases these populations' dropout rates (Fitzpatrick et al., 2014).

Epistemology

The epistemological stance that informed this study is constructionism. It is important to understand our approach to this study, given the phenomenological approach and our closeness to the topic, as graduates from a doctoral program similar to the ones our participants experienced. According to Crotty (1998), "there is no meaning without a mind" (p. 8); therefore, interaction with the realities of the world creates personal truth and meaning. Knowledge is constructed differently for persons who experience the same phenomenon through participation, exploration, and discovery. A person's curiosity and beliefs intervene with their environment to create knowledge through internal conflict and dominance or through the coincidence of shared values. "In short, the social – shape our conceptions of reality and influence its formation" (Burningham & Cooper, 1999, p. 299). Therefore, our approach to this study enabled us to co-construct knowledge. This study sought to understand how graduates from various Ed.D. programs constructed, perceived, and identified obstacles, as well as account for the culturally derived and historical constructs that enabled degree completion (Sipe & Constable, 1996).

Methodology

This study aligns with constructivism by gathering rich data from graduates of an Ed.D. program to understand the phenomena of Ed.D. persistence. To better understand how eight alumni engaged in their doctoral journey and were able to overcome the barriers they faced in their doctoral journey, we used a qualitative phenomenological approach. As Crotty (1998) noted, "interpretive understandings and analysis can point to the necessity of change" (p. 10).

We wanted to "discover the nature and meaning of phenomenon [persistence] through internal pathways of self, using the processes of self-reflection, exploration, and elucidation of the nature of phenomenon" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985) through the stories of the participants. Both an inductive and abductive qualitative approach by amalgamating the research methods with a reflective process to understand the phenomena (Hays & Singh, 2012). The following research questions served as a guide to the study to best understand the stories of eight Ed.D. alumni:

> RQ 1: What are the main variables that influence or contribute to Ed.D. completion?
>
> RQ 2: How do the lived experiences of Ed.D. alumni influence the researcher's understanding of Ed.D. completion?

Phenomenology

Human beings construct knowledge via mental modeling, using existing knowledge to extrapolate new knowledge. This data revealed how a person's habitus influences persistence through participation, exploration, and discovery. Through knowledge discovery, each person's experiences can create different realities from the same phenomenon. Individuals create their world through beliefs, personal history, experiences, and interactions with others. Burningham and Cooper (1999) stated that "ideas intervene between nature and its description, and that interests, values, conflict and power—in short, the social—shape our conceptions of reality and influence its formation" (p. 299).

An interpretive phenomenological theoretical perspective was used to gain a better understanding of how eight diverse Ed.D. students successfully navigated personal, professional, and academic demands to complete their Ed.D. program. A small sample size was used allowing deep involvement in the data to answer the research questions (Armour et al., 2009).

Theoretical Framework

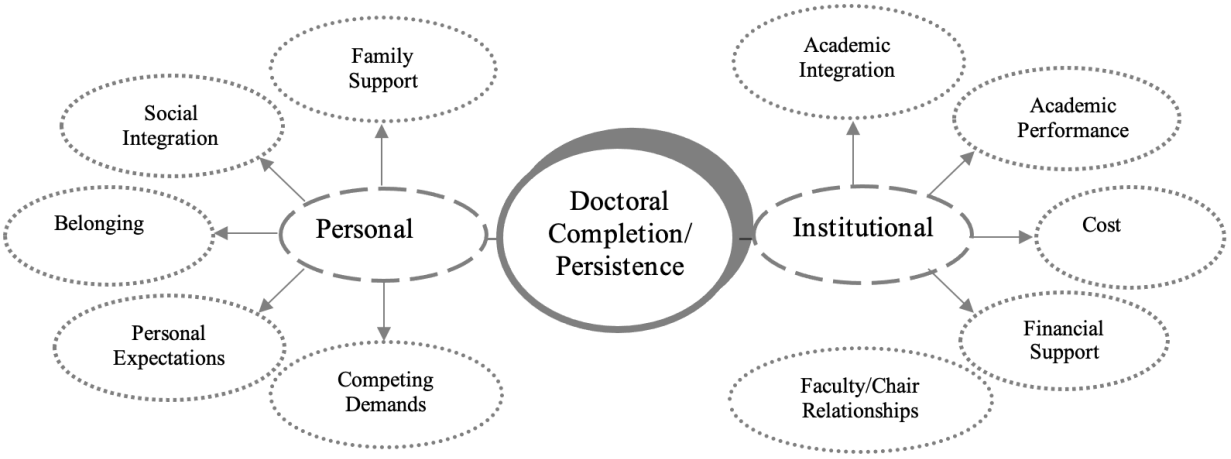
The theoretical framework used in this study pulled from existing persistence theories along with the concept that one's cultural capital or habitus influences actions, decisions, and dispositions. Thus, the habitus shapes the mind. However, congruent with Maxwell (2013), this research design was flexible and reflexive throughout each stage. The research plan was explicit, and the study's design informed the progression of the research. The professional experience of the first author as an admission and student service professional was used, along with personal experiences of obtaining two graduate degrees as a working adult. In addition, the second author's experiences also included

graduate work while working full-time with a family, and an in-depth knowledge of persistence theories and strategies.

This study blended several theories on persistence to develop a relational model of individual and institutional factors identified through the literature review and a relational diagram of factors (Figure 1) that affect doctoral persistence was developed based on empirical research on undergraduate, adult, and graduate student persistence. The factors presented were identified as components that impact persistence.

Figure 1

Factors of Doctoral Persistence from Empirical Research



Note. A relational diagram illustrating the factors that influence doctoral persistence that ultimately affect the decision of students to complete a doctoral program. The factors are divided into two main categories—Personal and Institutional. The arrows point to five specific components of personal and institutional factors identified from major scholarly persistence research.

The figure's main premise is that two overarching factors – personal and institutional –affect student persistence, personal and institutional, followed by five subcategories. Personal factors include family support, social integration, belonging, personal expectations, and competing demands. University factors include academic integration, faculty relationships, academic performance, cost, and financial support.

Table 1 illustrates the notable persistence models that correspond to the factors of persistence that guided this study. The complexity and phenomenon of doctoral persistence are represented by the existing empirical models, which explain persistence and the causes of persistence (Roland et al., 2016). Therefore, we noted the most identified factors of persistence using undergraduate, adult, and graduate persistence models. All three models were used because many of the earlier persistence models influenced or guided the later research of persistence. However, the complexity of persistence leads to the need for continued research to explore the intricacies of persistence and discover how students persist to degree completion.

Table 1

Factors Influencing Persistence and the Empirical Models of Persistence

Factors of Persistence		Persistence Models		
		Undergraduate Models	Adult Models	Graduate Models
Personal	Family support	Bean & Metzner (1985); Spady (1970)	Benshoff et al. (2015); Cohen & Greenberg (2011)	
	Social integration	Bean (1980); Bean & Metzner (1985); Pacarella & Terrenzini (1979); Spady (1970)	Bergman et al. (2014)	Golde (2000)
	Belonging	Spady (1970); Tinto (1975)		Golde (2000)
	Personal expectations	Bean (1980); Spady (1970)	Benshoff et al. (2015); Brus (2006); Cohen & Greenberg (2011); Gärling et al. (2016)	Girves & Wemmerus (1988) Golde (1998, 2005); Sowell et al. (2008)
	Competing demands	Tinto (1993)	Benshoff et al. (2015); Bergman et al. (2014); Cohen & Greenberg, (2011)	Golde (1998, 2005); Sowell et al. (2008)
Institutional	Academic integration	Tinto (1988)	Benshoff et al. (2015); Brus (2006); Cohen & Greenberg (2011); Meriwether (2016)	Lovitts (2001); Golde (2000); Tinto (1993)
	Academic performance	Bean (1980); Spady (1970)	Benshoff et al. (2015); Cohen & Greenberg (2011)	Girves & Wemmerus (1988)
	Cost		Benshoff et al. (2015); Cohen & Greenberg (2011)	DeAngelis (1998); Girves & Wemmerus (1988); Liseo (2005); Tinto (1993)
	Financial support	Tinto (1993)	Benshoff et al. (2015); Cohen & Greenberg (2011)	DeAngelis (1998); Girves & Wemmerus (1988); Liseo (2005); Tinto (1993)
	Faculty/Chair relationships	Bean (1980); Spady (1970)	Benshoff et al. (2015); Bergman et al. (2014); Cohen & Greenberg (2011)	Girves & Wemmerus (1988); Lovitts (2001); Tinto (1993)

Note. Undergraduate, adult, and graduate persistence models identified by factors of persistence the research represents.

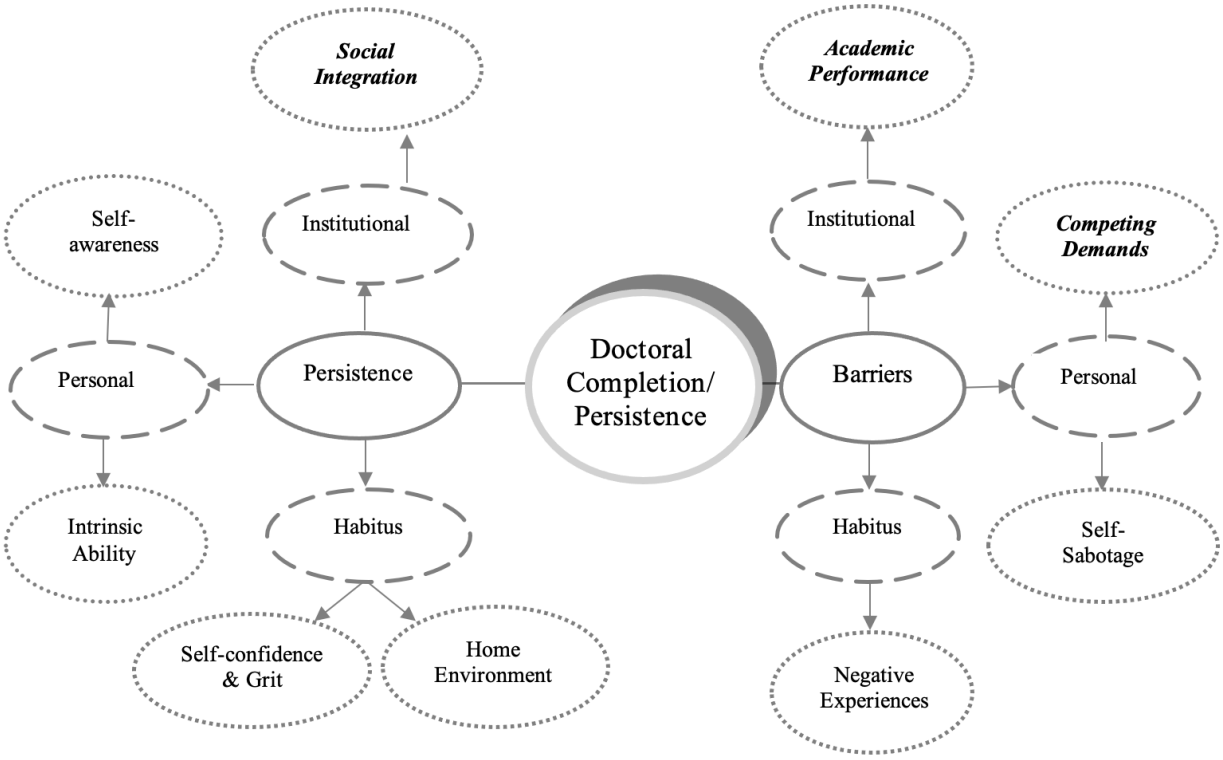
The first round of interview questions were designed to extract the barriers that each participant faced and to gain an understanding of what tactics, internal mechanisms, and strategies each participant used to ensure their doctoral success. The barriers and how they overcame the barriers

were analyzed in comparison to the existing models of persistence to confirm, refute, or discover new factors of persistence. Throughout the first round of interviews, habitus stood out as a contributing factor of persistence. Due to this revelation, questions added for the second round of interviews drew out the participant's habitus and how it positively affected persistence. Figure 2 discloses the four leading barriers (themes) the eight participants faced and the five persistence tactics (themes) of how they were able to complete the Ed.D. program. This disclosure resulted in the addition of habitus as a third overarching factor of persistence.

This study used phenomenology with heuristic inquiry to gather rich descriptions of personal experience to understand how students navigated factors that impede degree completion. Phenomenology seeks to describe human experiences scientifically and requires the researcher "to dwell intensely with subjective descriptions and to search for underlying themes or essences that illuminate the meaning of the phenomenon" (Casterline, 2009, p. 2). This framework uncovered how doctoral students persisted in comparison to the historical empirical studies by the researcher inserting themself in the data gathering to explore and discover the nuances of the phenomenon.

Figure 2

Factors Affecting Ed.D. Completion – Persistence and Barriers



Note. This is a relational diagram illustrating the barrier and persistence factors discovered through the stories of Ed.D. participants. Habitus is added as a third main category of factors that influence persistence in both persistence and barriers. Solid line ovals divide variables by persistence and barriers. Long-dashed ovals represent the three main persistence factors. Dotted ovals represent the themes discovered through the Ed.D. participant stories. Each theme reverts back to doctoral persistence/degree completion, with persistence themes overcoming the barriers. The three bolded themes support previous persistence models.

Method

Applying various persistence frameworks, this study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand how eight alumni engaged in and were able to overcome the barriers they faced in their doctoral journey. Through two rounds of interviews, alumni's voices illuminated their stories, providing rich data about how doctoral students persist. This study was part of a larger phenomenological and heuristic study of doctoral students' journeys to graduation.

Participants

We used random purposeful sampling to identify participants who had graduated from an Ed.D. program (Hays & Singh, 2012). The programs were from medium to large public institutions and one large private-not-for-profit institution. The delivery method included hybrid, distance learning, and in-person learning. The Ed.D. programs focused on general educational leadership, higher education leadership, and organizational leadership. Participants volunteered through an announcement post on LinkedIn, a professional virtual network, and no incentives were offered. See Table 2 for participants' backgrounds. The diversity of the participant group enhanced the value of this research and its credibility. By providing a thorough description of students' voices, researchers and practitioners can gather implications in their work with student persistence.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Ed.D. Graduates Participating in this Study (n=8)

Pseudonym	*Gender*	*Race*	*Age Range*	*Marital Status*	*First Generation Status*
David	*Man*	*White*	*35-44*	*Single/Married*	*No*
Diana	*Woman*	*Black*	*25-34*	*Single*	*Yes*
Denise	*Woman*	*White*	*35-44*	*Married*	*Yes*
Susana	*Woman*	*Am. Indian/Latin*	*25-34*	*Married*	*No*
Henry	*Man*	*Black*	*35-44*	*Married*	*Yes*
Natalia	*Woman*	*Black/Latin*	*25-34*	*Married*	*Yes*
Lisa	*Woman*	*White/Latin*	*35-44*	*Married*	*Yes*
Simon	*Man*	*Black*	*35-44*	*Married*	*Yes*

Eight participants volunteered to participate and completed a Qualtrics[xm] survey, which provided additional demographic information and details about their Ed.D. program. Upon completing the demographic survey (Appendix A), the researcher scheduled and recorded the first round of interviews via Zoom. Participants answered questions regarding their Ed.D. program, including their program experience, barriers faced and the timing of the barrier, barrier navigation, and if their background aided in persistence. They also self-identified if they were first generation undergraduate students, as noted in the table. All of the participants were the first in their families to complete a graduate degree program. The second interview took place approximately 45 to 60 days later and

was used to clarify information from the first interview and dig deeper into their habitus through questions about their childhood, young adulthood, and current experiences. In total, the researcher conducted 16 interviews with eight graduates from various Ed.D. programs. Transcripts were checked for accuracy.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began as the first researcher listened to interviews and cleaned transcripts for accuracy with their reflective journal and systematic memoing (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher assigned manual codes during transcription review and then expanded those codes to categories and themes based on the research question. Barriers and persistence emerged as parent codes and child codes included personal and institutional. As the research progressed, the researchers added habitus. See Appendix B for the coding and theme schematic.

Once the codebook was established, analysis moved to coding in Quirkos, a secure software database to analyze and code the text data. Coding organized and labeled the data to identify the barriers and themes of persistence. This coding method reveals meaning in the subjective nature of the interviews including emotion and values coding (Miles et al., 2013). Emotion and value coding focus on perspectives, worldviews, culture, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, morals, and prejudice, along with exploring the participants' interpersonal and intrapersonal beliefs.

Trustworthiness

The first author was a full-time university practitioner and doctoral student at the time of this study. In her full-time job, she supported doctoral students during their journeys, so she was deeply connected to this topic. This study was part of her doctoral dissertation, which included a heuristic inquiry, further connecting her with her participants. This study, however, is limited to the phenomenological interview data, acknowledging her connection to the content. To ensure trustworthiness and fidelity, the first author maintained a reflective journal, used thick descriptions, and debriefed with a peer in the doctoral program (Hays & Singh, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The second author joined the research team to reexamine the data and to delimit this study to reveal findings about doctoral student persistence. The purpose of the second author was to add new perspectives to the data and to benefit from a collaborative approach to understand the experiences of students in doctoral programs. Both researchers graduated from the same doctoral program in higher education leadership. The researchers met frequently to discuss the themes and findings.

Findings

The data revealed several commonalities of doctoral persistence in response to the research question: *What are the barriers and persistence strategies that influence or contribute to Ed.D. completion?* Our data showed that the most important factors in their successful doctoral journeys were: family dynamics, academic integration, and overcoming self-sabotage. Participants relied on their habitus, a socially ingrained set of norms, expectations, and habits passed on throughout life (Bourdieu, 1977). While competing demands (Benshoff et al., 2015; Cohen & Greenberg, 2011) and academic integration (Girves and Wemmerus, 1988; Lovitts, 2001; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1988, 1993, 2006) are well documented in persistence literature, previous life experiences and self-sabotaging thoughts

are rarely noted as barriers. It was noteworthy that the role of finances did not emerge as a theme, even though it is discussed in the literature (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; DeAngelis, 1998; Liseo, 2005; Tinto, 1993).

Theme One: Families of Origin

The participants were adult learners but their family histories were still influential in their journeys. Participants often described their family-home environment and the self-confidence and grit they developed in their childhood. They also carried habits, however, that did not always serve them well. The role of family was especially prominent for the six (of eight) participants (Diana, Denise, Henry, Natalie, Lisa, and Simon) who were first-generation undergraduate and graduate college students. Lisa's parents did not know how to help her with post-secondary education. As a result, she never asked for help and reflected her doctoral experience may have been different if she had just asked for help. Lisa stated, "I would not share what my progress was because I was so embarrassed," which was part of the reason the dissertation phase took six years. Henry, like Lisa, never asked for help as a child. He wanted to solve problems independently due to personal trauma as a child. Henry's doctoral journey took eight years. Diana described her conservative parents, who were not college-educated and did not understand the need for education past a bachelor's degree. Their desire for Diana to come home and live a conservative life resulted in high amounts of personal stress during her journey. Despite these challenges, participants believed postsecondary education provided a better life. Henry and Diana used negative experiences from their childhood to deduce higher education was a way out of poverty. David and Susana, second and third-generation college students, respectively, never questioned whether they would attend college—the only question was which college they would attend.

Family dynamics were also a factor for participants across generations. As Diana described her barriers, she immediately minimized them by realizing that several of her cohort peers faced more challenges than she did. She explained if her peers could persist while being married and raising children, she had no excuse for dropping out. Henry also experienced several obstacles that competed for his attention, including a family death, a critically ill mother located in another state, his marriage breaking up, and moving into a new home—all of which happened within a month. The culmination of this stress led to his ultimate barrier—a heart attack. He said:

> I was convinced it was stress-related and so I clearly at that point fell behind because in March was when you were supposed to have your dissertation done and reviewed with permission to defend. The defense would have been April, so that obviously took me off the grid, and I wasn't able to graduate.

Like two other participants, Simon experienced a death in the family, one being his mother. Simon took a leave of absence two different semesters for the birth of his children. Both of which, extended his time to completion.

A common theme of habitus for David, Denise, Simon, and Susana was to never settle and keep climbing to the next level. Their parents pushed them to complete their graduate degrees. Their parents instilled grit and commitment through their parenting, sometimes working more than one job to support the family. Pride and competition for Denise and Lisa came from their participation

in and coaching sports, as they both connected athletics with their doctoral persistence. In contrast, Henry and Natalie developed confidence, self-pride, and competitive nature in academic areas, using activities such as debate, cheerleading, and marching band to overcome shyness and develop a sense of drive.

Lisa, a Latina, also connected to her habitus to complete her Ed.D., which took eight years. As an "outward appearing white female," Lisa explained, she felt the deep-seated need to complete her degree to empower her underrepresented Latin community. This reason for persistence was inspiring and empowering for Lisa. Henry grew up with supportive parents but in a challenging environment, such as living in an apartment with rats and roaches. Henry's habitus inspired him to complete higher education to ensure he never lived in those conditions again. A survivor of domestic abuse, Denise was determined to complete her first degree and become a volleyball coach. All of the participants described events in their emerging adult years that encouraged a habitus of grit, determination, and self-awareness that connected to their ability to complete their Ed.D.

Theme Two: Academic Integration

The participants often expressed they felt supported by institutional faculty, advisors, and dissertation chairs. Each phase (coursework, candidacy, dissertation) presented unique situations of integration and persistence (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Tinto, 1993). Participants used words such as "amazing, awesome, understanding, and supportive" when describing their faculty, including their dissertation chair and committee members. They felt most of the faculty were sensitive to their working schedules and multiple demands, and accommodations would be provided as needed. However, each participant also expressed challenges.

Some students struggled in the coursework phase but most academic challenges emerged in the dissertation process. Natalie expressed the coursework she found challenging was "being in that space of truly not understanding, it's just a really vulnerable when you can't make it click or when something doesn't come naturally to you." Henry's struggles with sitting down to write added to his stress completing the program, and Denise felt large amounts of pressure and deadlines added to her stress throughout her doctoral journey.

Susana explained her cohort needed to apply to conduct research through the Institutional Research Board (IRB), but they were not given instructions. She took the initiative to call the IRB office and then relayed the message to her cohort. Denise experienced a mass exodus of leadership at her workplace, which exacerbated her workload as she began data collection. Denise realized she did not have the mental bandwidth or time to complete a qualitative study, so she changed her methodology to a quantitative study to complete it in the same timeline.

Some participants, however, encountered issues with faculty, dissertation committees, and how to write a dissertation. Natalie felt doctoral programs do not "help people understand what a dissertation is;" Lisa expressed the same concern. Lisa and Denise also described coursework that did not help them write their dissertations. Diana's committee was not knowledgeable about her topic. She felt the need to "defend her dissertation along the way." Despite this, she expressed her committee empowered her. All participants faced barriers throughout their doctoral journey, but

they possessed the acumen to overcome and resolve the barriers. Their intrinsic ability to push forward and persist was relentless.

Theme Three: Overcoming Self-Sabotage

All participants described competing demands during their program, including demanding work scenarios, changing jobs (with two of the participants changing up to three times), family deaths, relationship issues (including divorce), and health problems (one being a heart attack). These scenarios evoked stress, anxiety, and diminished mental bandwidth to concentrate on their program. Due to the demands of completing a doctoral program as a working adult, all eight alumni had self-sabotaging thoughts. These thoughts gave the students an "out," or a reason for not completing their degree, a defense mechanism to cope with stress. David's goal for his doctorate was a promotion from associate dean to dean of students or vice president of student affairs, roles that required a doctorate degree. During his program, he was promoted to assistant vice president dean of students, reaching his goal before completion. He noted that after the promotion, he thought, "why am I doing this to myself—I'm killing myself." He was at the "end" dealing with the stress. Lisa also had a prominent leadership role and rationalized a doctorate was superfluous when she felt stressed because they were already in a high-level position.

Family dynamics also lead to self-sabotaging thoughts. In response to her family's negativity, Diana felt her life would be better if she only worked and did not stay awake writing until early morning. A work promotion moved David away from his ailing father, so he feared "every time the phone rang," questioning the importance of his doctorate.

Imposter syndrome, a "sense of anxiety and self-doubt about the legitimacy" (Bothello & Roulet, 2019) of being a doctoral student, plagued all the participants. Contrary to self-sabotaging thoughts, the participants employed positive reasoning from their habitus to challenge this mental block. Natalie believed that trying to eliminate the imposter feeling was futile—the most productive method to manage it was accepting the feeling and using it as a form of humility. David and Denise used imposter syndrome as a motivator to not let any obstacle stand in their way of completing the program.

Discussion and Implications

All doctoral students face barriers in pursuit of their terminal degree. Often, these are adult students who are in relationships, possess professional positions, and juggle personal demands. They overcame negative experiences from their habitus, benefited from academic integration, and challenged self-sabotaging thoughts. This research supports extant literature, which attests competing demands and academic integration are barriers to degree completion (Bean, 1980, 1983; Golde, 1998, 2000, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Spady, 1970; Tinto 1975). Negative experiences from one's habitus and self-sabotaging thoughts are not common or well-defined in the literature, so this research defined these challenges and how students overcame them.

Our findings aligned with Tinto's (1993) framework, especially as students navigated barriers at each stage of the doctoral program: coursework, candidacy, and dissertation. Some students struggled with coursework, especially in writing, while others navigated bureaucratic data collection processes

independently. The majority of the participants struggled most during the dissertation process, which is not unique to students in Ed.D. programs (Golde, 2005). Early in the dissertation phase one participant experienced a disconnect from her chair and felt little support, which is why it took four years to complete her dissertation. Three other participants spent three to five years in the dissertation phase due to health, family, and careers. They felt disconnected from the community and lacked urgency to write the dissertation. These findings echo what Wollast et al. (2024) found in their study of Ph.D. candidates and their connection to their supervisors.

This study adds to the limited scholarship about different doctoral programs and students' experiences. Doran (2021) reflected on her scholarly identity as an Ed.D. graduate and scholar, often among graduates of Ph.D. programs. She explained the perceptions of an Ed.D. is that it is not as rigorous or perceived as "PhD-lite" (Doran, 2021, p. 111). However, she came to realize the value of her degree was not defined by others. Nuances among different graduate programs are important because their outcomes are different. Wollast et al. (2018), for example, found that graduate rates among 1,509 doctoral students in Belgium were lowest in the social sciences, followed by humanities, then health science. Doctoral students in sciences and technology had the highest graduation rates. Given these differences, it is important to learn from programs with higher completion rates as well as better understand those with more dropouts.

Further, the majority of the participants in this study were women, adding to previous literature that women in high-level positions, while pursuing their doctorate, excel in part-time programs (Hagedorn, 1999), an important finding since that study is 25 years old. The women in this study held director-level or higher positions and valued education as professional development (Bean, 1980). This study also supports Hagedorn's (1999) findings that married women persist at a higher rate. Over half of the women in this study were married.

Six of the eight participants were first generation graduate students and two of them were first generation undergraduate students. We defined first generation students whose parents did not graduate with a degree, so none of their parents had experiences beyond undergraduate degree programs, adding to the literature about students whose families have limited exposure to higher education. This is important because first generation students do not shed their identities, insecurities, or assets when they earn their first credential. Perhaps graduate programs should mirror some of the support networks and programs for first generation students often found at the undergraduate level (i.e., I'm First, First Gen Equity Program at the University of Texas at Austin; Proud to be First at the University of Buffalo).

This study is significant because a deeper understanding of how doctoral students navigate the barriers that impede completion can lead to more attentive retention and recruitment strategies, beyond the typical resources (e.g., assistantships, monetary awards, programmatic interventions). Advising, mental counseling (Benshoff et al., 2015), new student orientations (Gittings et al., 2018), and strategically planned resources (Manos et al., 2005; Sparkman et al., 2012) are mechanisms institutions can use to improve graduate persistence. Leveraging resources like learning management platforms (i.e., Canvas or Blackboard) can be a cost-effective approach to build an asynchronous orientation and resource for academic advising. Doctoral students may also benefit from more direct writing instruction, particularly scholarly writing, as well as clear instructions for university processes like IRB applications. Doctoral students need more than a link or a website to find help. Some may

not have the internal grit or habitus to overcome barriers and may need help to reframe their approach to school through tailored approaches that come from personalized advising and connections between institution officials (advisor, chair, faculty, student services) and the student.

Limitations and Delimitations

A study's limitations are characteristics of the methodology that influence research findings (Price & Merman, 2004). This study was limited by the number of participants (8) and the influence of the first author who collected the data as a doctoral student at the time of the study. Finding participants through LinkedIn meant some graduated more than eight years from the phenomena; therefore, they can experience recency bias. Their interview responses may have given greater importance to more recent memories.

This study was delimited to participants who were successful in their doctoral journey and, therefore, does not include the voices of those students who did not successfully navigate barriers. These findings, therefore, may or may not apply to other doctoral students and are not intended to be generalizable. This study was limited to a small sample to ensure ample time to conduct two rounds of interviews, allowing for rich descriptions of their life experiences and the phenomenon.

Conclusion

While half of those who commence doctoral programs depart before degree completion (Benshoff et al., 2015; Cohen & Greenberg, 2011; Gittings et al., 2018), half achieve degree completion. These rates reveal there are myriad factors that impede persistence or contribute to success (Lovitts, 2001). Historically, graduate student persistence research focused on obstacles, however, understanding the factors of persistence is also important (Lovitts, 2001). This study aimed to amplify the voices and descriptive journeys of eight students who completed their Ed.D. and gain an understanding of how they were able to overcome the obstacles revealed. Understanding how students succeed is critical to positively supporting students, leading to retention and, ultimately, degree completion.

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Appendix A

Demographic Survey (Qualtrics^{XM})

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research. With 50% or less of doctoral students who begin their studies persist to graduation, the purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Higher Education students who successfully navigated individual and institutional variables that influence persistence.

Please complete the following demographic survey. In keeping with the guidelines of the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at the University of Texas at Austin, all information provided will be kept strictly confidential. A pseudonym will be used for each participant and institutions will not be identified except by size and status and demographic data will be aggregated.

Question 2: What is your name?
Question 3: What is your email?
Question 4: What pseudonym would you like to use for this study?
Question 5: What college or university did you complete your Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Higher Education?
Question 6: What is your gender?

- Drop down with options

Question 7: What was your age when you started the Ed.D. program?

- Drop-down of age ranges

Question 8: What month and year did you start your doctoral program?
Question 9: What month and year did you complete your doctoral program?
Question 10: Are you Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin? Yes or No choices
Question11: How would you describe yourself? Please select all that apply.

- Drop-down race/ethnicity choices

Question 12: Are you first generation college student? Yes or No choices
Question 13: What is the highest degree or level of school you completed prior to starting your doctoral program?

- Drop-down education level choices

Question 6: What was your marital status at the time of completing your Ed.D.
Question7: Did you have any children while completing your doctoral program? If yes, how many and were they a dependent completing your Ed.D.
Question 8: What was your employment status during your doctoral studies?

- Drop down employment status choices

Final page: Thank you for completing the demographic survey for this study. [The researcher] will contact you to set up the first interview conducted via zoom. The interview will take 60-90 minutes. In preparation, please begin to think about the tenure of your degree and the barriers you faced. The interview questions are intended to hear your story of how you persisted to degree completion.

Appendix B

Coding and Theme Schematic

Parent Codes	Child Codes	Major Themes
Persistence	Personal	1. Habitus: Home Environment 2. Habitus: Self-Confidence/Initiation 3. Personal: Self-Awareness 4. Institutional: Social Integration (Advisor/Chair/Faculty) 5. Personal: Intrinsic Ability
	Institutional	
	Habitus	
Barriers	Personal	1. Personal: Competing Demands 2. Habitus: Negative Experiences 3. Institutional: Academic Integration 4. Personal: Self-Sabotage
	Institutional	
	Habitus	

Note. Schematic illustrating the major theme's path of discovery.

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"The Numbers Are There but the Attention is Elsewhere": An Analysis of The Boyer Report

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"The Numbers Are There but the Attention is Elsewhere": An Analysis of The Boyer Report

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Abstract

A 1998 report from the Boyer Commission called "Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities" issued a series of directives, suggestions, and critiques concerning the then-current state of undergraduate education at research universities. The document caused a minor media firestorm in the higher education and national outlets. This paper will analyze the report, the media responses to the report, and the academic articles inspired by it through the lens of the neoliberal economic models influencing higher education, encapsulated in the titular quote from the report regarding deficits in undergraduate education. We argue that neoliberal concepts infiltrated the discourse surrounding undergraduate education and provide the underpinnings for a value-added perspective on undergraduate education. We describe the historical circumstances influencing the report, conduct a poststructural analysis of the report using the lens of neoliberalism, and reflect upon the impact of the report for contemporary student affairs practitioners and faculty collaboration.

Keywords: Language, faculty affairs, neoliberalism, academic capitalism

Dedication

Dr. Somers was a true inspiration as a scholar and as a mentor. Saralyn took two classes with Dr. Somers and learned from her dedication to student success and willingness to try new pedagogical techniques. Dr. Somers was also passionate about international education and connecting students to Fulbright resources, a real specialty of hers. At her memorial, the officiant described her as a "life-friendly professor," which has been an inspiration to us. Aaron served on several committees with Dr. Somers and appreciated her wisdom and perspective in developing higher education curriculum. Dr. Somers was a constant advocate for students and how the program could be supportive of their individual needs, a model for both authors to follow in their lives.

Introduction

In 1998, a report from the Boyer Commission called "Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities" issued a series of directives, suggestions, and critiques concerning the current state of undergraduate education at research universities. Due to its bold call for action and critique of the state of higher education for student success, the document, hereafter called The Boyer Report or "the report," caused a minor media firestorm in the higher education and national outlets (e.g., Wilson, 1998). The Boyer Report provided prescribed pathways for remodeling education through a connection to analytical, fiscal, and operational components. The report has since been updated twice to modernize the components discussed in both 2002 and again in 2022 (The Boyer 2030 Commission, 2022; Katkin, 2002).

The Boyer Report provided a vision that spanned how higher education approached undergraduate education across institutions. It positioned itself as a comprehensive, authoritative look at how undergraduate education was evolving and what institutions needed to do to meet the needs and challenges of the next generations of students. Specifically, the report asked research institutions to lean into their status, size, and connections, as opposed to traditional so-called liberal models of education. As such, the report is worthy of a retrospective analysis to understand the context of its creation and its impact on higher education. We argue that while the report was heavily discussed after its release, its effects have persisted throughout the succeeding decades and permeated the way in which higher education has approached undergraduate study. Given the latest update's vision towards the next six years, it is timely to reinvestigate the report and its impact.

In this article, we therefore analyze The Boyer Report, the media responses, and the academic articles inspired by the report through the lens of the neoliberal economic models influencing higher education during the time period and in the present (McKinnon-Crowley, 2022), encapsulated in the titular quote from the report regarding deficits in undergraduate education (The Boyer Commission, 1998). We argue that neoliberal concepts infiltrated the discourse surrounding undergraduate education and provided the underpinnings for a value-added perspective on undergraduate education. These neoliberal assumptions reinforce a view of undergraduate higher education as chiefly economically beneficial and faculty as the sole dispensers of a contractually obligated service. In this article, we will describe the historical circumstances and people which influenced the original report, the media responses to the report, conduct a poststructural analysis of the report using the neoliberal lens, and reflect upon the impact of the report on contemporary student affairs practice. Additionally, we will examine how the implications of neoliberal discourse produce ongoing ripples for student affairs.

What is Neoliberalism?

For the purposes of this paper, we define neoliberalism in two ways: economically and discursively. Neoliberal economic assumptions that came to the forefront of American and British governmental philosophy in the 1980s concerning the public good and the purpose and economic value of education undergird The Boyer Report (Esson & Ertl, 2016; McKinnon-Crowley, 2022), though it flourished in the soil set by earlier economists like Friedrich Hayek (Olssen & Peters, 2005). Economic neoliberalism, as presented by Olssen and Peters (2005), is "a politically imposed discourse" in which "the state seeks to create an individual that is an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur" (p. 314; p. 315). In education, neoliberalism operates through "a positive conception of the state's role in creating the appropriate market by providing the conditions, laws and institutions necessary for its operation" (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p. 315). In this view, the *only* purpose the state has is to create a free, unfettered market (Boyd, 2011; Gonzales & Ayers, 2018; Levin, 2005, 2017). Discursive neoliberalism is how this philosophy functions at the level of individual actions (Han, 2017; McKinnon-Crowley, 2022). We ask the reader to keep both of these concepts in mind when we deploy the term in this paper.

Neoliberalism, Higher Education, and Student Affairs

The perpetuation of this neoliberal discourse and its associated impacts has vast ramifications for student affairs departments and professionals. We define student affairs as the role within higher

education that handles aspects of student experience outside the classroom, such as orientation, sorority and fraternity life, residence life, and student conduct (Voyles et al., 2019). A supposedly authoritative document that filters educational success through an economic approach marginalizes the qualitative, holistic, and humanist work from student affairs professionals that cannot be quantified in an algorithmic way (Han, 2017; McKinnon-Crowley, 2022; Smithers, 2023). Furthermore, the centering of faculty as deliverers for an educational *product* to students as *consumers* positions student affairs as superfluous and asks how student affairs work and production is an economic value-add for the student consumers (Squire & Nicolazzo, 2019). We do not believe that student affairs work can be reduced to an economic cost/benefit analysis, and indeed posit that such an analysis necessarily marginalizes student groups and identities who most need the support of universities and who are least captured by the discourse of streamlined efficiencies (Smithers, 2019).

Method

We investigated the history of the Boyer Report and analyzed its discourse from a poststructuralist perspective. For this paper, we define discourse as a tool of poststructural analysis that signifies a form of power relations unconsciously created and sustained by society that implicitly limits possible words, actions, and thoughts by its existence (MacLure, 2003; Voyles et al., 2019). In order to engage the Boyer Report for this analysis, we employed a twofold process. First, we performed a close reading the original Boyer Report (The Boyer Commission, 1998), looking for ruptures and breaks in the discourse, where we found overt and covert signals of neoliberalist discourse. Then, we gathered the popular media and scholarly journal reception (primarily through editorials) surrounding the Boyer Report, looking for their connections to the neoliberalism discursive node presented in the Boyer Report. Third, we reviewed the scholarly articles that mentioned the Boyer Report for the discursive moves relating to neoliberalism. Finally, we reviewed updates of the Boyer Report to see what had changed in subsequent years.

Stemming from the tradition of poststructuralist, Foucauldian discourse analysis (Foucault, 1980, 1991), we did not try to focus on a totalizing history, but instead investigated both factors immediately impacting the Boyer Report, and its impact on higher education discourse and the neoliberal framing present in higher education.

In this methodology, we aimed to construct a recent history of the report, characterize its popular and scholarly media depictions, and systematically analyze those to see what emerged. Following scholars who have grappled with the challenges of writing scholarly narratives of near-contemporary times (Romano, 2012; Romano & Potter, 2012), we were careful to be open to what we saw and "question[ed] the narrative" "developed about the past" for the Boyer Report and its role in changing higher education at research-intensive universities (Romano & Potter, 2012, p. 16). When analyzing, we looked for neoliberalism's current form as of this writing rather than the way it would have operated in the 1990s. In the wake of Foucault (1972), we aimed for a fluid process focused on where nodes of discourse became apparent. We also employed strategies from Kendall and Wickham (1999), who aimed to refine Foucault's process, and constructed our investigation by examining how The Boyer Report produced the *sayable* and delimits the *unsayable* in its framing of higher education. When we analyzed the data following this process, we initially noted the content. On subsequent readings, we looked for manifestations of the value of education in these nodes,

where we found a dominant neoliberal discourse and the perpetuation of neoliberal concepts within the report.

The Boyer Report: Who, What, When, and Where

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching published The Boyer Report in 1998 as the result of a three-year study sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation (Bateman, 2010; The Boyer Commission, 1998). According to their mission statement, the Carnegie Foundation is a research center that has "set its sights on tackling the nation's most significant educational challenge: achieving educational equity for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian and Pacific Islander, and first-generation students, as well as those from low-income households" and committed to using its resources to foster new research and practice collaborations in service of this aim (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, n.d., para. 3). Initial work on the report began in 1995 under the leadership of Ernest L. Boyer, the President of the Carnegie Foundation. After Boyer's death in 1995, the Commission was renamed "The Boyer Commission" in his honor.

The Boyer Commission's makeup included 11 members, six working directly in academia, three from American educational government agencies such as the National Academy of Sciences and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and arts and science organizations, as well as a designer and illustrator (The Boyer Commission, 1998). Katkin (2003) described the commission as "made up of eminent and creative thinkers from academia, government, and the arts;" the selection process for commission members is not described in the report itself (p. 21). Shirley Strum Kenny, president of the State University of New York at Stony Brook, chaired the commission and spoke to the media about the report after its publication. Robert W. Kenny, Shirley Strum Kenny's husband and not a member of the commission, wrote the report (The Boyer Commission, 1998; Goldberg, 1999).

The rationale for constructing the report came from the perception that students attending research universities were not receiving the best education for their money. Per the report, research universities (using the Carnegie classification) receive money from undergraduate students but often do not provide them with a product of equivalent value in return (The Boyer Commission, 1998, p. 1). Though universities had made strides toward changing undergraduate education, the Commission (1998) deemed these "cosmetic surgery" rather than "radical reconstruction" of institutional priorities (p. 6). A pervasive separation between faculty and graduate students, which reached to the undergraduate population, leading to alienation between students and faculty. Faculty were loyal solely to their discipline; students were puzzled by both disciplinary boundaries and a culture focused on research rather than teaching at their institution. According to Bateman (2010), the Commission was inspired by an undergraduate curriculum reform movement originating in the 1980s and a data-driven response to curriculum effectiveness and change taking place in the 1990s. National panels like the Business-Higher Education Forum proposed education reform based on non-discipline-specific results such as "critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication, and responsible citizenship" supported by reported workforce needs (Bateman, 2010, p. 108). The Boyer Commission wrote in response to these calls for reform and focused specifically on research universities due to their numerical influence on undergraduate education in the United States (The Boyer Commission, 1998; Katkin, 2003).

The report described the contemporary state of undergraduate education in the United States at research universities. It decried the lamentable amount of monetary and temporal resources provided for the undergraduate experience and offered 10 recommendations for change. These recommendations included centering the undergraduate education experience on research-based learning, creating a unified first-year experience focusing on inquiry, linking communication and writing to the undergraduate curriculum, improving graduate and faculty pedagogy, providing incentives to good teachers, and making a sense of community for all members of the research university campus (The Boyer Commission, 1998, pp. 15-36). Conceptually, the report suggested, the culture of research institutions should meaningfully change to prioritize undergraduate education. According to the report, administrative structures ought to reward quality undergraduate teaching, and offer financial incentives and tenure-related benefits to faculty who dedicated their time to undergraduate students. Upon its release, the report generated much commentary within the higher education community (e.g., Cornwell & Marcus, 1998; Lepkowski, 1998).

The Contemporary and Current Response

Published on the Stony Brook website, the report received over 15,000 visits within the first week of its publication (Cornwell & Marcus, 1998). Publications as diverse as *Science*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *The Times Higher Education Supplement* covered the report's release (Holden, 1998; Sandham, 1998; Wilson, 1998). Responses from the higher education sector varied. Some industry representatives expressed dissatisfaction with the report's invective, claiming that the reforms suggested in the report were already in progress and discounted by the report's authors (Bateman, 2010). Writing in *Chemical Engineering News,* Lepkowski (1998) reported: "The [Boyer] commission thought its report would be controversial. It was right. Media accounts elicited an outraged response from presidents of many of the country's top universities" at the spring meeting of the Association of American Universities (AAU) (p. 9). An article in *Science* reported that Dr. Kenny, the commission chair, wanted the report to be "'a call to arms'" though the AAU president, Cornelius Pings, characterized the report as an inaccurate picture of research university faculty's efforts to engage undergraduates in research (Holden, 1998, p. 681). Lepkowski (1998) presented a dissenting voice from The Boyer Commission in the form of Bruce Alberts, President of the National Academy of Sciences, who suggested that the report diminished the effort universities have made to reform freshman teaching. Dr. Kenny stated that the report was not intended to be "inflammatory" but rather "a 'wake-up call'" for "persistent" problems facing research-intensive institutions (Lepkowski, 1998, p. 9).

Other responses to The Boyer Report were positive. They applauded the creative and substantive approach to reforming undergraduate education. In an editorial for the *Journal of Chemical Education,* Moore (1998) wrote:

> Its [the Commission's] report deserves a careful, critical reading by all of us, not just those at research universities. Such a reading will certainly broaden our thinking about how we might improve the teaching/learning process, and it might just cause us to change some preconceived notions. Applying to the problem of improving undergraduate education the same kind of thought and creativity that go into research projects is something we all should do more often. (p. 935)

Moore framed undergraduate education as a problem to be solved, encouraging faculty buy-in by presenting undergraduate education as a tempting research question and downplaying the rhetoric of the report. Almost all media coverage besides Moore's editorial focused on the searing indictments of undergraduate education proposed by the report (Cornwell & Marcus, 1998; "Research Universities Neglect Students," 1998; Sandham, 1998; "Undergrads Shortchanged," 1998; Wilson; 1998). Moore's affirming response to the report was echoed by academic articles written years later about the report's impact on undergraduate education (Bateman, 2010; Hu et al., 2007; Katkin, 2003).

The Report's Impact

Studies conducted on the effectiveness of the report indicate that at least some of the suggestions for reform have been implemented in the nation's universities. In a quantitative study concerning the frequency of undergraduate research in all institutions of higher education, Hu et al. (2007) found that the amount has increased nationwide after 1998. Their data, however, indicated that this increase was not limited to research universities, and access to research programs at research universities is limited to the most academically successful students. The Boyer Report was updated in 2002 with the results of a longitudinal mixed-methods study of research institutions and their progress toward implementing the report's suggestions (Katkin, 2003) and again in 2022 (The Boyer 2030 Commission, 2022).

In the recent update, The Boyer 2030 Commission adopted language around equity and a classic, liberal education, but maintained a framework of neoliberalism. For example, its references to equity are framed in regard to what businesses desire in hiring and how businesses value diversity of identity and thought. It encouraged institutions to track job placements as a way of understanding how 'world ready' students are on the pathway to economic independence.

Even its most progressive diversity, equity, and inclusion discussions are framed within a response to a dominant neoliberal discourse. In a way, The Boyer 2030 Commission is responding to a discursive node that it employed and perpetuated within higher education.

As a result of the report, an attitudinal change regarding the value of undergraduate education has taken place on certain campuses. After the report's publication, universities supposed "research engagement in various forms" both "in formal ways, such as designated courses, funding support, and organizations to help open opportunities for research in the lab and elsewhere" and to increase students' professional development opportunities (Douglass & Zhao, 2013, p. 2). Per Katkin (2003), campus administrative leaders have employed The Boyer Report as "'ammunition'" to increase attention paid to undergraduate education (p. 35). As a result of the report's "'call to arms,'" the administrative generals had marshaled their considerable institutional forces toward improving undergraduate education, with observable, quantifiable results (Cornwell & Marcus 1998, p. 12). The Boyer Report has contributed to a nationwide growth in undergraduate research efforts at research-intensive institutions and elsewhere in all disciplines (Cooper et al., 2019; Craney et al., 2011; Larracey et al., 2023).

The Boyer Report: The Why

The Boyer Report creates a market for a particular type of undergraduate education by outlining an ideal of what that education should be, namely a sound financial investment with appropriate monetary returns. The Boyer Report's conception of a university is fundamentally market-based.

The Business of Undergraduate Education

The following excerpt from The Boyer Report encapsulates the most inflammatory language utilized in the report, and made visible the neoliberal assumptions underlying the logic of the Commission:

> The research universities have too often failed, and continue to fail, their undergraduate populations. Tuition income from undergraduates is one of the major sources of university income, helping to support research programs and graduate education, but the students paying the tuition get, in all too many cases, less than their money's worth. An undergraduate at an American research university can receive an education as good or better than anything available anywhere in the world, but that is not the normative experience. Again and again, universities are guilty of an advertising practice they would condemn in the commercial world. Recruitment materials display proudly the world-famous professors, the splendid facilities and the ground-breaking research that goes on within them, but thousands of students graduate without ever seeing the world-famous professors or tasting genuine research. Some of their instructors are likely to be badly trained or even untrained teaching assistants who are groping their way toward a teaching technique; some others may be tenured drones who deliver set lectures from yellowed notes, making no effort to engage the bored minds of the students in front of them. (pp. 5-6)

This passage revealed a preoccupation with the economic value of education and the role of the research universities as a dispenser of a financially beneficial services. The chief rationale in this passage for improving undergraduate education is that they are paying for this service, and therefore deserve their money's worth. Continuing to deploy the language of business, the report's authors protest the false advertising utilized in recruiting materials because the product promised does not have the promoted result. Graduate student and tenured faculty's quality of teaching frames the effectiveness of the service in terms of customer satisfaction. The language and neoliberal assumptions of this passage, often quoted in its media coverage, permeates the rest of the report and contributed to a neoliberal discourse regarding education as a good which can be bought and sold on the public, open market to make more effective consumers.

The Boyer Report constructs the undergraduate at a research university as an enterprising consumer who exercises his or her "sovereignty" in choosing and receiving an appropriately valuable education (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p. 315). Acting in a similar role to the state, The Boyer Commission reframes the public good of education as an economic good, influenced by tenets of public choice theory and its pioneering conceptualization of politicians and policy actors as economic actors (Olssen & Peters, 2005; Rizvi, 2006). Public choice theory often conceptualizes market governance as "a supply-side process of 'governing without governing', a process by which compliance is extracted through systems that measure performance according to both externally imposed levers,

and internally reinforced targets" (Olssen & Peters, 2005, pp. 319–320). Undergraduate education is successful when graduates are appropriately prepared for careers.

Businesses also seem to be the intended audience for the product of universities. The report stated, "corporate leaders complain that new Ph.D.s too often fail as communicators and cannot advance their own careers or contribute to the success of their companies," a failure that research universities ought to address (The Boyer Commission, 1998, p. 30). The Boyer Report extricates compliant behavior from its higher education audience by creating a method to measure performance of undergraduate institutions and deploying strong language to compel institutions to fall in line with the requirements made in the report. Media coverage of the report, encouraged and utilized by The Boyer Commission's chair, became a discursive tool to regulate acceptable undergraduate education. Acceptable undergraduate education, per the report, does not include academically underprepared students.

Discursive Exclusion

In the report, the ideal undergraduate student is one who enrolls ready and able to learn at the level expected by the faculty. Academic preparation includes "satisfactory mathematics and oral and written language skills" needed "before taking any credit courses" (The Boyer Commission, 1998, p. 20). Continuing the description of the ideal student, they write: "remediation should not be a function of a research university; for a research university to devote a large portion of its faculty time and its facilities to prepare students for university study represents a dissipation of increasingly scarce resources;" the onus for academic preparation lies with the student and explained away through a neoliberal preoccupation with efficient dispensation of "resources" (The Boyer Commission, 1998, p. 20). Remediation is specifically removed from the purview of research universities to other institutional types. Writing an editorial regarding the report, this sentiment is echoed by Moore (1998):

> In at least one area, remedial work at the freshman level, faculty will probably applaud the commission's report. It proposes that remedial work should be carried out before a student enrolls in a research university: through summer programs, in pre-college institutions, at other kinds of post-secondary institutions, or by special, noncredit courses such as English as a second language. Students in beginning courses would then be ready for the significantly different, inquiry-based kind of education that is advocated for the first year. (p. 935).

The removal of students who are not 'ready' for college reveals a lack of attention to pervasive structural inequities impacting student academic preparation. Students who require any remedial work receive a message of non-belonging and the assumption that they are not the kind of students The Boyer Commission would like research universities to teach, the students who "will provide the scientific, technological, academic, political, and creative leadership for the next century" (1998, p. 13). By implication, students needing remedial work require outside assistance and discursively constructed as not being those types of leaders.

Discursive Exclusion and Graduate Students

In particular, the report features a concerning framing where non-native English-speaking teachers are singled out as an area of high concern and as (The Boyer Commission, 1998):

> One of the conspicuous problems of undergraduate education. Unless fully proficient speakers of English are attracted to the professoriate in the United States, these problems will continue to exist. Research universities have, therefore, a strong interest in introducing research-based education to undergraduates who are proficient in English in the hope that many of those research-trained undergraduates will be drawn toward academic careers. Joined by the bright and eager international students, they will furnish unprecedented pools of talent from which future faculties will be drawn. (p. 10)

Faculty and their wellspring, graduate students, are only valuable inasmuch as they speak English well. Coupled with their research ability, their linguistic proficiency is the extent of their value to the university. This framing continues the neoliberal trend of reducing students to numerical statistics in which their added value (so to speak) is related to their ability to achieve economic success through education (Smithers, 2019). When the value of education is economized, populations that are not immediately successful are necessarily marginalized through either exclusion or the building of deficit-model interventions.

The implication here is that research universities are disincentivized to train or help those who are *not* proficient in English, implying ability in the language to be a fixed, immutable characteristic and prioritizing the abilities of first-language English speakers in what Tavares (2022) called "native-speakerism" (p. 2). Though implicit, the xenophobic undercurrents regarding who should and ought to do research and teach at research-intensive universities is both troubling and characteristic of a neoliberal university (Tavares, 2022).

The Point of Neoliberal Learning in the Report

The Boyer Report itself functioned in a constructive role, expressing a neoliberalist discourse and a technique of market governance supported by Public Choice Theory and dictating in what ways education is an economic good owed to the student consumers. As Foucault (1977/1980) would say, the report "play[ed] at once a conditioning and conditioned role" (p. 142). Education is valued in the report solely for its productive influence on students. Learning is not valued for its own sake; it is only useful when it creates and sustains the status quo. As the report says in quoting Massachusetts Institute of Technology President Charles Vest, "government funding of research in the universities is also an investment in the education of the next generation, with every dollar doing double duty, 'a beautiful and efficient concept'" (The Boyer Commission, 1998, p. 10). Efficiency stands as a hallmark of neoliberal economics. Government funding sustains an economic, instrumental vision of undergraduate education prized for its appeal only insofar as it relates to The Boyer Report's vision of an ideal educational model. The ideal education for these students, however, is devoid of student affairs. Any conception of a student as existing at the university for development outside of the classroom or alternate conceptions of students as anything other than participants in an academic capitalist marketplace (Rhoades & Slaughter, 2004; Taylor, 2020).

Effects and Implications for Student Affairs

The Boyer Report never mentions practitioners of student affairs or related synonyms, nor does it suggest opportunities for collaboration between faculty and student affairs; the vision appears limited to those on the ground doing the daily work of campus rather than higher-level leadership like Boards of Governors. The last recommendation in the report, "Cultivate a sense of community," contained ideas for increasing a sense of campus belonging but without mentioning student affairs (The Boyer Commission, 1998, p. 34). Suggestions included forming small campus groups, creating and sustaining shared rituals, appreciating diversity, and connecting campus residents and commuter students (The Boyer Commission, 1998, p. 34-36). Though published in 1998, the report indicates that at this time faculty interests (The Boyer Commission) were served *by* student development rather than working side-by-side with student affairs practitioners (Doyle, 2004; Voyles, 2015). Faculty alone possess responsibility for undergraduate education.

This responsibility extends to academic advising and critiques improper advising practices. Claiming that bad advising is responsible for student disengagement, the authors write that most academic advising is perfunctory and pays insufficient attention to student needs, stating that "students who find that existing majors do not suit their interests often encounter discouraging barriers; advisors will likely first try to fit those interests into one of the existing patterns" (The Boyer Commission, 1998, p. 24). In the report, advising does not seem to be solely the purview of professional advisors – faculty who provide "routine suggestions about choice of courses" are also targeted for their lack of attention to individualized student concerns (The Boyer Commission, 1998, p. 24). Rather than presenting a vision of an integrated campus in which faculty work with student affairs, the exclusion of student affairs professionals from the narrative of campus change and undergraduate education silences and excludes those community members (Doyle, 2004).

A Foundational Document?

Despite the omission of student affairs from the document, The Boyer Report initially came to Saralyn's attention because it was assigned reading in a first-semester, master's level introductory course to College Student Personnel Administration. We read the report in the early weeks of the class along with other foundational philosophical documents for the field. The exclusion of student affairs from The Boyer Report supports Arcelus' (2011) assertion that cultural misunderstandings about the role and purpose of faculty and student affairs abound and also hamper collaboration. If the high-ranking faculty, staff, and non-academic leaders who wrote the report do not see a place for student affairs in undergraduate education at research universities, why would the rank-and-file feel a need to work together? Without a perception of a common goal, faculty and student affairs may exist at cross-purposes at research universities. A possible solution is, as Arcelus (2011) suggested, a shared understanding that faculty and staff may hold undergraduate education in the highest regard and that the future may be faculty and student affairs working together to achieve that goal (Doyle, 2004, p. 76).

Conclusion

Upon its publication, The Boyer Report had a sensational effect on the national conversation about undergraduate education at research universities. Influenced by neoliberal economic thought—likely

implicitly—the report conceptualized undergraduate students as consumers who deserve to receive an appropriate financial return on their monetary investment. The report professes shock that these consumers have subsidized the work of the research university without adequate compensation. By focusing on neoliberal concepts of education as a consumable good, the report erases the role of student affairs professionals in undergraduate education. It sidelines both students who are not sufficiently prepared for their part in the contractual exchange of educational goods and services and the role of student affairs professionals in undergraduate education.

The Boyer Report redefines campus communities not as communal enterprises, but rather as a series of transactions. It positions students as both consumers and assets (McKinnon-Crowley, 2022). They are consumers who seek a product, pay for it, and expect delivery. They are assets in that they are financial targets for a university to recruit, maintain, and graduate. As consumers, universities then must streamline efficiencies to maximize economic benefit per consumer rather than tailor education to each individual student. As assets, universities must conceptualize students as a numerical benefit that can be resourced for partnerships in the community, with corporations, and for alumni and other stakeholders.

Further, the Boyer Report reduces classrooms to content delivery apparatuses, faculty as vessels for content delivery, student affairs to amenities, and student support and services into a process to keep students enrolled for the good of the university's numbers rather than students' unique educational needs. Though collaboration between faculty and student affairs in the pursuit of undergraduate education is possible, the report discursively silences the role of non-faculty members in achieving that aim—and minimizes the unique role of faculty individuality as well. We encourage institutions not to think of students as consumers or assets, but rather to think of the campus community in a holistic way. The field of student affairs ideally creates an environment that supports all students. The work takes shape and form in a multitude of ways that must be measured and understood through more lenses than just that of neoliberal capitalism.

Our aim in presenting this analysis of The Boyer Report is to illuminate the neoliberal underpinnings that have perpetuated a notion of student-as-consumer and quantitative-over-qualitative paradigm throughout higher education (McKinnon-Crowley, 2022). The Boyer Report can be read as illustrating a rulebook for a game of neoliberal comparison: faculty versus student affairs. In such a comparison game, student affairs cannot be fully valued because neoliberal discourse does not value student affairs. As institutions attempt to address neoliberal concerns, additional cuts, marginalization, and reduction will occur because the discursive environment will never position student affairs as a key component to education in a non-economic sense. Non-economic benefits will never be valued over economic ones in a neoliberal system. In order to address the discursive environment, we felt it necessary to analyze some of the key discursive nodes for neoliberal discourse in The Boyer Report so that student affairs professionals and other members of campus communities can better understand, adapt, and respond to changes in higher education to support all students.

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A Difference-in-Difference Examination of Tennessee Promise's Influence on Community College Enrollment by Student Adjusted Gross Income

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Abstract

We utilize a difference-in-difference design to examine the effect of adopting a statewide promise program on the enrollment of community college students across socio-economic status. Limited by a small sample size for treated units, we find inferential evidence that the adoption of a state-wide, last-dollar promise program for community colleges with no merit-based or need-based criteria raised the enrollment of in-state first-time-in-college, full-time students in their first year of college from families that earned between $0 and $75,000 in adjusted gross income. Effect sizes were largest for students from the lowest SES group ($0 to $30,000) approximately 168 additional students enrolled per 2-year institution per year following Tennessee Promise program adoption. Findings controlled for year-to-year variations in unemployment and state price parities. We discuss benefits and concerns regarding scholarships such as the Tennessee Promise that increase enrollment for lower-income students but do not affect the amount of financial aid included in their award packages in practice.

Keywords: Free college, promise programs, difference-in-difference, socioeconomic status, college affordability

Dedication

Pat Somers had diverse scholarly interests. Her expertise in financial aid influenced my decision to attend the University of Missouri – St. Louis in hopes of working with her. Throughout my time in the program, her classes, our conversations, and collaborations with her, I discovered her expansive interests spanning methodology, history, activism, free speech, institutional research, and international higher education. Pat always had intriguing ideas and inspired us with her remarkable capacity to view complex problems as opportunities.

I often tell students and colleagues that learning from Pat's enthusiasm was both a gift and challenge. Her wide-ranging interests and ability to nurture curiosity with methodological expertise greatly enriched our learning experiences. The gift lies in our growth as scholars. The challenge is that many of us were drawn to explore diverse topics rather than establishing a singular scholarly focus. In today's faculty marketplace and tenure processes, that is less desirable. But we are better scholars for it, and I am grateful to her for modelling this approach.

This paper connects multiple themes that held significance for Pat. It represents a quantitative exploration of financial aid policies and practices. Research on promise programs would have been a natural progression of her work. She also championed the community college mission. It also addresses access to higher education, a topic of great importance to Pat.
Most significantly, this paper is a collaborative effort that includes former and current students. Pat served as my dissertation chair, and I chaired Gresham's dissertation, which makes her his "grand

chair." She would have truly enjoyed collaborating with Zac, who shares many of her interests and demonstrates her enthusiasm and intellectual ability. While she was unable to directly contribute to the paper, her connection to this subject and to our growth as scholars are evident.

– J. Patrick Biddix

Introduction

States have a vested interest in maintaining a skilled workforce – benefits to states include attracting employers to the regions within the state, developing a higher earning tax base, and providing a path to upward social mobility for residents (Berger & Fisher, 2013; Chetty et al., 2017; Ma et al., 2019). However, the cost of postsecondary education is a barrier to accessing higher education and obtaining an award (Somers, 1996). Average annual tuition and fee costs at public, 2-year colleges grew by approximately 15.3 percent or $500 in 2021-2022 constant dollars between the 2011-2012 and 2021-2022 academic years (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023). Rising costs coincide with concerning trends in access and graduation; socio-economic gaps in access and obtainment have widened over time with lower income students being most affected by the barrier of cost (Cofer & Somers, 2001; Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). Currently, the predicted share of jobs requiring a high school diploma or less will shrink from a 32 percent share to 28 percent of jobs by 2030 (Carnevale et al., 2021). This highlights the problem motivating this study: if states cannot increase enrollment and graduation from postsecondary education, the resulting shortage in formally educated workers may create negative economic forces that states and their citizens will have to weather.

If higher income students are those who are more likely to enroll and graduate from college than their lower-income peers (Chetty et al., 2020), then states could focus on policy levers that increase postsecondary participation for lower income students to maximize potential postsecondary participation. In 2014 Tennessee was the first state to introduce a statewide tuition-and-fee free community/technical college promise program which served its first students in the fall of 2015. This policy tool was situated by Tennessee's then governor to simultaneously address postsecondary affordability and scale the states skilled labor force to meet the demand of employers interested in relocating to Tennessee (Collom, 2021; Hyder & Driscoll, 2023; Hyder et al., 2023). Through this policy adoption, state leadership hoped to create a stronger college going culture in Tennessee.

The purpose of this manuscript is to investigate the relationship between the adoption of state-wide, tuition-and-fee free community/technical college and enrollment across socio-economic groups. We utilized a difference-in-difference framework to analyze Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System's (IPEDS) first-time-in-college, first-year enrollment data for in-state students who were awarded any Title IV Federal financial aid by income level. Using this data, we studied the influence of adopting the Tennessee Promise on enrollment by income group as compared to 2-year public institutions in states with no state-wide tuition-and-fee-free community/technical college.
To our knowledge we are the first to utilize IPEDS enrollment counts by socio-economic category in this type of design or to investigate effects of adopting tuition-free community college. Limited by a staggered adoption process for the Tennessee Promise, we examine the influence of tuition/fee free college adoption on a smaller sub-set of 5 Tennessee community colleges. Our research

question asks: *Are there differences in effect size regarding the influence of Tennessee Promise adoption on students by socio-economic status?*

As the first state-wide promise program, scholars have previously studied Tennessee Promise's effect on community college enrollment. These analyses have focused on examining the program's effect across covariates such race and gender but not as closely on socio-economic status. Researchers know that socio-economic status is heavily linked to issues of racial and gender inequity (Chetty et al., 2020), so the lack of research on promise programs and socio-economic status in this area represents a gap in our understanding of how these programs affect students.

Review of Literature

Income is a variable of interest in examining college enrollment because socio-economic status is correlated with college attendance and selection. For example, the highest two quintiles of socio-economic status enrolled in postsecondary education at rates between 77 and 89 percent while students from the lowest two quintiles only enrolled at rates between 51 and 58 percent (Reber & Smith, 2023). Because lower shares of lower socioeconomic students enroll in postsecondary education, this population represents the largest share of people that could potentially generate the additional graduates desired by state governments for economic development. Thus, it is important to examine whether workforce development programs such as Tennessee Promise have differential effect sizes by income group. In this literature review, we provide a brief introduction relevant past research for promise programs broadly and then Tennessee Promise specifically.

Review of Promise Program Literature

Although the Tennessee Promise is a workforce development policy, the lever through which it affects students is financial aid. Thus, research on Tennessee Promise and its effects on students are closely related to other literature on financial aid. As individuals are exposed to additional aid and costs of attendance are lowered, student enrollment, program completion, and post-graduation outcomes such as earnings increase (Deming & Dynarski, 2010; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013; Dynarski et al., 2023; Long, 2008; Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). Within this body of research, studies on place-based scholarships or promise programs as a form of financial aid have demonstrated positive effects on postsecondary enrollment with program features such as award amounts influencing program effects (Dynarski et al., 2023; Swanson et al., 2020).

Studies on the earliest promise programs such as the Kalamazoo Promise established that these programs affect the postsecondary enrollment choices of students (Daughtery & Gonzalez, 2016; Gonzalez et al., 2011; Swanson et al., 2020). One study found that the announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise led to a 9 percent increase in the probability of students from Kalamazoo earning any postsecondary credits (Bartik & Lachowska, 2012). Another early study found that the effects of promise programs on where students choose to enroll were stronger among students from families earning less than $50,000 in annual income (Andrews et al., 2010).

However, promise programs represent a diverse collection of place-based scholarships, with a great deal in variety such as how funds are dispersed to students (e.g., first-dollar vs. last-dollar), where funds may be utilized, the intensity of early awareness operations for the program, and how large the

scholarship's service area is (Perna & Leigh, 2018). Here, we highlight two major differences between the Tennessee Promise and this early research on programs such as the Kalamazoo Promise. First, the Tennessee Promise only covers the costs of tuition and fees for sub-baccalaureate programs in Tennessee whereas students in other programs may be able to enroll in private and/or 4-year institutions. Second, is that the Tennessee Promise is configured as a last-dollar scholarship. This means that students' other aid such as Pell grants or merit aid are applied to students' balances before Tennessee Promise funds are dispersed.

Review of Tennessee Promise Literature

This has resulted in 43.6 and 46.0 percent of students from the first and second cohorts receiving zero dollars in promise funds as their tuition and fee costs are covered by their Pell grant or other scholarships (Tennessee Board of Regents, 2018; 2019). While this report has not been released in recent years, the proportion of Tennessee Promise students eligible for a full Pell grant award (EFC of $0) has remained consistent between 28 and 30 percent of each cohort since launch with likely a similar number of students in recent cohorts that received $0 in Tennessee Promise funds (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2023).

Regarding Tennessee Promise specifically, relevant research includes studies on both this program and a predecessor program, KnoxAchieves. Started six years before the Tennessee Promise in 2009, KnoxAchieves served high school graduates in Knox County, Tennessee by providing college coaching and financial aid support. Researchers found KnoxAchieves increased the enrollment of county high school graduates in the area's community college by 3.1 to 4.9 percentage points (Carruthers & Fox, 2016). Using program and district records for free and reduced lunch price program participation, the researchers were able to conduct an analysis that considered socio-economic status and concluded that the program had stronger effects for students that had participated in the free and reduced lunch program as compared to students that did not participate in this program (Carruthers & Fox, 2016).

However, researchers also share that the effects of KnoxAchieves may not only be due to the treatment of receiving more financial aid but also due to supplemental college advising and coaching services embedded in the program (Carruthers & Fox, 2016). This focus on college advising/coaching may have helped to spread awareness of student eligibility for not just the program's aid but also other need-based aid which may have increased effect sizes among its lower-income students.

Two previous studies have utilized difference-in-difference to examine the effect of the adoption of Tennessee Promise on community college enrollment for the entire state. In both studies, researchers considered race/ethnicity as covariates for analysis. These studies both found a positive effect on community college enrollment with both showing significant increases in Black enrollment (House & Dell, 2020; Nguyen, 2020). Only one of the two showed significant increases for Hispanic enrollment (Nguyen, 2020).

Of note is that the House and Dell (2020) study included a descriptive analysis considering socio-economic status. In this enrollment focused study, researchers conducted a descriptive analysis of Pell grant eligibility, adjusted gross income (AGI), and estimated family contribution (EFC).

Findings of this analysis found that the percent of Pell eligible students fell from 71.4% to 55.7%, average AGI rose from $41,658.22 to $66,439.88, and average EFC rose from 5,909.04 to 12,515,47 between 2013 and 2017 (House & Dell, 2020). These aligns with earlier findings from KnoxAchieves: increased enrollment following the adoption of free community college results in part due to students substituting away from more expensive 4-year institutions to the tuition/fee free 2-year institutions (Carruthers & Fox, 2016).

Our study builds upon these earlier attempts to consider socio-economic status across a more detailed categorical variable than previously done in estimating the effect of the adoption of free community college programs. The study on KnoxAchieves utilized free-and-reduced-lunch participation as a proxy for financial need in a propensity score analysis and found that KnoxAchieves students participating in free-and-reduced-lunch programs enrolled in community college at a rate of 1.2 percentage points more than their non-free-and-reduced-lunch eligible peers following adoption of the Tennessee Promise (Carruthers & Fox, 2016).

However, eligibility for free-and-reduced-lunch is an important albeit broad indicator of socio-economic status. The free-and-reduced-lunch eligibility threshold in the KnoxAchieves sample was $44,123 for a family of four and the median income in Tennessee at that time was $48,500 in 2016 constant dollars (Carruthers & Fox, 2020). While many students may be eligible for this program and benefit from its financial support, not all students experience the same degree of need within the free and reduced lunch program. For example, in 2012 over half of public-school children qualified for free-and-reduced-lunch, but only 22 percent were designated as living in poverty (Snyder & Musu-Gillette, 2015). Our study builds upon these two examples that consider socio-economic status by examining multiple income categories rather than a broad binary indicator of socio-economic status.

Method

Because an initial analysis of descriptive trends supported evidence of a parallel trends assumption, we identified difference-in-difference (DID) as an appropriate method for analysis. We utilized a DID design to examine the introduction of the Tennessee Promise (treatment) during and following the 2015-2016 academic year (post-treatment period). As a control for state-level economic forces that could influence enrollment, we included unemployment and regional price parities in our regression model as covariates. We also removed sub-state level promise programs. Doing this allowed us to account for the staggered adoption of the Tennessee Promise within the treatment group and institutions that may utilize local promise programs from our comparison group. Due to the potential for observations to have zero students enrolled within income categories, we are not able to use a log conversion to put findings into percent changes. Therefore, we report findings by increased number of students rather than percent change. Finally, we conducted a placebo test using non-treated states as a treated unit as a robustness check on our results. We used Stata version 18 for all data analysis in this project.

Data

We collected publicly available data from the IPEDS (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023), state unemployment rates from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics for each July prior to the

start of the fall term, and regional price parities. Regional price parities are measures of the purchasing power of a dollar provided by the US Bureau of Economic Analysis in each state for each year. We constructed a panel data set of enrollment headcounts by Adjusted Gross Income category at institutions spanning 10 academic years starting in 2010-2011 through 2019-2020. This established our sample time for pre- and post-treatment periods of five years each respectively.

After limiting our sample to public, two-year institutions in the United States that offer an associate degree (n=837) to the institutions in the 17 states without a promise program (n=275) and institutions in Tennessee (n=13) our initial sample of institutions was n=288. After removing sub-state-level promise programs and Tennessee institutions that were early adopters of a tuition free college model, our final comparison group was n=200 and final treatment group was n=5. Removal of these institutional, system, and regional level promise programs reduced the number of states represented in our sample to 14 states. Our outcomes of interest in this study were enrollment headcounts within five AGI categories *($0-30,000, $30,001-48,000, $48,001-75,000, $75,000-$110,000, and $110,00 or higher*). In Table 1, we report enrolled students (treatment and comparison group means) per year and income category. While this IPEDS variable only captured the enrollment of first-time, full-time students, it is an acceptable measure for our purposes because students are only eligible for Tennessee Promise if the students were first-time-in-college students who are full-time and attending college during the fall semester following high school graduation (House & Dell, 2020). In Figure 1, we provide visualizations of the average enrollment for the treatment and comparison groups at each income level and Wald test results used to assess the validity of our pre-treatment parallel trends assumption. Examining the visualizations for parallel pre-treatment trends using and Wald test results (Wald, 1943), we posit that the parallel pre-treatment trends assumption holds for all groups except students from families with reported AGI over $110,000.

Results for our parallel trends analysis and the use of IPEDS student AGI data does limit our analysis to first-year, full-time, first-time-in-college in-state students with family AGI less than $110,000 and to an aggregate count of those students. However, for our purposes these restrictions are acceptable. Only full-time, first-time-in-college in-state students can receive the Tennessee Promise scholarship, so the restriction of our sample to this group is beneficial in that only eligible students are included in this headcount in both our treatment and comparison groups. Additionally, the low student enrollment headcounts for students with over $110,000 in reported AGI are not conducive to DID analysis – note how headcounts for this group intersect in Figure 1. Figure 1 is separated across three pages for accessibility reasons using figures 1a through 1c. This is because the headcounts for this group vary by small margins and result in the year-to-year fluctuations where small variations in enrollment violate a parallel pretreatment trends assumption.

Difference-In-Difference

Researchers have regularly employed difference-in-difference design for quasi-experimental projects studying promise programs and other financial aid programs (Dynarski et al., 2023; Swanson, 2020). We examined community colleges as the treated-unit across a 10-year period to analyze how adoption of the state-wide Tennessee Promise influenced enrollment rates across income-groups as compared to states without a state-wide promise program. We utilized the following regression formula to accomplish this:

$$\boldsymbol{y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T_i + \beta_2 Post_t + \beta_3 (T_i * Post_t) + c_{it} + e_{it},}$$

In this regression, we utilized Tennessee's community colleges following promise program adoption in 2015 as the treatment group (T) and the 14 states without a statewide promise program as the comparison group (C). The pre-treatment ($T_0 = 0$ or $C_0 = 0$) period runs from the 2010-11 academic year through the 2014-2015 academic year. The post-treatment period ($T_1 = 1$ or $C_1 = 1$), runs from the 2015-2016 academic year to the 2019-2020 academic year. Together these periods, treatment condition, and their interaction can be presented with binary coefficients for treatment (T_i), period ($Post_i$), and interaction (T_i*$Post_i$) respectively. The interaction effect between treatment and period represents the difference-in-difference parameter.

Controlling for fixed effects in both pre-treatment and post-treatment observations is also important to account for variation between years, represented by c_i. To increase the inferential power of this quasi-experimental design, we constructed a regression model including covariates in this analysis that are reflective of the state's economic health which could motivate college enrollment, represented by X_i. This is reflected in the regression formula below.

$$\boldsymbol{y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T_i + \beta_2 Post_t + \beta_3 (T_i * Post_t) + X_i + c_{it} + e_{it},}$$

Due to the inclusion of additional covariates that account for the influence of the economy on the effects of Tennessee Promise adoption, we utilized regression formula (2) to provide the findings presented in this manuscript.

Table 1

Mean FTIC, Full-time, First-year Student Enrollment Receiving Any Title IV Funds for Treatment and Comparison Groups by Year and Income (Treatment Adoption Year Bolded)

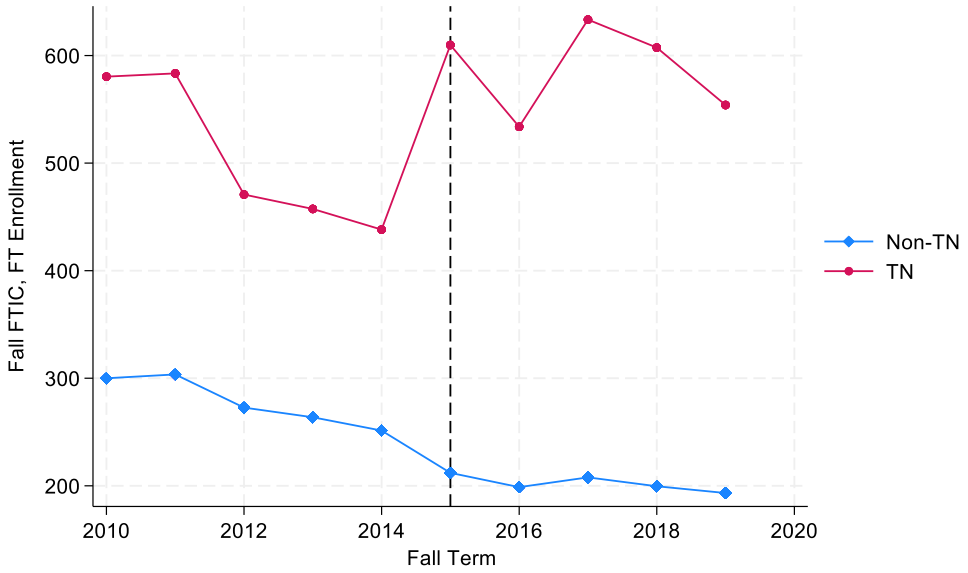
Group	Year	Income Group					
		$0 to $30,000	$30,001 to $48,000	$48,001 to $75,000	$75,001 to $110,000	$110,001 or higher	All Incomes
Treatment Group (Tennessee)	2010 - 2011	580.4	165.4	90.8	18.6	3.8	859.0
	2011 - 2012	583.4	135.4	84.8	20.0	5.6	829.2
	2012 - 2013	470.8	146.8	79.0	24.4	7.2	728.2
	2013 - 2014	457.4	143.0	94.6	22.4	6.8	724.2
	2014 - 2015	438.2	148.0	86.4	22.2	6.4	701.2
	2015 - 2016	**609.8**	**234.6**	**136.4**	**18.8**	**3.0**	**1002.6**
	2016 - 2017	533.8	221.8	129.2	12.2	1.6	898.6
	2017 - 2018	633.4	222.8	128.6	16.0	1.6	1002.4
	2018 - 2019	607.4	207.0	144.0	15.4	0.2	974.0
	2019 - 2020	554.0	192.4	139.4	17.4	0.8	904.0
Comparison Group	2010 - 2011	300.0	82.7	55.6	26.5	11.1	475.8
	2011 - 2012	303.5	76.2	53.7	25.6	11.7	470.7
	2012 - 2013	272.7	73.2	51.0	25.8	12.6	435.4
	2013 - 2014	263.7	72.3	51.7	27.2	15.0	429.9
	2014 - 2015	251.4	63.8	47.9	25.9	15.5	404.5
	2015 - 2016	**212.1**	**64.6**	**49.1**	**27.2**	**17.5**	**370.5**
	2016 - 2017	198.8	66.8	49.6	26.7	18.5	360.4
	2017 - 2018	207.8	66.4	46.5	26.4	18.5	365.7
	2018 - 2019	199.6	65.1	48.1	26.2	19.2	358.2
	2019 - 2020	193.3	65.7	50.5	27.6	21.4	358.5

Figure 1a

Visualization of Parallel Trends Visualization for Sample

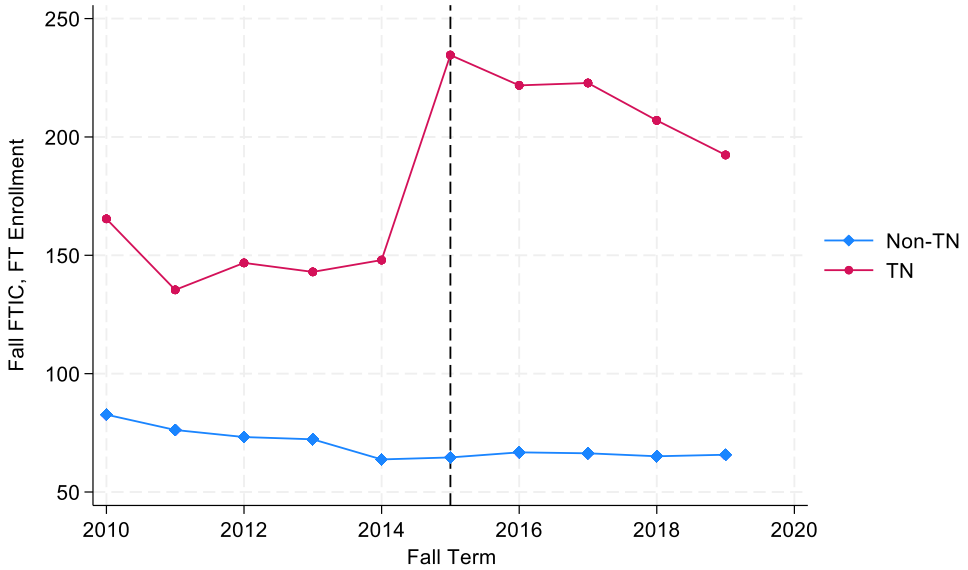
$0 - $30,000

Wald Test: (Prob >*F* = 0.0006***)



$30,001 - $48,000

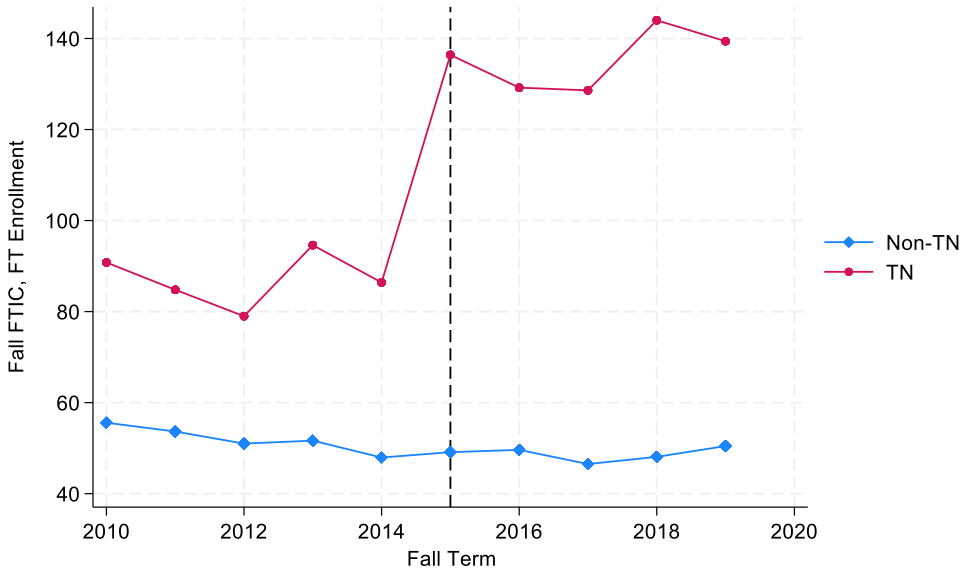
Wald Test: (Prob >*F* = 0.0201*)



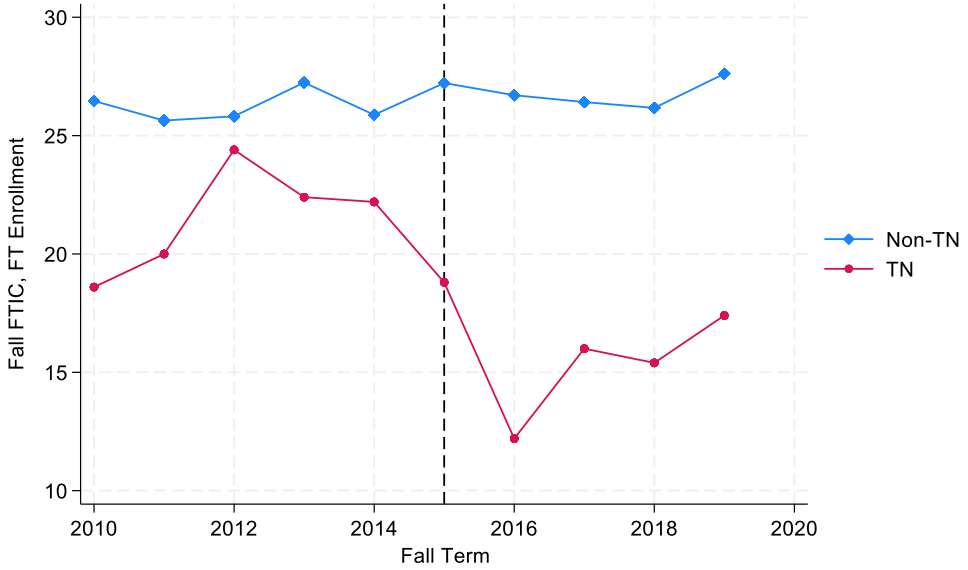
Note. Wald Test results for test of parallel trends assumption in parentheses = * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001 (Wald, 1943).

Figure 1b

Visualization of Parallel Trends Visualization for Sample
$48,001 - $75,000
Wald Test: (Prob >*F* = 0.0157*)



$75,001 - $110,000
Wald Test: (Prob >*F* = 0.0449*)



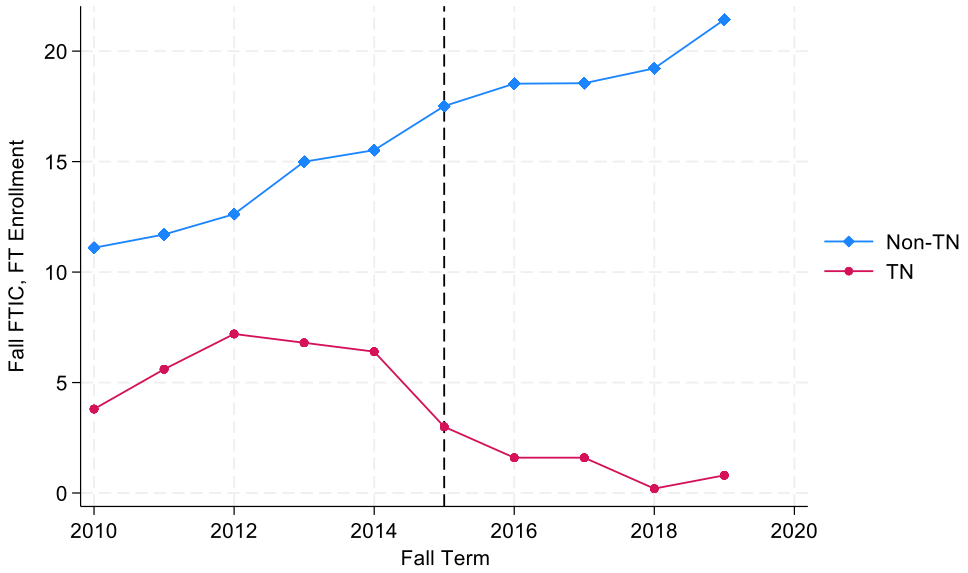
Note. Wald Test results for test of parallel trends assumption in parentheses = * p <0.05 **, p <0.01, *** p <0.001

Figure 1c

Visualization of Parallel Trends Visualization for Sample

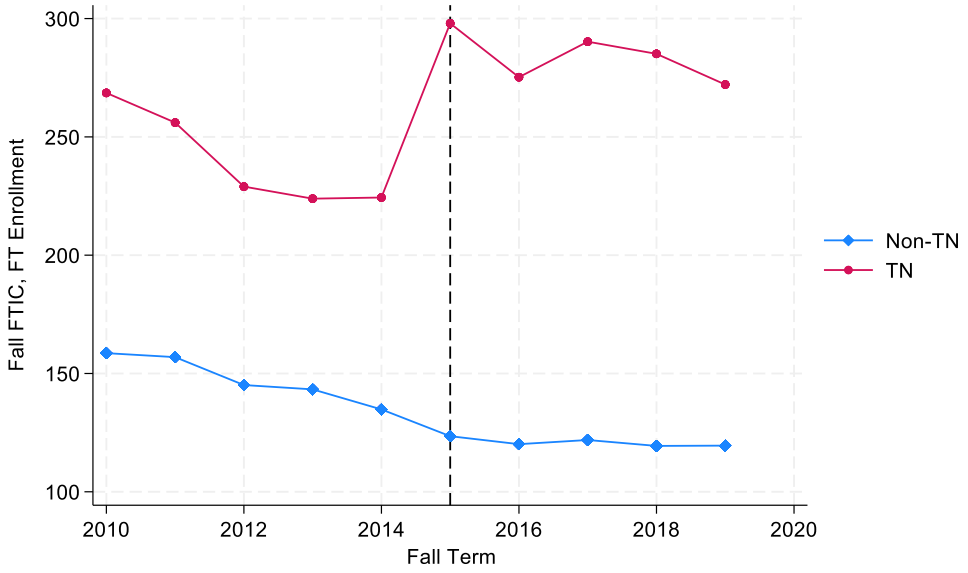
$110,000 & Higher

Wald Test: (Prob >*F* = 0.5194)



All Incomes

(Prob >*F* = 0.0206*)



Note. Wald Test results for test of parallel trends assumption in parentheses = * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001

Results

Normally, DID models exploit a quasi-experimental design to estimate an interaction effect $\beta(T_i * Post_t)$ representing causal effect of treatment. However, this study's limited treatment group size and use of institutional-level data rather than the treatment-level data of the students themselves reduces this project's conclusive power. Despite this loss of statistical power, this analysis is still needed as a purposeful initial attempt to investigate the relationship between promise program adoption and postsecondary outcomes across IPEDS's enrollment by socio-economic category.

Regression results are provided in Table 2 for regression formula (2) by income group. We only provide data for the categories that met the parallel trends assumption in our tables hereon in, excluding students with reported AGI higher than $110,000. Comparing enrollment at community colleges in Tennessee, estimates show that enrollment significantly increased for all groups where our parallel trends assumption was met. We find an increase in enrollment for students from families with AGIs between $0 - $3,000, $30,000 - $48,000, and $48,000 - $75,000, at p <0.001 by approximately 291 students per year and institution or approximately 1,457 more students per year for five Tennessee community colleges affected by the adoption of Tennessee Promise within the TBR system. This estimate for increased enrollment falls between 15.4 to 15.5 percent of the full-time, first-time-in-college students of the five treated TBR institutions for each year since program adoption throughout our sample. For the aggregate all-incomes group, enrollment did increase in Tennessee following promise program adoption by an average of about 275 students per institution or 1,377 first-time-in-college, full-time first-year students across the five treated institutions. The effect size of students from families with AGI between $0 and $30,000 is approximately 59.3 percent of the effect size for all students which is reflective of the reality that community colleges serve as an affordable, open-access option for higher education and thus enroll a high number of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Table 2

Difference-in-Difference Estimate for Effect of Tennessee Promise

	Income Group				
	$0 to $30,000	$30,001 to $48,000	$48,001 to $75,000	$75,001 to $110,000	All Incomes
Interaction (Promise)	163.7***	76.05***	51.74***	-6.122***	275.5***
	(12.42)	(1.411)	(2.22)	(1.39)	(11.69)
Unemployment	6.285	-0.685	-0.566	-0.385	5.086
	(6.242)	(1.221)	(1.451)	(0.945)	(7.899)
Price Parities	-3.784	-1.471*	-1.4	-0.874	-7.711
	(3.417)	(0.64)	(0.883)	(0.765)	(4.66)
n	205	205	205	205	205
R^2	0.23	0.11	0.08	0.01	0.18

Note. Standard errors in parentheses
= * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001

Robustness Check Strategy

During our robustness check, we found dissimilar results to our correctly specified model. Here, regression formula (2) is also utilized to provide the results found in our robustness check using a placebo test strategy. We conducted a placebo test using a randomized draw of treated units created through a series of 500 permuted simulations using the *ritest* Stata command for placebo tests as described by Heß (2017). We present the Randomization inference (RI) based p-values as $p=c/n$ with standard errors. We denote $p=c/n$ as a pooled ratio of the count of simulations that produced dissimilar T-test statistic results when compared to the correctly specified model to the number of simulations ran (500). A seed was used in the random treatment assignment process to insure replicability for this robustness check process. For each of our income groups, we received nonsignificant $p=c/n$ results. All income levels produced insignificant results for this robustness check, and we can assume that our results are not sensitive to changes in which institutions within specific states are the treated group.

Table 3

Robustness Check Results Utilizing State Other Than TN as a Treated Unit

	Income Group				
	$0 to $30,000	$30,001 to $48,000	$48,001 to $75,000	$75,001 to $110,000	All Incomes
$p=c/n$	0.4720 (0.0223)	0.4680 (0.0223)	0.5180 (0.0223)	0.4740 (0.0223)	0.4680 (0.0223)

Note. Standard errors in parentheses. No values were significant at $p < .05$.

Limitations

Our study takes advantage of publicly available, institutional-level data and as a result loses significant statistical power due to using institutional rather than student-level data as the treated-unit in our design. While our quasi-experimental design does provide us enough statistical power to present inferential findings, we also acknowledge that there is more work to be done in examining the effect of financial aid program such as the Tennessee Promise across various socio-economic groups. For example, because of our lack of student level data we cannot observe variations in intensity of enrollment or examine the effect size per dollar spent on students by examining financial aid packages. We also cannot present our findings as casual due to our small, treated sample size of n=5 despite using DID design which typically allows for the estimation of casual effects. Additionally, we share that our study does not control for potential confounding variables concerning Tennessee's public or private four-year universities. While it is unlikely that changes in admissions policies or practices of in-state universities affected community college enrollment, we do acknowledge this exclusion from our study here as a limitation. Finally, our findings are only reflective of last-dollar promise scholarships with no need or merit criteria which cover the costs of required tuition and fees at 2-year institutions because we only utilize the Tennessee Promise as our criteria to establish treatment in our study.

Discussion

Research on college promise programs offers optimistic findings regarding increasing access to postsecondary education for all individuals (House & Dell, 2020; Nguyen, 2020) Further, some evidence suggests increased use of promise program offerings among students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who stand to benefit the most from social mobility offered by a college degree (Carruthers & Fox, 2016). Our study supports previous research on college promise programs by providing novel empirical evidence with an added caveat, the amount of influence these programs have on students can vary across socio-economic status.

Implications

Based on our analysis, adoption of a state-wide, last-dollar promise program for community colleges (Tennessee Promise) increased enrollment significantly for students from families that earned between $0 and $75,000 in adjusted gross income. When considering all new enrollments, students from families with an AGI between $0 - $30,000 represented nearly 59% of the overall observed effect size. In other words, our findings revealed the Tennessee Promise may have increased enrollment the most among the student group with the most to gain from a college degree (i.e., students from low-income backgrounds). While this study yielded inferential results and does not establish causality, our analysis supports that the policy may be effectively broadening access to college for the students, and families, with the most need.

Increase Supports for Low-Income Students

With growing evidence supporting an increase in *access* for low-income students related to promise programs, we recommend policymakers focus on creating policy to support student persistence and graduation, primarily for low-income students with the greatest financial need. Critics of promise programs often point to the last-dollar funding model and the implications for equity of scholarship distribution (Collom et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2020). In a last-dollar program like Tennessee's, federal Pell Grants are applied to tuition and fees prior to promise program funding. Since the Pell Grant typically covers most of tuition and fees at community and technical colleges, very little promise program funding is used to support low-income students. Instead, last-dollar promise programs without income criteria run the risk of subsidizing middle- and upper-income students (Jones & Berger, 2020). Despite criticisms of last-dollar models, it remains unlikely that existing promise programs will adopt a first-dollar model (Bell, 2020). Policymakers implementing promise programs continue to use last-dollar models for a multitude of reasons, including both its cost-effectiveness when compared to first-dollar models (Perna & Leigh, 2018), and perceived fairness in providing tuition and fee free college to everyone, regardless of income (Bell, 2020).

We instead suggest policymakers consider expanding on the support available to students beyond tuition and fees. As of this writing, the Tennessee Promise includes a mentoring program and community service obligation. Yet, minimal evidence exists suggesting either requirement yields beneficial outcomes for students. Instead, we suggest state policymakers consider expanding programs such as the tnAchieves COMPLETE Grants program statewide. The COMPLETE Grants program provides application-based rewards intended to cover costs other than tuition and fees, including transportation, groceries, computers, supplies, rent/utilities, textbooks, and class-

specific fees (tnAchieves, n.d.). The Tennessee Higher Education Commission also highlighted the need for increased financial support for low-income students in their 2023 annual report, stating,

> "The cost to enroll and remain enrolled in higher education extends beyond tuition and mandatory fees. Lower-income students who receive Federal Pell grants and Tennessee Student Assistance Award (TSAA) dollars typically receive little, if any, scholarship money directly from Tennessee Promise, which is a consequence the program's last-dollar structure. TSAA and Completion Grants present two opportunities for the state to make postsecondary education more affordable for the state's lowest income families" (p. 9).

(Re)Focus on Workforce Outcomes

Given the Tennessee Promise's stated purpose of improving Tennessee's workforce and economy, a greater focus on the policy's impact on workforce outcomes is essential. Policymakers implemented the Tennessee Promise largely to improve the state's economy by increasing the number of individuals in the state with a postsecondary credential, with the hope that a more educated population may incentivize employers to remain in or relocate to the state. Yet, workforce outcomes are noticeably absent from both existing research and state communications focused on the Tennessee Promise. For example, in their 2023 annual report the Tennessee Higher Education Commission stated over 41,000 students who received the Tennessee Promise "have earned a credential since the program began" (2023, p. 8). However, the report provides no data on student employment following obtaining their credential and briefly mentions the workforce in the report's conclusion (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2023). Our findings add to the growing body of literature showing an increase in access for low-income individuals. However, enrolling in college is the first of many steps students must take to benefit from a college degree. We recommend a broad (re)focus on workforce outcomes by both researchers and policymakers to better understand, and improve, how promise programs and state institutions support students on their path to a high-quality degree and career.

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J. Patrick Biddix is the Jimmy and Ileen Cheek endowed professor of higher education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Patrick is a former advisee and longtime collaborator of Dr. Somers. He attributes his eclectic research focus to her mentorship and encouragement.

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Increasing United States College Access for Native Arabic Speakers: Applying a Simplification Intervention and Evaluating Machine and Human Translations

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Increasing United States College Access for Native Arabic Speakers: Applying a Simplification Intervention and Evaluating Machine and Human Translations

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Abstract

Across many language backgrounds, a consistent hurdle to accessing United States higher education is understanding the basic information necessary to apply for admission and financial aid and complete the many enrollment management processes necessary to begin one's college career (apply for housing, receive and submit vaccinations, register for classes, etc.). However, to date, no studies have explored how this type of higher education information can be simplified and translated into Arabic, one of the most widely spoken languages in the world and a linguistic background shared by tens of thousands of prospective international students (and their families) seeking higher education in the United States. This case study reports on research-to-practice work conducted with the University of Iowa, specifically how the university simplified their enrollment management information and how that information was translated into Arabic for native Arabic speakers seeking access to the University of Iowa. Findings reveal that the institution simplified text to speak more directly to prospective student audiences by using second person pronouns and simpler sentence structure and diction to engage this audience. Moreover, analyses of machine and human translations of English to Arabic suggest that human translation should be the preferred mechanism of translating higher education information, as Google Translate and ChatGPT provided adequate but not perfect translations of Iowa's information. Implications for practice and college access are addressed.

Keywords: college access, language, linguistics, Arabic, English, translation, human-computer interaction, machine translation, Google Translate, ChatGPT, artificial intelligence

Dedication

The last time I saw Pat in person was during my dissertation defense at the cop shop on campus. The second-to-last time I saw Pat in person was at the IHOP off of I-35 in South Austin, just a few blocks from Southpark Meadows. That IHOP was our breakfast spot where I would meet her at her car, carry her backpack into the restaurant, and we'd chat about whatever papers we were working on. In all of my breakfasts with her, she never opened her backpack—it was almost a bodily appendage for Pat. She couldn't help but bring that backpack along for the ride. But beyond any academic talk we would have, I most enjoyed Pat's humor. Pat was funny.

Every time, without fail, during breakfast at IHOP, she would remind me of what a disaster the "IHOB" campaign was for the IHOP chain of restaurants. For those of you who don't remember, around 2018, IHOP created this marketing gimmick, calling itself "IHOB" to call attention to the warm, delicious fact that IHOP indeed sold burgers, as well as pancakes. Pat never got the pancakes—she'd have toast, and I'd get the heart-attack pancake or whatever pancake was the featured, most sugary pancake currently available. Anyway, for whatever reason, Pat could not let "IHOB" go.

She'd start our conversation with something like, "So, how's it going?"

I'd say, "Awesome, how you been?"

And she'd say something like, "Well, I received an email last night at 3:30am. Basically, I'm working with this rather feisty group of activists who want to essentially radicalize their government and regain control of academic freedom for their university professors."

I'd say, "Wow."

And then she'd say something like, "But out of curiosity, do you remember IHOB? What a joke that was! No one comes here for burgers. They come here for pancakes. Look at all the children here. They're not eating the burgers."

I'd say, between laughing, "Yeah, totally. International House of Burgers sounds weird, right?"

And then she'd say something like, "How could a large, national company greenlight an idea that stupid? Clearly, I don't think it has worked. IHOB was a bust."

To me, this was hilarious. It was Seinfeldian. It was an everyday observation with its humor compounded by its banality and simplicity.

And maybe she didn't mention IHOB every time we went to IHOP, but I can recall at least three separate instances when Pat got her licks in. IHOB was a bust.

After Pat's funeral, I was driving back to Mississippi and passed maybe ten IHOPs. That made the drive easier. We miss you, Pat.

Introduction

With the ever-growing rate of globalization in the world comes the ever-growing need for effective means of communication across languages and cultures. Now more than ever, there is a need for research in interlingual translation in all aspects of our global society. An often-overlooked component is the need for translation services for international students attending higher education in the United States (U.S.).

As of 2022, there were nearly 950,000 international students studying at U.S. universities. Of these students, 53,104 were reported as being from the Arabic-speaking countries that make up the Middle East and North Africa (NCES, 2022). The native Arabic-speaking community is a rapidly expanding demographic in the U.S. in need of translational accommodations. Access to informational resources at higher education institutions aids Arabic-speaking international students' adaptation to their educational and social environments at their place of study. However, there are many language hurdles between native Arabic speakers and institutions of higher education in the U.S.

First, U.S. higher education features a notoriously complex lexicon (Taylor, 2020), with many native English-speaking students and support systems claiming that the language used by admissions and financial aid offices is often too complex to understand and act upon. Further, U.S. higher education is a thoroughly English-centric system, meaning that many enrollment management processes that students need to navigate are governed and explained strictly in English. In fact, recent studies have found that less than 5% of institutions of higher education communicate their admissions (Taylor & Hartman, 2019) and financial aid application processes (Taylor, 2019a, 2019b) in a non-English language. This situation has resulted in a complex, English-centric system of higher education that is incredibly difficult for non-native English speakers to navigate, especially those who are first generation college students or originate from another marginalized population (Kanno, 2018; Taylor, 2019a, 2020).

To remedy this issue and increase access to higher education for native Arabic speakers, this paper will consider the challenges faced in the translation of higher education resources from English to Arabic. In 2023, the research team partnered with administrators at the University of Iowa (Iowa) who were interested in simplifying and translating their enrollment management processes for prospective native Arabic speakers. During this collaboration, the research team worked alongside admissions and financial aid administrators and practitioners at Iowa to understand how to best simplify their information, so as not to lose critical content that may be necessary for student comprehension and process completion. These processes included submitting an admissions application and placing a housing deposit, among others. Then, the research team engaged with two machine translators (Google Translate and ChatGPT) to perform machine translations of simplified Iowa materials to explore machine translation costs and benefits. To perform the translation work to fidelity, the team partnered with native Arabic speakers to translate Iowa's materials to native Arabic, providing future native Arabic-speaking Iowa students with clear, concise information. However, during the simplification and both translational processes, linguistic hurdles were handled differently by human translators and machines, the strategies of which will each be evaluated and weighed against each other.

As a result, this study addresses the following research questions related to higher education access and the translation hurdles from English to Arabic leveraging both machine and human input:

> RQ1: What processes did Iowa follow to simplify enrollment management information meant for prospective student audiences?
>
> RQ2: From a baseline English text, what translation errors does Google Translate and ChatGPT make when translating higher education access materials from English to Arabic?
>
> RQ3: What elements of the Arabic language make English translations difficult for higher education access materials (i.e., how to apply for admission, how to apply for financial aid, how to navigate student housing contracts and on-campus student organizations)?

Addressing these questions will provide enrollment management officers and higher education practitioners with ways to simplify and work alongside native speakers of non-English languages to translate information for prospective students and their support members, no matter their language background. This process, in turn, will render the U.S. higher education a simpler, more navigable

system for native Arabic speakers, ideally increasing their access to Iowa and any other institutions seeking to practice linguistic equity for prospective students and their support networks.

Literature Review

Although many studies have evaluated the role that language hurdles can play in higher education access (Kanno, 2018; Taylor, 2019a, 2020, 2021; Taylor & Hartman, 2019), there has been no work conducted specific to Arabic speakers and their access to higher education in U.S. settings. Inversely, there have been many textbooks and peer reviewed articles written about how Arabic can be translated to English and the reverse, providing some framework for how to understand how institutions of higher education can simplify and translate their English content into Arabic content to increase access to U.S. higher education for native Arabic speakers (Al-Shawi & Mahadi, 2017; Farghal, 2015; Husni & Newman, 2015; Zakraoui et al., 2021).

Regarding translation of English to Arabic, linguists have described several distinct differences between English and Arabic that make translation difficult and problematic. First and foremost, Arabic is a right-left language, inverse from English, rendering it difficult for novice English-to-Arabic translators to understand the word order and syntax of the Arabic language (Farghal, 2017; Versteegh, 2014). Arabic as right-left poses difficulty for English translation (and the inverse) considering syntax, punctuation, and grammar, all of which differ from English and may render translation difficult.

Semantically, both English and Arabic are pronoun dense languages, meaning that both spoken and written text frequently addresses a reader or interlocuter (a person participating in a conversation) with first, second, and third person pronouns (Farghal, 2017). As pronouns can sometimes be ambiguous (unclear antecedent, gender neutral, etc.), translating pronouns from English to Arabic can prove difficult. Pronouns are also context dependent in both languages and in both languages, pronouns must agree with the number and gender of their antecedent (Farghal, 2017; Husni & Newman, 2015). Compounding this difficulty is that English and Arabic derive from difficult cultures and geographies, introducing cultural, linguistic, and idiomatic differences that English and Arabic speakers may be separately aware of but lack knowledge of each other's cultural, linguistic, and idiomatic nuances (Farghal, 2017; Ryding, 2014). As a result, basic pronoun understanding and translation from English to Arabic can be problematic.

Moreover, both English and Arabic are conjunction dense (ex: and, so, if, but, because), resulting in more translation hurdles from English to Arabic and vice versa (Farghal, 2017; Versteegh, 2014). A fundamental element of sentence construction in both English and Arabic languages is the concept of a phrase, with English phrases and clauses (or just clauses) forming complete sentences often through conjunction use. However, phrases and clauses in English contexts differ from Arabic sentence constructions, as Arabic conjunctions can connect individual parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives, as well as connecting clauses (as complete sentences). As a result, Arabic can facilitate much more complex sentence structures than English through conjunction usage, which is problematic for English to Arabic translations and vice versa (Ryding, 2014; Versteegh, 2014).

Syntactically, sentences in Arabic syntax are dependent structurally and systematically around the predicate, which slightly differs from English notions of phrases. Arabic syntax encompasses verbal and verbless (equational) sentences, with predicates spanning various lexical categories: verbs ("We studied the book"), pronouns ("This is he"), prepositional phrases ("The book is in the kitchen"), adjectives ("The house is big"), or nouns ("These are students") (Ryding, 2014). Although verbs typically form the core of most predications, in Arabic, the verb "to be" doesn't appear in the present tense indicative, allowing other syntactic categories to fulfill the predicate or copular function in equational sentences (Ryding, 2014).

Traditional Arabic grammatists typically classify sentence types based on the initial word (noun or verb – jumla ismiyya/jumla fiʕliyya, 'noun-sentence'/ 'verb-sentence'), but they can also be categorized based on the presence or absence of an overt verb (Ryding, 2014). Verbless sentences constitute a distinct linguistic category, often termed "equational" sentences in English, with a fundamental distinction between the "topic" component (al-mubtadaʔ) and the "comment" component (al-xabar) (Al-Shawi & Tengku Mahadi, 2017; Ryding, 2014). Subsequently, English to Arabic translations may prove difficult for verb-heavy English text that may require Arabic translation into different sentence categories and verb usage.

Finally, linguists have found that many hurdles have already been uncovered regarding English to Arabic translations in medical settings (Farghal, 2015), idiomatic text (Ali et al., 2017), and machine applications (Zakraoui et al., 2021). First, considering the domain-specific nature of medical texts (ex: patient intake forms, diagnoses, medications, anatomy), Farghal (2015) found that human English-to-Arabic translations of medical text often suffered from many lexical translation errors including false additions, incorrect collocations, incorrect synonyms, and omissions. As a result, Farghal (2015) suggested that Arabic translations may inflate original English texts by word count, as many of the errors in Farghal's (2015) study resulted in a longer Arabic translation by lexical item.

Regarding idiomatic text, Ali et al. (2017) found that native Arabic speakers studying English often struggled to understand English idioms and could not accurately translate English idiomatic text. Ali et al. (2017) argued that Arabic has a rich dictionary of cultural idioms with many idioms being informal and nature and differing from culture to culture or across races, ages, genders, and religion. For instance, the English idiom, "butterflies in my stomach" was often translated as "hunger" or "stomach pain," as Arabic speakers were not familiar with the idea of butterflies being associated with nervousness or excitement in conjunction with an anatomical stomach. As a result, the Arabic speakers noted the mention of an anatomical stomach and assumed that butterflies did not belong in one's stomach and therefore was a type of malady (Ali et al., 2017). Overall, Ali et al. (2017) argued that Arabic speakers who wish to translate English text may need to learn the idiom first and then translate to Arabic, with the caveat being that many English idioms do not exist in Arabic and would likely cause confusion for native Arabic speakers unfamiliar with the English idiom.

Pertinent to the study at hand, Zakraoui et al. (2021) conducted a survey study of native Arabic and English speakers to understand Arabic-English and English-Arabic translation issues caused by reliance on machine translation. Ultimately, Zakraoui et al. (2021) found that native speakers of both languages asserted that machine translations often made lexical errors related to synonym use that human translators with context-specific knowledge would not otherwise make. As a result, the major contribution of Zakraoui et al.'s (2021) work was that translators should first simplify the target text

to reduce the lexicon and lessen the likelihood of a synonym or lexical item error: If there are fewer number of complex words in a text or the text has a lower token-type ratio, the text will be easier to translate in both directions.

Ultimately, English and Arabic are both rich languages with complex semantic and syntactic elements that render translation difficult. As a result, this study will make a novel contribution to the literature by exploring English simplification, English-Arabic machine translation, and English-Arabic human translation of higher education information to explore how English-centric institutions of higher education may render their communications more intelligible and inclusive of native Arabic speakers seeking access to higher education.

Method

This study employs an applied linguistics approach to text simplification and both human and machine translation of English to Arabic. As a result, the following sections will outline how pre-simplification text was gathered, how the text was simplified, and the processes for conducting machine and human translation for subsequent analysis.

Collecting University Communication for Simplification

To gather data for this study, the research team worked with the University of Iowa's enrollment management team including their vice president for enrollment management and their director of financial aid to consolidate their enrollment management text meant for prospective student audiences. This process involved multiple conversations with this leadership to consolidate the text to what a prospective student would need to understand to be able to successfully apply for admission, learn more about financial aid and housing, and explore campus through in-person tours and other web resources. Moreover, according to Iowa's enrollment management protocol, prospective students also needed to be aware of other sources of funding such as scholarships, housing arrangements, on-campus activities and methods of student engagement, and opportunities to tour campus with friends and family. Subsequently, the research team gathered the requisite text from Iowa's website to compile a corpora (collection of thematic texts). That corpora included website text regarding the aforementioned processes (ex: applying for admission, learning about scholarships, booking an on-campus tour). Once the corpora were created, the research team shared the corpora with Iowa's leadership. After they approved the corpora, this allowed the research team to begin simplification.

Simplification Intervention

Increasing Lexical Cohesion

The first method of increasing lexical cohesion required an evaluation of the corpora. Corpus linguistics involves the use of software programs and computers to quickly analyze, sort, and interpret large collections of text, known as corpora (Vaughan & O'Keeffe, 2015). We used Readability Studio and Python to sort the corpus by lexical item to learn which lexical items appear more or less frequently across the corpora. This procedure resulted in a word list, which "allows the user to load a corpus and investigate basic frequency patterns. This frequency view shows which

words are occurring the most regularly in a text or collection of texts," (Vaughan & O'Keeffe, 2015, p. 5). For example, the corpora may use the word "submit" more frequently than the word "complete," suggesting that submit may be a preferred term. Gaining an understanding of the lexical items in the corpus allowed the research team to understand how Iowa's text could not only be simplified but how the corpora could be simplified in a way that promotes lexical overlap, increasing the simplicity and cohesiveness of the texts.

Moreover, the corpus analysis and the generation of a word list (Vaughan & O'Keeffe, 2015) allowed the research team to identify rarely-used lexical items across each corpus, providing us with insight as to which lexical items may be removed and substituted with a different but more common or simpler lexical item across the corpus. For example, the word "feasible" may be a relatively obscure word in a corpora and could be substituted with the word "possible," which may be a more common word for prospective college student audiences. Understanding the corpora word list and the lexical diversity of the corpora assisted the research team with simplifying the corpora in a way that reduced the lexical diversity—and increased the lexical cohesion—of the corpora.

Simplifying Sentence Structure

The second method of increasing syntactic sentence similarity required an evaluation of each sentence of each text to better understand how the research team could manipulate each sentence's structure (syntax) to increase the simplicity of the overall text. To isolate every sentence of each text separately, we used Readability Studio (Oleander Solutions, 2024) and Python (Python Software Foundation, 2024) to parse each sentence into consecutive order on corresponding lines. This analysis resulted in each sentence being isolated onto its own line, allowing the team to compare each sentence to the previous sentence (if applicable) and subsequent sentence. Using our own native English speaker judgements and knowledge of domain-specific postsecondary text, we performed manual text simplification by analyzing each sentence and attempting to model a simpler sentence using a similar syntax in all subsequent sentences.

One strategy that we employed was simplifying each sentence into a shorter sentence (by word count), as extant research has suggested simplifying sentences into shorter sentences increases the comprehensibility of text (Coleman, 1962). Regarding efforts to improve sentence simplicity, Coleman (1962) suggested that when performing manual text simplification, there are four possible strategies for shortening and simplifying a sentence. Coleman (1962) reasoned that one may improve text simplification by raising clause fragments to full sentences, dividing sentences joined by conjunctions (e.g., because, but, for, or), avoiding dividing sentences joined by the conjunction "and," and shortening clauses by using periods where other forms of grammatical punctuation may be found (e.g., semicolons, colons, commas). Understanding these methods, we adopted Coleman's (1962) framework for sentence-level simplification and attempted to shorten sentences by word count to increase the simplicity of the sentence without losing critical information. It was important to explore whether sentences could be shortened, as shorter sentences inherently do not have the (potentially) complex syntax that longer sentences do—the shorter the sentence, the less likely the sentence will feature complex syntax (e.g., compound-complex sentences, multiple dependent clauses).

Using Active Voice

In addition, we attempted to increase syntactic sentence similarity of admissions and financial aid text by writing all instances of passive voice into active voice. Using Readability Studio and Python, the research team isolated all sentences written in passive voice and re-wrote the sentence using active voice (e.g., the subject performing the verb in the main clause). For example, a financial aid text could read, "The application must be completed by the student"—this sentence is written in passive voice, as the application is the subject of the sentence but is not performing the main verb of the sentence. However, this passive voice sentence could be re-written as, "The student must complete the application"—this simplification positions the student as the subject, the application as the object, and reduces the word count of the sentence by two words or 25% of the original sentence length.

Evidence from extant research suggests that writing or speaking in active voice rather than passive voice can increase the simplicity of a sentence, text, or speech and decrease the number of words in a sentence, text, or speech, ultimately producing a shorter and simpler sentence, text, or speech (DeVito, 1969; Ferreira, 1994; Myhill, 2003; Olson & Filby, 1972). Ferreira (1994) learned passive voice sentences take longer to formulate than active voice sentences, possibly rendering passive sentences more difficult to read and comprehend than active voice sentences. In addition, DeVito (1969) suggested active verb constructions "are still regarded as more basic" than passive voice constructions (p. 401), rendering active voice sentences easier to understand than passive voice sentences for many readers.

Increasing Word Frequency

The third and final method of increasing word frequency—and thus increasing the simplification of the text—required an analysis similar to that of increasing lexical cohesion. However, relying on native English speaker judgements and domain-specific knowledge of the corpora, we attempted to analyze texts at both the text- and sentence-level to understand how words could be repeated throughout a text to increase the simplicity of the overall text. Unlike attempts at increasing lexical cohesion, increasing word frequency may include repeating words in subsequent or later sentences, which may involve adding a word to a text to increase a word's frequency to assist comprehension (Hulme et al., 1997; Mandler et al., 1982; McGinnies et al., 1952; McNamara et al., 2014). For instance, Hulme et al. (1997) learned that increasing the word frequency in an informative text helped with the short-term memory recall of research participants regarding the content of the text, supporting the finding that increasing the word frequency in a text may lead to a better understanding of the text on behalf of the reader.

Pertinent to this study, Monaghan et al. (2017) also found that individual differences across bilingual readers (native Dutch speakers) in terms of word frequency effects were due to exposure to word diversity, not an individual's vocabulary size (personal lexicon). This finding supported the use of increasing word frequency to increase a text's simplicity and possible readers' comprehension of the text (Monaghan et al., 2017). As a result, we attempted to detect content words that could be repeated earlier or later in each text separately, and then we added these words into the text while maintaining the grammaticality of the text, possibly increasing its simplicity.

Related to but not directly addressing specific simplification methods for second language learners, we attempted to locate acronyms (e.g., Free Application for Federal Student Aid [FAFSA]) and initialisms (e.g., GPA) and insert definitions (elaborations) of these acronyms and initialisms if they were not already present in the text. Research on acronyms and initialisms has found that using these lexical items in potentially unfamiliar text can be confusing to readers, thus making the text more difficult to read (Cannon, 1989; Grange & Bloom, 2000; Ibrahim, 1989; Rúa, 2002). Researchers have stated that using acronyms often comes "at the price of clarity" (Grange & Bloom, 2000, p. 1), as the reader may need to parse extra text or consult another text in order to decipher the acronym or initialism and fully comprehend the text (Altmiller, 1982; Rúa, 2002; Taghva & Gilbreth, 1999).

Advances in computational linguistics have provided many tools to recognize acronyms and their definitions, ensuring that texts contain both the definition of the acronym (e.g., FAFSA) and the acronym itself to optimize reading comprehension of the text (Taghva & Gilbreth, 1999; Xu & Huang, 2007). Laszlo and Federmeier (2007) posited that it is crucial for readers to be able to move rapidly from print to meaning to optimize reading comprehension, and the embedding of unfamiliar acronyms and initialisms often slows that process for readers, especially those unfamiliar with the type of text or the lexicon of the text. Given that admissions and financial aid communication is a unique type of text that often employs a unique lexicon (Taylor, 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2020), we simplified texts in this study by inserting extra lexical items that were not present in the original, pre-simplification text, as such adding the definition or elaboration of an acronym or initialism, in order to increase the simplicity of the text.

Once the text was simplified, the research team met with the University of Iowa's enrollment management team, including their vice president for enrollment management and their director of financial aid, to gain a subject-matter acceptability judgment of the simplified text. After review, institutional leaders provided a verbal acceptability judgment of the simplification, and the research team was able to proceed to machine and human translation from English to Arabic. Overall, the original text scored at the 11.8th grade level on the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Test in 1,851 words across 120 paragraphs. The simplified text scored at the 10.7th grade level on the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Test in 1,471 words across 107 paragraphs, suggesting the simplification intervention was effective.

Human and Machine Translation

Using the Iowa-approved simplification, we engaged with two different machine translators: Google Translate and ChatGPT 3.5 (January, 2024). Then, we engaged with three different native speakers of Arabic to perform human translation of the simplified text. Once each human was finished, each native Arabic speaker provided a blind peer-review of the English-to-Arabic translation to guarantee accuracy. Ultimately, all three native Arabic speakers agreed upon the human translation of the simplified English-to-Arabic document.

Findings

Analysis of Text Simplification

After simplification, machine translation, and human translation of English-to-Arabic higher education information, several main findings emerged from the data. To begin, we will address elements of the simplification process from complex-to-simple English**.** Before translating a text, one must consider how easily the current structure and language used in the original text would carry over to the target language. Often, this will involve adjusting the source text's language to reach its meaning in the simplest of terms to ensure the necessary information will be conveyed to readers of the target language.

During the simplification process, ideas perceived as technical or those that have little context outside that of higher education were replaced with more accessible terms. In the original text, Iowa officials chose to use the word "disbursement" when discussing the distribution of financial aid to students. In the simplified text, however, the words "receive funds" are used instead. This took the technical term "disbursement" (releasing financial aid from federal or institutional accounts to student financial accounts) and used far simpler words to concisely describe what will be done with students' financial aid. This decision not only makes the term easier for English readers to understand but makes the translator's job more straightforward as well. In addition to simplifying technical terms, there are some informal phrases and ideas that needed simplification before translation. The original text states "The University of Iowa has over 600 student organizations and dozens of community groups which students can join, including dozens of groups centered around underrepresented minority students and first-generation college students." The idea of an organization being "centered around" certain students is a very English phrase. The simplified text reads instead "dozens of groups for underrepresented minority students." This removed the unnecessary verbiage of the original text and made it easier to translate the idea into Arabic.

The simplified text also makes more use of the second and first-person points of view, as opposed to the original which tends to use third-person when referring to the University and students. In the original text, the University will refer to itself as "The University of Iowa" and the readers as "students." Although not inaccurate, use of these nouns is repetitive and unnecessarily lengthens the text. The simplified version will instead use "we" when referring to the University and "you" when addressing students. This removes the repetition of the original and establishes a more direct, personal voice in the new text. This use of personal pronouns, along with the other means of simplification, have been carried over into all Arabic translations of the text, helping ensure ease of reading for prospective Arabic-speaking students. Overall, readability and text statistics suggested that by complexity (grade level) and length (word and paragraph count), the Iowa corpora was simplified, rendering the corpora both easier to translate and possibly easier for native English speakers to read and comprehend.

Comparative Analysis Machine Translations of Google Translate and ChatGPT

After conducting machine translations of the simplified Iowa information, there were several inconsistencies between the Google Translate and ChatGPT versions. Both translations were mostly accurate, with a few caveats. Most issues and inaccuracies on the part of the machines were caused

by a lack of critical thinking and understanding. There are conventions in the English text that don't exist in Arabic that Google Translate and ChatGPT handled differently and, often, incorrectly.

Transliteration

When translating from one language to another, we often found that English words and concepts had no equivalent in Arabic. If the source language and the target language share the same alphabet, one of the most common ways to overcome this issue is to simply leave the "untranslatable" word in its original language. English and Arabic, however, do not share the same script. The characters used in the two languages, in fact, look radically different. If an Arabic reader were to see English letters in an Arabic text without knowledge of the Latin alphabet, they would have no way to read the word. In this instance, a translation may call for "transliteration." This is the act of using the characters of the target language to convey to readers how the word would sound in the source language. Through this process, a reader should be able to pronounce foreign words using their own script.

In this study, there were multiple instances in the text when Google Translate and ChatGPT utilized translation when they did not identify a word as one that could be translated into Arabic. There were, however, several errors and inconsistencies the machines made when recognizing words that should be transliterated. The first English word that neither machine had a single word to which it was equivalent was the word "regent." In the case of the English text, "regent" was referring to a board of directors that sees over the three major public universities in the state of Iowa. Google Translate had two different approaches to translating this word into Arabic. Upon its first use in the text, the machine chose to transliterate the English word "regent" to "ريجنت," its phonic equivalent in Arabic script. In the very next line of text, however, the word appears as "regent", only for the transliteration to be again used later. ChatGPT, on the other hand, had a different strategy. Instead of leaving the word in English or choosing to transliterate it, ChatGPT opted to create a definition in Arabic words. The machine translated "regent" to " المجلس التنظيمي." which means "regulatory board." This was the case in all uses of the word in the ChatGPT translation.

The Iowa Edge Program (a college transition program for students of Color) program for minis another English phrase the machines had trouble reproducing in Arabic, specifically struggling with the word "Edge." Google Translate, once again, chose to transliterate "Iowa Edge" to "آيوا إيدج," The transliteration of a state, such as Iowa, is common in Arabic, but the machine recognized "edge" as a proper noun as well, deciding it would be best to transliterate the word, rather than literally translating to the Arabic equivalent. ChatGPT also recognized this proper noun but opted to leave it in its English form "Iowa Edge." As a result, prospective students or families who are native Arabic speakers may struggle to understand the nature of the Iowa Edge Program and whether the prospective student may want to participate in the program in the future.

Acronyms

Acronyms are commonly used in English, relative to other languages, especially Arabic. Although acronyms do exist in Arabic, they are rarely used outside of the context of names of corporations and organizations. Because Arabic has no capital letters and all the letters in a single word are connected to one another, an acronym that is not originally in Arabic, but taken from English, could

be difficult for a Native Arabic speaker to recognize. For the most part, Google Translate and ChatGPT were able to identify English acronyms and left them in English letters after translation. There were, however, several issues that arose with specific acronyms in different contexts.

In translating the acronym "SAT," Google Translate first recognized the word as an acronym, leaving it in English for its first use. In the same line, the machine doesn't register SAT as an acronym, instead translating it to "السبت," the Arabic word for Saturday. There also arose an issue with the acronym "RAI" (Regent Admission Index). In addition to the definition specific to the University, there is the more widely known meaning of "Radioactive Iodine Therapy." Although Google Translate did correctly identify RAI as an acronym, it incorrectly assumed that it was referring to the former. In the Arabic translation, Google chose to translate this to "اليود المشع," or "radioactive iodine, though it left the acronym in English later in the text. Not only did the machine choose to define the acronym, but it used the wrong words entirely.

Although Google Translate left some acronyms in English and mis-translated some into Arabic, ChatGPT left all the English acronyms in the original language and format. This approach does leave them in a state in which they would be recognizable as acronyms, but there is an issue in figuring out what exactly they stand for. In the Google translation, the English words "Regent Admission Index" are translated to "مؤشر قبول ريجنت," roughly meaning "regent's admissions index." While this does nicely capture the English meaning, when the acronym "RAI" does appear in the Google translation, there is nothing that indicates these two are connected. The only word in the Arabic translation that corresponds phonically with any part of the acronym is "ريجنت," which is a transliteration of "regent." The other two words in the phrase begin with sounds that don't at all resemble the rest of the English acronym. This makes it difficult for future students to recognize the acronyms for programs whose names they have only read in Arabic.

Colloquialisms and Metaphorical Speech

Moreover, the machine translations did not always produce accurate translation at the word or semantic level, as there were words in the simplified English version of the text that did not exist in Arabic or needed transliteration to be intelligible. Google Translate and ChatGPT don't always detect colloquialisms and metaphors, often translating them fairly "literally," resulting in the meaning not always coming across in Arabic the same way it does in English. The first words that greet the reader in the English text are "This is the University of Iowa." In English, this is a commonly used phrase in advertisements and the world of higher education institutions. When both Google Translate and ChatGPT were given this line, it was translated as "هذه جامعة هيوا," which is a completely literal translation. Although this phrase is common and recognizable in English, this is not something used in Arabic. This is not a colloquialism that would be completely lost on Arabic readers, but it is not a very accessible expression with which to welcome prospective students.

The English text also uses the expression "a vibrant campus in the heart of Iowa City." Both Google Translate and ChatGPT kept this line literal, translating it to "في قلب مدينة أيوا," which directly translates to "in the heart of Iowa City." Although the machines chose to literally translate these words, this is a case in which the expression exists both in English and Arabic. The word "قلب" can be used in Arabic in the same ways it is used in English, as it can refer to the organ or something more abstract like feelings and, in the case of this expression, the location of the University being in

the central part of the Iowa City. Though this expression's meaning was carried across languages after translation, we can't say that either machine can recognize this, as this saying is the same in English and Arabic. Translation machines are not able to take a saying like this from one language and find its equivalent in another unless it just so happens that it can be translated literally. It is clear though that machines still fall behind in recognizing and accurately translating colloquial speech.

When comparing both machines, it was clear the two AIs handled the linguistic hurdles they encountered differently. Google Translate was more prone to transliterate words that it did not find an Arabic equivalent to but ChatGPT would come up with a new definition. Google was also less able to recognize acronyms as it would, on occasion, transliterate the English acronym or translate it incorrectly. ChatGPT seemed to recognize the English acronyms, leaving them in their original language. Both machines also don't seem to be capable of translating colloquial expressions, as they both chose to literally translate any instance of this. Although Google Translate and ChatGPT did provide fairly accurate translations, there are some major recurring errors that should not be overlooked when translating higher education resources.

Comparing Human Arabic to Machine Arabic Translations

The Google Translate and ChatGPT translations were quite accurate in a sense of meaning but have been shown to make errors when having to decide context that exists outside of the text. Although both machines can take some context into account, the issue arises when the AI decides meaning on its own through critical thinking. The machine will often either not use outside context or make an incorrect judgement call. It is here that human translation surpasses that of machines. The translation of Iowa's enrollment information performed by a native Arabic speaker shows this. Not only does it provide a more accurate, accessible translation, but it does not share some of the previously highlighted mistakes made by Google Translate and ChatGPT.

Colloquialisms and Metaphorical Speech

We can see the difference between human and machine translators from the very beginning of the text. The line "This is the University of Iowa" is translated literally in both machine translations, but the human translator handled this differently, instead translating this line as "مرحبا بكم في جامعة آيوا," which means "welcome to the University of Iowa." This is a much more commonly used phrase in Arabic than the literal translation the machines produced, and it is much more accessible and welcoming to any Arabic reader. The human translator also chose to translate the expression "in the heart of Iowa City" literally as Google Translate and ChatGPT did, since this saying exists in both languages.

There is a point in the text where it references resources and organizations for minority students. In the English text, the terms "students of Color" and "Black" are used, and the two machine translations use these words as well. The human translator, however, translated both terms to "African American." Although the two terms in the English version are commonly used general descriptions in English, colors are used to describe people much more specifically in the Arab world, as a wide range of words are used to describe specifically the color of one's skin rather than the more American idea of race. The terms "students of Color" and "Black" were likely changed to

"African American" to convey this idea of race to Arabic readers, though the term does lose some of the meaning the original English carried with it.

Acronyms and Transliteration

The Google Translate and ChatGPT translations demonstrated that the two machines had different ways of translating acronyms and words that don't have an Arabic equivalent. The human translator took the same approach to acronyms as ChatGPT did, leaving the Acronyms in English. This decision was likely made because the student will see these acronyms in the original English in the future, as they would be unrecognizable if they have only seen an Arabic translation of the acronym, however that may appear. Both the human translator and ChatGPT were able to consistently identify acronyms and left them in English, but Google Translate had more issues with this task, as previously shown. There still does exist the issue that the English letters don't align with the sounds the Arabic words for the acronym make, and there is often little indication within the text that a certain acronym corresponds with a certain definition.

When it came to translating singular words that don't exist in Arabic, the human translator often chose to transliterate them as Google Translate did. Both the human and Google translations chose to transliterate the words "regent" and "Iowa Edge," but ChatGPT constructed an Arabic meaning for "regent" and left "Iowa Edge" in English. It is likely the human translator recognized these words both as proper nouns that should not be translated literally. ChatGPT was somewhat inconsistent in this decision, as leaving the name of the "Iowa Edge" in English demonstrates its identification as the name of a program and defining "regent" shows it was recognized as just a word. Though they took different approaches, all the decisions on when to transliterate words are accurate. This issue comes down to needing the ability to identify "untranslatables" and a consistent strategy to translate them.

Sentence Structure

The two major Arabic sentence structures are nominal sentences (jumla ismiyya) and verbal sentences (jumla fiʕliyya). In a nominal sentence, the subject will come first, followed by the verb and the object. A verbal sentence will instead follow the order of verb, subject, object. Although neither is more grammatically correct than the other, there are some instances in which one would choose to use one of the structures. When first choosing which structure to use, a speaker or writer will want to consider if they want to emphasize the subject or the action. A nominal sentence will bring to the forefront the subject of the sentence, but a verbal sentence will highlight the action. If someone has already established the type of sentence structure they are using in text or speech, they would want to remain consistent and use the same structure throughout. Of the three translators, only ChatGPT chose to use nominal sentences throughout the text. Both the human translation and Google translation use verbal sentences instead. Though neither is more grammatically correct than the other, the use of verbal sentences in this text could be more contextually correct. The text is an informational resource about enrollment for prospective students at Iowa, meaning it includes a lot of instructional material. The text tells readers how to apply for admission and financial aid, as well as the different organizations they can join. The use of verbal sentence structure puts emphasis on the actions readers need to take rather than the students themselves further supports the nature of this text as an informational resource.

Although neither of the machine translations are wildly inaccurate in meaning throughout, there are moments that can disrupt a reader's experience and their understanding of the text. These issues come mostly in the form the machines' lack of ability to translate English conventions to Arabic so that an Arabic reader could understand them. This is where a human translator is needed, as the recognition of these elements of speech and writing as well as the knowledge to translate them in a way Arabic readers would grasp is critical to ensuring an accurate, accessible translation.

Conclusion

Researchers have emphasized the importance of crafting institutional policies that are inclusive for individuals from diverse language backgrounds (Shirahata & Lahti, 2023), and as the U.S. continues to diversify by race and language, the need for accurate methods of translation for secondary education resources is more prevalent than ever. In the case of the University of Iowa, there was a need for the simplification and subsequent translation of enrollment information from English to Arabic. In addition to the translation for the University performed by a human translator, the research team utilized Google Translate and ChatGPT to identify the errors machine translators make when compared to humans. There are conventions and nuances of both the English and Arabic languages that make the two difficult to translate accurately between, and these are especially important to pay attention to when translating informational resources.

The issues identified by the findings of this study demonstrate, in action, the linguistic hurdles highlighted by previous research on the translation of English to Arabic. The clear structural and syntactical differences between the two languages offer issues for anyone trying to translate or read one language or the other should they not be extremely familiar with both. In addition to this, English and Arabic have such distinct cultural and historical backgrounds that finding ways to translate idiomatic language and expressions in a way native readers will understand can offer a challenge to the most confident translators. We also find in this study that acronyms and English terms that exist mainly within the world of higher education are difficult to translate to Arabic. Human translators can identify these issues and make translation decisions based on their ability to take outside context into consideration, but these nuances are less likely to be handled properly by translation machines.

Leaders of institutions of higher education that seek translations of resources for prospective and current students are best off utilizing human translators rather than relying on machine translation. Although AI like Google Translate and ChatGPT have the capabilities to accurately translate certain texts, they struggle to communicate the nuances of most languages. This is especially true when translating from English to Arabic. Machine translation is not yet at the point where it understands Arabic as it does other languages, and given the differences between English and Arabic, there can be some major misunderstandings. When translating texts like the enrollment information, higher education institutions need to be aiming for a level of accuracy that machines haven't yet achieved. Not only do the Arabic readers not understand the English languages, but there exist terms within the context of higher education that prospective students may not be familiar with. There needs to be some level of human thought and decision put into the translation of these niche terms and "untranslatable" words and ideas to ensure the accessibility of higher education.

Moreover, leaders of institutions of higher education ought to partner with non-Native English speakers when embarking upon translation projects to effectively send the message that the people leading the institution value the people and cultures seeking access to the institution. Surely, as artificial intelligence and machine translation continue to improve with training, institutional leaders could simply choose to employ the machines and reject human input. Yet, this decision is a fundamental choice to prioritize profits over people and a celebration of machines rather than ushering in a new era of linguistic inclusion and translation of a U.S. system that should not be as Anglocentric as it always has been.

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Brett McCartt is an undergraduate student at the University of Iowa. Brett is learning Arabic through his academic coursework and may apply knowledge of the language in his future career.

Tahagod Babekir is a financial management counselor at Georgia State University. Tahagod is a native Arabic speaker and wants to continue working on projects that increase access to higher education for other native Arabic speakers.

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Navigating Ambiguity, Inspiring Career Pivots, and Engaging in Critical Action: Leveraging Critical Consciousness with Education Abroad Alumni

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Abstract

This study considers the experience of education abroad alumni through a social justice lens. We leverage literature that places systemic change at the fore, underscoring the importance of addressing deeply ingrained attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions that perpetuate systemic inequalities or hinder progress. Practitioners and scholars have called into question the problematic, essentialist roots of study abroad while advocating for increased accessibility to education abroad. Building upon this priority, this article is oriented with a critical consciousness framework. The findings show the profound transformative impact of the study abroad experience on the personal lives of alumni, the level of career integration in their professional development, and the direct correlation between program design as it relates to social justice orientations. This project addresses a gap in the scholarship by focusing on longitudinal, qualitative data for action and the influence of alumni in increasing access to education abroad for the next generation.

Keywords: education abroad, social justice, high-impact practices, anthropological praxis, critical consciousness

Dedication

Dr. Patricia Somers was an international educator, higher education scholar, mother, and grandmother. She led the hiring committee that brought Richard Reddick and Victor Sáenz back to the Forty Acres. She appreciated what it meant for Dana Tottenham to be a working mom in a global pandemic who was chasing her lifelong dream of a doctorate. When The University of Texas launched the Ed.D. in Higher Education Leadership program in 2019, Juan Gonzales recruited Pat to teach the qualitative methods course. Her eclectic expertise influenced how graduate students framed their research, encouraging them to infuse social justice into their work as leaders. Pat arrived to Zoom rooms with her graduation cap on and the image of the Texas Tower in the background, symbols of her institutional pride and enthusiasm. She continues to be one of the ancestors cheering us on through academic milestones, holding her Horns up high. Hook 'Em.

Introduction

As campus internationalization efforts have expanded, scholars have concurrently launched research agendas to document and assess the impact of education abroad. These research agendas have focused on curriculum integration, cross-cultural competencies as learning outcomes, career integration, and frameworks of global engagement, to name a few (Johnson & Anderson, 2019; Knight, 2008; Ogden, 2022). In the past fifteen years, the modern era of initiatives set out to diversify the field (from the demographics of students to the locations of programs to the disciplines offered) has served as a centerpiece for policy and practice in education abroad (Lincoln

Commission, 2005). These initiatives have included targeted efforts to diversify students who participate in education abroad, the faculty and staff who administer the programs, and the types of curricula associated with program design. Significant strides are being made to increase accessibility in education abroad, amplify the voices of underrepresented students, focus on asset-based frameworks, and recruit a new generation of international educators with diverse backgrounds (Acevedo, 2023; Contreras, 2020; Diversity Abroad, n.d.; Lu et al., 2015).

The common assumption in the field is that sending students abroad is a high-impact practice that provides students with positive experiences, learning opportunities in diverse communities, and exposure to new worldviews. Many institutions measure their internationalization efforts by how many students are studying abroad and the percentage of international students on their home campuses (IIE Open Doors, 2023). As evidenced in research from *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, scholars have conducted empirical research to justify the work of the field and to demonstrate the positive impact of global exchange. The journal's first volume was published in 1995 (Whalen, 1995), representing only three decades of scholarship for a rapidly growing and expansive field. Despite the good intentions of educating the next generation to become global citizens, the field has been challenged by its neocolonial past. Prior research calls into question the problematic roots and essentialist nature of study abroad (Johnson, 2009; Vavrus & Pekol, 2015; Woolf, 2006; Zemach-Bersin, 2007).

Patricia Somers (2022), a respected comparative higher education scholar, sharply criticized the neoliberal approach of leading higher education organizations. She posited that such organizations are "straight off the banana plantation with little or no sense of the colonial history or current ideas of social justice. I am truly embarrassed for my field of international education" (P. Somers, personal communication, July 29, 2022). Likewise, Jennifer Lund (2024), a lifetime member honoree of NAFSA: Association of International Educators, once observed with colleagues in a meeting that "I think we may be languishing in the theoretical" (Lund, personal communication, March 3, 2024). In their respective spirit, instead of languishing on the plantation, there is an opportunity to proactively reframe research agendas in education abroad with a social justice lens and redefine how international educators approach their work.

This study serves as an intentional pivot from the field's neocolonial roots. Prior research stops short of examining how and to what extent students reflect a critical consciousness upon their return, both in the short- and long-term. Instead of viewing study abroad as a consumption of cultural experiences, the practice of critical consciousness offers new approaches for international educators to situate social justice at the forefront of said experiences (Buckner & Stein, 2020; St. John et al., 2017; Vavrus & Pekol, 2015; Zemach-Bersin, 2007). We argue that international educators need to continually engage in critical reflection on the work in the field and aim for pathways of critical action (Berger, 2020; Watts et al., 2011).

The purpose of this study is to consider the experiences of education abroad alumni through a social justice lens. We operationalize Wick and Willis's (2020) definition of social justice in international education as "a redistribution of resources that is designed to foster critical consciousness, develop critical interculturality, and work toward equitable impacts on individuals and their communities" (p. 12). In this article, we seek to examine the "cultural imperative to systemic reform" (Kozaitis, 2013, p. 139) through the perspective of higher education's integration of education abroad as a core high-

impact practice (Kuh, 2008). Said differently, we argue that changing systemic issues requires not only structural changes but also shifts in societal norms, beliefs, and values. By addressing both the symptoms and underlying causes of systemic issues, meaningful and lasting change can be achieved. We draw on the theoretical framework of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, 1974) to answer the following research question: In what ways do education abroad alumni reflect on their personal experience, professional development, and social justice orientations? By examining critical consciousness within higher education, this study sheds light on the importance of how alumni critically reflect on the impact of education abroad over time, as well as how these reflections impact alumni's critical actions.

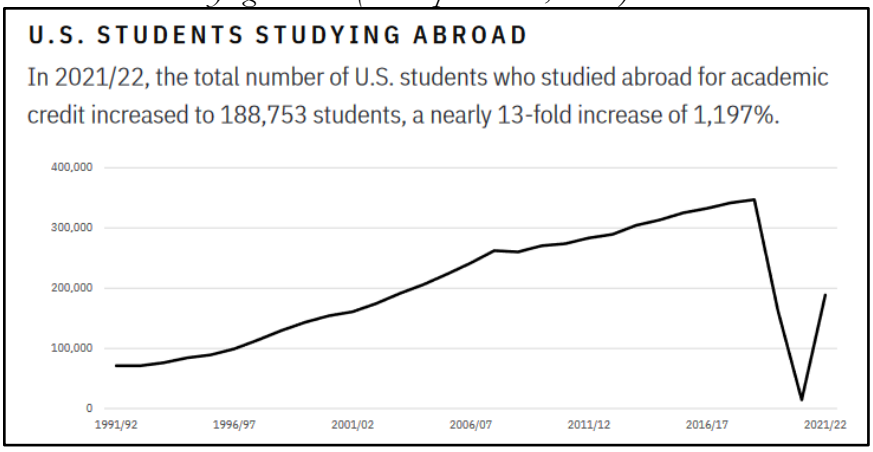
COVID-19 and Global Travel

New research agendas are now needed to address the current challenges facing the field. The COVID pandemic of 2020 brought new modalities of how international education was defined and measured. The pandemic has radically changed the landscape of international education, from virtual exchange access to online global encounters (Altbach & de Wit, 2020; Giovine & Uriarte, 2020). During the year of the pandemic, the number of U.S. students studying abroad for academic credit declined by 91%, and over 400 U.S. institutions reported an additional 32,990 U.S. students participating in online global learning opportunities (IIE Open Doors, 2022).

As shown in Figure 1, the most recent release of the next Open Doors survey in 2023 tells a new story about the state of the field of education abroad and its comeback. For now, indicators show that institutional and economic measures of international education are rebounding. As the report states, "U.S. students who studied abroad for academic credit increased to 188,753, a nearly 13-fold increase of 1,197%" (IIE Open Doors, 2023, p. 2). As can be imagined, this radical increase in a short period of time has coincided with a dramatically changing workforce in the field. Many staff and administrators were forced to leave the field when the world shut down. Institutions are now faced with onboarding new staff, re-arranging program priorities, and leveraging professional development as a necessity as the field rebuilds in a shifting era (Gallagher, 2023).

Figure 1

U.S. Students Studying Abroad (IIE Open Doors, 2023)



An Ethnographic Paradigm

As the field moves into a new era, the design of education abroad programs must be taken into consideration. The ethnographic paradigm (Ogden, 2006) and the use of postcolonial learning spaces (Fiedler, 2007) provide a framework for considering the intersection of program design, field-based experiences, and critical reflection learning activities before, during, and after studying abroad. Ogden (2006) suggests that through an ethnographic paradigm, students acquire advanced tools for cultural learning and become mindful observers, gaining awareness of their own culture and respect for others' cultural systems. He further contends that this process enables students to engage in all facets of cultural encounters, fostering a deeper and more reflective understanding (Ogden, 2006). Relatedly, Fiedler (2007) defines postcolonial learning spaces as dynamic spaces where identities and differences are negotiated and rewritten, preparing learners as global citizens for 21st-century challenges. This study considers how study abroad impacts the extent to which students have the opportunity to engage with the local community, critically reflect on these experiences, and critically act on their experiences over time.

Theoretical Framework

Critical consciousness as a theoretical framework has been used by scholars across multiple disciplines for the past five decades. Freire (1970) conceptualized critical consciousness as an educational tool for self-determination, providing the necessary knowledge for marginalized communities to combat systemic oppression and to act. Education as practice is at the heart of Freire's work: navigating the role that not only the educator plays but also emphasizing the agency of the learner. To embrace Freire's work, one must consider how all players engage with each other in the educational context. Likewise, it is also important to recognize that education as a practice requires higher education administrators to question how and in what ways institutions should embody these principles.

In this work, we operationalize Watts et al.'s (2011) systems approach analysis of critical reflection as the social analysis and rejection of intersecting societal inequities that constrain well-being and human agency. Moreover, we apply Watt's (2011) conceptualization of critical action to refer to individual and collective efforts aimed at altering societal elements, including institutional policies and practices, that are perceived as unjust. The origins of Freire's work were rooted in education as a liberation tool for the marginalized in his native Brazil (Freire, 1970). Yet the foundations of his work translate to a broader context, and there is also a need for educators to consider ways to engage those with privilege in critical reflection and challenge them to consider pathways of critical action. Our qualitative study provides an opportunity to collect data that sheds light on the contexts, lived experiences, and meaning associated with critical action.

Qualitative Methodology

This study draws upon anthropological praxis and ethnography (Bernard, 2006; Kozaitis, 2000). We center the constructivist research paradigm while incorporating a case study design (Bradbury-Jones, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a bounded system, this case study centered on one specific study abroad program that was administered for a span of fifteen years between 2001 and 2016. Data sources included demographic surveys, participant reflective journal entries, and semi-structured

interviews with 12 U.S. adults who studied abroad two decades ago. The demographic surveys were used to provide background on alumni participants, whereas the participants reflective journal entries and semi-structured interviews were coded to understand their lived experiences. The data was supplemented with a focus group of four program coordinators, an interview with the faculty director, and Tottenham's self-reflexive field journal.

Research Setting

The research setting was a semester-long study abroad program designed and implemented in 2001 through a collaborative partnership between a private, not-for-profit R1 university located in the southeastern United States and a local Tibetan institute of higher learning located in the foothills of the Himalayas in Dharamsala, India.

Data Collection

The project used purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to recruit alumni participants who studied abroad between 2001 and 2010 as well as the faculty director who participated in the case of a study abroad program. Data collection occurred between December 2023 and January 2024. Data analysis was guided in part by an embedded analysis of the case study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The triangulation of data sources and participant checking supported the validity of the research findings. The data coding and analysis involved both an inductive and deductive process, focusing on the lived experiences of alumni, the essence of the phenomena of their reflections over time, and the themes that emerged from the data (Hays & Singh, 2012). The study design, including the coding scheme and review of themes, were developed with input from the full team of authors.

Positionality

We draw particular attention to the positionality of Tottenham, an international educator who helped to launch the study abroad program and was involved in alumni engagement initiatives. This self-reflexive journal is significant because this practice is "analogous to an anthropologist's field notes" (Lincoln & Guba, 1982, p. 9). Through an analysis of these data sources, specific themes are discussed using an autoethnographic (Ellis et al., 2011) and self-reflexive writing style. Careful attention has been made throughout the research process as we aim to draw upon the wisdom of other scholars who attempt to "share our narratives with rigor and trustworthiness" (Reddick & Sáenz, 2012, p. 359). The remaining coauthors had no affiliation with the study abroad program, are faculty members at U.S.-based higher education institutions throughout the U.S., and primarily contributed to the theoretical and conceptual elements of the research.

Findings

Education Abroad Cohort Overview

The 12 alumni participants span ages 36 to 49 and represent 50% of each male and females. The demographic profile includes one Latino, three Asian Americans, and eight white participants. They live in six different cities across the U.S., Australia, and France. They speak 15 languages collectively. Their undergraduate majors included all the strands of the liberal arts: humanities, social sciences,

and sciences. All but two participants pursued graduate degrees, ranging from master-level work in economic geography and religion to doctoral work in Asian religions and Tibetan medicine to professional degrees in law and business. All but three participants had scholarships or financial aid that partially or fully funded their participation.

Thematic Findings

Three themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data. Each theme and sub-theme are supported by the words of the participants themselves. There were common patterns across all twelve participant accounts. However, this paper will present representative examples of eight participants.

Theme One: Transformative Personal Experiences

Navigating Ambiguity: "Losing Our Path." Getting lost was a key to where alumni found themselves and discovered their identities. Kim is a 43-year-old white female who lives in Sydney, Australia and works as a brand and experience design consultant. She defined navigating ambiguity as a life-long skill:

> you go through this whole experience of adapting to [a very different environment…where you don't really know what to expect] and…being exposed to so many new things and new people. And…feeling changed by the end of it… I've definitely put myself up for situations where I don't really know what to expect, and I feel very comfortable with the ambiguity of that…I feel confident that I can handle anything like it's built a certain capability in me.

This statement is significant because it illustrates her reflections over time as an alumna who studied abroad 25 years ago.

Exploring Cross-Cultural Contexts: Chai Shops as "Third Space." The novelty of difference led alumni to explore different cross-cultural contexts. Alfonso is a 42-year-old Indian Asian male who lives in Centennial, Colorado, and works as a business development executive. He defined one memorable experience as revolving around chai shops, which he described as "creating a third space." In the simple practice of "hanging out and getting tea," he had conversations, met new people, and explored the intersections of ethnic identity. This daily routine of stopping by the local chai shop enabled Alfonso to feel connected with the local community. Alfonso became acutely aware of Indo-Tibetan relationships, a topic he further explored during independent fieldwork. He described "I think the chai shop was run by Indian people. However, it was on a Tibetan campus. So, you saw…this fusing of culture happening." Alfonso's reflection also demonstrated his awareness the local economy dynamics and the intersections of people who were embedded in this one environment.

Discovering Global Travel: "The Secret Sauce." The study abroad program served as a launchpad for meaningful, mindful travel. All alumni attributed future overseas travel, whether personal or professional, to the inspiration that they found in discovering new cultures and finding adventures in global contexts. Finn is a 44-year-old white male who lives in Detroit, Michigan and works as a global health physician. Finn stated, "My wife actually gives me a hard time because I

refuse to…travel anywhere just for tourism's sake…I always want there to be…a purpose behind it…it is sort of like the secret sauce behind it."

Theme Two: Intersections of Study Abroad and Career Integration

Reinforcing Professional Callings: "Where I am Now". Some of the alumni already knew what careers they wanted to pursue, and the study abroad experience solidified their professional callings. Jack is a 40-year-old white male who lives in Fairfax, Virginia and works as the South Asian reference specialist at the Library of Congress. He stated:

> I often get the question, "What brought you to this career?" My story begins with my…interest in the humanities and world languages…but I phrase Dharamsala as the point of departure for my 20-year study of South Asia. I talk about the experiences provided by the program structure: the guest lectures with the Dalai Lama, [meeting a former Tibetan political prisoner], and the field trips. I talk about volunteering with the community,… learning Tibetan, living with a roommate,…and doing independent study…on Tibetan thangka painting…And I talk about the sense of community of the program itself…The [study abroad] program remains the first big milestone in the "where I am now" story.

In interactions with a range of visitors and colleagues at the Library of Congress, Finn reinforced how study abroad connected to his professional calling.

Inspiring Career Pivots: "Planetary Cosmos Alignment." When asked about the impact of study abroad on his career, Alfonso responded, "Huge. Massive. Life-altering completely trajectory realignment….planetary cosmos alignment." He abandoned plans to be a pre-medical student, changed his major to Asian studies and music, and completed post-baccalaureate coursework in economics. Alfonso became very emotional as we concluded the interview. He had to reschedule the initial interview because his neighbor had just been involved in a car wreck. He defined the deep empathy that he felt towards those around him in this way: "That is something that I found myself coming back to again and again. I think it's largely because of the study abroad program, but particularly about learning…Tibetan Buddhism and the teachings of His Holiness around empathy and being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes because you never know what's gonna happen." He expressed bringing this sense of empathy to both his personal and professional trajectory over his lifetime.

Theme Three: Social Justice Orientations

Critical Reflection: "Get Out of Jail Free Card." Participants described their awareness of privilege that they carried vis a vis the refugee community. In some cases, the awareness was taking place while they were on the program. In other cases, the awareness came decades later. As study abroad students, the local community gave students experiences and opportunities to meet key leaders and stakeholders, a privilege not offered to any visitor to the town. Roy, a 49-year-old white male educator who lives in Atlanta, Georgia, stated:

> I was always aware of [of the access that we had] and the difference between me and people from within the community that I had become close to. But it wasn't just the Tibetan

> community, just the privilege in general, the privilege in India and even being granted expedited passes into restricted areas for our research…I was always, always aware of it.

Many alumni described how having a U.S. passport ensured not only their freedom but also their access to mobility in ways that did not exist for the local community. Matt, a 36-year-old white male economics professor who lives in Paris, France, articulated this best when he said, "just having an American passport…is like a get out of jail, free card…You're carrying all these different sets of privileges around with you all the time." Students often assumed they had immunity to local laws and took risks that they never would have back in the United States. Their sense of invincibility reified privilege and passport mobility.

Critical Action: "What They Asked From Us In Return." Students engaged with political issues such as nonviolent movements both inside the classroom and during fieldwork. They met with political prisoners and current activists. Living in a refugee community offered a chance for students to experience real-time the movements in place for political change. Matt described the alignment of the March 10th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising that coincided with the 2008 Beijing Olympics. His interest in the nonviolent revolution movement inspired his independent research topic as well as his undergraduate honor's thesis "about Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy and its connections to sustainability and economics."

Upon return, students also engaged in critical action. Many alumni discussed the steps they chose to take to participate in critical action for change. Wendy, a 43-year-old white female who lives in Washington, DC, and works as a human rights lawyer, said, "I was an intern at the U.S. Tibet Committee in New York where I just wanted to contribute to…social activism, political activism work…I stayed really involved in the cause."

Meanwhile, Celeste, a Taiwanese American female who lives in Detroit, Michigan, and works in the sustainability field, compared the difference between studying abroad for a summer versus a semester program. As a student who participated in both, she described the short-term program as having an "extractive dynamic" where you arrive overseas and learn but not necessarily take critical action. She further explored this distinction:

> I think the beauty of [this semester program] and what felt profoundly different…is that [the program] felt like a relationship… we were going there,…we were learning from them, and we were learning about their culture. But there was a lot that they asked from us in return…which was to understand their stories, which was to care about their stories, which was to take up that call for activism for Tibet.

Many alumni returned from the program, participated in Students for a Free Tibet, wrote letters to congressional representatives, and educated others about the Tibetan cause. The annual campus Tibet Week was an opportunity for them to take their engagement to another level by bringing together the campus community, screening documentaries, and discussing what role they could play.

Discussion

The alumni's capacity to articulate how their time overseas profoundly shaped them and created their "ability to see bigger and broader" (in the words of Alfonso) documents the high-impact practice of education abroad programs. Through the data analysis process, their reflections coalesced into shared themes. The participants consistently described the transformative, life-altering impact of the program. They reported that their experience directly impacted their career choices, whether reaffirming and expanding their professional pursuits or changing their trajectory in new, unexpected ways. The participants shared common reflections that demonstrated their critical reflection and understanding of their situated and privileged identities as U.S. students vis a vis the local community. Alumni also reported the role of critical action in their lives, whether working in the field of human rights law, supporting the Tibetan cause, or embodying Buddhist principles of compassion and empathy.

This program was designed with an orientation towards immersion in the local community. The faculty director integrated the fundamental concept of establishing rapport and building respect with the local community. Instead of playing a role as cultural consumers of the study abroad experience, students in this program were encouraged to critically reflect on their experiences and to engage in meaningful, field-based connections with the local community. They explored holistic healing practices, studied educational systems established in exile, and learned about nonviolent movements as they related to the Tibetan cause, to name a few. Independent fieldwork projects involved ethnographic inquiry as they were trained in participant observation and wrote their findings. This process provided the learning core produced with this practice.

As evidenced by the findings, this program design has had a direct impact on how alumni reflect upon their experiences decades later. The alumni voices echo the saturation point, where all of them expressed a version of the fact that studying abroad was the most impactful component of their undergraduate careers. The ethnographic paradigm concept applies to the experience of alumni who look back and reconsider their memories of studying abroad. The demographic survey, reflective journal entries, and individual interviews yielded these findings.

Following the interview, Kim shared, "In all seriousness, I like to do projects outside of work that are things that I'm passionate about…let's talk about all the ways that we could get more people to consider study abroad and understand what the barriers are…" Not only were alumni engaged in the process of their reflections, but they also expressed an eagerness and readiness to learn more about the research outcomes and find out how they could become involved in future initiatives. The findings affirm that alumni experienced impactful learning during and immediately after the abroad experience with lasting long-term life consequences.

Based on these findings, we argue that postcolonial learning spaces should be integrated into study abroad program designs as a best practice for the field. Furthermore, embracing the principles of the ethnographic paradigm, study abroad has the capacity to encourage critical reflection and critical action before, during, and decades later after studying abroad.

Recommendations for Higher Education

Implications for Policy and Practice

With its orientation in anthropological praxis, the following recommendations consider the concept of center-outer reform. Center-outer reform is defined as "a process by which targets of change become agents of change and the reference points of analysis, intervention, and evaluation of project goals and outcomes" (Kozaitis, 2013, p. 139-40). Thus, these recommendations consider both education abroad alumni and higher education administrators as "agents of change." With this orientation in mind, the following recommendations represent multi-level orientations.

Alumni-level

We suggest that higher education embrace a more inclusive approach to engaging and connecting with education abroad alumni. This approach not only involves the concept of co-creating spaces for engagement but are more creative in terms of how alumni engagement opportunities are envisioned, designed, and implemented. According to the Council on Advancement and Support of Education (CASE, 2022), the modes of engagement are defined and tracked as metrics for university-wide alumni engagement. Education abroad alumni should be leveraged as key constituents, given that their time abroad significantly impacted their undergraduate experience and informed their life-long choices.

Institutional-level

At the institutional level, administrators should consider how to structure partnerships between international education colleagues and alumni engagement, development, and advancement colleagues. The silos within the academy are all too common. Collaborative efforts could motivate administrators to find areas of common strategic planning and to provide an avenue to make goal attainment sustainable and scalable. Collaborations with other partners allow leaders to consider how these initiatives dovetail into a broader strategic framework to support high-impact programs such as education abroad. Additionally, institutional-level collaborations between faculty who led study abroad programs and their former students are crucial to expanding the network of alumni with whom they may be connected after they graduate.

Professional organization-level

Professional organizations in higher education design training for lead staff and administrators, develop strategic planning documents, and advocate for policy planning and resource allocation. Senior higher education leaders should consider how education abroad and alumni engagement partnerships could be taken to a systemic level within their professional organizations. Leaders should also consider how to invite research dedicated to alumni engagement for consideration in future issues. Research agendas could further measure the impact of program models that use of the ethnographic paradigm and prioritize postcolonial learning opportunities.

Implications for Future Research

Future research could expand upon this work by including multiple types of study abroad programs (faculty-led, direct exchange, non-profit program provider), duration of the program (May term, summer-term, year-long), different types of institutions (public, private, HBCUs, women's colleges), and distinct locations around the globe. In addition, future research should focus on inclusivity in its participant recruitment strategies to ensure that a broader, more diverse set of alumni voices are included in the research on education abroad. Future research could further examine issues of identity and intersectionality before, during, and after the study abroad experience.

Furthermore, scholars should continue the crucial work of documenting the overall impact of education abroad experiences. Further research is warranted that considers the lifelong impacts of studying abroad from a qualitative, longitudinal perspective. This impact should consider not only personal experiences and professional development but, most importantly, social justice orientations of alumni over the course of decades. These longitudinal impacts align with a critical consciousness theoretical framework, as it considers a critical reflection of education abroad alumni and intersections with critical action, inclusive of alumni engagement and philanthropy, decades later. In addition, since collaboration with education abroad offices for fundraising purposes has been almost nonexistent, future research could include assessment of alumni engagement and advancement initiatives. The collaboration between "higher education fundraising units and study abroad programs has been typically an afterthought and usually driven by donor passion, not a strategic fundraising plan" (J. Gonzales, personal communication, March 1, 2024). This perspective inspires us to consider action-oriented solutions and longer-term research agendas.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of integrating practices that ensure education abroad work is infused with principles of critical consciousness. These spaces should include opportunities for critical reflection to inspire critical action, as well as supporting programs designed with the ethnographic paradigm, which encourages postcolonial learning spaces.

New modalities of connecting with education abroad alumni, such as targeted philanthropy and mentorship, offer pathways to increase access to study abroad for the next generation of students. We argue that higher education leaders need to co-create spaces for education abroad and alumni engagement interactions. As we head into a new era for international education, this work must be a collective effort. Now is the time for the field of higher education writ large, and education abroad in particular, to embrace the movement of social justice, to infuse critical consciousness as a theoretical lens, and to challenge the field to take situated action.

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The Nexus Between Patriotism and Censorship: The "New Normal" for Academic Expression

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Abstract

According to the ACLU (2005), ". . .at times of national stress -- real or imagined -- First Amendment rights come under enormous pressure." So, too, academic freedom of expression for faculty, staff, and students has become a casualty in the post-9/11 world. Academics were criticized and reprimanded for not being patriotic enough. Using a conceptual framework that includes historical reanalysis, terror management theory, contradictory constructions of patriotism, and electronic discourse, this essay explores the nexus between patriotism and free expression in higher education. We examine historical trends in freedom of expression, analyze three higher education case studies (Chilling Churchill; 9/11 and Middle Eastern Studies; and Shunning Bob Jensen), and suggest why patriotism and censorship go hand and glove in times of national crisis. We end one a cautionary note, expressing concern about how easily words can be turned against academics, the very people who should have the highest level of protection for their words.

Nearly 20 years ago, Professor Pat Somers joined the faculty at the University of Texas at Austin bringing her trademark wit and her seemingly indefatigable energy to root out injustice. The paper below represents one such branch of her academic curiosity in response to a perceived injustice to a fellow member of the Academy. This paper was first presented as a draft manuscript at the American Educational Research Association and later submitted to a notable journal. Unfortunately, a second paper on academic freedom was already included in the edition, but the editors encouraged Pat and her team to pursue other publications. And then, as with many things, this paper fell to the side as Pat pursued a new branch of academic curiosity and stewarded her many doctoral students through the dissertation process. As you will note in the dedication, Pat was a deeply curious and pedagogically dynamic member of the Academy and this paper stands at the ready for updating and resubmission. We present it today unadulterated as a testimony to Pat's prescience, her passion and her drive – a historical glimpse into the early days of a very real threat to academic freedom that persists today.

Note: The opinions expressed here are those of the authors and do not represent official or unofficial policy of the institutions with which we are affiliated.

Keywords: freedom of expression, censorship, patriotism, historical analysis, AAUP

Dedication

We knew Pat as a capacious researcher: her work spanned topics from academic capitalism to social inclusion policies to campus carry policy at The University of Texas at Austin. She was also expert at speaking and writing about these topics in a way that reflected the complexity of these topics within the field of higher education. Whether she presented as faculty to the Comparative and International

Education Society, as a Fulbright Scholar in Brazil, or as a fellow of the Humanities Institute at UT, she was able to weave together research from wide-ranging fields in a way that made sense to interdisciplinary audiences. Her choice of conceptual frameworks, which she drew from areas of law, education, sociology, history, and business, also run the gamut. However, it was her passion for the injustices of the world that drove her pedagogical practice and her inspiring, and unwavering, support of graduate student scholarship. The topic that held her gaze from her time as a student affairs administrator to her work as a senior faculty member was that of academic freedom. Pat was a long-time member of the AAUP and a staunch advocate for free expression on campuses. For her, every issue was one of academic freedom—and every threat to this freedom was a threat to her beloved Academy. We cannot help but think that Pat would be riveted by what's happening at her home institution in the current moment: including the attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion that's resulted in the dissolution of UT's Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, a home to so many of her practitioner and faculty collaborators; and speech issues around the current conflict in Gaza. Recently, a letter was released by AAUP members of UT's faculty; we are certain Pat's imprint would have been all over that were she still with us. Pat was prescient in her thinking about academic freedom, producing much writing and thinking about the case of former college president Ward Churchill, who claimed that the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001 were the logical result of U.S. foreign policy. This unpublished paper discusses Churchill, along with a speech by a fellow UT professor at that time. Ostensibly, the final section, on Middle Eastern studies, reflects her desire to tie the present to the past. This paper is also a glimpse into Pat's mind at work - seemingly disparate pieces of information working together to raise awareness and draw attention. Since her death, we all (former students, colleagues, and collaborators) had time to reflect on the sheer volume of the work that Pat produced. As her former graduate students, we and our CVs benefitted from inclusion on her research, papers and presentations, many unpublished or unfinished. This paper demonstrates Pat's enduring legacy of scholarship and mentorship; we are confident that all of Pat's students in their places will continue her legacy. - Suchitra Gururaj, Jess Geier, Curtis Brewer

Introduction

The First Amendment isn't what it used to be.
– Toby Ziegler*, The West Wing,* October 2, 2005

The First Amendment in fact is anti-authority, and sooner or later ticks off nearly everyone who pays attention to such things.
– Levinson, 2003, p. 5

According to the ACLU (2005), "It is no accident that freedom of speech is protected in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights. But historically, at times of national stress -- real or imagined -- First Amendment rights come under enormous pressure." Writing about the "Fog of Patriotism" (2002), Ward concurs,

> In every crisis, in every war, journalists come under pressure to be "patriotic." Patriotism in this context, is not just a love of one's country. Patriotism goes further and asks journalists to water-down the standards of journalism: to root for the home team, to minimize dissent, to censor the enemy, and to maintain "morale." (p. 1)

So, too, academic freedom of expression for faculty, staff, and students has become a casualty in the post-9/11 world. Professors, staff members, and students were criticized and reprimanded for not being patriotic enough (see Somers & Somers-Willett, 2002). For example, a Manhattan College basketball player who turned her back on the flag during the national anthem was booed, threatened, and singled out for harassment by military cadets bussed in for the event (Chronicle, 2003). Individuals – both adults and students – who wore T-shirts with dissident messages have been ejected from shopping malls, expelled from schools, and denied a seat on a Southwest Airlines flight (see Somers et al., 2005). Not since the Vietnam War have academics received so much attention, criticism, and venom for their words.

This essay explores the nexus between patriotism and free expression in higher education. We examine historical trends in freedom of expression, analyze three higher education case studies, and suggest why patriotism and censorship go hand and glove in times of national crisis.

Historical Background

Rather than being an exception, war-era violations of civil liberties in the United States are the accepted norm for our government.
– Linfield, 1990, p. 2

Blanchard (2002) describes two almost parallel cycles of repression and reaction in freedom of expression in the United States during times of crisis. Her work is based on that of Frederick Seibert's study of censorship in Britain. He said, "The area of freedom [of speech] contracts and the enforcement of restraints increases as the stresses on the stability of the government and the structure of society increase" (Seibert, 1965, p. 10, as cited in Blanchard).

According to Blanchard, the American cycles have in common two notions. First is the belief that society will be destroyed if "freedom of speech is not implemented" and the second is that "criticism of government action must be eliminated" (2002, p. 348). Blanchard points out that even as the repression of speech begins, the seeds of the counter-cycle are sown.

The very first cycle was anchored in the early experiences of the Colonists. The 1736 trial of Peter Zenger charged him with "printing and publishing several seditious libels dispersed throughout his journals or newspapers. . .tending to raise factions and tumults among the people of this Province, inflaming their minds with contempt of His Majesty's government, and greatly disturbing the peace thereof" (Bench Warrant for arrest of John Peter Zenger, November 2, 1734). While *King v. John Peter Zenger* established the right to criticize the monarch, the resulting Stamp Act of 1765 heavily taxed and limited the publication and distribution of such criticism.

The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 were passed to protect the country from war with France and to shield President John Adams from challenge by the pro-French Thomas Jefferson (Blanchard, p. 351). Federalist Harrison Gray Otis argued, "Every independent government has a right to preserve and defend itself against injuries and outrages which endanger its existence. It is clearly understood that to punish licentiousness and sedition is not a restraint or abridgement of freedom of speech or of the press" (*Annals of Congress*, 1798, pp. 2148-9). Blanchard notes that "all the Sedition Act did

was draw a line around freedom of expression. Federalist speech was inside the circle; Republican speech was outside" (p. 352).

The Civil War framed the next cycle. During this national crisis, President Lincoln suspended habeas corpus, closed newspapers, and jailed legislators. Three of the five Supreme Court cases challenging Lincoln's actions were struck down after his assassination (*Ex Parte Milligan,* 1866). Blanchard argues that these cases were important because they "created. . .the beginnings of a judicial safety net to stop such repression" (p. 360).

"World War I is considered one of the most repressive periods in American history. The three branches of the federal government acted to ensure that executive policy, legislation, and judicial decisions would combine to silence disagreement with the wartime policies of Woodrow Wilson" (Blanchard, p. 360). Congressman Thomas of Colorado said, "It is only in time of war that these great Constitutional limitations upon despotism are put to the test. . .it is at such times that we must see to it that they are preserved, lest when peace does return we shall realize that some of the most important safeguards of liberty have been swept away in the torrent of conflict" (*Congressional Record*, 1917, pp. 789-90).

In *Schenk v. United States* (1919) a unanimous court ruled, "When a nation is at war many things that might be said in a time of peace are such a hindrance to its effort that their utterance will not be endured so long as men fight and that no court could regard them as protected by any Constitutional right" (p. 50).

The Red Scares of 1919-1920 marked another cycle of repression. In *Abrahms* [*sic*] *v. United States,* Justices Holmes and Brandeis dissented in favor of free expression, "the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market" (*Abrahms* [*sic*], p. 630). The Miltonian notion of a "marketplace of ideas" would later be used to argue for free expression in the Academy (*Healy v. James*, 1972; *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 1957).

With another war on the horizon, Congress established the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities (HUAC) and passed both the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938 and the Smith Act of 1940, to permit the prosecution of individuals who advocated the overthrow of the U.S. government. Attorney General Francis Biddle told a *New York Times* reporter, "In so far as I can, by the use of my authority and the influence of my office, I intend to see that civil liberties in this country are protected; that we do not again fall into the disgraceful hysteria of witch hunts, strike breaking, and minority persecutions which were such a dark chapter in our record of the last World War" (Phillips, 1941, p. 8).

The next repressive cycle began in 1940 when the Supreme Court ordered that a local school board in West Virginia could force children to salute the flag despite religious objections (*Minersville School District v. Gobitis,* 1940). Justice Felix Frankfurter wrote, "National unity is the basis of national security. The ultimate foundation of a free society is the binding tie of cohesive sentiment" (p. 604). Dissent, from religious groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses or others, would not be tolerated.
In another flag salute case (*West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette,* 1944), the Supreme Court overturned *Gobitis*. The Court said,

> Those who begin coercive elimination of dissent soon find themselves exterminating dissenters. . .If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein. If there are any circumstances which permit an exception, they do not occur to us now. (pp. 641-2)

In just two years, the Court went from enforced patriotism in the form of a flag salute to stating emphatically that no government official could mandate demonstrations of patriotism.

In two cases (*Baumgartner*, 1944; *Hartzel*, 1944) from World War II, the Court upheld the rights of dissenters, a complete turnabout from the cases of World War I. Justice Frankfurter summed up this new attitude, "Our trust in the good sense of the people on deliberate reflection goes deep. For such is the contradictoriness of the human mind that the expression of views which may collide with cherished American ideals does not necessarily prove want of devotion to the nation" (*Baumgartner,* p. 44).

The period after World War II was marked by the Cold War, loyalty oaths, communist hunts, and fear brought on by the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Yet it was President Truman who provided the first glimmer of a reactive cycle when he remarked, "In a free country, we punish men for the crimes they commit, but never for the opinions that they have," adding, that freedom of expression protects criticism, and "criticism leads to progress" (1950, p. 649).

Even conservative Senator Margaret Chase Smith tried to muffle the McCarthy witch hunt. She said,

> Those of us who shout the loudest about Americanism in making character assassinations are all too frequently those who, by our own words and acts, ignore some of the basic principles of Americanism – the right to criticize. The right to hold unpopular beliefs. The right to protest. The right of independent thought. (*Congressional Record,* 1950, p. 7894)

In 1957, the Court handed down four decisions (*Sweezy; Service; Watkins; Yates*) on "Red Monday" which criticized the Congressional investigations. Amid criticism, the Supreme Court restored the civil right of the Communists (see Sabin, 1999, for more information).

The Supreme Court then turned to cases involving freedom of expression in the civil rights movement, the beginning of the next cycle. In the wake of *Brown I* (1954) and *Brown II* (1955), opponents of desegregation attempted to attack the NAACP and its members rather than continuing to defend the legal doctrine of separate but equal. However, the Supreme Court ruled First Amendment protection for membership lists (*NAACP v. Alabama,* 1958), for the list of organizations to which teachers belonged (*Shelton,* 1960), and for the right of NAACP members to band together for legal redress (*NACCP v. Button*, 1963).

While the Court was upholding the rights of individuals to protest (see, for example *Tinker,* 1969), Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon attempted to quash news stories about American involvement in Vietnam. And, with the country divided over both civil rights and the war, Congress enacted the Safe Streets Act to prevent individuals from crossing state lines to incite rioting.

These years were marked by individuals – high school and college students, civil rights workers, feminists, pacifists and other activists – who took it upon themselves to protest the status quo. Two lower court cases provided ringing endorsement of an individual's right to free expression. In the Boston 5 case, which included defendants Rev. William Sloane Coffin and Dr. Benjamin Spock, the Court found "Inseparable from the question of the sufficiency of the evidence to convict are the rights of the defendants, and others, under the First Amendment" (*Spock,* 1969, p. 169). From the appeal of the Chicago 7 case came this statement, "Rioting, in history and by nature, almost invariably occurs as an expansion of political, social, or economic reactions, if not ideas. The rioting assembly is usually protesting the practices of a government" (*Delberg,* 1972, p. 359). The period of the peace and civil rights movements established important precedents for the individual right of free expression.

The next period of conflict was the first Gulf War (1991), which may have set the stage for the challenges to freedom of expression that we experienced post-9/11. Media censorship was easy to accomplish because American armed forces used Saudi soil to mount their attacks; the Saudi government had absolute control over which journalists were provided visas to enter the country. Further, journalists were assigned "minders" while in country. Only a few reporters like Peter Arnett and Bernard Shaw broke rank and covered the invasion from Baghdad. As John MacArthur concluded, "Count Desert Storm as a devastating and immoral victory for military censorship and a crushing defeat for the press and the First Amendment" (2004, p. 8).

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, dissent was almost immediately isolated, criticized, and frequently, silenced. News networks received complaints of journalists who were not being patriotic enough. President Bush said, "You are either with us or with the terrorists" (quoted in Stone, 2004, p. 551). Attorney General John Ashcroft said, "To those who scare peace-loving people with phantoms of lost liberty, my message is this: your tactics only aid terrorists, for they erode our unity and diminish our resolve. They give ammunition to America's enemies" (Stone, p. 552).

Predictably, legislation to restrict civil liberties came quickly in the form of the USA Patriot Act (Stone, p. 553) a mere six weeks after the attacks. The Act authorized indefinite detention with limited civil liberties for non-citizens and citizens labeled as "enemy combatants." The Freedom of Information Act along with the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act were modified to investigate terrorism (Stone, 2004). The standard of review for wiretapping cases was significantly reduced for national security cases and those individuals served with subpoenas were also given a gag order. Banking, brokerage, Internet, medical, and library records were declared fair game in the war on terror. Finally, clandestine physical searches were enabled.

Given these unprecedented wartime powers, the counter-action, the liberalizing part of the cycle, had more limited success. Librarians across the country organized to foil both searches of library records and gag orders. For example, librarians would, when appropriate, post signs such as "No search warrants were served at this library today." They also took special care that patron records were kept on the computer system for as little time as possible.

The old maxim, "Intra arma seleat legis," or "In terms of war, the laws are silent" has been invoked in the eight wartime periods described here. With each cycle of repression, came advances in protecting free speech, particularly after World War II. However, today's extended "war on terror"

will likely make it more difficult to regain civil rights. The mass psychology of wartime capitalizes upon citizens' fear to allow for restricted freedoms. We talk more later about the motives for censorship and the prospects for the future.

Conceptual Framework

Other countries kill their dissidents. We frustrate ours into silence. . .turning advocates into cranks.
– Levinson, 2003, p. 2

We blend two theories to examine the nexus between patriotism and censorship: terror management theory (Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2003), the commodification of higher education and the contradictory constructions of patriotism (Kahne & Middaugh, 2005; Primoratz, 2004; Westheimer, 2004). Finally, we use electronic discourse to examine the use of e-mailstrom (Selingo, 2005) as a tactic to bring economic and political pressure to bear on those individuals who speak out and are affiliated with colleges or universities.

In the book *In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror*, the authors use their "Terror Management Theory" (TMT) to explore the national response to 9/11 (Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2003). Faced with mortality, humans tend to act in predictable ways, called distal and proximal reactions. Direct (proximal) responses include increased drinking, gaming, shopping, movie-going, and isolation. The distal effects are increased patriotism, censorship, and bigotry. So too it was after 9/11, Americans purchased flags and displayed them on their homes, their cars, and their clothing. Criticism was immediate, as Bill Maher, host of *Politically Incorrect*, can confirm. He made controversial statements on his September 17, 2001 show that were considered unpatriotic by some viewers. He was not just censored, but excoriated and fired.

Patriotism is contested terrain in America (Kahne & Middaugh, 2005; Primoratz, 2004; Westheimer, 2004). Four visions, with different values and attitudes, are recognized. First, committed patriotism is love of country. Second, nationalistic patriotism supports one country's interests regardless of the impact on others. The individuals ". . .fail to appreciate the role of critique in democracies as engines of improvement – instead they say, 'America, love it or leave it'" (Kahne & Middaugh, p. 2). Moreover, nationalists tend to use conventional, "obedience to authority" moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1981). Third, symbolic patriotism is a grand but less detailed vision which evokes the symbols of a nation: the flag, pledge, anthem, or uniform. Finally, democratic patriotism is equated with "high ideals" and invokes a more global sense of moral reasoning. According to Kahne and Middaugh, democratic visions of patriotism, "[open] up the potential to work to improve and support the society, while avoiding the problems with nationalism" (p. 2).

In the post-9/11 era, there are serious conflicts between the committed and democratic patriots, who are equally as activist and as strongly committed to their own point of view. However, democratic patriotism encourages critical thinking and dissent. As Constitutional lawyer Erwin Cherminsky notes, "History shows us that in terms of crisis, the suppression of dissension occurs" (quoted in Hudson, 2002).

Finally, we explore the use of technology in chilling academic expression. Shortly before the advent and widespread distribution of the personal computer in 1984, researchers suggested that new

technologies such as computers could have an influence on the distribution of political power (Haight & Rubinyi, 1983). This could be accomplished by increasing the dissemination potential of information, not only through enhanced word processing and printing, but most notably through electronic distribution lists (Rice & Case, 1983). In this way, activists could connect to like-minded people across the globe. Rheingold (1991) would later term the Internet "The Great Equalizer," referring to the potential that ordinary citizens could affect power structures through direct communication. In an era when all citizens are potential customers, committed and democratic patriotic activists, fueled by the fear of terrorism, can cause massive disruptions to academic institutions through e-maelstrom. "Ten years ago. . .an incident might have received a mention in the student newspaper and that would be that. . .news about even minor campus dust-ups is disseminated much more quickly" (Selingo, 2005, p. A29).

While fear of terrorism, conflicting visions of patriotism, and commodification of education create "the perfect storm," e-maelstrom has the potential of blowing that storm to every college campus in the country. As Zemsky notes, "Campuses are no longer places for civilized public discourse. They've become places for political campaigns that are getting sourer and sourer. People are no longer willing to fight their battles without trying to muster allies outside of campus" (Selingo, 2005, p. A29).

For the purposes of this article, we use the terms freedom of expression, free speech, and academic speech. We recognize that "freedom of expression" provides a broader view of the topic and includes the speech of students, faculty, and staff at both public and private institutions and in classroom and extramural settings. However, we recognize that academic freedom has a much different history than freedom of expression and is to be lumped together with academic speech, free speech, and freedom of expression. Most of what we cite in the three cases falls outside of the classroom and faculty research venues and is classified as extramural speech.

The Cases

It has long been a cornerstone of First Amendment law that the state must remain neutral on the content of speech, even when this ends up sheltering what is abhorrent to the minority or majority – the latter being the real test since what is acceptable to most people doesn't need as much protecting.
– Levinson, 2003, p. 4

In this section, we discuss three cases related to academic freedom of expression following September 11. The first, Ward Churchill, involves a faculty member who made statements about 9/11, and was subsequently charged with various infractions of university policy. Robert Jensen, professor of journalism at the University of Texas and an anti-war activist, wrote an op-ed piece for the *Houston Chronicle* directly after 9/11 that ignited a storm of controversy and raised issues about extramural speech. While supported in his right to speak, Jensen was nonetheless attacked and shunned. The third case outlines the attack on federally funded Middle Eastern Studies programs.

Chilling Churchill

One of the prerogatives of American citizenship is the right to criticize public men and measures – and that means not only informed and responsible criticism but the freedom to speak foolishly and without moderation.

– *Baumgartner v. United States,* 1994, pp. 673-4

Ward Churchill, a professor of ethnic studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder, drafted the now infamous essay *Some People Push Back: On the Justice of Roosting Chickens* (Churchill, 2001, 2003), just a few hours after the 9/11 attacks. The essay and his comparison of those killed in the World Trade Center to "Little Eichmanns," sat relatively untouched until discovered by a government professor a few months before Churchill's 2005 scheduled campus appearance at Hamilton College. According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Smallwood, 2005, February 10), that professor was joined by three others who sent the essay along with two opinion pieces to the campus newspaper, directing the campus community to some of Churchill's other more controversial writings. That story was later picked up by a newspaper in Syracuse, New York, and a link to the article was subsequently posted on a conservative weblog on January 26, 2005 (www.littlegreenfootballs.com). Less than two hours later, online activists had called the governor of Colorado, and contacted media outlets in Denver (Smallwood, 2005, February 10). A few hours after that, the original weblog had already received over 500 comments (www.littlegreenfootballs.com, 2005). Bill O'Reilly did a feature piece on Churchill on January 28.

As for campus fallout at Hamilton, the institution received over 8,000 email messages regarding Churchill in a matter of days. Subsequently, claiming threats of violence, Hamilton College cancelled the speaking engagement.

At the University of Colorado -- Boulder, Churchill was forced to resign his (untenured) post as department chairman, but not his tenured faculty position. The president of the University resigned later, citing her defense of Churchill as being the final blow to a term that had been filled with other controversies (Fain, 2005).

The System Chancellor asked two deans to review the charges against Churchill in February, 2005. The questions raised were, "First, did certain statements by Professor Churchill exceed the boundaries of protected speech? Second, is there evidence that Professor Churchill engaged in other conduct that warrants further action by the University – such as research misconduct, teaching misconduct, or fraudulent misrepresentation in performing his duties?" (Statement of Chancellor Phil DiStefano, March 24, 2005). DiStefano reported that, "in our review, we have found that the content and rhetoric of Professor Churchill's essay on 9/11 are protected by the First Amendment. While there are limits to the protections afforded by the Constitution, our review has determined that those limits have not been exceeded in Professor Churchill's case" (DiStefano, 2005). However, the investigation did determine that the "allegations regarding research misconduct warrant referral to the Standing Committee" and "in regard to the allegation of misrepresentation of ethnicity to gain credibility and an audience for scholarship, we believe such misrepresentation may constitute research misconduct and failure to meet standards of professional integrity" (DiStefano, 2005). While the findings for Churchill's right to free speech were entirely consistent with the First Amendment and university policy on academic freedom, it's clear that Churchill's legion of critics had combed his record electronically to uncover any possible indication of wrongdoing.

DiStefano referred the charges to the Standing Committee on Research Misconduct at the Boulder campus. A subcommittee of the Standing Committee reviewed the allegations against Churchill and recommended that seven of the nine charges warranted full investigation. There were "alleged

instances of plagiarism, misuse of others' work, falsification and fabrication of authority" (Hale, 2005). The other two allegations, on copyright infringement and "mispresentation [*sic*] of ethnicity" were not regarded as appropriate for the research misconduct process. Further, "Three other allegations brought in recent weeks by the family of Professor Churchill's deceased wife, Leah Kelly, were not considered by the committee because they did not fall within the definition of research misconduct" (Hale, 2005).

In May of 2006, the investigation committee of the Standing Committee found that Churchill, "had engaged in a pattern of misconduct, shown a recurrent refusal to take responsibility for the errors, and repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to blame others for his troubles" (Smallwood, 2006, p. A1). The committee split on the punishment with two voting for a two-year suspension without pay, two voting for a five-year suspension without pay, and one member recommending outright dismissal. The administration at the University of Colorado is currently reviewing the options.

The most chilling part of the Churchill case is the tenacity with which his opponents have brought charges against him. When it was clear that Churchill's First Amendment rights would prevail, critics dug up sordid details of his past and converted them into a charge of academic fraud. Who among us can pass a litmus test on every detail of our lives? The message is clear. As the creator of the website Little Green Footballs has written, ""It's much harder to get away with dirty little secrets like Ward Churchill - who apparently gamed the CU system for years - in the era of the blogosphere, when facts (not rumors) can be instantly reported. If I had simply published rumors, the story would never have caught on like it did" (2005, http://littlegreenfootballs.com/weblog/?entry=16979&only).

9/11, Academic Speech, and Middle Eastern Studies

There are many ways to shut people up: bans on words, images, or discussion... conditions placed on employment funding or publication.
– Levinson, p. 3

Given the mass hysteria that gripped Americans post-9/11 that equated fundamental Muslims with evil and the battle against them a "crusade" as characterized by the president of the United States (George W. Bush, Second Inaugural Address, 20 January 2005), it should come as no surprise that scholars of Middle Eastern Studies have felt themselves particularly under attack and vulnerable to rollbacks in traditional forms of academic speech. Currently, the federal Department of Education funds 17 Middle Eastern Studies National Resource Centers (NRCs). Says Beshara Doumani of this attack,

> It is no accident that the issue of academic freedom was thrust into the limelight after 11 September 2001. The two authoritative statements on academic freedom in the United States were both articulated by the AAUP one year after the outbreak of major wars. The first was the 1915 *Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure*. The second was the 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*. In the aftermath of 11 September the Bush administration declared a "war against terror." Unlike previous wars, however, this one is not against specific countries or regimes, but against an ill defined enemy to be pursued everywhere with no end in sight. It is also the first global war in the information

> age, and a deeply unpopular one everywhere except in the United States and Israel. (2005, p. 23)

The first salvo against Middle Eastern Studies scholars came with the publication of a critical book by Kramer (2001) where he held responsible the scholars working for National Resources Centers (NRCs) in the United States for their failure to *predict* the events of 9/11, rather than relying on traditional intelligence agencies for this information.

Dr. Daniel Pipes established the Campus Watch organization and website in September 2002 whose stated purpose is "to expose the analytical failures and political bias of the field of Middle Eastern Studies." The site has listed over 100 professors Pipes considered biased (http://www.campus-watch.org/). Pipes says that he posts the actual work of professors to allow the reader to make informed judgments, but many observers feel his tactics border on a new McCarthyism, with anti-terrorism replacing fears of communism. Campus Watch has been involved in a complaint at Columbia University that began with individual students accusing a professor of "anti-Semitism." The complaint was finally sent to the office of President Lee Bollinger for adjudication. Amal Hageb of the Independent Press Association (IPA) reported:

> The current media circus surrounding Columbia University was triggered by a highly controversial video featuring a few students from Columbia University with grievances against the Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures department (MEALAC). "Columbia Unbecoming" was financed by The David Project, a post-9/11 group based in Boston created to minimize the increasing criticism against Israel's policies. (2004, p. 124)

Five professors have been identified: Joseph Massad, professor of Modern Arab Politics and Intellectual History at Columbia University; George Saliba, professor of Arab and Islamic Science; Hamid Dabashi, chairman of the Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures; Rashid Khalidi, Edward Said Chair of Arab Studies; and Gil Anidjar, professor of Comparative Literature. All have been publicly critical of both U.S. and Israeli policies in the Middle East. Massad, a junior, untenured professor, is perhaps most vulnerable in this group, and in a personal statement he called the actions to censure this group a "witch-hunt [that] aims to stifle pluralism, academic freedom, and the freedom of expression on university campuses in order to ensure that only one opinion is permitted…" (2004, p. 116).

The situation at Columbia was intensified by New York City Councilman Michael Nelson who has threatened to call for an independent investigation if Columbia's own internal investigation fails to turn up any wrongdoing (New York City Civil Liberties Union website, 2004) as well as New York Congressman Anthony Weiner calling for Massad's resignation (IndyMedia.com, 2005). This sort of action evinces a new willingness on the part of public servants to call academicians to account.

On June 19, 2003, Stanley Kurtz, a research fellow at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University and a contributing editor to the Internet magazine, *National Review Online*, testified to the House Subcommittee on Select Education about Title VI funding and area-studies programs. He states in his testimony that "Title VI-funded programs in Middle Eastern studies (and other area studies) tend to purvey extreme and one-sided criticisms of American foreign policy" and feels that the paradigm of "post-colonial" rhetoric is largely at fault. His testimony calls for the establishment of a

"supervisory board … able to hold annual hearings on Title VI activities, including the outreach activities of Title VI National Resource Centers (such as the teacher-training workshop[s]" and "would remove Title VI funding from any center that engages in or abets a boycott of national-security-related scholarships" (2003, June 23, *The National Review Online,* 2003).

The U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed House Resolution 3077 (HR 3077) that pulled the funding for NRCs out of the Higher Education Act, moving it into a stand-alone bill. HR 3077 established an "Advisory Board" to monitor area studies centers in order to ensure that they advance the "national interest." Doumani writes:

> While the law would apply to all centers funded under the federal Title VI program, the target is clearly the nation's seventeen centers for Middle East Studies. The Association of American University Professors (AAUP), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), and most professional organizations have raised alarms about this unprecedented government invasion of the classroom. Among their concerns are the Board's sweeping investigative powers, lack of accountability, and makeup, as its members would be comprised, in part, from two agencies with national security responsibilities. (2005, p. 3)

The Shunning of Robert Jensen

We do not lose our right to condemn either measure or men because the country is at war.
– Phillips, 1941, p. 9

On September 14, 2001, just three days after the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Dr. Robert Jensen, then-Associate Professor (now a full professor) of Journalism at The University of Texas at Austin (UT), wrote an Op/Ed piece for the *Houston Chronicle* (Jensen, 2001a). He opened the editorial by describing his deep sadness as a result of the September 11th attacks, and he indicates that defending those acts of terrorism would "be to abandon one's humanity." He added:

> This act of terrorism was no more despicable than the massive acts of terrorism – the deliberate killing of civilians for political purposes – that the U.S. government has committed during my lifetime… So, my anger on this day is directed not only at the individuals who engineered the Sept. 11 tragedy, but at those who have held power in the United States and have engineered attacks on civilians every bit as tragic. (p. A-33)

He explains that as he watched the media coverage of the September 11 attacks, the question on everyone's lips was, "When will the United States. . .retaliate?" Instead, he wishes the question were more basic: "Will the United States retaliate?" He observes that any type of massive retaliation "...will kill innocents. Innocent people, just like the ones in the towers in New York and the ones on the airplanes that were hijacked." He ends with a plea to let "the insanity stop here." Indeed, as a person who did not fully identify with mainstream American culture, Bob Jensen reacted exactly as Tom Pyszczynski's Theory of Terror Management (TMT) would predict: those who fully identified with mainstream culture demanded immediate vengeance; those estranged from the mainstream were more controlled and restrained in their responses.

The response to Jensen's commentary was immediate. By September 21, Jensen had received over 1,300 e-mails on the topic. Four months later, Jensen wrote he had received "over 4,000 messages and phone calls …many from folks who thought I should be fired and/or run out of the country for my critique of U.S. policy" (Jenson, 2001b). Larry R. Faulkner, then-President of The University of Texas at Austin, indicated he was under considerable pressure to respond ("Undiluted attack," 2001) because he had received "a large volume of outside inquiry by e-mail, phone, and letter after Jensen's column was published, asking if Jensen's view was also the University's official position…" Faulkner stated, "I, as president of large public university, simply have to respond to a large public inquiry of this type" ("Faulkner disassociates," 2001, p. 2).

So, on September 19, 2001, five days after Jensen's opinion piece appeared and eight days after the attacks, with the nation still in shock and mourning, Faulkner's response appeared in the Viewpoints section of the *Houston Chronicle*. The first paragraph of Faulkner's letter pointed out that Jensen was speaking as a private individual, not as a university representative, and therefore acknowledged Jensen's First Amendment right to speak. Unfortunately, the remainder of the letter was an *ad hominem* attack on Jensen, implicitly questioning his patriotism and professionalism:

> Using the same liberty [the First Amendment], I convey my personal judgment that Jensen is not only misguided, but has become a fountain of undiluted foolishness on issues of public policy…. practically no one here takes [Jensen's] outbursts seriously. Students must learn that there is a good deal of foolish opinion in the popular media, and they must become skilled at recognizing and discounting it…I, too, was disgusted by Jensen's article, but I also must defend his freedom to state his opinion. The First Amendment is the bedrock of American liberty. (Faulkner, 2001, p. 39)

Faulkner was later quoted as saying that Jensen was "rubbing salt on national wounds" and that he did what he needed to do in the circumstances ("Faulkner disassociates," 2001, p. 1).

Richard Graham, F. H. Nalle Professor of History Emeritus, wrote in the editorial section of the student newspaper *The Daily Texan* that, "Dr. Faulkner was quite right to state that Dr. Jensen's statements did not reflect the opinion of the university, and he could even have said that many members of the community would disagree with Jensen. But personally to attack a member of his own faculty from behind the ramparts of a president's power is simply a cowardly act." On the other side, Matt Haegerty, a UT philosophy/government sophomore wrote the same day, "Have any of you people fully thought out why you are so mad at Faulkner? You criticize Faulkner for attacking freedom of expression, but how can this be? Faulkner largely supported Jensen's right to have a foolish opinion. If these people wish to preach about freedom of expression, then they cannot start crying the second someone freely expresses their opinion on a ridiculous argument" (2001, September 27, p. 2).

UT Communications Associate Professor Dana Cloud responded in an open letter to Faulkner published in the *Houston Chronicle* on September 22, 2001:

> It is your privilege, of course, to disagree with Professor Jensen. However, in publishing such a strident denunciation of his ideas and denying his belonging to our university

> community, you shut down that kind of environment. . .While you frame your response in terms of his and your individual rights to free speech, I believe that you also have a responsibility to recognize that, coming from someone in your position, this kind of response can have a chilling effect on the intellectual climate of the university.

Cloud, who regularly teaches a course entitled Communication and Social Change, continued to detail the facts supporting Jensen's claims about American foreign policy throughout the fall and into the next year on her own web site. She ends her open letter:

> Public name-calling is no substitute for true democratic dialogue. If Professor Jensen's thoughts represent "undiluted foolishness," then I prefer the undiluted company of fools to that of cowards. I would have hoped that you would stand up to public criticism and legal pressure (which I assume prompted your defensive response) on behalf of one of your own and in defense of an open, diverse University community. I am extremely disappointed in you. As I grieve and reflect upon the loss of life in New York and Washington last week, and as I fear what steps may come in retaliation and further bloodshed, I also fear and grieve the fact that neither I nor my other progressive, critical, and outspoken colleagues seem to be welcome at our University… I'm disappointed and grieve the fact that, as someone critical of U.S. foreign policy, I may not be safe at UT, either (Cloud, 2001, p. O-1).

To which Alan MacKendree responded via *The Daily Texan's* Firing Line column, "Don't be chilled…Dr. Faulkner was, first, making it clear that Jensen did not speak for UT in his editorial in response to multiple queries. Second, he gave his personal opinion of the editorial, clearly labeled as such…Negative as the letter was, if Jensen or Cloud allow themselves to be 'chilled' and frightened by it, I'd say they need a bit more confidence in their own positions" (2001, p. Opinion-1). But this belies the reality of the situation: presidential opinions about particular professors can carry enormous weight in terms of professional advancement at a university. Jensen followed up in January 2002 writing:

> It is likely that not only my tenured status -- I can't be fired without cause, protection that few people in this economy have -- but my white skin helped protect me [from being fired]. What I did find disturbing about the public dialogue after Sept. 11 was not the way in which members of the public sometimes attacked me, but the way in which members of my intellectual community mostly refused to engage these crucial issues about terrorism, the war and U.S. foreign policy.

Jensen adds that Faulkner has yet to explain in a public forum "what substantive disagreements he had with my position." Jensen is clearly engaged in a political dialogue about national policy issues, but at the time of his first foray into the topic of 9-11, he was voicing a minority opinion. He wrote "In a democracy, we do not surrender to leaders the right to make policy undisturbed by the people" and adds:

> It is of course dangerous to label any idea "anti-American," because the term suggests that there can be political positions that are fixed forever But the foundation of the U.S. system is (or should be) an active citizenry; being a citizen should mean more than just voting every few years. We have the right -- maybe even the obligation -- to involve ourselves in the

> formation of public policy, and in that process no one can claim that some proposals cannot be voiced. (Jensen, 2002)

Just as it seemed the tempest in a teapot was about to die down, Jensen's story was picked up in the national media:

> In early October a producer at National Public Radio's "Talk of the Nation" show called to book me on a program about antiwar dissent. When she called back to ask if I would be willing to go on at the same time as Faulkner, I quickly agreed. She called back a third time to report that the UT president was going to appear on the show but had declined to go on the air with me live. It turns out that Faulkner's reticence was not idiosyncratic. Later in the fall a student organizing a debate on civil liberties issues related to the war enlisted me to be a speaker. About a week before the scheduled event, the student told me she was going to cancel the forum, explaining that she couldn't find a professor to speak in favor of the Bush administration's civil liberties policies or the anti-terrorism legislation. I was incredulous, saying I could think of several professors on campus whom I was fairly certain were supportive. She told me that, indeed, she had identified such professors and talked to them, but none would participate in a public debate on the issues. Another person planning a community forum told me that a well-known professor who was invited to speak at the event had said that he would not sit on a platform with me, or anyone who held positions like mine. A producer who booked me for a Canadian Broadcasting Company radio program reported that several American professors she approached to debate the history of the United States' use of violence against civilians turned her down; she was ready to cancel the segment when at the last minute she found a "scholar" from a right-wing think tank to appear. The producer's difficulty was not due to a shortage of conservative or pro-administration professors in the United States. The idea that campuses are dominated by left-wing radicals is laughable; the country's major universities are predominantly centrist to right-leaning institutions, and UT is no different. Given that many professors routinely speak in public and on mass media — indeed, many actively seek the exposure for their views, myself included — why in these situations would so many turn down the opportunity? (Jensen, 2002, pp. C-1, 4)

Meanwhile, at UT, Barbara Harlow's pleas were answered: Dr. Faulkner convened a Task Force on Assembly and Expression in January 2002 that published its report in nine months later, including a recommendation that an "appropriate" committee review "procedures for enforcing rules that apply to faculty and staff, with a view to creating, at least in the context of the limits on free speech, equally effective enforcement mechanisms for students, faculty and staff" and that to the extent feasible these rules should be consolidated in one place (2002, October 31). The report narrative further clarifies the task force position:

> The Task Force decided that elaborating a disciplinary system for faculty and staff was beyond the scope of its charge and beyond its abilities in the time available. But some appropriate body needs to clarify the rules and procedures for enforcing rules as they apply to faculty and staff. Due process requires clear rules and procedures, academic freedom requires that procedures for faculty be based on traditional principles of peer review, and the vision of equal rights to free speech for students, faculty, and staff requires some effective

> enforcement mechanism for each group. In the meantime, we adopt the Justice Committee's recommendation that alleged faculty violations be referred to the Executive Vice President and Provost, and that staff violations be referred to Human Resources Services. (2002, October 23, p. 15)

In December 2004, relying on the work of the Task Force, the Board of Regents for the University of Texas System adopted a new policy under the Rights and Responsibilities of Faculty Members, entitled "Freedom in the Classroom." The statement reads, "Faculty members are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing his or her subject, but are expected not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter that has no relation to his or her subject" (2004, Sec. 2). The following section entitled "Clarification of Role" states, "Faculty members are citizens, members of learned professions, and officers of an educational system supported by the State of Texas. When the faculty member speaks or writes as a citizen, he or she should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but should make it plain that the faculty member is not an institutional spokesperson" (2004, Sec. 3).

As Dana Cloud writes on her web-posted political writings site, "What is not clear is what counts as appropriate, who gets to decide, and what happens to those whose decisions are inappropriate" ("Bring Home Now," 2005).

Recently, Bob Jensen has stepped into the electronic maelstrom surrounding the Churchill case. While he does not agree with all of Churchill's ideas or analysis, he fundamentally agrees with the major premise that the attacks of 9/11 were "the chickens coming home to roost." He continues, "So, I don't hesitate to defend Churchill, his work, and the larger political movement of which he is a part. But I also want to articulate where I disagree with his analysis -- not to distance myself from him but instead to demonstrate solidarity. Real colleagues do not ignore differences; they engage them" (2005). Jensen acknowledges that he expects his comments to be taken out of context by both the left and the right to prove their points, but he feels compelled to defend an appropriately civil discourse in the scholarly community.

Finally, no charges of misconduct under the regulations of the faculty handbook have ever been filed against Jensen. Rather, he was charged and tried in the press for the "offense" of being an "undiluted fountain of foolishness" and "anti-American."

Discussion

The Constitution has never greatly bothered any wartime president.
– Former Attorney General Francis Biddle (cited in Cole, 2011, August 31, para 3)

This paper has addressed historical cycles of repression of free expression and discussed three cases of attempted academic censorship after September 11, 2001. But this has left unanswered questions such as, What motivates censorship in times of crisis? What has been different post-9/11? And, does the electronic age pose new challenges to academic expression?

As Doumani indicates, "it is no accident that two of the AAUP statements on academic freedom were released within one year of the outbreak of a war" (2005, p. 23).

What is it about war that lessens our tolerance for diverse opinions and dissent? For an explanation, we turn to Terror Management Theory (TMT).

What motivates censorship in a time of crisis? TMT suggests that the threat of attack from nameless, faceless terrorists strikes fear in our hearts. As a matter of survival, we react in certain ways to these threats. We can take individual measures to protect ourselves, such as avoiding crowds, stockpiling staples, and buying gas masks. We can also become hyper-aware of our surroundings, to watch for people or things that "don't fit." In a more general sense, TMT suggests that we may also strengthen our culture by casting aside "foreign" or unfamiliar elements through uber-patriotism and censorship. Thus, to reduce our fear (and, hopefully, increase our chances of survival) we surround ourselves with those we think we can trust: people who look, think, act, and most especially, speak like us.

As Blanchard (2002) suggests, a period of censorship during times of crisis is part of a larger cycle of repression followed by restoration of free expression. But, according to Dennis Laycock, dean of the University of Texas Law School and a Constitutional Scholar, "The right to say things in public spaces emerges. . .in the 1930's with the labor union cases, but the Supreme Court has been cutting back and cutting back since the '70s. Now, the right to speak in public places is much more up to the government than it is to you" (quoted in Lindell & Lisheron, 2005, p. H4).

And, what of the endless war on terror? Does this war require indefinite restrictions on free expression? Will there be a proactive part of the cycle which restores free speech? Perhaps two recent cases have marked the beginning of the restorative phase. The first is the challenge to student free speech zones at Texas A&M University (*Roberts v. Harragan,* 2004). The federal district court ruled that these restrictions at the university, which are also common at political events held at any venue, are impermissibly narrow and chill freedom of expression. Second, very slowly, portions of the Patriot Act, which expanded federal intelligence gathering authority in terrorism cases, have been challenged. The real test of a restorative upswing in the cycle, however, is if Congress lets provisions of the Act "sunset" at the end of 2005 (Stone, 2004, p. 553).

When the issue of academic speech is considered, additional factors come into play. Increased accountability standards combined with the need to seek outside funds to make up for state budget shortfalls, have made college administrators much more sensitive to criticism. As "Columbia-gate" indicates, private institutions are now under the same scrutiny that public universities have long endured.

While these complaints often come in public forums – news conferences, from the floor of the legislature, attacks on live television – critics turn as well to electronic means to complain and disrupt university operations. The first phone call to the Colorado governor's office was received within two hours of the posting of anti-Churchill material on one blog. The e-maelstrom caused by comments from Ward Churchill can easily crash servers, put public relations offices in a panic, and force a siege mentality on a university. The individual faculty member faces an onslaught of criticism and phone calls, death threats, and questions from media. Electronic resources, so vital to the post-modern university, can also cripple the institution.

Finally, a very few people will use a crisis for political gain. What's the cost of criticizing a Churchill or a Middle Eastern Studies Program? The return on such criticism is potentially very high. While political talk can be cheap and yield high dividends, free speech is not free; the psychic and other costs are very dear.

A direct result of fear, patriotism, accountability, and politics is self censorship (Ackerman, 2001; Cloud, S., 2002; Levy & Bugingo, 2001). After 9/11, many television reporters were criticized for not being patriotic enough, for not laying blame before the identity of the perpetrators was documented. As a result, the media began to censor itself – to pay proper respect to the victims and the government – and to allay the fears of the public. So too, academics and other professionals began to self censor. It is no accident that few people wanted to appear with Bob Jensen on radio or TV. His public humiliation was a powerful lesson for faculty members: be patriotic and shut up!

Yet what constitutes patriotism is contested terrain (Kahne & Middaugh, 2005; Primoratz, 2004; Westheimer, 2004). The varying definitions of patriotism include committed patriotism, nationalistic patriotism, symbolic patriotism, and democratic patriotism. In the post-9/11 era, the edict is not just to be patriotic, but to choose the "correct" definition of patriotism.

What of academic freedom of expression in the future? With new federal efforts to regulate higher education, a politically divided country, and the long-term war on terror, faculty speech and actions will continue to be scrutinized and measured against a patriotic litmus test. Further, e-maelstrom will increasingly be used to muffle those with unpopular viewpoints or intemperate remarks.

According to the First Amendment Center's (2000) survey, 63% of Americans oppose a flag-burning amendment, 58% support a tape delay for live television programs, and 38% believe that newspapers should not be allowed to criticize the military. In this contradictory, politically charged time, free expression will continue under attack. The proactive and reactive portions of the free cycle may occur simultaneously and with equal vigor, effectively stifling academic free speech.

We end with the cautions of Nan Levinson (2003),

> In many ways, the First Amendment's embrace is more expansive now than ever before. . .the easing of legal sanctions has run parallel with mounting social sanctions. . .We, as individuals and a nation, have to come to fear language, not just for what it can do, but for how it will be used against us. (p. 4)

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Affirmative Action in Brazilian Higher Education: Actors, Events, and Networks, 1992 – 2008

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Abstract

This unfinished manuscript (written February 2008) originated as a working paper published here to illustrate Pat's organizational approach, writing process, and commitment to engaged scholarship. The article contains several incomplete sections, but the editors added notes to provide some explanations and a complete set of references. The paper focuses on African Brazilians' struggle for race equity, leading to legislation and regulations institutionalizing affirmative action practices in Brazilian higher education. Rather than complete the paper, the editors believe that presenting her work in this form, on a subject she sincerely cared about, serves as a meaningful tribute to her legacy.

Keywords: Brazil, tertiary education, social inclusion, race, higher education

Dedication

Pat Somers was bright and quick in her academic collaborations supporting social action. The paper was written as a draft as she engaged colleagues in developing ideas, concepts, and evidence supporting social action. Patrick Biddix came across this draft while thinking about this special issue of the *Texas Education Review*. Patrick, an endowed professor at the University of Tennessee, was Patricia's doctoral student at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. People who worked with Pat Somers generally enjoy collaborating. As an addendum to this paper, it made sense to annotate how some of Pat's work on affirmative action in Brazil intersects with her life calling as an engaged scholar.

Introduction

The period from 1992 to 2008 was pivotal for race relations in Brazil. During this period, the country moved from a widely accepted "myth of racial democracy" (Freyre, 1986) to mandated affirmative action in higher education admissions for Afro-Brazilians[1] and indigenous persons. Using an interactive model of social and policy change (Htun, 2004), this article reviews the major actors, events, and networks that propelled the country from a total Black university enrollment of 2% to an entering class of 10 – 20% Afro-Brazilian and indigenous students in most colleges.

Background

Slavery was not prohibited in Brazil until 1883, making it the last country in the Western Hemisphere to outlaw the practice. The Golden Law (Lei Aurea) which abolished slavery was more about the availability of cheap European labor than a philosophical repudiation of owning another

[1] The terms African Brazilian, Afro-Brazilian, Afro-descendent, and Black are used interchangeably in this paper.

human being. Three years after the Lei Aurea, the government ordered the burning of all slavery archives. With no formal records to document race, attempts at indemnification and other compensatory measures were made impossible.

A "whitening" policy, which encouraged European immigration, followed the passage of the Golden Law. In 1912, Brazilian eugenicist Joao Batista Lacerda predicted that within 100 years, Brazil would be 80% white, 3% mixed, 17% Indian, and 0% Black as a result of the whitening policy. In 1923, a federal deputy asserted that the "negro" in Brazil will disappear by the year 2000.[2] Along with the whitening policies of immigration came efforts to discourage Afro-Brazilian culture and religions.[3] Rather than the disappearance of Blacks, one hundred years later, the country has "browned" instead of "whitenened."[4]

Conceptual Framework

Htun (2004) proposed an interactional model for policy changes with three variables: international events, issue networks, and presidential initiatives. Of the latter two, she notes,

> …social networks do not just affect policy, but are also shaped by the state. Institutional openings provide a focal point around which social actors and networks can coalesce, repeated interactions with state officials help movements defy mobilization change. (p. 83)

International variables, such as treaties, U.N. resolutions, global conferences, and transnational organizations are also part of the interactive process. For her model, Htun draws from social movement theories (Skocpol, 1992: Skocpol, Ganz, & Munson, 2000) and internationalization (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Risse & Sikkink, 1999).

To recognize the complexities of the development of affirmative action in Brazil from 1992 to 2008, I add other variables to Htun's interactive approach. This expanded model includes issue networks and organizations, international events and actors, the media and public discourse, and political actors and networks.

The Myth of Racial Democracy

In the 1930s, a new national ideology on race, "racial democracy," emerged (Degler, 1971; Htun, 2004). This ideology was promoted by, an Sociologist and engaged Brazilian scholar,[5] who praised the effects of racial mixing in Brazil. Freyre argued that race was not a liability, but rather, a source of diversity and cultural vitality. He also maintained that Brazil's human development problems were not caused by race, but by widespread poverty and economic disparities.

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[2] Editors: Pat Somers found citation in her historical research. The citation was not provided in the working draft of the paper.
[3] Editors: Pat Somers had a note about further references here. Brazil's whitening policies are widely documented (e.g., Jensen, 2023). *The Color of Asylum: The Racial Politics of Safe Haven in Brazil*. University of Chicago Press.
[4] Editors: Pat Somers noted this topic had been widely reporting in international media, including reporting in the US by the Public Broadcasting System (PPBS).
[5] Editors: Pat Somers was multi-lingual in Portuguese, Spanish, and English. Her readings included Brazilian scholars who studied Gilberto Freyr's engaged scholarship on race equity (e.g., Lehmann, 2008).

Early collective action proved ineffective in dismantling the myth. The Brazilian Black Front (FNB) was founded in Sao Paulo in 1931. However, in 1937 the Vargas dictatorship (1937 – 1945) banned all political parties, a tradition continued under the military dictatorship of 1964 – 1985) (Skidmore, 1999). The long periods of dictatorships forced Afro-Brazilian activists and intellectuals into exile.

The growth of the Black movement has been hampered by a split of activists into separate camps according to Page (1995). First, are those who advocate political action as the "primary vehicle for achieving racial justice" (p. 77). The second faction focuses on the cultural elements (including African religions) and the subsequent development of an Afro-Brazilian consciousness.

Jorge Amado asserted that, "It's impossible to separate and catalogue all of the bload strains in a child born in Bahia," where at least 50% of the population is Afro-descendent. Three years after the passage of the Golden Law, the Brazilian government ordered the burning of all slavery archives. With no formal records to document race, attempts at indemnification or compensatory action were impossible. By the 1970 Census, Blacks identified 134 non-white categories representing race. Moreover, there was a substantial trend to "whiten" one's racial category for the purposes of the Census.

The post-emancipation policy of "racial whitening" through increased immigration from Europe, along with efforts to discourage the preservation of the Afro-Brazilian culture and religions[6] provoked a collective amnesia about race. A federal deputy predicted in 1923 that "the Negro in Brazil will disappear [by the year 2000] (Page, p. 69).

Politically, the myth of racial democracy was perpetuated by both democratic governments as well as dictatorships. The myth, according to Page, ". . .served as a convenient way to dismiss racial issues and to come to grips with the stark fact that centuries of slavery had deprived Afro-Brazilians of the ability to compete on an equal footing for jobs and social status" (p. 72).

Race was not discussed as a part of public policy until the abertura of the 1970s. With the abertura (which refers to the "thawing" of totalitarian rule in Latin American countries), many Afro-Brazilian activities and intellectuals resurfaced. During the Emancipation Centennial (November, 1985), a sustained attack on the myth began. In particular, the media gave extensive coverage to the large disparities between Afro- Brazilians and whites in all aspects of life (education, health care, housing, income). Further, the media examined racism in Brazilian life and remedies proposed by Black activists. As the following sections discuss, the scrutiny of the media, increased Black activism, the support of political actors, and international agencies together opened the discourse that led to the adoption of affirmative action in the 1990s.

[6] Editors: Pat Somers noted she would add a reference. The history of policies on whitening in Brazil are well documented in Brazilian scholarship (Giumbelli, 2018).

The Actors

Political Activists

The Sociology professor. In 1994, ex-Sociology professor and former Finance Minister Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) was elected president of Brazil. As a young scholar in the 1950s and 1960s, Cardoso had written about race relations in Bahia. Moreover, he described his heritage of having "one foot in the kitchen," a popular Brazilian saying that alludes to having African ancestors. In many ways, FHC was in a unique position to understand the problems of racism and discrimination.

With the International Labor Organizations (ILO) citing Brazil for racial discrimination in 1993, 1994, and 1995, there was increased international awareness of the country's racial problems. Black activists held the first Brazilian civil rights march of 40,000 people in the capitol on November 20, 1995 (National Black Consciousness Day). During a speech at the march, Cardoso declared that racial discrimination against Blacks existed in Brazil (Santos, 2006, p. 32; *Folhado Sao Paulo,* November 21, 1995).

As a result of the march, Cardoso created an advisory commission (GIT) on racism and multi-culturalism. The Commission held an international conference on affirmative action which many U.S. and Brazilian scholars attended. FHC acknowledged the existence of racism, but called for a "Brazilian solution,"

> Here in Brazil we constantly live with and are surrounded by prejudice and discrimination... Discrimination in our society has long been consolidated and is constantly reproduced... This situation must be brought out in the open so we can condemn it, and not merely with words but also through mechanisms and processes that will lead to a transformation of our society into one where truly democratic relations among different races, classes, and social groups can abound. (dos Santos, p. 32.)

Cardoso opposed affirmative action until the Durban Conference of 2001 (Guimarães, 2001), which is discussed in more detail below. Shortly after the Durban conference, Minister of Agriculture Raul Jungman issued an executive order that mandated that 20% of the Ministry's staff be Black and that contractors have 20% of their staff be Black and 20% be female.

As the first federal agency to require affirmative action, Jungman's executive order created controversy and resistance. In particular, the order raised questions about identifying and verifying the racial identity of individuals in a "racial democracy" that kept no records of race.

In rapid succession, Federal Supreme Court (STF) President Marcio Aurelio and President Cardoso ordered affirmative action plans for the Court and all cabinet agencies respectively. Aurelio pre-emptively noted that affirmative action was a necessary and Constitutional remedy for inequality in Brazil.

In March of 2002, the Congress approved a law that established admissions quotas for students at public institutions. Verification procedures were left to individual universities, in part because of the

autonomy guaranteed public universities by the Constitution. Several states also adopted admissions quotas for their universities.

After the first round of admissions under the new laws, a number of changes were made. Rather than racial self identification, most colleges created their own "race boards" that reviewed pictures of applicants to identify whether or not they were Black. The preferences were broadened to include social class and other groups such as women, indigenous populations, and the physically disabled. Many universities developed more modest goals and focused on support and retention services for poor and minority students.

While still contested, affirmative action admissions programs are required at all federal universities, many state and municipal colleges, and some private institutions (which can receive up to 10% of their tax obligation to pay for scholarships).

Ironically, while President Cardoso took the first steps toward affirmative action, he seemed to turn over responsibility for the program later in his presidential term. Speculation regarding the withdrawal from a public role in the debate and implementation of affirmative action range from criticism by academics to the emergence of more pressing economics issues.

The auto worker. In 2002, Luis Inacio Lula da Silva (Lula) was elected president of Brazil. In his inaugural speech, he said,

> At least half of our Brazilian people – the Black and overwhelmingly impoverished half – have been seriously harmed by racism and discrimination. More than 64 percent of those living in poverty and at least 70 percent of indigents are Black. Blacks also number greatest among the unemployed and underemployed populations of our country... This cruel and unjust situation is not only a direct product of our national history and the history of the institution of slavery which lasted four centuries in Brazil, leaving behind profound and indelible marks on our society; it is also a result of the absence of public policies created to ameliorate and eradicate it. The Brazilian government should not remain neutral on issues of race and racism. Instead, it should actively ensure that all Brazilians are granted equal opportunities in the pursuit of a better life. This new Secretariat [SEPPIR] will give deserved priority to the promotion of racial equality in Brazil and, in conjunction with all levels of state and federal governments, will make way for the effective integration of projects and policies to that end. (dos Santos, p. 33).

On March 21, 2003, Lula created SEPPIR and gave it the equivalent status of a federal ministry.

While Lula carried on the affirmative action in admissions policies of his predecessors, he also created PROUNI for private universities.[7] This tax rebate/scholarship program allows private universities to use a portion of their federal tax obligation to fund full and partial scholarships for up to 10% of their students. The students must be either low income or Afro-Brazilian.

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[7] PROUNI: "The University for All Program (PROUNI) is one of the features of the Education Development Plan (EDP)…promotes undergraduate scholarships in private higher education institutions (HEIs) by releasing participating organizations from federal taxes, such as social security and corporate income tax (Somers et al. 2013, p. 208).

Other politicians.

1. Deputy Abdias do Nascimento[8]
2. Abdias Birth
3. Senate Paulo Paim
4. Gov. Bendita da Silva (RJ state)

Organizations and Networks

MNU. The Unified Black Movement (MNU) was founded in Sao Paulo in 1978, about midway through the abertura. Two events in Sao Paulo precipitated the organization of the group: the killing of a Black worker by police and the expulsion of four Black boys from a volleyball team because of their race and color (Covin, 2006). The group attracted intellectuals, students, and trade unionists, and had a core of Black feminists. The founding of the MNU represented the greatest upswing in Black activism since the FNB of the 1930s.

The MNU became an organization within a movement and worked with other Black political and cultural groups. The MNU set an ambitious agenda to attack the myth of racial democracy and to establish a genuine racial democracy. November 20 was adopted as a "Day of Black Consciousness" by the MNU, and the date coincided with the death of Black leader Zumbi. The group presented papers at academic conferences and began its own journal.

In 1991, the MNU fielded Black candidates for political office across Brazil. Most lost. However, Bendita da Silva was elected mayor of Sao Paulo. She now governor of the state of Sao Paulo.

In 1992, the MNU embraced a policy of rapprochement with the state in order to secure affirmative action in employment and university admissions. This drastic repositioning made affirmative action possible (Andrews, 1994; Burdick, 1992, Moehlecke, 2002; Telles, 2004), although it caused a rupture in the Black civil rights movement in Brazil.[9] However, MNU leaders considered this shift a political maturation of the group (Covin, 2006).

In 1995, the MNU organized a celebration of the 300th anniversary of Zumbi's death, and that was the first Black Consciousness Day. Forty thousand activists marched in Brasilia and heard Cardoso's history speech in which he admitted to the existence of racism in Brazil. The MNU used an aggressive organizing strategy and developed a national agenda (Covin, 2006). A large delegation traveled to Durban to attend the conference on Racism. After Durban, the MNU pressured the Cardoso government to adopt affirmative action. Likewise, MNU pressured the Lula government to extend affirmative action.

In 2003, Lula created the Secretariat for Racial Equality and appointed MNU member and Black feminist Matilde Ribeno as its Minister. She brought with her other MNU members who assumed

[8] Abdias do Nascimento, a scholar, poet, actor, legislator, university president, and civil rights activist" (Somers et al., [2017], p. 29).
[9] Editors: Pat Somers noted she would add a reference. The rapture has been addressed in Brazilian scholarship (e.g., Saad-Filho & Boito, 2016).

various positions in the Lula government. In 2005, Lula proclaimed March 21 the Day for Elimination of all Forms of Segregation (Milkevis & Flynn, 2005).[10]

Other Black political or cultural groups.[11]

[Incomplete]
NGOs. [Incomplete]

1. Ford Foundation
2. World Bank
3. Civil rights lawyers' network
4. IMF
5. OAS
6. IADB[12]

Faculty. [Incomplete]

1. Academic papers (pro/con)
2. Debates in press
3. Social scientists shifted debate from myth of racial democracy to "Who is Black in Brazil," probably an equally as damaging discourse.

Students. [Incomplete]

1. The Bahian anthropology student
2. The UNB twins
3. Pro/con blogs

Media. [Incomplete]

1. Debates between pro/con AA newspapers [Incomplete]

Events

The Durban Conference

The United National Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) Conference on Racism and Public Policy (2001) helped promote the agenda of affirmative action in Brazil. In the 12 months preceding the conference, the government convened a wide range of public officials, academics and community groups to discuss racism. The data collection effort culminated in the First Brazilian Conference on Racism and Intolerance, attended by 1,700 participants. Though most of the speakers were white, the final report endorsed affirmative action and was adopted by the Brazilian delegation.

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[10] Editors: Pat Somers indicated she would add a reference. The proclamation of March 21 as the Day for Elimination of all Forms of Segregation has been noted in the Brazilian literature (e.g., Liu, 2019).

[11] "One of the most influential Black groups, the Black Experimental Theater (TEN), was founding in 1944 by visionary Abdias do Nascimento, a scholar, poet, actor, legislator, university president, and civil rights activist" (Somers et al., [2017], p. 29).

[12] Editors: Pat Somers noted these organization was aligned with critical race theory, a legal framework critical of racial underrepresentation, a topic in Brazil and other nations (Pazich, & Teranishi, 2012).

The Conference was marred by fighting between Arab countries, Israel and the United States. However, the final paper denounced slavery as "always having been wrong," and called for compensatory action for those groups that had suffered from discrimination.

The Abertura

Cracks in the Brazilian military dictatorship began to appear in the 1970s, when political control decreased. This diminution is referred to as the "abertura" or a thawing of restrictions on personal freedoms. The term is particularly used for waning dictatorships in Latin American countries and signaled the slow process of redemocratization in Brazil.

An example of the changing winds is a 1985 anti-discrimination law, which criminalized racist behavior and had no statute of limitations. The law is mostly symbolic and has rarely been used to successfully fight discrimination. About the same time, the state of Rio de Janeiro passed a law prohibiting discrimination apartment building elevators, hallways, and lobbies. The law was introduced after the daughter of a prominent politician was harassed in an elevator because of her dark skin color. This law, too, is not often used.

Discussion [Incomplete]

1. Some actors/networks more important – Cardoso, Lula and MNU. The history related herein shows the interactive loops of these players over time.
2. Academics left out of the early debate and planning stages – Rector of Univ. of Sao Paulo informed of quotas one hour before announced executive order.
3. Academic actors (students, faculty, staff) were forced to debate issues in public for a such as newspapers, in many cases after the policy had been adopted. Many academics rejected affirmative action, which they equate with quotas, and fear that the universities will be flooded by underprepared and unqualified students.
4. Politicians and academics alike point out that the K-12 system needs reform students in public schools can obtain an adequate foundation for higher education. The Darcy Ribeiro Law of 1998 reformed K-12 education and the federal and state governments provide economic incentives for poor families to keep their children in school.
5. Brazil has always been long on rhetoric about social programs, but the programs that are passed are slowly, badly, or never implemented (the 1984 Anti-discrimination law is an example).
6. Many of the mandates for affirmative action have come in the form of executive orders. Indeed, there are dozens of EO's which have made small and constant changes to affirmative action policy. This indicates the publicly contested nature of affirmative action.
7. Brazil's AA program emphasizes only access to higher education, not on equity and non-discrimination in the labor market. If the status quo does not change in hiring (where appearance is the major and sometimes only hiring criterion), the minorities who go to college will have limited opportunities which can create significant societal problems.
8. Many universities are not providing adequate support services for "quota students." How will this affect their college success?
9. If many of the "quota" students are unable to find work after graduation, there are psychic and social costs for the individual and society. In the current economic environment, Brazil

needs college graduates in the labor market, regardless of race, to continue its plans for economic growth and development.

10. If college graduates cannot find work because of their color, will this threaten the stability of the government?

Summary[13]

Patricia A. Somers was an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Texas at Austin. A prolific scholar and supportive mentor, Dr. Somers also held faculty affiliations with the UT Center for Women & Gender Studies and the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies.

[13] Editors: When collaborating on a paper, Pat Somers often left the summary completion as the last task in writing. She and co-writers often developed lists of summative points as the summary at the end of the article.

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