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Concurrent Study of the Impact of an Institutionalized Diversity Plan on the Perceived Sense of Academic Achievement, Sense of Belonging, and Program Completion Among African American Students in a Midwest Community College

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CONCURRENT STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF AN INSTITUTIONALIZED DIVERSITY PLAN ON THE PERCEIVED SENSE OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, SENSE OF BELONGING, AND PROGRAM COMPLETION AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN A MIDWEST COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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CONCURRENT STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF AN INSTITUTIONALIZED DIVERSITY PLAN ON THE PERCEIVED SENSE OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, SENSE OF BELONGING, AND PROGRAM COMPLETION AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN A MIDWEST COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Abstract

This dissertation explored how an institutionalized diversity plan impacts perceived academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion among African American students. The concurrent mixed-methods methodology followed a single case study design to explore the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan in a Midwest community college. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed. The results of this study revealed that although diversity and inclusion programs are somewhat effective in higher education, more needs to be done to satisfy the needs of minority students in higher education. According to the findings of this study, most students felt a sense of belonging. The results of the tests indicated that there were no significant trends in any of the time series of retention rate, recruitment, 100% completion rate, and 200% completion rate in the period from 2016 to 2021. These findings demonstrate the significant impact that a sense of belonging can have on the success of a student in school. The study further indicates the importance of having faculty of diverse of backgrounds in an institution, which can also foster a sense of belonging among its students.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family, co-workers, and friends. A special feeling of gratitude to my parents, Dwight and Karen Watson whose unyielding words of encouragement have pushed me to accomplish my goals. I also dedicate this dissertation to my friends and co-workers who have supported me throughout the process. I will always appreciate all they have done to help me get started and to keep going. I dedicate this work and give special thanks to my husband Tony Thompson, for being there for me throughout this entire process. You have been the ultimate cheerleader, constant supporter, and believer in me. You never left my side, and I couldn't have done this without you. We did it!

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

U.S. higher education institutions continue to become more diverse. The American Council on Education (2019) indicated that approximately 45% of undergraduate students on college campuses identified as people of color, which was a sizeable increase of 30% over 2 decades. These statistics depict that college campuses are becoming more diverse to mirror the current multicultural society. Accordingly, U.S. higher education institutions are introducing efforts to become more diverse in order to more efficiently meet the needs of learners from different racial and ethnic groups (Lewis & Shah, 2021; McGee et al., 2019; Mwangi et al., 2018). Despite these efforts, Black students continue to experience racial campus climates characterized by structural racism, poor academic achievement, and feeling unwelcomed (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Lewis & Shah, 2021). For instance, in the 2017–2018 academic year, the national adjusted cohort graduation rate for high school students was 85% (McGee et al., 2019). Black students, however, recorded a slightly lower adjusted cohort graduation rate at 79%, indicating that the graduation rate for this race is below the national average (Lewis & Shah, 2021).

In Chapter 1, the researcher provides a preliminary overview of the current study on the impact of diversity and inclusion initiatives on African American students within institutions of higher learning. The researcher also introduces the methodologies that were employed to address the research problem and to answer the research questions. The major sections in this chapter include a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions and research hypotheses, general methodology, the significance of the study, delimitations, limitations, and

definitions. The chapter concludes with a detailed summary of the key ideas and arguments present in the current study.

Background of the Study

Many U.S. higher learning institutions have established and adopted initiatives that are meant to support diversity, inclusion, and equity in an endeavor to improve retention rates, address their exclusionary history, and ameliorate the current forms of racism that are manifested within their institutions (Lewis & Shah, 2021). Researchers have found that some of these diversity initiatives have positive impacts on students (Browers & Ho, 2021; Moreu et al., 2021; Rodríguez et al., 2018). In a randomized controlled study, Rodríguez et al. determined that university students who were enrolled in an intergroup dialogue program improved their comprehension and thinking of racial affiliation more compared to participants in the randomized control group who were wait-listed for the program. In contemporary society, there is a greater inspiration to bridge intergroup disparities, structural comprehension of racial inequity, and behavioral obligation to address inequality (Rodríguez et al., 2018). Browers and Ho found that students at a rural university perceived campus climates created by diversity and inclusion initiatives as accepting and respectful. In a systematic review, Moreu et al. found that by implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives in institutions of higher learning, it is possible to increase the success, graduation rate, and sense of belonging of minority learners.

Although diversity and inclusion efforts have been implemented to improve campus climate, issues remain regarding inequities in campus climate and race (Lewis & Shah, 2021; McGee et al., 2019; Telles & Mitchell, 2018). The widely implemented diversity and inclusion initiatives have done little to transform the culture of the predominately White university, hence sustaining the status quo of institutionalized Whiteness and racism (Lewis & Shah, 2021). Lewis

and Shah added that the diversity and inclusion initiatives adopted at the institution were viewed to be approached as agenda items as opposed to steps towards definite changes, which led to propagating and safeguarding institutionalized Whiteness and racism rather than establishing practical transformations toward justice. Research on the effect of diversity and inclusion programs on college and university campuses, especially curricular and co-curricular types of programs, generally center on measurable outcomes linked to student learning and development. Assessable outcomes like acceptance of diverse racial groups (Campbell-Whatley et al., 2021), democratic and civic involvement (Mills, 2021), and intergroup interactions (Lewis & Shah, 2021; Rodríguez et al., 2018) saturate curricular and cocurricular diversity research. These are marketable outcomes and not a means of developing structural institutional change which, according to Lewis and Shah, have led to the commodification of diversity in institutions of higher learning where diversity is perceived as something to be managed as a profitable resource. Banks and Dohy (2019) further revealed that university and college instructors across the United States are mainly White, which has resulted in the preservation of the status quo and a lack of adjustment in the curriculum and high-quality mentorship for Black students from Black faculty members. McGee (2020) added that institutions of higher learning implement diversity mentoring initiatives mainly to address underrepresented Black students while minimizing or overlooking the function of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) departments that create racially hostile educational and work environments.

Racial issues and climates are also manifested in institutions of higher learning that are primarily focused on supporting underrepresented students, which are commonly known as minority-serving institutions (Jones & Phillips, 2020). According to Booker and Campbell-Whatley (2019), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) still subject students to

diversity and inclusion issues, such as racism concerns, despite being developed to offer access to postsecondary education for Blacks mainly in the segregated southern states. Utilizing an online survey in a land-grant university, Sanchez et al. (2018) found that Black graduate learners, as well as students from underrepresented or multiracial groups, had statistically lower scores as compared to their White counterparts. Sanchez et al. further showed that sexual minorities had statistically lower ratings relative to their counterparts in all three aspects of diversity assessed.

The ongoing issues of racial problems and school climate have been associated with structural racism in higher education (Bonilla-Silva, 2019; McGee, 2020). These inequities result in poorer academic achievement, including lower retention and graduation rates among Black students in higher education (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Research shows that campus racial climate has adverse impacts on Black students, including making the students feel unwelcomed, invalidated, and marginalized in the educational setting (Drape et al., 2017; Lewis & Shah, 2021; McGee et al., 2019; Mwangi et al., 2018). Mills (2021) conducted a quantitative study in a predominantly White university and revealed that more positive perceptions of racial campus environment substantially predicted lower degrees of academic resilience among Black college students. Racism issues contribute to feelings of disengagement, and loneliness is an obstacle to retention and graduation for Black students (Banks & Dohy, 2019). These concerns lead to higher college dropout rates, as Black students feel as if they do not belong in predominately White learning institutions where they are normally exposed to blatant institutional and implicit acts of racism from instructors and other learners (Banks & Dohy, 2019). According to Banks and Dohy, another key issue is that Black students are subjected to incidents of microaggressions from White instructors where perceptions might persist that Black students are academically poorer than White learners. Considering that diversity and inclusion programs are developed to

address and ameliorate racial discrimination as well as to enhance the campus environment, much can be explored on how a specific institutionalized diversity plan impacts Black students in terms of the leading campus racial issues, including academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion.

Statement of the Problem

The problem that was addressed in this study is that although diversity and inclusion efforts have been implemented to improve campus climate, issues remain regarding inequities in campus climate and race (Dingel & Sage, 2020; Lewis & Shah, 2021; Telles & Mitchell, 2018). Despite great efforts to increase diversity and inclusion in institutions of higher learning, many minoritized groups continue to experience obstacles to accessing higher education (Lewis & Shah, 2021). Diversity and inclusion initiatives adopted at institutions of higher learning are viewed to be approached as agenda items as opposed to definitive changes, which leads to propagating and safeguarding institutionalized Whiteness and racism rather than establishing practical transformations toward justice (Lewis & Shah, 2021). Many diversity initiatives have generated more statements of intention than an actual transformation of racial campus settings (Williams & Udoh, 2020). Lewis and Shah further realized that there is an emergence of the commodification of diversity in institutions of higher learning, where diversity is perceived as something to be regulated as a lucrative reserve. Dingel and Sage determined there are high levels of color-blind racism in colleges, leading to a dismissal of the lived experiences of underrepresented students by disengaging from discussions of racism.

Ongoing racial issues and racial campus climates have been linked to structural racism in higher education (Bonilla-Silva, 2019; McGee, 2020). These inequities result in poorer academic achievement, including lower retention and graduation rates among Black students in higher

education (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Research has further shown that campus racial climate has adverse impacts on Black students, including making the students feel unwelcomed, invalidated, and marginalized in the educational setting (Lewis & Shah, 2021; McGee et al., 2019; Mwangi et al., 2018). Other negative effects of the racial campus environment include lower levels of academic resilience (Mills, 2021) and higher college dropout rates for Black students (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Banks and Dohy similarly posited that due to the racial campus environment, Black students are subjected to incidents of microaggressions from White instructors where a conviction may persist that they are academically poorer than White learners.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this concurrent mixed methods study was to explore the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan, including the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion among African American students in a Midwest community college. The concurrent mixed-methods methodology followed a single case study design to explore the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan, including the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, among African American students in a Midwest community college. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed. All quantitative data were sourced from archival records. Data related to the institutionalized diversity plan under assessment were stored in a tableau on the Midwest community college's website. After cleaning, the quantitative data were exported from the tableau to the R project for statistical computing software for data visualization and analysis. The R project was used to generate descriptive statistics from the data. The participants for the qualitative phase of this study included Black students enrolled in a Midwest community college.

Research Questions and Research Hypotheses

The current study was guided by the following research questions and research hypotheses:

RQ1. What are the trends related to the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students after the implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan? (Quantitative question).

$H0_1$: The implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan has not significantly increased the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students.

Ha_1: The implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan has significantly increased the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students.

RQ2. How do African American students perceive their academic success in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion? (Qualitative question).

RQ3. What can be done to improve the academic success of African American students in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion from the perspectives of African American students and with respect to the status of reaching the goal 8 metrics of the strategic enrollment plan within the institutionalized diversity plan? (Mixed-methods question).

General Methodology

The mixed-methods research methodology was selected to address the acknowledged research problem and to answer the three research questions. In mixed-methods research, scholars gather and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data in the same study (McKim, 2017). By integrating these two types of data, the researcher benefits from gaining both the thorough contextualized insights of participants through qualitative methods as well as the externally valid, generalizable results from the quantitative method (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018;

McKim, 2017). The mixed-methods study approach has gained acceptance in modern society as scholars have become more willing to admit the exclusive strengths and weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies (McKim, 2017). By utilizing the mixed-methods approach, scholars can feasibly avert the weaknesses of using one methodology, either quantitative or qualitative, thereby increasing the reliability and validity of evaluation data (Harrison et al., 2020). Considering these benefits, the mixed-methods research approach was deemed a suitable technique for the current study. The objective of the current study was to leverage qualitative data gathered via interviews to inform 5-year quantitative data stored in the archival form to understand the impact of an institutionalized diversity program on Black students. The mixed-methods research methodology further enabled the researcher to explore different viewpoints and discover the associations that exist between the sophisticated layers of the four research questions.

The concurrent approach was the research design utilized in the current study. The objective of the current study was to focus on easily reachable archival quantitative data about the institutionalized diversity plan under investigation and to then make use of qualitative data from Black students at the study site to interpret the quantitative data with the overall objective of gaining in-depth perceptions and understanding regarding the impact of this diversity plan. This called for the adoption of a concurrent design, where the quantitative data were gathered and analyzed first followed by the qualitative data. The concurrent mixed-methods methodology followed a single case study design to explore the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan, including the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, among African American students in a Midwest community college. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed. All quantitative data were sourced

from archival records. Data related to the institutionalized diversity plan under assessment were stored in a tableau on the Midwest community college's website. After cleaning, the quantitative data were exported from the tableau to the R project for statistical computing software for data visualization and analysis. The R project was further utilized to generate descriptive statistics from the data. The participants for the qualitative phase of this study included Black students enrolled at a Midwest community college. The sample size was 20, which fell within the required sample size of between 15 and 30 participants for case studies. Individual semi-structured interviews were held virtually through Zoom. The qualitative data were analyzed statistically utilizing Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The final step entailed interpreting both the quantitative and qualitative findings to help answer the developed research questions and to address the research hypotheses.

Significance of the Study

The current study had both empirical and practical significance. Empirically, this study helped bridge the dearth of literature on the impact of diversity and inclusion initiatives implemented in institutions of higher learning on Black students. This study explored the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan, including the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, among African American students in a Midwest community college. Effectively, this study increased the knowledge of how diversity and inclusion initiatives adopted on college and university campuses impact Black students. Practically, this study helped alleviate the adverse impacts of implementing impractical diversity and inclusion initiatives in institutions of higher learning. Based on the research problem, Black students experience structural racism and poor academic achievement, including lower retention and graduation rates. Further, Black student feel unwelcomed, invalidated, marginalized, have

lower levels of academic resilience, and face incidents of microaggressions from White professors. By eradicating racial campus climates via proper implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan, the current study helped to alleviate these problems. Further, the outcomes of this study have significant implications for college and university administrators. The findings underscored the significance of implementing diversity and inclusion programs to support Black students when they encounter racism from different individuals or groups of individuals both on and off-campus.

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the features that limit the scope and designate the boundaries of the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). These features include the population characteristics, geographical setting or locality in which the study occurred, and sample size. The following several delimitations were designated for this study:

1. The participants in this case study were limited to Black students enrolled in a Midwest community college. The findings of this study, therefore, may not be reflective of the insights and experiences of students from other racial/ethnic groups at the Midwest community college as well as of students enrolled in other community colleges. Further, the findings may not be reflective of the insights and experiences of students enrolled in other institutions of higher learning.

2. The assessment in this study was limited to only one institutionalized diversity plan, which was implemented at the selected Midwest community college. The purpose was to explore the impact of this institutionalized diversity plan, including the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, among African American students at the Midwest community college. The findings of this study are,

therefore, not reflective of the impacts of other institutionalized diversity plans that are

implemented in other institutions of higher learning.

3. Another delimitation of the current study was that all quantitative data were sourced from

archival records. Data related to the institutionalized diversity plan under assessment

were stored in a tableau on the Midwest community college's website. Only qualitative

data were collected from Black students at the selected college.

Limitations

Limitations in research refer to the aspects of the methodology or design that influence or

impact the interpretation of the outcomes of a study (Queirós et al., 2017; Theofanidis &

Fountouki, 2018). The limitations of the current study were as follows:

1. The first and most significant limitation of the current study was that only one

community college was explored. This study was designed based on a concurrent single

case study design to investigate the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan on Black

students. The specific limitation of utilizing a single case study design is that the study

lacks scientific rigor and provides the minimal basis for the generalization of outcomes to

the broader population of Black college students.

2. Another limitation of the current study was linked to the use of archival data in the

quantitative phase. The limitation of this type of data is described as a selective deposit,

implying that the collected data can be biased (Barnes et al., 2018). Another limitation is

that the archival records may comprise overwhelming quantities of data, leading

researchers to spend more time curating and making sense of the files.

The recognized limitations were significant but did not substantially alter the outcomes of

the current study to a level that would render the study unreliable or invalid. Measures were

further taken to mitigate the impacts of these limitations. To mitigate the weaknesses of using archival data, qualitative data were gathered to inform the quantitative archival data. Because nothing could be done to mitigate the generalizable concerns of a single case study design, it was underscored that the findings of this study apply only to Black students that have been enrolled at Midwest community college in the past 5 years because the institutionalized diversity plan has been implemented for 5 years to date.

Definitions

The following technical terms were utilized frequently in this study:

Academic achievement. Academic achievement, also referred to as academic performance, is the level at which an institution, instructor, or student has achieved their short-term or long-term academic objectives (Wu et al., 2021). When learners can observe their progress in education as well as in mastering a skill or subject, they will feel a sense of academic achievement.

Color-blind racism. Color-blind racism is a racial philosophy that suggests that the optimal approach to end discrimination is by treating people as equally as possible without regard to ethnicity, culture, or race (Bonilla-Silva, 2020). Color-blind racism amounts to a dismissal of the lived experiences of people of color and signifies that racism does not exist as long as one overlooks it (Bonilla-Silva, 2020).

Community college. In the United States, a community college refers to a 2-year school which provides realistically-valued higher education as a pathway to a 4-year university degree (Felix, 2021).

Diversity. Diversity is described as the quality or practice of involving or including individuals from a range of diverse social and racial/ethnic backgrounds and of dissimilar ages,

religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, physical and intellectual disability, sexual orientation, gender/sex, gender identity, indigenous identity, and culture (Hakkola & Ropers-Huilman, 2018; Smith, 2009).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). HBCUs are institutions of higher learning that were established with the key objective of educating the descendants of formerly enslaved Africans before 1964 (Hotchkins, 2021). As opposed to PWIs, HBCUs were not established to isolate or exclude students based on their race or ethnicity, but were developed due to exclusionary practices of the period before 1964 (Hotchkins, 2021).

Institutional diversity. Institutional diversity refers to organizational change and general techniques by which governments, institutions of higher learning, companies, and not-for-profit firms create, implement, and evaluate ideal practices to embed and infuse diversity, inclusion, and equity into the fabric and philosophy of the labor force (Hakkola & Ropers-Huilman, 2018).

Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). A predominantly white institution (PWI) is an institution of higher learning where White students account for 50% or more of the entire student enrollment (Edwards & Ross, 2018). Nonetheless, most of these organizations can also be considered historically White institutions in acknowledgment of the exclusion supported by the United States before 1964 (Briscoe, 2022; Edwards & Ross, 2018). According to Briscoe, it is in a historical perspective of segregated learning that PWIs of higher learning are described and contrasted with other comparable institutions, which serve learners within diverse cultural, racial, and/or ethnic settings.

Sense of belonging. A sense of belonging is grounded on acquiring support, attention, and acceptance from members of a group or institution and equally providing comparable support, attention, and acceptance to those members (Drezner & Pizmony-Levy, 2021).

Structural racism. Structural racism is defined as the overall means by which societies foster racial/ethnic discrimination via communally supporting systems of healthcare, criminal justice, credit, benefits, earnings, employment, education, and housing (Bailey et al., 2017). These practices and trends eventually strengthen inequitable values, beliefs, and distribution of resources (Bailey et al., 2017; O'Brien et al., 2020).

Summary

The research problem addressed through this study was that although diversity and inclusion efforts have been implemented to improve campus climate, issues remain regarding inequities in campus climate and race (Dingel & Sage, 2020; Lewis & Shah, 2021; Telles & Mitchell, 2018). Despite having diversity and inclusion initiatives in institutions of higher learning, Black students continue to experience racial campus climates and the consequences of these climates, such as structural racism, poor academic achievement, and feeling unwelcomed (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Lewis & Shah, 2021). The purpose of this concurrent mixed methods study was to explore the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan, including the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, among African American students in a Midwest community college.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed. All quantitative data were sourced from archival records. Data related to the institutionalized diversity plan under assessment were stored in a tableau on the Midwest community college's website. After cleaning, the quantitative data were exported from the tableau to the R project for statistical computing software for data visualization and analysis. The R project was further used to generate descriptive statistics and time-series trends from the data. The participants for the qualitative phase of this study included Black students enrolled at a Midwest community college.

A sample size of 20 was considered adequate to ensure data saturation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted electronically via Zoom. The qualitative data were analyzed statistically utilizing Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The final step entailed interpreting both the quantitative and qualitative findings to help answer the developed research questions and to address the research hypotheses. The current study helped alleviate problems Black students experience such as structural racism and poor academic achievement, which may lead to lower retention and graduation rates. Further problems include feeling unwelcomed, invalidated, and marginalized, having lower levels of academic resilience, and encountering incidents of microaggressions from White instructors. In Chapter 2, the researcher presents and describes the existing literature that applies to the research problem, research questions, and concepts of the current study.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Higher education institutions across the United States commonly make proclamations of being havens of diversity and inclusion (Starck et al., 2021). Certain initiatives have been undertaken by institutes of higher education to promote positive campus climates of diversity and inclusion (Girolamo & Ghali, 2021; Williams et al., 2021). Although some of the strategies employed by these institutions have been appreciated by both African American students and the student population at large (Rodríguez et al., 2018; Sanchez et al., 2018), experiences of racial campus climates, structural racism, feelings of being unwelcome, and poor academic performance continue to be the norm for a large portion of the African American student community (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Lewis & Shah, 2021).

The focus of existing higher education diversity and inclusion initiatives have been reported to have shifted from accessibility for students of color to educational benefits for White students (Nishi, 2022). The support for diversity and inclusion in U.S. higher education institutes has been found to correspond to the preferences of and relatively better outcomes for White students compared to their racial minority counterparts (Starck et al., 2021). The responsibility for these undesirable outcomes has often been placed on the higher education institutions' policies, starting from the admission processes that they adopt and resulting in a moderately diverse, yet somewhat unwelcome environment for traditionally under-represented students (Callahan et al., 2018). In this context, it is critical to explore the perspectives of traditionally under-represented and minority community students in order to develop and implement diversity and inclusion programs that genuinely cater to these populations.

To design and implement genuine and effective diversity and inclusion initiatives, Vick et al. (2018) highlighted the significance of "aligning efforts across the operational continuum to achieve diversity goals" (p. 53) in the context of higher education. The alignment of institutional operations for promoting diversity and inclusion was noted to begin with the mission and vision statements of the institution; the acknowledgement and knowledge of the beliefs and social and cultural practices of minority communities; and the priorities placed on the potential applicants, students, faculty, staff, and the overall community (Capers et al., 2018; Jones, 2018; Vick et al., 2018). According to Patton et al. (2019), although some researchers have explored the issues of inclusion, equity, diversity, and justice in the U.S. higher education context, there is a lack of research involving an assessment of specific initiatives undertaken by higher education institutions for promoting diversity and inclusion on their campuses. In this regard, the exploration of an institutionalized diversity plan in the higher education setting to examine the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion among African American students was expected to provide valuable insights for promoting diversity and inclusion in campus.

In Chapter 2, the researcher presents a discussion of the existing literature related to diversity and inclusion in the context of U.S. higher education. Recent studies exploring diversity initiatives in the United States are first described, followed by a discussion of certain limitations of these initiatives. The perceptions of diversity and inclusion programs and strategies by students, faculty, and other higher education stakeholders are then discussed. The future promising directions that these initiatives may take for efficiently promoting a sustainable campus climate of diversity and inclusion are then discussed. Finally, a summary of the literature review is presented to conclude the chapter.

To identify the relevant studies for the literature review, the following search strategy was employed. Scholarly databases such as ERIC, ProQuest, PsychInfo, and Google Scholar were searched. Key search terms included *diversity initiative*, *inclusion initiative*, *diversity and inclusion initiative*, *United States diversity and inclusion initiative*, *African American inclusion*, *African American diversity*, *African American diversity higher education*, and *United States African American diversity higher education*. The search was refined to focus on peer-reviewed studies published between 2018 and 2022. The search yielded over 3,000 studies. The researcher read through abstracts of the obtained studies to determine their relevance to the study topic. A few older studies were included based on their relevance to the study topic. Finally, 62 studies were included in the literature review of this study. Among the 62 studies, 58 (93.6%) studies were published between 2018 and 2022 and 4 (6.4%) studies were published prior to 2018.

Diversity Initiatives in the United States

Diversity initiatives are policies and programs that are intended to promote the inclusion, retention, and success of traditionally under-represented groups and to ensure institutional fairness (Dover et al., 2019). The purpose of diversity and inclusion initiatives is to help the communities that face societal disadvantage to achieve better outcomes in the institutions wherein they study or work (Leslie, 2019). These initiatives and programs are relevant and significant in various contexts, including organizations, businesses, or educational institutions. In the higher education context, the integration of diversity initiatives is intended to help promote the recruitment and engagement of a diverse body of students, staff, and faculty and to address the academic achievement gaps among various ethnic groups (Hakkola & Ropers-Huilman, 2018; Jones et al., 2018). In the United States, an increase in the number of African American and Latinx students is being observed, and national political and social debates regarding the

structural and systematic exclusion of individuals from the non-White communities are on the rise. In this context, higher education institutions across the nation may benefit from re-examining inclusive education and campus climate, attempting a more nuanced understanding of diversity and inclusion, and tailoring diversity and inclusion initiatives for creating a diverse and inclusive academic environment (Green & Bedeau, 2020).

Researchers have attempted to explore various aspects of the diversity and inclusion initiatives undertaken by U.S. higher education institutes. According to a report by the United States Department of Education, research suggests that the following focus areas establish the practices that can help higher education institutions in promoting diversity and inclusion within their campuses: institutional commitment in the form of mission and vision statements; diversity across all institutional levels, including the students and faculty; outreach to and recruitment of diverse students; provision of support services; and cultivation and promotion of an inclusive climate within the campus (United States Department of Education, 2016). Although the design and implementation of these initiatives may be prevalent, their practical effectiveness in enhancing campus diversity is another matter. For example, Slay et al. (2019) examined how diversity initiatives work practically in higher education institutes. The researchers noted that department-level higher educational structures, such as the diversity committee, the curricular diversity initiative, and admissions reforms, reflected the departments' commitment towards enhancing compositional diversity. These formal initiatives were, however, found to not be effective in creating positive changes for students of higher education in the context of their classrooms, labs, and faculty relationships. Slay et al. noted that for promoting and sustaining a genuine campus climate of diversity and inclusion, it is critical that all dimensions of a racial

climate be attended to, particularly students' interactions with faculty members and the overall perceptions of inclusiveness.

In this context, specific research on initiatives that have evidence of practically promoting diversity and inclusion within higher education campuses may be more informative. Researchers have conducted studies on certain student-led initiatives for promoting diversity and inclusion within educational settings. For instance, Achenjang and Elam (2016) explored a student-led diversity initiative at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine. The aim of this initiative was to provide support for the recruitment of under-represented students in medicine. Potential students from Kentucky and the surrounding states were given opportunities to obtain a detailed understanding of the admission process, financial aid process, and the overall demands of the institution and medical education in general. The student-led initiative facilitated the participants to engage in one-on-one interactions and hands-on activities with currently enrolled medical students of the institution. This initiative by the students at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine was noted as successful by the increasing numbers of applicants and participants (Achenjang & Elam, 2016). In a more recent study, Girolamo and Ghali (2021) explored how student-led initiatives could help support minority students. The researchers focused on University of Kansas' student equity and inclusion workgroup, a student-led initiative that is entirely independent of any institutional influence. This initiative aimed to recognize minority student leadership, ensure equitable opportunity access, and provide meaningful support to students. With these aims in mind, institutional advocacy initiatives, research initiatives, and mentorship initiatives constituted the focus of this student-led group. The researchers noted that these student-led initiatives may be effective in supporting traditionally under-represented and

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minority students through direct involvement of the students who contribute to the campus climate of diversity and inclusion (Girolamo & Ghali, 2021).

Along with a focus on student-led initiatives in the United States, researchers have also focused on the practices and strategies used by faculty members and administrative staff for promoting a diverse and inclusive campus climate. Willard (2021) examined the strategies used by faculty members of predominantly White institutions (PWIs) for promoting a sense of community and belonging among students of color. The researchers considered the questionnaire responses and semi-structured interviews with 12 faculty members with 3 of more years of teaching experience. Four themes were identified: (a) the need to professionally train the instructors on appropriate navigation through racial contexts as they arise in the classroom, (b) the provision of a safe and inclusive environment in the classroom environment as a precursor to teaching and learning, (c) the need for collective agreement on the significance of cultural relevance, and (d) the promotion of cultural responsiveness by providing holistic student support services. Willard noted that White members of the faculty were often unsure of the most appropriate way to support students of color. Notably, the researchers highlighted that the role of faculty members in promoting a diverse and inclusive campus environment was critical. Strategies such as the provision of culturally relevant pedagogies, the adoption of instructional practices, and the development of meaningful relationships with students may be beneficial in this regard (Willard, 2021).

In a similar study, Williams et al. (2021) investigated the culturally affirming practices that HBCU administrators and faculty members enacted to promote inclusive institutional environments. A qualitative methodology with a grounded theory design was adopted for this study. The participants of the study included 16 academicians, most of whom worked at private

HBCUs. Among the 16 participants, eight were faculty members and eight were full-time administrators. The researchers conducted individual semi-structured interviews with each participant. The study findings revealed that the participants embraced African American cultural affirmations in the following ways: (a) by emphasizing culturally relevant knowledge and culturally informed pedagogy that centered the experiences of African Americans and (b) by committing to African American cultural validation through the development of connections with the African American community (Williams et al., 2021). These findings indicate that culturally affirming pedagogy and corresponding positive campus climates may help higher education institutes to create inclusive spaces for students from all backgrounds.

What Diversity Initiatives Fail to Consider

While diversity and inclusion initiatives in higher education are intended to create better outcomes for traditionally under-represented and minority students, researchers have presented several instances in which they fail to practically do so. In one study, Starck et al. (2021) explored how university diversity rationales in the United States informed higher education students' preferences and outcomes. The researchers adopted a quantitative methodology to code higher education institute websites and conduct surveys. The study findings revealed that instrumental rationales corresponded to the preferences of White students but not to those of African American students. The researchers noted that instrumental diversity rationales were more prevalent than moral diversity rationales, and the presence of the former was aimed at increasing the White–Black graduation disparities. Further, admission staff as well as parents believed that African American students would experience a tougher time in university than their White counterparts. Through their findings, Starck et al. (2021) concluded that the support for diversity and inclusion in U.S. higher education institutions corresponded to the preferences of

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and relatively better outcomes for White students compared to their low-status racial minority counterparts. This observation was in alignment with the results of the study conducted by Khan et al. (2019). In their assessment of 15 of the foremost institutions of social science and public health, Khan et al. found that despite the presence of diversity and inclusion initiatives, these institutions presented conspicuous ethnic disparities within its population.

Oftentimes, diversity initiatives not only fail to fulfill the intentions with which they were developed, but also exacerbate the very issue they were meant to tackle. In this regard, Dover et al. (2019) focused on the undesired mixed signals that diversity and inclusion initiatives may send. The researchers noted that diversity initiatives in institutions may send "fairness signals," which may lead the campus society to presume the presence of fairness for traditionally under-represented and minority groups, making it difficult for discrimination to be identified and litigated. Conversely, the presence of these initiatives may result in the presumption of unfairness for individuals of the over-represented groups. The presence of diversity initiatives may also send "inclusion signals," which are the intended signals for under-represented and minority groups, but which may be perceived as signals of threat and exclusion among over-represented groups. Finally, diversity and inclusion initiatives may send "competence signals," which signify that the traditionally under-represented and minority groups require help for succeeding and, by that logic, are less competent compared to their advantaged counterparts (Dover et al., 2019).

In a similar study, Leslie (2019) explored the unintended consequences that may result from diversity initiatives. These included backfire (i.e., negative progress of the diversity goal), negative spillover (i.e., undesirable side-effects on outcomes apart from the diversity goal progress), positive spillover (i.e., desirable side-effects on outcomes apart from the diversity goal

progress), and false progress (i.e., perceived improvement in diversity metrics without genuine diversity goal progress). Leslie noted that a broader conceptualization of the effectiveness of diversity initiatives was required and that all possible mechanisms and outcomes associated with these initiatives, along with the correlations among them, should be under consideration during the development and implementation of the initiatives. The findings of Dover et al. and Leslie highlight the significance of meticulously taking into account the possible counterproductive signals and unwanted outcomes that may result from diversity initiatives.

In this context, a few researchers have explored the negative impacts that diversity initiatives have had on African American students. McGee (2020) explored how STEM universities institutionalized diversity programs while minimizing or ignoring the creation of hostile educational and workspaces by STEM departments. The researcher noted that the very programs that were designed to increase racial diversity within STEM education contributed to the disparities faced by minority students. This was because in these highly competitive programs, African American students were evaluated by stricter and more subjective criteria than their counterparts, such as skepticism regarding their suitability for certain academic positions. The specific facilities and support provided to African American students were noted to be condescending and intended to fix them so that they could perform better academically and successfully complete their education (McGee, 2020). It is important to note that African American students face these challenges in addition to the systemic trauma they encounter in their higher education institutions in the form of racism, including systemic barriers such as racial climate, stereotype threat, and cultural mistrust, and the contextual factors of technology and social media (Williams et al., 2021). These observations critically underscore the need for designing and promoting diversity initiatives that are better informed and, consequently, more

genuinely effective against the barriers and challenges specific to African Americans and other traditionally under-represented groups of students.

Perspectives on Higher Education Inclusion and Diversity

The literature review revealed that several recent studies have been conducted to understand the perceptions of various higher education stakeholders regarding the campus climates of diversity and inclusion. Some researchers have focused on the perceptions of faculty and administrative staff in this regard. For instance, Briscoe (2022) explored the perceptions of student affairs professionals (SAPs) regarding campus racial climate at PWIs. The researcher focused on the experiences that the SAPs had of racialized incidents on campus and how they made sense of those experiences. A multiple case study approach was adopted for the study, and the researcher utilized a multi-contextual model for diverse learning environments and critical incident technique as the theoretical frameworks. The study sample included 12 SAPs, and the researchers used constant comparative data analysis. The study findings revealed that, overall, the SAPs had a "business as usual" mindset based on their experiences on campus. The PWI SAPs reported that the current political climate with respect to racial issues had influenced campus incidents and campus dynamics, and these led the SAPs to often consult and confide in colleagues and peers in fear of retaliation. The study participants, particularly those of color, reported experiencing challenges with balancing institutional racism, microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue when they had to process and make meaning of the racialized incidents on campus (Briscoe, 2022). In a similar study, Felix (2021) explored the implementation of the student policy-based equity plan from the perspective of the program planners and coordinators. The researcher adopted an instrumental case study design and focused on the Huerta College, which had implemented an equity plan to address the transfer inequity among Latinx students.

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Data were collected over 2 years through interviews, observations, and document collection. In total, 16 participants were included in the study, of which 8 were planners and 8 were coordinators. The study findings revealed that the key factor of equity planning was that a critical portion of Latinx practitioners were able to use the policy implementation as an opportunity to tackle campus inequities. An efficient student equity plan would embody the characteristics of equity-mindedness, be race-conscious, position equity as the institution's responsibility, and include several culturally relevant projects (Felix, 2021).

Some researchers have explored the perspectives of students with a focus on their interactions with students from diverse backgrounds. For instance, Hussain and Jones (2021) examined how diverse peer interactions and institutional diversity commitment buffered the correlation between discrimination and sense of belonging among PWI students of color. Based on moderated regression analysis of the survey responses of 626 students, the researchers noted that more diverse peer interactions had a buffering effect against the negative impact that bias and discrimination had on the students' sense of belonging. Positive perceptions of the institution's commitment towards creating a diverse and inclusive campus also had a similar buffering effect. In another study, Thelamour et al. (2019) focused on an ethnically diverse sample of African American college students to examine the correlation between their racial identity and their campus connectedness. The researchers also examined the mediating effect of same-ethnic friendships on this correlation. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, and 345 African, Black, and Caribbean American college students were included in the study sample. Both quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis provided similar results. The researchers found that Black American students who had strong racial identities were likely to feel a lower level of campus connectedness. The participating students from all ethnic backgrounds were

found to report feeling closer to their same-ethnic peers compared to those with different ethnicities. Same ethnic friendship was observed to have a mediating effect on the correlation of racial identity with campus connectedness only for Black American students (Thelamour et al., 2019). The findings of these studies highlighted the significant contribution of the interactions and relationships among diverse groups within under-represented student communities in creating an inclusive campus environment where students feel a sense of connectedness and belonging.

For a true diverse and inclusive campus environment, the disparities among students as well as those among the staff and faculty belonging to different ethnic groups must be addressed (Hakkola & Ropers-Huilman, 2018; Jones et al., 2018). In this regard, Edwards and Ross (2018) explored the perceptions of African American faculty from PWIs regarding their success in college. The researchers noted that in current times, African American higher education faculty at research-oriented PWIs and institutions granting extensive doctoral degrees had concerns of institutional climates of stress, dissatisfaction, and distrust. The researchers recruited 24 African American faculty members across 43 PWIs and conducted three rounds of paneling. Thirteen major concerns were identified. These included the following: absence of mentors, insufficient guidance regarding tenure and promotion processes, insufficient guidance regarding academic work place, social isolation and absence of collegiality, token committee assignments, perceived triviality of research, infrequent occasions for assuming leadership positions or achieving institutional presence, limited opportunities for contributing to departmental and institutional decision making, lack of security in the ability to attain tenure, fear of speaking up, inequity of pay, provision of respect and equity from peers, and campus-wide failure of African American faculty retention. These concerns were noted to explain the under-representation and lack of

success of African American faculty at PWIs (Edwards & Ross, 2018). The findings of Edwards and Ross (2018) and Briscoe (2022) indicate that the racially motivated challenges experienced by faculty and administrative staff may be critical points to consider while developing a plan for higher education diversity and inclusion.

A number of researchers have specifically focused on the perceptions of students regarding diversity and inclusion in their higher education campuses. For instance, Drape et al. (2017) explored the perspectives of undergraduate students regarding diversity within their campus. Specifically, the researchers focused on the students' perceptions of diversity and inclusion and their views on how the campus climate could be improved. The target population of the study included all full-time undergraduate students in a mid-Atlantic institution with a primary major in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. The researchers adopted a mixed-methods research approach and utilized a descriptive survey. Twelve percent of the student population responded to the survey, and they were mostly White (74%) and female (69%), with the others ethically identifying as Asians, Hispanics, African Americans, and Native Americans. The study findings revealed that a wide range of perceptions regarding diversity existed among students. Students from majority and minority communities highlighted that feelings of racism and discrimination needed to be addressed. Overall, three major themes were identified: the meaning of diversity and inclusion for students, feelings of discrimination on campus, and suggestions for improving the diversity and inclusion climate on the college campus (Drape et al., 2017). In a similar study, Sanchez et al. (2018) explored the perceptions of students from a college of education regarding inclusion and diversity. The researchers specifically focused on the students' perceptions of the academic and social climate in the context of campus diversity and assessed their views on the college curriculum, methods of instruction, and

interactions. The researchers conducted an online survey with 209 students studying at a Western U.S. university. The study findings indicated that the participating students generally agreed that their institution was inclusive, with categories of gender, race, and disability given the highest diversity ratings and those of religion and gifted/talented given the lowest diversity ratings. Sexual minority students, however, were found to report significantly lower ratings overall compared to their nonminority counterparts. A similar trend was observed for graduate students and students belonging to traditionally under-represented and multiracial communities. Based on their findings, Sanchez et al. (2018) highlighted the need to enhance the academic and social campus climate for all students. For this, the perceptions of students could be taken under consideration.

In this context, it is critical to consider whether the perceptions of students regarding diversity and inclusion within their campuses remain the same or change with time. Dingel and Sage (2020) examined how the perspectives of undergraduate college students on diversity changed over time. Specifically, the researchers focused on the students' perspectives on diversity on their campus and how they perceived a sense of belonging in the context of campus diversity. The sample of the study included 32 first and second-year college students, and the researchers conducted individual interviews with the participants to explore their perceptions in detail. Follow-up interviews were also conducted with 18 of the 32 participants after a period of 2 years when they were in their third and fourth years of college. The study findings revealed that a wide range of traits were classified by the students under the concept of diversity. With regard to race, the participants were found to exhibit a high degree of color-blind racism, as described by Bonilla-Silva (2020). According to Bonilla-Silva, the central tenets of color-blind racism include abstract liberalism (i.e., using abstract and de-contextualized arguments for the

explanation of racial matters); naturalization of racialized outcomes, such as neighborhood segregation; cultural racism (i.e., attribution of racial differences to cultural practices); and minimization of racism. These students' color-blind perceptions were found to be quite stable over 2 years; however, other changes were noted in their attitudes. How students introduced learning styles and career goals during their second interviews were noted to reflect the extent to which their concept of diversity was deeply rooted in their social context. The second interviews with the students also reflected that their color-blind ideology was sufficiently flexible for incorporating context-specific frameworks of diversity and difference (Dingel & Sage, 2020). Dingel and Sage found that, overall, the participating students retained their perceptions on diversity over 2 years. More importantly, however, the researchers underscored that color-blind racism was prevalent within undergraduate students in higher education institutes.

The prevalence of this subtle form of racism in a postracial nation signifies how individuals from the African American community continue to face implicit discrimination and explicit disparities, even in the 21st century (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Burke, 2016). In this regard, the academic disparities of African American students are significant. African American students have been found to fare poorly in the U.S. higher education system, having the highest undergraduate dropout rates, lowest persistence rates, highest borrowing rates, and largest debt burdens compared to all other ethnic groups (Espinosa et al., 2019). Higher education in the United States involves intense racial struggles for African American students. This is evident from the trends across U.S. higher education institutions, where the number of African American students at flagship institutes have declined, a higher number of students are receiving enrollment and degree completion at African American-serving institutions, and HBCUs are more racially diverse (Allen et al., 2018). In order for African American students in higher

education to break out of their seemingly stagnant position, a re-imagination of the future is required, wherein determined effort is put into building educational and intellectual spaces for the African American community, leaving behind all forms of settler colonial logics (Dancy et al., 2018).

In this context, several researchers have focused on the perceptions of students of color. For instance, Ong et al. (2018) examined the perceptions of female higher education students of color regarding their experience of STEM education and the creation of counter-spaces. The researchers defined counter-spaces as safe spaces for minority groups outside of the mainstream educational space. Particular focus was awarded to the struggles of female students of color in STEM education. The researchers examined the operation of the subsequent counter-spaces of these women, focusing on how these spaces served as havens away from microaggressions and isolation. The study participants included 39 female students of color, and the researchers adopted the critical race theory and intersectionality theory as the theoretical frameworks for their study. Interviews were conducted with the participants, and the findings indicated that there were five major ways of operation of these students' counter-spaces: through peer-to-peer relationships, in mentoring relationships, in national STEM diversity conferences, within STEM and non-STEM student groups in campus, and within STEM departments. The researchers noted that counter-spaces varied with respect to gender, ethnicity, and the power levels of the students and that these spaces could be physical or ideological and conceptual and could exist at the center of STEM departments or at their margins (Ong et al., 2018). In another study, Booker and Campbell-Whatley (2019) explored the perceptions of students from a historically black university regarding diversity and inclusion in their institution. The researchers adopted a qualitative methodology for this study, and the study participants included 16 undergraduate and

graduate students who were studying at the historically black university. The framework of Tinto's theory of student departure was adopted for the study. Data collection was performed through individual interviews with the participants as well as focus group sessions where the researchers aimed to assess the students' perceptions of peer relationships, faculty interactions, campus programming, and university communication approaches. Booker and Campbell-Whatley found that the students who participated in the study perceived a strong connection with their faculty instructors; however, their social connections with peers were reported to be mixed. Based on the nonideal social integration on campus, the students' sense of inclusion may not have been what they had hoped for or expected at a historically black university (Booker & Campbell-Whatley, 2019).

Some researchers have specifically explored the perceptions of African American students in higher education. Certain studies have been conducted to understand African American higher education students' perceptions of their campus climates. For instance, Mills (2021) explored the perceptions of African American college students regarding the general, academic, and racial campus climates in their institutions. The researcher further studied the moderating effect that civic engagement had on the association between campus climate and academic resilience. The participants of the study included 388 African American undergraduate students from a PWI who were predominantly female (76.8%); majoring in social, behavioral, and economic sciences (58.8%); and enrolled in full-time courses (87.4%). Data for the study were collected through an online survey, and moderated regression analyses were performed on the collected data. The study findings revealed that higher positive perceptions of the general and academic campus climate were significant predictors of higher academic resilience. However, higher positive perceptions of the racial campus climate were significant predictors of lower

academic resilience. The factor of civic engagement only had a moderating role on the correlation between general campus climate and academic resilience. Through their findings, Mills highlighted that the academic resilience of African American college students could be enhanced by improving the general and academic campus climates. In a similar study, Mwangi et al. (2018) explored African American higher education students' perceptions of their campus racial climate in the context of broader racial tensions and movements taking place in the United States. The researchers adopted a qualitative approach and utilized surveys and interviews as the data collection instruments. The participants of the study included African American students who were current or past undergraduate students of a U.S. PWI. Three hundred and fifty-one students participated in the survey, and 25 participants took part in the interviews. Four themes were identified from the qualitative data: (a) perceptions of the African American ethnicity on campus, (b) campus climate reflecting the societal racial climate, (c) experiences of and involvement in campus movements, and (d) influence of the overall racial climate on students' plans of the future. Mwangi et al. highlighted how the societal racial climate had a significant impact on the campus climate as perceived by African American students.

While Mwangi et al. (2018) and Mills (2021) focused on the perspectives of African American higher education students regarding diverse and inclusive college campuses and campus climates, Leath et al. (2021) explored the perceptions of African American college students regarding the campus climate for students belonging to other under-represented groups and examined the associations of these perceptions with African American students' mental health. Specifically, the researchers investigated how diversity and inclusion within higher education institutions impacted the students' negative mental health as well as their positive mental health. A sample of 1,188 African American college students from 15 higher education

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institutions across the United States was included. The study findings revealed that African American college students who perceived that their higher education campus was welcoming towards first-generation students showed more positive mental health. African American students who believed that their campuses were welcoming towards racial minority students; lesbian, gay, and bisexual students; and students of low socioeconomic status were found to report lower anxiety and depression levels. The researchers concluded that the perceptions of African American students regarding the campus climate as they related to the diversity and inclusion of under-represented groups were significant predictors of the African American students' mental health outcomes (Leath et al., 2021). These findings indicate that the overall experiences and perceptions of African American students regarding campus diversity and inclusion may impact their own feelings of belongingness in their higher education institutions.

The experiences of African American students as they pursued their higher education studies have been studied in a number of distinct contexts. McGee et al. (2019) explored the perceptions of African American engineering and computer science students regarding their experiences in doctoral education. The participants of the study included 48 African American students who ranged from being in their first year of doctoral studies to having recently completed their doctorate. The participants included 29 male and 19 female students across various institutions, and data were collected through semi-structured one-on-one interviews as well as focus group sessions. The findings of the study indicated that the participants placed high priority on their studies and that academic and career success took precedence over the students' physical or mental health. The researchers noted that their focus for succeeding may have come at physical, emotional, and psychological costs. The study findings revealed that students' racialized experiences resulted in stress and anxiety, which made them doubt their qualifications.

The imbalance between the racial make-up of these students' academic environment as well as their racialized academic identities exacerbated their imposter syndrome, and their coping mechanisms took a severe toll in the process (McGee et al., 2019). In another study, Berry (2021) examined the experiences of African American college students studying in PWIs in terms of adaptation and identity. Specifically, the researchers explored the experiences of these students, how the students assigned meaning to their experiences, and how the experiences impacted their identity. The study sample included 19 African American male students. The researchers adopted the frameworks of the surprise and sensemaking theory (Louis, 1980) and black identity theory (Cross Jr, 1971) to investigate the students' past as well as current experiences on campus to understand how African American men adapted to their environment. The study findings revealed that many African American men had been conditioned to have a strong awareness of their ethnicity and had been taught how to navigate through a predominantly White nation from an early age. The researchers noted that the theory of surprise and sensemaking facilitated the identification of the African American students' possible encounters of surprise while studying at a PWI. Further, the framework of the black identity theory was conducive towards determining whether the African American students' identities were impacted while they were studying at a PWI (Berry, 2021). Further research is necessary to understand how African American students at PWIs adapted to their environment and how they developed a sense of belonging within the higher education institution.

The findings of McGee et al. (2019), Booker and Campbell-Whatley (2019), and Dingel and Sage (2020) indicated that African American students in U.S. higher education institutions continue to face ethnic disparities as well as racially motivated challenges. In this context, Proctor et al. (2018) explored the perceptions and experiences of African American higher

education students with a focus on the factors that may help these students in persisting through their higher education studies. The researchers adopted a qualitative methodology for this study and focused on African American specialist-level students in psychology programs. The study sample included eight African American first-year students who were studying in National Association of School Psychologists-approved programs across the United States. For data collection, the researchers conducted interviews with the participants, and the results indicated that the participants perceived that the supports all students received from faculty members as well as the positive and supportive student-faculty relationships were effective retention strategies. The participants also felt that the provision of diversity accessibility within support systems could be a beneficial retention strategy. The persistence strategies used by participants were reported to be social engagement and family and peer reliance (Proctor et al., 2018). These observations, complimented by further studies to obtain evidence-based information on effective practices and policies, may help in the development and implementation of future diversity initiatives within the U.S. higher education setting.

The Future of Diversity Initiatives

A number of researchers have conducted recent studies with findings that may be conducive towards the design and implementation of effective diversity and inclusion initiatives in the U.S. higher education context. For instance, Salmi and D'Addio (2021) explored existing policies, programs, and interventions in place for promoting inclusion in higher education. The researchers noted that existing diversity and inclusion efforts include the removal of financial barriers for equitable access to higher education. However, institutional dependence on grants and scholarships and the prevalence of student loans limit the provision of financial aid. Existing nonmonetary supports include outreach and bridging programs; affirmative action programs such

as quotas, retention, and remedial programs; and individualized and specialized support programs. The researchers concluded that a comprehensive development of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives is required, which considers financial aid as well as nonmonetary supports. Further, the requirement of complimentary coordination of institutional and national-level actions with a focus on both access and success was highlighted (Salmi & D'Addio, 2021). These observations may be used to make informed decisions while planning future initiatives aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion within higher education campuses. Binning and Browman (2020) proposed that in order to address the educational gaps among students in higher education, diversity and inclusion initiatives should be developed by first diagnosing the students' individual levels of threat and then tailoring the initiatives to address the specific threats.

Some researchers have specifically focused on the initiatives that can be taken by HBCUs in this regard. Jones and Phillips (2020) highlighted that although HBCUs have been performing better than PWIs with respect to educating students of color in the United States, these institutions can implement strategies to further diversity and inclusion within their campuses to far greater extents. The adoption of tailored campus climate evaluations would inform these institutes of the needs of their students from traditionally under-represented and minority communities and would also facilitate the highlighting of their achievements. Jones and Phillips noted that conventional campus climate assessment models may be unsuitable for HBCUs, as these models center around the theoretical suppositions related to PWIs and White students and fail to take under consideration the history, population, structure, and tension that are specific to HBCUs. Jones and Phillips called for the reimagination of the campus climate theory and assessment to formulate a sustainable model that is relevant in the 21st century and that

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underscores the HBCU mission of providing a diverse, equitable, and inclusive educational environment for all its students. Killough et al. (2018) noted that HBCUs could adopt several strategies for addressing the challenges faced by their African American student population. These strategies could include the development of contemporary agenda to address the negative outcomes for African American students, promoting technology and social media use to elicit public dialogue regarding communal political problems, and acknowledging and giving voice to the history and culture of the African American community (Killough et al., 2018).

Studies have been conducted to focus on the specific challenges of African American higher education students and target diversity initiatives accordingly. Easterbrook and Hadden (2021) highlighted that these students experience structural barriers, such as disparities in access to high-quality education, as well as institutional biases and psychological barriers. These psychological barriers, which are specific to African American students who have suffered from historical inequalities, include social identity threat and a sense of incompatibility with academic success. These barriers significantly contribute to the academic achievement gaps of the African American community through implicit signals within local educational settings that imply that these students are not as valued in their educational institutions, that they are likely to be unsuccessful in their studies, and that they are unlikely to benefit from pursuing higher education. The researchers proposed that social psychological interventions that target students' subjective interpretations of their educational context may help in reducing educational inequalities brought about by psychological barriers (Easterbrook & Hadden, 2021). Easterbrook and Hadden noted that these social psychological interventions or wise interventions are simple but effective, owing to their ability to change the students' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of their educational context. Regarding specialized interventions, Moreu et al.

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(2021) reviewed recent developments in the higher education sector and recommended that during the development of diversity initiatives, focus should be awarded to the target audience of the initiative in order to promote the relevant target behavior(s) and to address the possible strengths and challenges of these behaviors. The researchers noted that several existing diversity and inclusion initiatives, such as self-affirmation interventions and growth-promoting programs, are intended to help students from traditionally under-represented and minority communities succeed in a campus climate that is not inclusive. A more efficient way of promoting diversity and inclusion would be to shift the focus to creating an inclusive academic environment rather than teaching these students to attempt to survive and thrive amidst discrimination and exclusion. Moreu et al. suggested ways in which this could be achieved: social norms messaging (i.e., promoting messages and statements regarding social norms, in this case diversity and inclusion); intergroup contact (i.e., interventions and programs aimed at connecting individuals from different groups for promoting diversity and inclusion); and the pride and prejudice approach (i.e., acknowledgement of the historical and cultural pride of traditionally under-represented and minority students and addressing the discrimination and prejudices against them).

Similar to the intergroup contact interventions suggested by Moreu et al. (2021), Rodríguez et al. (2018) highlighted the significance of intergroup dialogue. Specifically, Rodríguez et al. explored the impact of intergroup dialogue on college campuses in the United States. Interracial or interethnic dialogue was noted as a model of intergroup contact that underscored the prominence of racial/ethnic group membership with the aim of improving campus intergroup relations. The researchers adopted a field experiment approach, and 737 undergraduate students were included in the study. Participants were randomly assigned to an intergroup dialogue course, and this enrollment was found to increase their thoughts and

understanding of racial/ethnic group membership compared to those of the control group participants who were placed on the course waitlist. Improvements in thinking and understanding were observed after the completion of the course and 1 year later. Participation in interracial dialogue was further found to increase students' motivation of bridging intergroup differences, promoting structural understanding of ethnic and racial inequality, and enhancing commitment to address and oppose inequality even after 1 year (Rodríguez et al., 2018).

A few researchers have explored how the engagement of traditionally under-represented and minority students within the higher education campus can be enhanced. Museus et al. (2018) explored the relation between engaging campus environments and sense of belonging for students of color. The researchers adopted a quantitative methodology, and the study participants included 870 students who were enrolled in an urban research university. The participants included both White students as well as students of color. Data collection was performed through the use of a survey, and the researchers used linear regression analysis to analyze the collected data. The findings of the study indicated that the sense of belonging exhibited by White students and students of color were varied, and this variance in the perceived sense of belonging of the two groups was explained by the perceived culturally engaging environments. The researchers noted that the students' sense of belonging may be related to their intention of persisting in their courses, and the lower sense of belonging of students of color was predictive of their lower rates of persistence and course completion compared to their White counterparts (Museus et al., 2018). These findings indicate that students' sense of belonging should be targeted in diversity and inclusion initiatives.

In a similar study, Beasley (2021) explored the associations of student-faculty interactions and psycho-sociocultural factors of African American students with their academic

and social engagement in higher education. The researchers focused on African American students who were enrolled in PWIs, and two dimensions of interactions between the students and their faculty were considered: caring attitudes and respectful interactions. The psycho-sociocultural factors that were considered in this study included students' racial identity, their perceptions of the university's environment, and their cultural congruity. The study sample included 209 African American undergraduate students who were studying at a Southwestern research-intensive PWI. Based on survey data and hierarchical regression analysis, the researchers found that the considered student-faculty interactions and psycho-sociocultural factors accounted for 34% and 32% of the variance in academic engagement and social engagement of the students, respectively. Specifically, the factors of caring student–faculty interactions, racial centrality, and cultural congruity significantly predicted students' academic and social engagement (Beasley, 2021).

In alignment with Beasley's (2021) presented factor of students' interactions with faculty members, researchers have explored how teachers and faculty members can help facilitate diversity and inclusion within academic settings. For instance, Jimenez et al. (2019) examined how faculty from under-represented communities significantly contributed towards advancing diversity and inclusion. Specifically, the researchers aimed to quantify faculty engagement in inclusion and diversity activities and to identify the associated facilitatory and inhibitory factors. The researchers conducted a national survey with ecology and evolutionary biology departments across the United States and obtained 469 responses from faculty members of these departments, including assistant professors, associate professors, and professors. The respondents were dominantly Caucasian/White (87.6%), male (51.6%), and first-generation college students (22.0%). The majority of the faculty members (91.7%) reported being involved with diversity

and inclusion activities in their institutions and perceived that these activities were valued by the institution. Most participants (71.7%), however, also perceived engagement in these activities as having relatively less importance for decisions regarding their tenure. Motivative factors of engagement in diversity and inclusion activities included a moral obligation as well as a desire to mentor diverse leaders, improve scientific education among a diverse group, and enhance research and teaching within these groups. Insufficient time, insufficient funding, and higher importance of research were noted to be the inhibitory factors (Jimenez et al., 2019).

In a similar study, Taylor et al. (2022) explored how faculty diversity impacted the learning and success of students of color. The researchers focused on departments of environmental studies in two higher education systems in California. Data collection was performed through surveys conducted among the faculty of 22 departments across these university systems to assess the faculty demographics and tenure status as well as the corresponding implications for student success. The study findings revealed that although the University of California and California State University had 58.2% and 52.4% students of color, respectively, the corresponding proportions of faculty of color were only 22.5% and 17.7%. The researchers highlighted the critical need for diversification of faculty in these higher education institutions. Further, the researchers noted that the implementation of anti-racist training for hiring committees, provision of differentiated support for faculty members of color, and creation of inclusive campus climates were key for recruiting and retaining faculty of color. Faculty of color recruitment and retention was, in turn, noted to be critical for the success of students of color (Taylor et al., 2022).

The success of students of color in relation to their teachers has been of focus in some studies. Sanders et al. (2021) examined how teachers helped in improving the outcomes of

traditionally underserved students in full-service community schools. The researchers adopted a qualitative multiple case study approach, and three full-service community schools in mid-Atlantic United States served as the cases included in this study. Interviews, observations, and document review were conducted for data collection. Fifty-three formal semi-structured interviews were conducted with school principals, an assistant principal, teachers, coordinators, directors of the coordinating agency, community partners, service providers, and community and parent leaders. A total of 53 formal school-based interviews were conducted during the course of the full study. The study findings revealed that teachers' qualifications (i.e., having standard or advanced levels of professional certification, teaching experience), supportive and collaborative work ethic, and their response to the diverse needs of their students facilitated positive outcomes for their students. Further, the professional capital, particularly teachers' school-based social capital, was found to be a critical factor in this regard. From their findings, Sanders et al. demonstrated how faculty members could help in the performance of underserved students. Similarly, Castillo-Montoya (2019) explored the pedagogical strategies used by faculty of higher education in order to effectively teach their students in the context of campus diversity. The researcher focused on the teaching strategies adopted by two professors of sociology at a Hispanic-serving institution in metropolitan New York. Data for this study were collected through observations during class, analysis of syllabi, and interviews with the two professors. Further, the researcher conducted three interviews each with 18 first-generation college students who took classes under the two sociology faculty members. The findings of the study revealed that a number of strategies were used by professors for teaching through diversity, such as creating opportunities for the students to connect to the subject matter and, simultaneously, learn about each other. The professors' strategies of teaching through diversity were reported to enact

a kind of intermediary position between the academic content being taught and the students'

lives. The participating professors were found to help their students learn the required academic

content while simultaneously helping them develop a sociopolitical understanding and cultural

competence by teaching them sociology through diversity (Castillo-Montoya, 2019). The

findings of Castillo-Montoya (2019), Sanders et al. (2021), Jimenez et al. (2019), and Taylor et

al. (2022) highlight the critical role that higher education teachers and faculty members play in

promoting diversity and inclusion within the campus as well as on the academic and social

outcomes of students, particularly those of color.

Another avenue that has been explored with relation to enhancing the diversity and

inclusion within higher education institutions is the recruitment of a more diverse student body.

Aibana et al. (2019) explored how a holistic review of candidates may help in increasing

diversity in graduate medical education. At the internal medicine residency program in the John

P. and Kathrine G. McGovern Medical School, a pilot intervention was conducted during the

2016–2017 and 2017–2018 academic years. The aim of this pilot intervention was to increase the

number of matriculating residents who came from traditionally under-represented communities

in medicine. Three principles were used to guide the pilot intervention: (a) the use of holistic

review during the selection process for identifying interview candidates, (b) the standardization

of interview encounters, and (c) the explicit focus on the program's diversity commitment while

conducting the interviews. Prior to the intervention, during the 2015–2016 academic year, the

percentage of under-represented applicants who were reviewed was 14.1%, the percentage of

under-represented applicants who were interviewed was 16.0%, and the percentage of under-

represented residents who matriculated was 12.5%. After conducting the pilot intervention,

during the 2017–2018 academic year, these percentages increased to 20.4%, 24.5%, and 31.7%,

respectively (Aibana et al., 2019). These findings demonstrated how diversity in education could be enhanced by appropriately implementing the selection process. Similarly, Grbic et al. (2019) explored how a holistic review of higher education applicants was related to diversity among the accepted students. Specifically, the researchers examined the correlation between student diversity measures and the implementation of the holistic review in admissions (HRA) workshop of the Association of American Medical Colleges. Data were collected from 134 medical schools that were accredited by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education for 10 years between 2006 and 2016, and a fixed-effects regression analysis was conducted to determine the relation between the HRA workshop and the following measures of student diversity: percentage of first-generation college students, percentage of African American students, percentage of Hispanic students, and overall racial/ethnic diversity level. The study findings revealed that the period of implementation of the HRA workshop was correlated with a significant increase in all the diversity measures. In alignment with the findings of Aibana et al., Grbic et al. demonstrated that a holistic review-based admission workshop may help increase the diversity in higher education institutes.

Capers et al. (2018) investigated the administrative processes during student recruitment that may help increase diversity and inclusion. The researchers focused on various strategies that could be adopted during medical school admissions for increasing student diversity. The researchers reported on the initiative taken by the Ohio State University College of Medicine for diversity enhancement within their campus. The following strategies were proposed by the researchers for this purpose: (a) creating and explicitly promoting admissions mission and vision statements that speak to diversity enhancement; (b) anonymizing committee voting systems for admissions, including an adequate number of faculty application screeners for minimizing the

impact of individual biases; (c) adopting a holistic view during the admission process; (d) blinding interviewers to applicants' academic metrics; (e) conducting implicit association tests with the committee members to determine their unconscious biases and taking steps to minimize them; (f) removing applicants' photographs from files during discussions; and (g) appointing women, minorities, and younger people (i.e., groups with less implicit racial bias) as committee members. Based on these strategies, the Ohio State University College of Medicine was able to substantially increase diversity in their campus. In 2009, the institution matriculated a class that contained 45% female students and 13% students from under-represented and minority communities. In 2016, after implementing the discussed strategies, the entering class of the institution contained 54% female students and 26% under-represented and minority students (Capers et al., 2018).

While Aibana et al. (2019), Grbic et al. (2019), and Capers et al. (2018) focused on the selection and review of applicants and the admission process, Hernandez et al. (2018) explored how institutional efforts after recruitment could help in the outcomes of traditionally under-represented and minority students. Specifically, the researchers examined how undergraduate research could help in retaining under-represented students of science. The researchers conducted a 10-year longitudinal study across multiple institutions and adopted a propensity-score-matched research design for comparing the persistence and performance of science students who participated in undergraduate research with those of science students who did not have research experience. The findings of the study revealed that science students who spent 10 hours or more per week conducting co-curricular and faculty-mentored research for two or more semesters or summers performed better than those who did not. Their performance increased in terms of their higher likeliness of graduating with a science-related degree, of being accepted

into science-based graduate programs, and of undergoing training for or participating within the scientific workforce 6 years postgraduation. Based on their findings, Hernandez et al. highlighted that spending some quality and dedicated time obtaining undergraduate research experience could help in improving the outcomes of traditionally under-represented and minority students and broaden the diversity of the scientific workforce.

The review of literature revealed that for the successful promotion and development of future diversity and inclusion initiatives across U.S. higher education institutions, an appropriate focus on the needs, experiences, and perceptions of African American students is critical (Easterbrook & Hadden, 2021; Rodríguez et al., 2018). Further, the significant contribution of the recruitment process (Aibana et al., 2019; Capers et al., 2018; Grbic et al., 2019) and faculty members (Castillo-Montoya, 2019; Jimenez et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2022) should be considered. In order to positively impact the retention and academic success of under-represented and minority students across U.S. higher education institutions, Green and Bedeau (2020) suggested the following: investment in and establishment of programs focusing on both culturally relevant and growth and strength-based approaches of learning, development, and an increase of living-learning communities, which have conventionally demonstrated success in the retention and persistence of under-represented and minority students as well as engagement in collaborative efforts with HBCUs, considering their familiarity with and success in creating an academic space for students from under-represented and minority communities.

Summary

The review of literature revealed a number of recent studies that have been conducted to explore the concepts and strategies of diversity and inclusion in U.S. higher education. Researchers have explored campus climates within higher education institutions across the

United States (Drape et al., 2017; Edwards & Ross, 2018; Mills, 2021; Sanchez et al., 2018) and examined how various strategies and initiatives taken by students, faculty, and institutional bodies have contributed to making the campus a diverse and inclusive space for all students (Dancy et al., 2018; Girolamo & Ghali, 2021; Jimenez et al., 2019; Ligocki et al., 2021). A number of studies have also been conducted to explore African American higher education students' perspectives of the racial climates within their institutions (Beasley, 2021; Mwangi et al., 2018), their adaptation and identity development in PWIs (Berry, 2021), their academic performance and success in these universities (Edwards & Ross, 2018), and their overall experiences (McGee et al., 2019; Proctor et al., 2018).

Despite several studies on the perceptions of African American higher education students, research on the specific impact of institutionalized diversity plans is lacking. Studies that have been conducted in this regard have either focused only on the minimization of racism within campus (Ligocki et al., 2021) or on how admission processes can be modified to improve campus diversity (Aibana et al., 2019; Capers et al., 2018; Grbic et al., 2019). The impact of an institutionalized diversity plan on the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion among African American students has not been explored in detail. Therefore, the present study filled this identified gap in the literature by adopting a concurrent mixed-methods approach in a Midwestern community college setting. Further discussion of the methodology, target population, data instruments, and data collection and analysis procedures of this study is presented in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY[A1]

Introduction

The purpose of this concurrent mixed methods study was to explore the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan, including the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, among African American students in a Midwest community college. By eradicating racial campus climate via proper implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan, the current study helped solve problems Black students experience, such as structural racism and poor academic achievement, including lower retention and graduation rates; feeling unwelcomed, invalidated, and marginalized; having lower levels of academic resilience; and encountering incidents of microaggressions from White instructors. The concurrent mixed-methods approach followed a single case study design to explore the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan, including the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, among African American students in a Midwest community college.

In Chapter 3, the researcher provides an account of the study approaches that were utilized to address the research problem as well as to answer the formulated research questions. The major sections of this chapter encompass an overview of the research problem, research questions and research hypotheses; research design with subsections including setting, participants, and instruments; procedures; data management and analysis; ethical considerations; limitations; and summary. The research methodology is discussed to provide other researchers with sufficient details to replicate the present study.

Overview of Research Problem

The research problem addressed through this study was that although diversity and inclusion efforts have been implemented to improve campus climate, issues remain regarding inequities in campus climate and race (Dingel & Sage, 2020; Lewis & Shah, 2021; Telles & Mitchell, 2018). Despite great efforts to increase diversity and inclusion in institutions of higher learning, many minoritized groups continue to experience obstacles to accessing higher education (Lewis & Shah, 2021). Diversity and inclusion initiatives adopted at institutions of higher learning are perceived to be approached as agenda items as opposed to definitive changes that lead to propagating and safeguarding institutionalized Whiteness and racism rather than establishing practical transformations toward justice (Lewis & Shah, 2021). Many diversity initiatives have generated more statements of intention than an actual transformation of racial campus settings (Williams & Udoh, 2020). Lewis and Shah further realized that there is an emergence of the commodification of diversity in institutions of higher learning, where diversity is packaged as something to be regulated as a lucrative reserve. Dingel and Sage (2020) determined the existence of high levels of color-blind racism at colleges, which leads to a dismissal of the lived experiences of under-represented students by disengaging from discussions of racism.

Continuing racial issues and racial campus climate have been linked to structural racism in higher education (Bonilla-Silva, 2019; McGee, 2020). These inequities result in poorer academic achievement, including lower retention and graduation rates among Black students in higher education (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Research has further shown that campus racial climate has adverse impacts on Black students, including making the students feel unwelcomed, invalidated, and marginalized in the educational setting (Lewis & Shah, 2021; McGee et al., 2019; Mwangi et al., 2018). Other negative effects of the racial campus environment include

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lower levels of academic resilience (Mills, 2021) and higher college dropout rates for Black students (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Banks and Dohy similarly pointed out that due to the racial campus environment, Black students are subjected to incidents of microaggressions from White instructors where a conviction persists that they are academically poorer than White learners.

Research Questions and Research Hypotheses

The current study was guided by the following research questions and research hypotheses:

RQ1. What are the trends related to the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students after the implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan? (Quantitative question)

$H0_1$: The implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan has not significantly increased the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students.

Ha_1: The implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan has significantly increased the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students.

RQ2. How do African American students perceive their academic success in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion? (Qualitative question).

RQ3. What can be done to improve the academic success of African American students in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion from the perspective of African American students and with respect to the status of reaching the goal 8 metrics of the strategic enrollment plan within the institutionalized diversity plan? (Mixed-methods question).

Research Design

The mixed-methods research methodology was utilized to address the recognized

research problem and to answer the three research questions. A mixed-methods methodology is a

research approach whereby scholars gather and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data in

the same study (McKim, 2017). By integrating these two types of data, the researcher benefits

from gaining both the thorough contextualized insights of participants through qualitative

methods as well as the externally valid, generalizable results from the quantitative method

(Ivankova & Wingo, 2018; McKim, 2017). The mixed-methods study approach has gained

acceptance in modern society as scholars have become more willing to admit the exclusive

strengths and weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies (McKim, 2017).

Accordingly, by utilizing the mixed-methods approach, scholars can feasibly avert the

weaknesses of using only one methodology, thereby increasing the reliability and validity of

evaluation data (Harrison et al., 2020). Considering the aforementioned benefits, the mixed-

methods research approach was a suitable technique for the current study. The objective of the

current study was to leverage qualitative data gathered via interviews to inform 5-year

quantitative data stored in the archival form to understand the impact of an institutionalized

diversity program on Black students. The mixed-methods research methodology further enabled

the researcher to explore different viewpoints and discover associations that exist between the

sophisticated layers of the three research questions.

A concurrent mixed-methods research design was utilized in the current study. A

concurrent mixed-methods research design is an approach where both quantitative and

qualitative data are collected in parallel (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research design

provides more insights into the phenomenon under study by either cross-validating findings or

supplementing the outcomes. Typically, the qualitative stage is significant in aiding the

researchers in comprehending unforeseen outcomes which emerge in the opening quantitative segment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Wipulanusat et al., 2020). A concurrent research design is usually adopted when the researcher is interested in obtaining different, yet complementary data that validate the overall findings of a study and, therefore, help in developing an understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fetters et al., 2013). The researcher focused on easily accessible, archival quantitative data on the institutionalized diversity plan under investigation and then made use of qualitative data from Black students at the study site to interpret the quantitative data with the overall objective of gaining in-depth perceptions and understanding about the impact of this diversity plan. This called for the adoption of a concurrent design, where both quantitative data and qualitative data were gathered (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Further, the topic of the impact of diversity and inclusion initiatives on Black college/university students has received minimal empirical attention in the past, justifying why the concurrent design has been chosen to provide more insight into the phenomenon.

This concurrent mixed-methods study followed a single case study to explore the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan, including the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, among African American students in a Midwest community college. A case study design refers to a rigorous assessment of an individual, a group of individuals, or units with the goal of generalizing the outcomes over several individuals, groups, or units (Cook & Kamalodeen, 2020; Yin, 2014). Crowe et al. (2011) added that the case study research design facilitates in-depth, manifold assessments of composite matters in their real-life contexts. The nature of the current study and its multifaceted research questions necessitated a case study research design. The case study design is necessary to examine the institutionalized diversity plan in a realistic context, justifying why the study involved

scrutinizing quantitative archival data recorded due to the implementation of the diversity plan and then informing these data with qualitative data collected via interviews with Black students. In this way, the impact of the institutionalized diversity plan was explored in its real-life context.

Setting and Context

The current study was conducted at a Midwest community college. As the name suggests, the site is an institution of higher learning that predominantly serves its immediate community. As a community college, the institution provides millions of learners an ideal way to realize their objectives, whether the objective is to attain a good-paying occupation fast or to obtain a better, more reasonably priced beginning to a university degree by transferring credits to a 4-year school. The college is a well-diversified institution of higher learning, with 25% of its student population comprising students of color in the 2020/2021 academic year.

The college was selected as the site for this study based on the progress it is making towards realizing diversity as guided by Smith's (2009) scopes of diversity. The institution has implemented an institutionalized diversity plan for the past 5 years. The diversity plan encompasses eight primary goals, including (a) student success; (b) recruitment and enrollment; (c) completion; (d) workforce; (e) employee; (f) financial; (g) community; and (h) diversity, equity, and belonging. To realize the student success goal, the college is determined to increase the proportion of students achieving successful grades in every course, develop a community of care, aid the learners in affording college, ensure that courses are provided as scheduled for students through completion, and implement technology to support student success. Learners of all education levels, interests, backgrounds, and ages are recruited and enrolled at the college due to the accessibility of wide-ranging certificate and degree options.

The third goal entails the commitment to guiding learners through completion as well as offering intentional academic advice to learners so that they can appropriately select careers and higher education pathways. The fourth goal to which the college is committed is ensuring that students are placed into and succeed in high-demand, high-wage occupations. Despite this obligation, the college itself is a reputable place to work. The subsequent goal is to guarantee that the college has adequate financial resources to realize its mission. The seventh goal entails ensuring that the campuses are integral to the communities the college serves. Lastly, the college is committed to creating a sustainable culture of diversity, equity, and belonging, which forms goal 8 of the institution. The college pursues goal 8 by mitigating systemic inequities for learners, increasing diversity in leadership, adopting new structures to warrant staff and faculty diversity, leveraging leadership's power and privilege to drive positive change, and guaranteeing that everyone in the college feels that they belong to the community.

There are six metrics (see Appendix E) for realizing goal 8 (i.e., diversity, equity, and belonging) at the community college. The first metric is to reduce the equity gap in conversion, which is the gap between White students and students of color. The second metric entails reducing the equity gap between White students and students of color in fall-to-fall retention. The third metric is to minimize the equity gap between White students and students of color with a 100% completion rate. The fourth metric is to reduce the equity gap between White students and students of color by a 200% completion rate. The fifth metric is the belonging score from the employee engagement and insights survey. The final metric is the complete campus affirmative action plan.

Participants

The students' ages ranged from 18 to 59 (*M* = 27.69, *SD* = 9.61). [A2]Quantitative data were sourced from archival records. Quantitative data related to the sense of belonging were collected from the students using the general belongingness scale (GBS) created by Malone et al. (2012; see Appendix C). Data related to the institutionalized diversity plan under assessment were stored in a tableau on the Midwest community college's website. All recorded data were analyzed without sampling based on the variables identified in the first two research questions. Only qualitative data were collected from a sample of Black students at the selected college using the established interview protocol (see Appendix B). The participants for the qualitative phase of this study, therefore, included Black students enrolled at a Midwest community college. Based on 2019 statistics, the Midwest community college had a total enrollment of 72,689 learners, 21,242 of whom were full-time students and 51,447 of whom were part-time students. Considering racial/ethnic composition, 71% of the enrolled students were White, 12.5% were African American or Black, 0.385% were Native American, 1.96% were Asian, 3.96% were Hispanic or Latino, and 3.88% were two or more races. Given these statistics, the targeted population (Black students) comprised 12.5% of 72,689, which resulted in 9,087 students.

As the aforementioned population was adequately large for the qualitative phase of this study, there was quite a significant number of Black students at the Midwest community college who could participate in either quantitative or qualitative research. Considering the nature of the research problem and research questions for this study, study participants from the larger population were selected using purposeful sampling. As described by Campbell et al. (2020), purposive sampling is a nonprobability sampling approach where researchers depend on their decisions to select variables for the sample population. Purposive sampling relies on the researcher's judgment and understanding of the study context (Campbell et al., 2020). For the

current study, the researcher utilized the following inclusion criteria: (a) Black or African American students, (b) studying at a Midwest community college, and (c) have some knowledge and experience of institutionalized diversity plans that have been implemented at the college. Accordingly, this called for the researcher to select the participants purposively in order to ensure participant eligibility. The sample size was 20, which fell within the required sample size of between 15 and 30 participants for case studies (Boddy, 2016).

Instruments

The targeted quantitative data were in archival form and were readily available in tableau. During data gathering, the researcher sought site authorization from the Midwest community college's administrators. The permission pursued was for using archival data from the college website as well as for probing Black students from this college. The researcher then cleaned and shaped the tableau data to remain only with the variables and data points aligned to the acknowledged research problem and the research questions. The use of archival data yielded some validity concerns. The limitation of this type of data was that they are selective deposits, implying that the data can be biased (Barnes et al., 2018). Further, the archival records may comprise overwhelming quantities of data, leading researchers to spend more time curating and making sense of the files. Nevertheless, as depicted by Heng et al. (2018), considering the vast amount of archived material accessible, archival research is commonly more sophisticated and time-consuming as compared to research conducted over the Internet, but it typically generates more reliable outcomes. Accordingly, using archival data from the tableau was feasible for the quantitative phase of the current study.

The GBS (see Appendix C) was also used to collect quantitative data about the students' sense of belonging. This scale contains 12-item measures (six for acceptance and six for

exclusion) that are rated on a 7-point Likert scale (Malone et al., 2012). The six items for exclusion are reverse-scored and loadings are standardized. The 12 items were retained from a table of 30 initially established parameters to act as representatives of belongingness across the construct (Malone et al., 2012). The decision to retain the 12 items was informed by the need to ensure variability across the item means, the content structure, and factor loading.

In the qualitative segment of the current study, the researcher was the key instrument. The researcher was responsible for designing and collecting qualitative data pertinent to the study. The materials that were utilized in this phase comprised a listserv, Zoom, and an interview protocol (see Appendix B). The listserv application was used to invite the targeted Black students to participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews with the selected students were conducted remotely via Zoom, a videotelephony software capable of streamlining meetings as well as providing identical, congruent experiences for all cases. Semi-structured interviews were selected for data collection in this study because they are ideal for determining the perceptions and encounters of the respondents to predetermined questions in their distinct words (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The purpose of these semi-structured interviews was to glean data regarding the perceptions of Black students on the influence of the institutionalized diversity plan on their academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion. Each semi-structured interview lasted between 35 and 50 minutes. Dependability was achieved by audio-recording the semi-structured interviews. Afterward, transcripts were created to facilitate member checking before the development of data themes and subthemes.

The semi-structured interviews were guided by the use of an interview protocol. The protocol comprised open-ended questions developed based on the last two research questions with chances to ask follow-up questions, enabling the respondents to provide additional data.

The aim of developing an interview protocol was to assist the researcher in investigating a standard set of questions to obtain comparable data from all respondents. To guarantee validity and reliability, a panel of three specialists with doctoral credentials was recruited to appraise the open-ended interview questions. Following this expert review, the researcher restructured the open-ended interview questions as per the recommendations of the panel. These efforts were made to ensure that the open-ended interview questions were aligned with the last two research questions.

Procedures

Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered co-currently. Before commencing data collection, however, the researcher sought approval of the study and the study instruments/materials from the Western Kentucky University (WKU) Institutional Review Board (IRB), approval code IRB 23-009. [A3]The motive of obtaining the IRB approval was to guarantee, both in advance and by a periodic appraisal, that proper stages would be followed to safeguard the welfare and rights of individuals participating as subjects in the study which, in this case, were Black college students (Parvizi et al., 2007). Following IRB approval, the researcher then obtained site authorization from the Midwest community college's administrators. Authorization was pursued for utilizing the archival data from the college website as well as for probing Black students from this college. After obtaining approval, the researcher embarked on phase one of the study, which entailed collecting quantitative data.

The targeted quantitative data were readily accessible in tableau, which made it easier for the researcher to analyze the data statistically. While still in tableau, the quantitative data were cleaned and shaped to contain only the required variables and data points. The targeted variables included recruitment, retention, and completion of Black students after the implementation of the

institutionalized diversity plan. Other variables comprised the six metrics for realizing goal 8 of the institutionalized diversity plan, which pertained to diversity, equity, and belonging at the community college. The GBS was used to obtain quantitative data regarding the variable of sense of belonging among the students. The quantitative data were exported from the tableau to the R project for statistical computing software for data visualization and analysis. The R project was further used to generate descriptive statistics and time-series trends from the data.

Because human subjects were involved in the collection of qualitative data and quantitative data, the first step was to recruit participants. To recruit participants, I sent emails to a listserv of students at the Midwest community college. Informed consent forms were then sent to willing and eligible participants. These forms were utilized to provide eligible subjects with the details required for them to decide whether to volunteer for the study. The forms contained key information about the study such as the purpose, strengths, limitations, and timeline of the study. Qualitative data were only gathered from willing participants, as the current study was voluntary. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews, which enabled the researcher to probe respondents' beliefs, feelings, and thoughts concerning the impact of the institutionalized diversity plan implemented in their college. An interview protocol was formulated to aid the researcher in examining a standard set of semi-structured interview questions to obtain similar data from all participants. Individual semi-structured interviews were held electronically through Zoom. The researcher used a listserv to organize the date and time for each interview. Upon consent from each participant, the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed for analysis. Specifically, the audio-taped interview data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using NVivo 12. Quantitative data were then collected using GBS.

Data Management and Analysis

To begin the quantitative analysis, the researcher cleaned[A4] the data to only contain the required variables and data points. The targeted variables included recruitment, retention, and completion of Black students after the implementation of the institutionalized diversity plan. Other variables encompassed the six metrics for realizing goal 8 of the institutionalized diversity plan, which pertained to diversity, equity, and belonging at the community college. After cleaning, the quantitative data were exported from the tableau to the R project for statistical computing software for data visualization and analysis. The R project was further used to generate descriptive statistics and time-series trends from the data. These analyses helped answer the first two research questions as well as address the linked hypotheses.

Qualitative data, on the other hand, were analyzed statistically utilizing Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis approach. According to Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis is an approach to identifying, analyzing, and documenting themes or patterns within a set of data. Six steps are normally followed in thematic analysis, including familiarization with the data and data tools, coding, generation of themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and presenting the outcomes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2018). The researcher followed these steps while analyzing the qualitative data for the study. Pattern coding was adopted to facilitate the alignment of transcribed interview data into a smaller number of constructs, themes, or sets. The main themes or patterns concerning the impact of the institutionalized diversity plan under investigation were generated, deduced, and defined. These themes were then presented in transcript and graphical forms. The last step entailed interpreting

both the quantitative and qualitative findings to help answer the developed research questions and to address the research hypotheses.

Several management strategies were employed to guarantee the safety of the collected data as well as the confidentiality of the participants. Audio-taped recordings and transcripts from semi-structured interviews were kept safe on the researcher's password-protected external hard drive and reserved in a secure location to which only the researcher had access. All data will remain protected for 3 years after the end of the study. After this time, all electronic data will be deleted permanently from the hard drive while physical data will be damaged.

Reliability and Validity

Validity and reliability are used in evaluating the quality of a quantitative study. Both validity and reliability indicate how effective a technique, method, or test is in measuring something. According to Hayashi et al. (2019), reliability refers to the degree to which the findings can be reproduced if the study is repeated under similar situations. Validity indicates the degree to which the study results measure what they are intended to measure (Sürücü & Maslakçi, 2020). Various measures were adopted to ensure validity and reliability in the current study.

Quantitative data were collected using GBS, which is an established measurement tool. Hayashi et al. (2019) affirmed that the use of standardized research instruments enhances reliability and validity because the established measurement tools are considered valid and reliable. The coefficient alphas of the GBS range between .96 and .94; therefore, it is plausible to affirm that the tool is reliable (Malone et al., 2012). Reliability in the current study was also ensured by applying the research design consistently (Sürücü & Maslakçi, 2020). The process of

measuring the quantitative variable of interest (i.e., sense of belonging) was clearly defined in close reference to how the parameter was measured.

The current study had various threats to internal, external, and statistical conclusion validity. Sampling bias was a major threat to the external and statistical conclusion validity of this study. Hayashi et al. (2019) affirmed that this threat occurs when the research participants differ significantly from the study population. Because purposive sampling was adopted in participant selection, it is plausible to affirm that the students who participated in the study had to meet certain inclusion criteria that could make them different from others. This sampling approach threatened the external and statistical conclusion validity of this study. Social interaction was also a major threat to the internal validity of the current study. Sürücü and Maslakçi (2020) affirmed that social interaction between participants in different groups can influence the study findings. Because the students who took part in the current study interacted with their peers, it is plausible to affirm that the internal validity of the study was compromised.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in the process of data collection and analysis, the collected data, and how the research findings are interpreted (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). Cloutier and Ravasi affirmed the need for a researcher to establish the procedures and protocols required for a study to instill confidence among the readers. In qualitative research, trustworthiness has four main components: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the degree of confidence a qualitative researcher has in the truth of the study's findings (Stahl & King, 2020). In the current study, credibility was ensured through member checking, which refers to the process of returning the study results to the participants to verify accuracy and resonance with experience (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). The researcher adopted this validation technique by sharing summarized responses from the interview with the research subjects to promote credibility.

Transferability

Transferability refers to how a qualitative researcher depicts that the study findings can be applied to a similar situation, phenomena, and population (Stahl & King, 2020). In the current study, the thick description approach, which refers to the technique of providing a detailed and robust account of the researcher's experiences during data collection (Johnson et al., 2020), was used to establish transferability. Utilizing this strategy, the researcher provided social contexts that surrounded the process of data collection to enhance the transferability of the research findings.

Confirmability

In qualitative research, confirmability refers to the degree of neutrality of the study's findings (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). Reflexivity, which refers to the act of acknowledging the role of the researcher and how it is likely to influence the findings (Stahl & King, 2020), was adopted to enhance the confirmability of the study. For the current study, the researcher detailed how her beliefs, experiences, and assumptions were likely to influence the study findings.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the extent to which a study could be repeated by different researchers and still achieve consistent results (Johnson et al., 2020). In the current study, the audit trial strategy, which refers to a detailed description of all the steps undertaken by the researcher from the start of a project to the collection of data and reporting of findings (Stahl & King, 2020), was used to ensure the dependability of the research findings. The researcher provided a comprehensive description of all the steps undertaken in the research, including the recruitment of the research subjects and data analysis to ensure enhanced dependability of the study.

Ethical Considerations

In research, ethical considerations refer to a set of doctrines which guide study practices and designs (Hintz & Dean, 2020). These doctrines include informed consent, voluntary participation, the possibility of harm, confidentiality, anonymity, and communication of study findings (Brittain et al., 2020; Hintz & Dean, 2020). Because the current study involved the participation of human subjects, the researcher was committed to guaranteeing that all the study aspects met the doctrines of ethical research. Before beginning the data collection process, the researcher sought approval of the study as well as study instruments/materials from WKU's IRB. The intention of obtaining IRB approval was to warrant, both in advance and by periodic assessment, that proper stages would be followed to safeguard the welfare and rights of individuals participating as subjects in the study which, in this case, were Black college students (Parvizi et al., 2007). After IRB authorization, the researcher then obtained a site permit from the Midwest community college's administrators. Permission was pursued for utilizing archival data from the college website as well as for examining Black students from this college. Informed consent forms were then sent to willing and eligible respondents. These forms were utilized to

provide eligible subjects with the details required for them to decide whether to volunteer in the current study. The forms comprised crucial information about the study such as the purpose, strengths, limitations, and timeline of the study. The qualitative data were only gathered from willing participants, as the current study was voluntary.

Measures and practices of ethical research continued even after the collection of data. The first strategy of affirming ethical research after data collection was to conduct member checking, as this is an acknowledged approach to mitigating researcher bias. Privacy and confidentiality of participant information were imperative to the researcher. The first step the researcher took to guarantee the privacy and confidentiality of the collected data was to use pseudonyms while identifying the study subjects. The study site was identified as the Midwest community college throughout the study, while the participants were labeled using numbers (e.g., Student 1, Student 2). The researcher upheld participants' privacy and confidentiality by not collecting or describing details of the respondents. Only data linked to the research questions and interview questions were collected, analyzed, and documented in the final report. Privacy and confidentiality were further realized by proper management of the collected data and study materials. Audio-taped recordings and transcripts from semi-structured interviews were kept safely on the researcher's password-protected external hard drive and reserved in a secure location to which only the researcher had access. All collected data will remain sheltered for 3 years after the end of the study. After this time, all electronic data will be destroyed permanently from the hard drive while physical data will be damaged.

Limitations

As described by Queirós et al. (2017), limitations in research are aspects of the methodology or design that influence or impact the interpretation of the outcomes of a study.

Two key limitations were anticipated in the current study. The first and most weighty limitation of the study was that only one community college was investigated. The current study was designed based on a concurrent single case study design to investigate the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan on Black students. The precise limitation of utilizing a single case study design was that the study lacks scientific rigor and provides only the minimal basis for the generalization of outcomes to the broader population of Black college/university students. The second limitation is associated with the utilization of archival data in the quantitative phase. The constraint of this type of data is described as a selective deposit, implying that the gathered data can be biased (Barnes et al., 2018). The other constraint was that the archival records may comprise overwhelming quantities of data, leading researchers to spend more time curating and making sense of the files. To alleviate the limitation of using archival data, qualitative data were collected to inform the quantitative archival data. Because nothing can be done to mitigate the generalizable concerns of a single case study design, it was underscored that the findings of this study apply only to Black students that have been enrolled at Midwest community college in the past 5 years because the institutionalized diversity plan has been implemented for 5 years to date.

Summary

The mixed-methods research methodology was selected for this study to address the recognized research problem and to answer the four research questions. The mixed-methods research methodology further enabled the researcher to explore different viewpoints and discover the associations that exist between the sophisticated layers of the four research questions. The concurrent mixed-methods study followed a single case study to explore the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan, including the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, among African American students in a Midwest community

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college. The case study design was necessary to examine the institutionalized diversity plan in a realistic context, justifying why the current study involved scrutinizing quantitative archival data recorded due to the implementation of the diversity plan and then informing these data with qualitative data collected via interviews with Black students. This concurrent mixed-methods case study was conducted at a Midwest community college. This college was chosen as the site for this study based on the progress it is making towards realizing diversity as guided by Smith's (2009) scopes of diversity. The institution has implemented an institutionalized diversity plan for the past 5 years.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed in this study. Quantitative data were sourced from archival records and were also obtained using the GBS instrument. After cleaning, the quantitative data were exported from the tableau to the R project for statistical computing software for data visualization and analysis. The R project was further used to generate descriptive statistics and time-series trends from the data. The participants for this study comprised Black students enrolled at a Midwest community college. The study participants from the larger population were selected using purposeful sampling. The researcher sought participants who are Black or African American, studying at a Midwest community college, and have some knowledge and experience of institutionalized diversity plans that have been implemented at the college. Accordingly, this called for the researcher to purposively select only eligible participants. An interview protocol was formulated to aid the researcher in examining a standard set of semi-structured interview questions to obtain similar data from all participants. Individual semi-structured interviews were held electronically through Zoom. The qualitative data were analyzed statistically utilizing Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The last step entailed interpreting both the quantitative and qualitative findings to help answer

the developed research questions and to address the research hypotheses. In Chapter 4, the

researcher presents and describes the results of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis

processes.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

The problem addressed in this study was that although diversity and inclusion efforts have been implemented to improve campus climate, issues remain regarding inequities in campus climate and race. Despite the great efforts that have been made to increase diversity and inclusion in colleges and universities across America, many minority groups continue to experience obstacles to accessing higher education (Dingel & Sage, 2020; Lewis & Shah, 2021). Diversity and inclusion initiatives adopted at institutions of higher learning are viewed to be approached as agenda items as opposed to definitive changes, which led to propagating and safeguarding institutionalized Whiteness and racism instead of establishing practical transformations toward justice (Lewis & Shah, 2021). Too many diversity initiatives have generated more statements of intention than the actual transformation of racial campus settings (Williams & Udoh, 2020). Lewis and Shah (2021) further realized that there is an emergence of the commodification of diversity in institutions of higher learning, where diversity is packaged as something to be regulated as a lucrative reserve. Similarly, Dingel and Sage (2020) noted the existence of high levels of color-blind racism at colleges, which leads to a dismissal of the lived experiences of under-represented students by disengaging from discussions of racism.

The racial issues and racial campus climate in American colleges and universities have been associated with structural racism in higher education. These inequities contribute to poorer academic achievement, including lower retention and graduation rates among Black students in higher education (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Bonilla-Silva, 2020; McGee, 2020). Researchers have reported that campus racial climate has a negative impact on African American students, including making them feel unwelcomed, invalidated, and marginalized in the educational

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setting (Lewis & Shah, 2021; McGee et al., 2019; Mwangi et al., 2018). Other negative effects of the racial campus environment include lower levels of academic resilience and higher college dropout rates for Black students (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Mills, 2021). Banks and Dohy (2019) similarly pointed out that due to the racial campus environment, Black students are subjected to incidents of micro-aggressions from White instructors where a conviction might denote that they are academically poorer than white learners. The purpose of this exploratory sequential mixed methods study was to explore the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan, including the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, among African American students in a Midwest community college. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed. The findings from this research are presented in two sections. In the first section, the researcher presents the quantitative findings. The second section includes the qualitative findings of the research.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The researcher sought to answer three research questions. Out of the three, the first is quantitative in nature, the second is qualitative, and the third is a mixed-methods question. Research hypotheses were formulated in relation to the first research question, which were tested in this research. The RQs and hypotheses are as follows:

RQ1. What are the trends related to the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students after the implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan? (Quantitative question).

H0$_1$: The implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan has not significantly increased the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students.

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Ha₁: The implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan has significantly increased the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students.

RQ2. How do African American students perceive their academic success in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion? (Qualitative question).

RQ3. What can be done to improve the academic success of African American students in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, from the perspective of African American students and with respect to the status of reaching the goal 8 metrics of the strategic enrollment plan within the institutionalized diversity plan? (Mixed-question).

Quantitative Findings

The quantitative data were sourced from archival records. Data related to the institutionalized diversity plan under assessment were stored in a tableau on the Midwest community college's website. The quantitative data were also collected using a survey assessing students' sense of belonging. A total of 171 students provided responses to this survey. For the quantitative component of this study, after cleaning, the quantitative data were exported from the tableau to the R programming language for statistical data visualization and analysis. R was also used to generate descriptive statistics for the student data.

Descriptive Statistics

This section includes a presentation of the results of the descriptive analyses conducted to characterize the sample collected from students assessing their sense of belonging. A total of 171 surveys were collected from the students. The students' ages ranged from 18 to 59 ($M = 27.69$, $SD = 9.61$). Tables 1 through 9 report the results of the frequency relating to data from the questionnaire. As reported in Table 1, 96.5% of the students were Black or African American,

1.2% were American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.2% were from two or more races, 0.6% were

Hispanic or Latino, and 0.6% were White, non-Hispanic.

Table 1

Frequency Table for Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
American Indian or Alaska Native	2	1.2
Black or African American	165	96.5
Hispanic or Latino	1	.6
Two or more races	2	1.2
White, non-Hispanic	1	.6
Total	171	100.0

Table 2 displays the distribution of current GPA. The distribution shows that 45% of the

students reported that their current GPA was 3.1 or above, 43.3% reported between 2.2 to 3.0,

11.1% reported between 1.1 to 2.1, and 0.1% reported between 0.0 to 1.0.

Table 2

Frequency Table for Current GPA

Response	Frequency	Percent
Between 0.0-1.0	1	0.6
Between 1.1-2.1	19	11.1
Between 2.2-3.0	74	43.3

3.1 or above	77	45.0
Total	171	100.0

When asked whether they believed they belonged, 79.6% either agreed or strongly agreed, 17.0% neither agreed nor disagreed, 2.9% disagreed, and 0.6% strongly disagreed (see Table 3).

Table 3

Frequency Table: Do You Feel You Belong?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	0.6
Disagree	5	2.9
Neither Agree nor disagree	29	17.0
Agree	48	28.1
Strongly Agree	88	51.5
Total	171	100.0

The respondents were also asked to indicate whether they were aware of the college diversity, equity, and belonging plan. In response to this question, 38.6% reported 'yes', 35.1% indicated 'somewhat', and 26.3% said 'no' (see Table 4).

Table 4

Frequency Table: Are You Aware of the College Diversity, Equity, and Belonging Plan?

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	45	26.3

Somewhat	60	35.1
Yes	66	38.6
Total	171	100.0

When asked how well their college was doing in terms of diversity, 46.2% responded 'Very Good', 31.0% reported 'Good', 20.5% reported 'Acceptable', and 2.3% reported 'Poor' (see Table 5).

Table 5

Frequency Table: How Well Is the College Doing in Terms of Diversity?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Poor	4	2.3
Acceptable	35	20.5
Good	53	31.0
Very Good	79	46.2
Total	171	100.0

When asked how well their college was doing in terms of equity, 45.6% indicated 'Very Good', 33.3% indicated 'Good', 19.3% reported 'Acceptable', and 1.8% reported 'Poor' (see Table 6).

Table 6

Frequency Table: How Well Is the College Doing in Terms of Equity?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Poor	3	1.8

Acceptable	33	19.3
Good	57	33.3
Very Good	78	45.6
Total	171	100.0

When asked how well their college was doing in terms of belonging, 49.7% reported 'Very Good', 32.2% said 'Good', 12.9% reported 'Acceptable', 5.3% reported either 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' (see Table 7).

Table 7

Frequency Table: How Well Is the College Doing in Terms of Belonging?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very Poor	1	0.6
Poor	8	4.7
Acceptable	22	12.9
Good	55	32.2
Very Good	85	49.7
Total	171	100.0

The students were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement that the college DEB plan had contributed to their success as a student. In response to this survey question, 59.6% indicated either 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree', 22.8% had a neutral opinion, and 17.6% reported either 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree.'

Table 8

Frequency Table: The College DEB Plan Has Contributed to My Success as a Student.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	21	12.3
Disagree	9	5.3
Neither Agree nor disagree	39	22.8
Agree	50	29.2
Strongly Agree	52	30.4
Total	171	100.0

In response to the question asking whether they felt supported by their instructor in the class, more than half of the students (54.4%) responded 'Strongly Agree', 26.9% reported 'Agree', 13.5% had a neutral opinion, and 5.3% reported either 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree.'

Table 9

Frequency Table: Do You Feel Supported by Your Instructors in Your Class?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	0.6
Disagree	8	4.7
Neither Agree nor disagree	23	13.5
Agree	46	26.9
Strongly Agree	93	54.4
Total	171	100.0

Findings for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was formulated to evaluate the trends related to the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students after the implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan. The following null and alternative hypotheses were developed based on this question.

$H0_1$: The implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan has not significantly increased the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students.

Ha_1: The implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan has significantly increased the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students.

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The Mann-Kendall test was utilized to address this research question. This test examines the null hypothesis of no trend versus the alternative of a monotonic trend in the data (Hamed, 2008). This analysis was conducted for each of the series of recruitment, retention rate, 100% completion rate, and 200% completion rate separately. This test makes the assumption that the data are not serially correlated. Therefore, before applying this test, the data were examined for the presence of autocorrelation using the autocorrelation function (ACF) and partial autocorrelation (PACF) plots. If these plots indicate the presence of autocorrelation, the Mann-Kendall test is conducted using the sieve-bootstrap enhancement to account for the autocorrelation in the data (Noguchi et al., 2011). The results of evaluating the presence of trends in the series of recruitment, retention rate, 100% completion rate, and 200% completion rate are provided as follows.

Retention Rate

The plot of the series of retention rate was created to examine how it changes over time. An overall upward pattern can be observed in this plot. The Mann-Kendall test was utilized to determine whether this trend was statistically significant (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Time Series Plot of Retention Rate
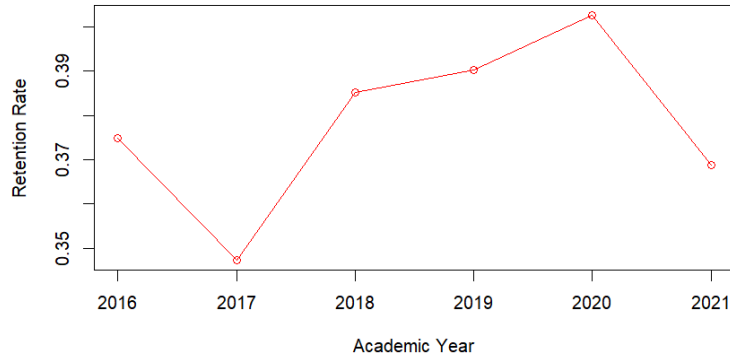
Before conducting the Mann-Kendall test, it was examined whether there was evidence of serial correlation in the series using ACF and PACF plots. Examinations of the ACF and PACF plots for the time series of Retention Rate suggest that the autocorrelation and partial autocorrelation present in this series did not seem to be statistically significant. All the vertical spikes for lag values of the series in both the ACF and PACF plots fall within the blue dashed lines representing the significant cutoff levels (see Figure 2). These plots indicate that the series was not significantly correlated with any of its lag values. Similarly, there was no evidence of significant direct relationships between the series and any of its lag values. Hence, it was concluded that there was no autocorrelation in the series of retention rate.

Figure 2

ACF and PACF Plots of Retention Rate
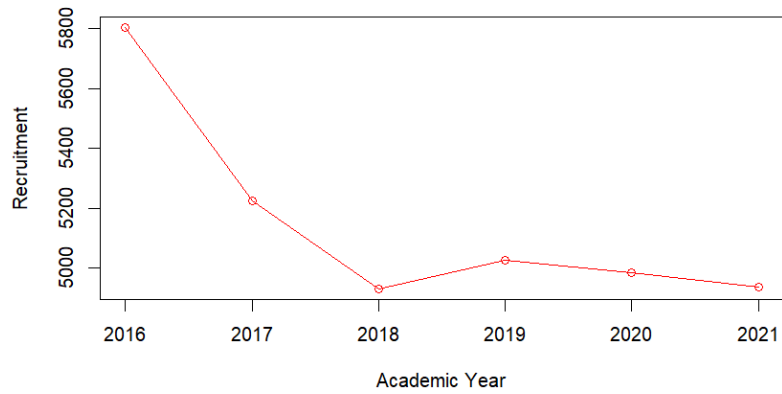
Retention Rate

Retention Rate
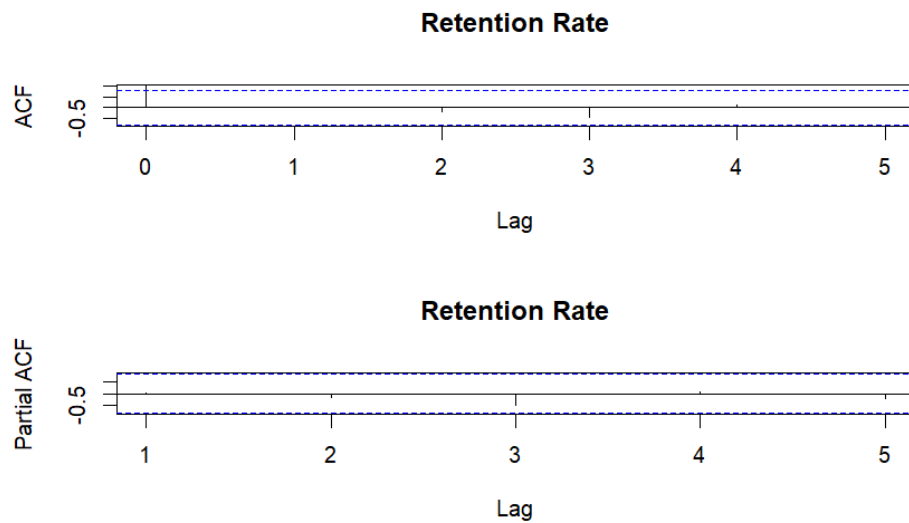
Considering that there was no significant evidence of serial correlation, the Mann-Kendall test was performed to assess whether there was a trend in the series. A nonsignificant result was achieved, $T = 0.333$, p-value $= .452$. Hence, these results did not provide sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no trend in the retention rate from 2016 to 2021.

Recruitment

Figure 3 illustrates the plot of the series of recruitment over time. This plot suggests that there is a falling trend in the series. To determine whether this trend was statistically significant, the Mann-Kendall test was applied. Before performing the Mann-Kendall test, the series was tested for the presence of serial correlation using the ACF and PACF plots.

Figure 3

Time Series Plot of Recruitment

A screening of the ACF and PACF plots for the time series of Recruitment revealed that there did not seem to be significant autocorrelation in the data. All the vertical spikes for lag values of the series in both ACF and PACF plots fall within the significant cutoff levels (see Figure 4). Hence, these plots indicated that the series was not significantly correlated with any of its lag values, thus suggesting an absence of autocorrelation in the data.

Figure 4

ACF and PACF Plots of Recruitment
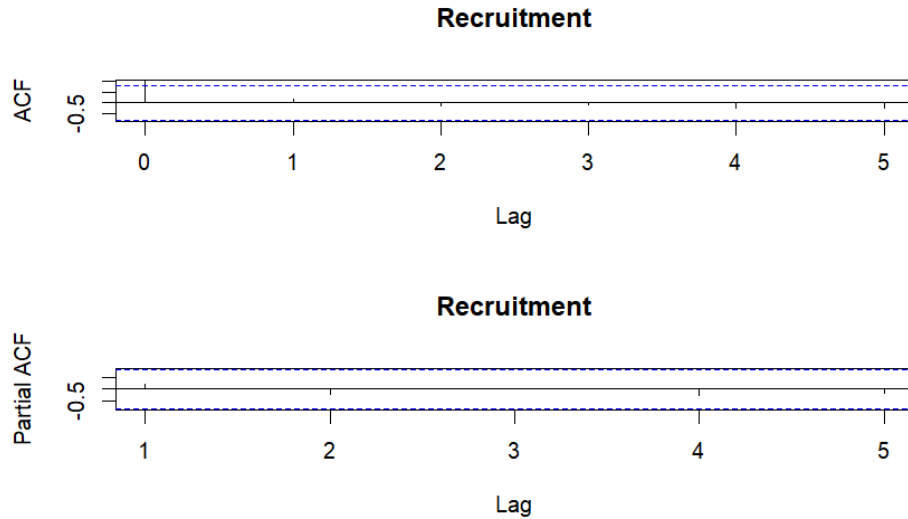
Provided that no significant evidence of serial correlation was identified, the Mann-Kendall test was conducted to assess whether there was a trend in the series. A nonsignificant result was achieved, $T = -0.6$, *p*-value = .133. Therefore, these findings did not provide sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no trend in recruitment from 2016 to 2021.

100% Completion Rate

Figure 5 depicts the plot of the series of 100% completion rate. This plot depicts that there is an overall upward trend in the series. To test whether this trend was statistically significant, the Mann-Kendall test was performed. However, before applying this test, it was examined whether there was evidence of serial correlation in the series using the ACF and PACF plots.
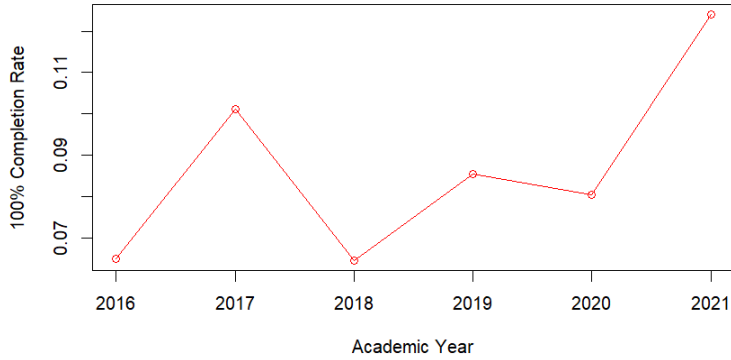
Figure 5

Time Series Plot of 100% Completion Rate

An inspection of the ACF and PACF plots for the time series of 100% completion rate suggests that the autocorrelation and partial autocorrelation present in this series do not appear statistically significant. As shown in Figure 6, all the vertical spikes in both the ACF and PACF plots for lag values of the series fell within the significant cutoff levels. These plots suggested that the series was not significantly associated with any of its lag values, thus providing support that there was an absence of significant serial correlation in the data.

Figure 6

ACF and PACF Plots of 100% Completion Rate
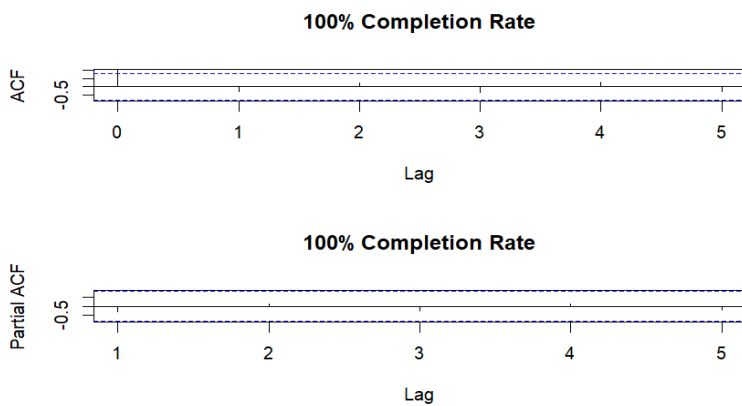
Given that a lack of serial correlation was supported, the Mann-Kendall test was conducted to assess whether there was a trend in the series. A nonsignificant result was achieved, $T = 0.333$, p-value = .452. Therefore, these results did not provide sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no trend in the 100% completion rate from 2016 to 2021.

200% Completion Rate

The plot of the series of 200% completion rate was created to inspect how it changes over time (see Figure 7). There was an overall rising trend in the series. To determine whether this trend was statistically significant, the Mann-Kendall test was applied. However, before performing this test, it was examined whether there was significant evidence of serial correlation in the series using ACF and PACF plots.
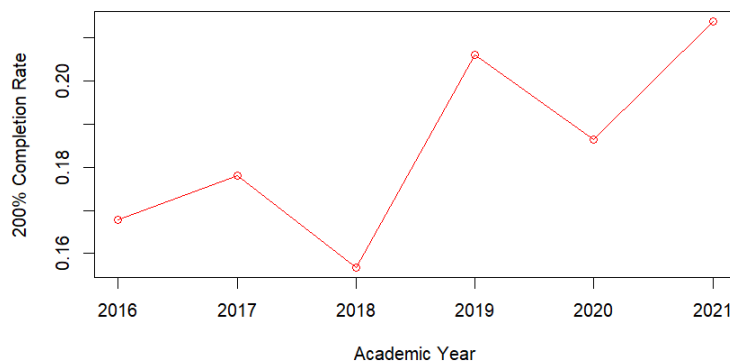
Figure 7

Time Series Plot of 200% Completion Rate


An examination of the ACF and PACF plots for the time series of 200% completion rate suggests that the autocorrelation and partial autocorrelation present in this series do not seem to be statistically significant. As depicted in Figure 8, all the vertical spikes for the lag values in both the ACF and PACF plots fall within the significant cutoff levels. These plots indicated that

there was no significant autocorrelation or partial autocorrelation in the series, suggesting that there was an absence of serial correlation in the series.

Considering that no significant evidence of the presence of serial correlation was identified, the Mann-Kendall test was conducted to assess whether there was a trend in the series. A nonsignificant result was achieved, $T = 0.6$, p-value $= .133$. Thus, these results did not provide sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no trend in the 200% completion rate from 2016 to 2021.

Figure 8

ACF and PACF Plots of 200% Completion Rate

200% Completion Rate
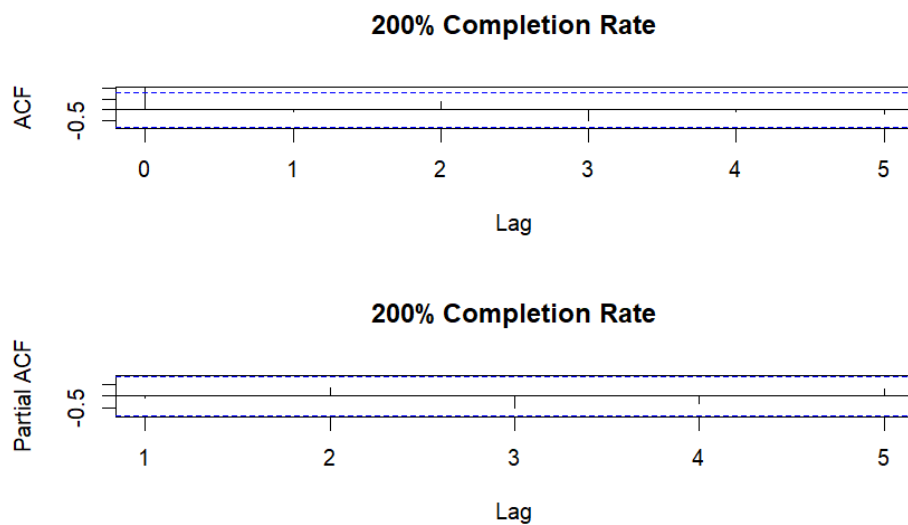
Qualitative Findings

In this section, the qualitative data are presented with the use of a clear text narrative that is supported by tables and covers the following subsections: (a) data analysis, (b) findings for research question 1, (c) findings for research question 2, and (d) findings for research question 3. The findings are organized by research question.

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

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The qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis. These steps included (a) familiarization with the data and data tools, (b) coding, (c) generation of themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and finally (f) presenting the outcomes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2018). The researcher adopted pattern coding for the purpose of facilitating the alignment of transcribed interview data into a smaller number of constructs, themes, or sets. The main themes or patterns concerning the impact of the institutionalized diversity plan under investigation were generated, deduced, and defined. These themes were then presented in transcript and graphical forms. The qualitative data analysis helped to address the second research question, which is a qualitative question, and part of the third research question, as the third questions was a mixed-methods question. NVivo 12 software aided the analysis of the qualitative data derived from semi-structured interviews.

Findings for Research Question 1

The first research question asked, What are the trends related to the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students after the implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan? This was a quantitative question. In relation to this question, a null hypothesis ($H0_1$) and an alternate hypothesis (HA_1) were formulated as follows:

$H0_1$: The implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan has not significantly increased the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students.

HA_1: The implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan has significantly increased the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students.
The researcher sought to prove the alternate hypothesis HA_1 as true and thus disprove the null hypothesis.

Findings for Research Question 2

The second research question asked, How do African American students perceive their academic success in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion? This was a qualitative question. In response to this question, several themes emerged from the analyzed data. With regard to sense of belonging, four themes emerged as follows: (a) the students love the school, (b) the school provides many opportunities to students of color, (c) the school is great in terms of diversity, and (d) there is support for students at the school. These themes are shown in Table 10 along with the number of participants who contributed to each theme and references to each theme in the data.

Table 10

Research Question 2 Themes

Theme	n of participants contributing to this theme ($N = 21$)	n of references to this theme in the data
The students love the school	6	7
The school provides many opportunities to students of color.	3	3
The school is great in terms of student diversity	7	7
There is support for students at the school.	6	7

Theme 1: The Students Love the School. In relation to a sense of belonging, theme 1 suggests that the study subjects love being at the school and, in fact, enjoy it. This was mentioned by six out of the 21 participants seven times. For example, Participant 2 stated, "I love this school is an amazing change for new students and even older students to start a new." Similarly, Participant 12 mentioned, "I love it here. It's a great campus and I feel good about receiving help with my courses." Therefore, some students love college and feel that it is a great campus. Others seem to love the school due to the fact that earning a degree from this institution

is not expensive. For example, Participant 20 mentioned that "earning a degree without spending much money is very good." This also suggests that the African American students are concerned with the amount of money spent in a university or college and prefer the college as it is cost-effective. Another Participant stated, "I love all employees and students look happy and belonging" and yet a different Participant noted that "the school is the best option that I have." Likewise, another Participant mentioned that "I have no complaints or feel that there needs to be any severe changes. Thanks to college my education plan has been great!" These views demonstrate that the respondents love college as it is and they love it for various reasons, which helps to enhance their sense of belonging.

Theme 2: The School Provides Many Opportunities to Students of Color. Theme 2 demonstrates that the students believe that the school provides a lot of opportunities for them. This was mentioned by three participants three times. According to Participant 10, "There are way more opportunities for us now. I love how there are more scholarships and aid available for us of color so that we can be successful and succeed." Others shared similar sentiments. Participant 21 noted that "the college has given me so many opportunities that I didn't think I would find at a community college, truly grateful." Another Participant added that "there are more scholarships and aid available for us of color so that we can be successful and succeed." This demonstrates that the African American students who took part in this study appreciate the fact that the school offers them a lot of scholarships and financial aid, which helps to promote a sense of belonging at the institution. Overall, this theme revealed that the participants believe that they have many opportunities at this school, even more than they could find in other institutions of higher education, including other community colleges. This is important to their sense of belonging.

Theme 3: The School Is Great in Terms of Student Diversity. The third theme that arose in relation to sense of belonging was that the students believe that the school is great when it comes to student diversity. This was mentioned by seven different participants seven times. For example, Participant 4 shared the following:

> I feel like the college has done a better job in terms of diversity, equity, and belonging there have been more groups and diverse groups of ethnicity and people wanting you to do things with them and the school that can better yourself, the college and the community and its great.

Others believed that although the school is doing great in terms of diversity of students, there is not much diversity in terms of instructors, as there are few African American instructors. According to Participant 6, " the college is a great school but I would wish for more black instructors to be hired." This indicates that some students feel that African American instructors are under-represented at the college. Additionally, Participant 16 mentioned that "The school is great for diversity." Participant 8 also shared the same views by noting that " the college is a place to be and its college that work well with students irrespective of their ethnicity." Furthermore, Participant 7 stated, "I feel very included." The students feel included while pursuing their studies at the college and believe there is inclusion at the institution, which helps to promote a sense of belonging.

Theme 4: There Is Support for Students at the School. The fourth theme in relation to the qualitative question was that the students believe that they receive the necessary support at the school. This was mentioned seven times by six participants. According to Participant 7,

I feel very included and supported by all faculty and staff I have encountered so far

during my experience at the college. As a Dean's List and Honors College student, I feel

my education is being prioritized by all faculties at the college.

Furthermore, some students believe that they are getting a lot of support from instructors at the

institution when it comes to examinations. For example, Participant 1 mentioned that "I feel

some of the online instructors be doing too much when it comes to exam." This implies that the

learners are, in fact, receiving substantial support. Similarly, Participant 3 indicated that "I like

that there's a lot of support and tutors to help students." This shows that the learners feel that

they are receiving sufficient support from instructors at the school.

Similar views were shared by other respondents. According to Participant 12, "I love it

here. It's a great campus and I feel good about receiving help with my courses." This denotes

that the school's staff are providing assistance to students who need help with their courses.

Likewise, Participant 13 mentioned, "I'm glad to be back in a school where I get all the supports

I need," further demonstrating that African American students at the college are, in fact, getting

all the support they need at this school. Moreover, others appreciate the kind of guidance that

they receive at the institution. For example, Participant 5 stated that she appreciates "all the

guidance the college has provided." This means that the guidance being provided to students at

the school as part of student support is being recognized by the African American learners.

Findings for Research Question 3

The third research question asked: What can be done to improve the academic success of

African American students in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program

completion, from the perspective of African American students and with respect to the status of

reaching the goal 8 metrics of the strategic enrollment plan within the institutionalized diversity

plan? This was a mixed-methods question. The qualitative component included the perspectives of African American students on what can be done to improve their academic success in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion. Regarding what the participants think can be done to improve their academic success in terms sense of belonging, three themes emerged: (a) provide more opportunities to students of color, (b) increase diversity and inclusion of both students and tutors, and (c) provide support for students at the school. These are depicted in the Table 11.

Table 11

Research Question 3: Themes on What Can be Done to Improve Their Academic Success in

Terms of Sense of Belonging

Theme	*n* of participants contributing to this theme (N=21)	*n* of references to this theme in the data
Theme 1: Provide more opportunities to students of color.	3	3
Theme 2: Increase diversity and inclusion of students and tutors	7	7
Theme 3: Provide support for students at the school.	6	7

Theme 1: Provide More Opportunities to Students of Color. The first theme shows

that these students believe that one of the ways their academic success can be improved in terms

of sense of belonging is by being provided with more opportunities. This was mentioned three

times by three different participants. Participant 10 pointed out that, "There are way more

opportunities for us now. I love how there are more scholarships and aid available for us of color

so that we can be successful and succeed." This suggests that the students hold the belief that

providing them with more opportunities, including scholarships and financial aid, can help them

succeed academically. Likewise, Participant 21 stated, "The college has given me so many

opportunities that I didn't think I would find at a community college, truly grateful." This theme

shows that the participants appreciate the opportunities provided to them at the school, which can

help them achieve academic success. Providing more opportunities is crucial to increasing students' sense of belonging.

Theme 2: Increase Diversity and Inclusion. The second theme that came up was that the students believe that the school is great when it comes to student diversity, although instructor diversity needs to be increased. This was mentioned by seven different participants seven times. Participant 6 stated that " the college is a great school but I would wish for more black instructors to be hired." This demonstrates that some students feel as though there are very few Black instructors at the college and that increasing the diversity of instructors by hiring more African American instructors will increase the students' sense of belonging. Similarly, Participant 4 shared, "I feel like the college has done a better job in terms of diversity, equity, and belonging." This shows that the students appreciate what the school is doing in terms of having a diverse student body, as it promotes a sense of belonging that can help the students attain academic success. Increasing this diversity will, in turn, increase the learners' sense of belonging, which may consequently help them achieve academic success. Participant 7 mentioned, "I feel very included," further demonstrating that these students appreciate inclusion, which can increase a sense of belonging and, ultimately, students' academic success.

Theme 3: Provide Support for Students at the School. The third theme was that the students believe that receiving support from instructors can promote a sense of belonging. This was mentioned by six participants seven times. Participant 3 stated that "I like that there's a lot of support and tutors to help students." Likewise, Participant 7 noted that, "I feel very included and supported by all faculty and staff I have encountered so far during my experience at school," while Participant 1 indicated that "I feel some of the online instructors be doing too much when it comes to exam." These views demonstrate that the students appreciate the kind of support that

they receive at the school, particularly from instructors. This support is integral to promoting a sense of belonging in the students, which can help them to achieve academic success.

Table 12

Joint Display of Findings

Quantitative Findings		Qualitative Findings	
Findings from Time Series Analysis	Test Statistics	Emerging Theme	Representative Quote
No significant trend was identified in the series of retention rate.	$T = 0.333$, p-value = .452	The students love the school.	"I love this school is an amazing change for new students and even older students to start a new."
No significant trend was identified in the series of recruitment.	$T = -0.6$, p-value = .133	The school provides many opportunities to students of color	"There are way more opportunities for us now. I love how there are more scholarships and aid available for us of color so that we can be successful and succeed."
No significant trend was identified in the series of 100% completion rate.	$T = 0.333$, p-value = .452	The school is great in terms of student diversity	"I feel like the college has done a better job in terms of diversity, equity, and belonging there have been more groups and diverse groups of ethnicity and people wanting you to do things with them and the school that can better yourself, the college and the community and its great."
No significant trend was identified in the series of 200% completion rate.	$T = 0.6$, p-value = .133	There is support for students at the school	"I feel very included and supported by all faculty and staff I have encountered so far during my experience at the college. As a Dean's List and Honors College student, I feel my education is being prioritized by all faculties at the college."

		Quantitative Findings	Qualitative Findings
-	-	Provide more opportunities to students of color	"There are way more opportunities for us now. I love how there are more scholarships and aid available for us of color so that we can be successful and succeed."
-	-	Increase diversity and inclusion	"The college is a great school but I would wish for more black instructors to be hired."
-	-	Provide support for students at the school	"I like that there's a lot of support and tutors to help students."

Evaluation of the Findings

The purpose of this exploratory sequential mixed-methods study was to explore the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan, including the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, among African American students in a Midwest community college. As a mixed-methods study, this research comprised both a quantitative and qualitative component. The results from both parts helped to address the research questions.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked, What are the trends related to the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students after the implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan? In relation to this quantitative question, the null hypothesis ($H0_1$) was that the implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan has not significantly increased

the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students. Conversely, the alternative hypothesis (HA₁) was that the implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan has significantly increased the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked, How do African American students perceive their academic success in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion? This was a qualitative question that focused on the respondents' perceptions or views of their academic success in terms of three aspects, namely sense of belonging, academic accomplishment, and completion of their program. A total of four themes emerged from data regarding sense of belonging. The themes included the views that they love the school and think the college is a great campus and that the school offers numerous opportunities to students of color, including aid and scholarships that allow the students to succeed academically in addition to other opportunities that are not even available in community colleges. Other themes included the view that the college is a great institution of higher education in terms of student diversity, as there are students from diverse ethnicities, races, and cultures at the school, which makes every student feel included as well as the view that students receive all the support they need at the school, particularly from the instructors.

These themes suggest that the sense of belonging of the African American students increased due to the support they receive at the institution of higher learning, availability of support provided to learners at the school, and the diversity of students. These results are consistent with what previous researchers have reported. According to Moreu et al. (2021) and Hussain and Jones (2021), the implementation of inclusion and diversity initiatives in

universities and colleges can increase a sense of belonging among minority students. Receiving support from a group or institution also enhances a sense of belonging (Drezner & Pizmony-Levy, 2021). Therefore, the support that the African American students receive is of great importance in enhancing their sense of belonging at the institution. The themes also suggest that the students feel included. This is vital in regard to a sense of belongingness, as providing a safe and inclusive classroom environment, as Willard (2021) mentioned, also helps to promote a sense of belonging among students of color.

Research Question 3

The third research question asked, What can be done to improve the academic success of African American students in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, from the perspective of African American students and with respect to the status of reaching the goal 8 metrics of the strategic enrollment plan within the institutionalized diversity plan? This was a mixed-methods question. The qualitative component included obtaining the perspectives of African American students regarding what can be done to improve their academic success in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion. In total, three themes emerged from data regarding what can be done to improve their academic success in terms of sense of belonging. According to the participants, institutions should increase diversity and inclusion, provide support for students at the school, and provide more opportunities to students of color. These themes suggest that in terms of sense of belonging, the academic success of African American college students can be improved simply by providing the necessary supports to these learners, providing them with more opportunities, as well as by increasing the diversity of not only the students, but also of the instructors. These results are in line with what has been mentioned by other scholars. For example, Museus et al.

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(2018) found out that diversity and inclusion initiatives help to increase a sense of belonging among students of color. Likewise, Hussain and Jones (2021) reported that institutional diversity enhanced a sense of belonging amongst students of color and buffered against the adverse impacts of discrimination and bias.

Summary

The quantitative component of this study was performed to address the first research question of the study, which was formulated to determine whether there were trends related to the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students after the implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan. The null hypothesis corresponding to this question was that the implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan has not significantly increased the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students. To evaluate this hypothesis, multiple Mann-Kendall tests were conducted to examine for the presence of significant trends in the series of retention rate, recruitment, 100% completion rate, and 200% completion rate. However, the results of these tests indicated that there were no significant trends in any of the time series of retention rate, recruitment, 100% completion rate, and 200% completion rate from 2016 to 2021. Thus, these findings did not provide support to reject the null hypothesis.

The qualitative component of the study addressed the second and third research questions. The second question asked, How do African American students perceive their academic success in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion? This was a qualitative question. Regarding a sense of belonging, the results revealed that the African American students believe that the school offers a lot of opportunities to students of color, is great in terms of student diversity, and there is support for students at the school.

They also feel that they generally love the school. The third research question asked, What can be done to improve the academic success of African American students in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, from the perspective of African American students and with respect to the status of reaching the goal 8 metrics of the strategic enrollment plan within the institutionalized diversity plan? This was a mixed-methods question as it contained both a qualitative and a quantitative component. In answering the qualitative component regarding sense of belonging, the participants stated that three things can be done to improve Black students' academic success: providing support for students at the school, providing more opportunities to students of color, and increasing diversity and inclusion of students and instructors. Chapter 5 contains the research summary, implications, conclusions, and recommendations from this study.

Chapter V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

In order to examine the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan in a Midwest community college, a concurrent mixed-methods study was conducted. The purpose of this concurrent mixed-methods study was to explore the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion among African American students in the community college. The concurrent mixed-methods approach used in this study utilized a single case study design to investigate what impact an institutionalized diversity plan had on African American students, including their perceptions of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion. The researcher collected and analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data. In order to obtain the quantitative data for this study, archival records were used as the sources of information. Students were asked to fill out a questionnaire that contained data related to the feeling of belonging (quantitative) by completing the GBS. The data were retrieved from a stored tableau on the Midwest community college's website that contained information related to the institutionalized diversity plan that the college was implementing. By using an interview protocol, qualitative data were collected from a representative sample of Black students at the selected college in order to address the research questions.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 Black students that were enrolled at a Midwest community college. The qualitative data for the study were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis. The researcher adopted pattern coding for the purpose of facilitating the alignment of transcribed interview data into a smaller number of constructs, themes, or sets. The main themes or patterns regarding the impact of the institutionalized diversity plan under investigation were generated, deduced, and defined. The

qualitative data analysis helped to address the second research question, which was a qualitative question, and part of the third research question, which was a mixed-methods questions.

There was a need for this study to be conducted because it was both empirical and practical in nature. The results of this study can empirically contribute to an improvement in the study of the impact of diversity and inclusion initiatives on Black students by bridging the gap in the literature. This study may also increase the understanding of how diverse and inclusive initiatives that have been adopted on college and university campuses are impacting Black students. According to the findings in this study, there is a possibility that the information that has been revealed may also help resolve the negative impacts that impractical diversity and inclusion initiatives can have in higher learning institutions. Additionally, the findings of this study underscored the importance of implementing diversity and inclusion programs as a means of supporting the Black students both on and off campus when they encounter racism in their daily lives. As a result of the research, the overall quantitative findings of the study indicated that there was no evidence of significant changes in the time series of retention rates, recruitment, 100% completion rate, and 200% completion rate from 2016-2021 in any of the time series. The qualitative findings revealed that students believed the school offered a lot of opportunities to students of color, was great in terms of diversity, and supported students at the school. The mixed-methods findings for the third research question indicated that there are three things that can be done to improve Black student's academic success. The following section includes more details regarding these findings along with a discussion of the remainder of the findings from the study.

Discussion of Findings

The study was guided by the following research questions and hypothesis:

RQ1. What are the trends related to the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students after the implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan? (Quantitative question)

H0$_1$: The implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan has not significantly increased the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students.

Ha$_1$: The implementation of an institutionalized diversity plan has significantly increased the success (recruitment, retention, and completion) of African American students.

RQ2. How do African American students perceive their academic success in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion? (Qualitative question).

RQ3. What can be done to improve the academic success of African American students in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, from the perspective of African American students and with respect to the status of reaching the goal 8 metrics of the strategic enrollment plan within the institutionalized diversity plan? (mixed-question)

In order to answer the quantitative research question, the Mann-Kendall test was used, and the null hypothesis was accepted. According to the analysis, no significant trends were found in any of the time series of retention rate, recruitment rate, 100% completion rate, and 200% completion rate from 2016 to 2021 for any of these variables. Researchers have noted that while some of the strategies employed by higher education institutions have been appreciated by African American students (Rodríguez et al., 2018; Sanchez et al., 2018), experiences of racial campus climates, structural racism, feeling of being unwelcome, and poor academic performance continue to be the norm for a large portion of the African American student community (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Lewis & Shah, 2021). As reported by Starck et al. (2021) in

their study of higher education institutions, the support for diversity and inclusion has been shown to coincide with the preferences of White students and to be associated with better outcomes than those of their racial minority counterparts. It has been noted that the implementation of institutionalized diversity plans failed to increase the level of success among African American students, as was shown in the findings of this study.

There is no indication that the diversity plans that have been developed have benefited other students in the study; however, the programs that have been developed have not been able to meet the goals of increasing and enabling the success of African American students. Approximately 46.2% of the students who responded to the survey in this study indicated that they felt their college was doing a very good job in terms of diversity. The qualitative results also revealed similar findings, with African American students believing that the school offered a lot of opportunities to students of color in terms of diversity, and there was support for students at the school. This sentiment was cited by three participants in the study. Participant 10 stated, "There are way more opportunities for us now. I love how there are more scholarships and aid available for us of color so that we can be successful and succeed." The findings for the second research question indicated that participants believed that they could find many opportunities at the school, even more than they could find in other institutions of higher education, including community colleges.

Sanchez et al. (2018) also cited diversity as a contributing factor to their study that examined the perceptions of students regarding college initiatives aimed at improving diversity and inclusion. According to the results of their study, students generally agreed that their institution was inclusive, with gender, race, and disability being rated as the attributes most related to diversity. Participants in this study stated that they believe the school was great in

terms of diversity, which was mentioned a total of seven times by seven different participants. While participants were satisfied with the level of diversity, some believed there could be more diversity in terms of African American instructors. Participant 6 stated, "the college is a great school but I would wish for more black instructors to be hired." Banks and Dohy (2019) similarly noted that university and college instructors across the United States are mainly White, which has resulted in the preservation of the status quo and a lack of adjustment in the curriculum and high-quality mentorship for Black students from Black faculty members.

Although students in the current study as well as the study conducted by Sanchez et al. (2018) stated they were satisfied with the level of inclusion in their college, many students may not even know what initiatives the higher institution utilizes. The findings of the current study revealed that only 38.6% of students were aware of the college's diversity, equity, and belonging plans, which is low in comparison to the college's student body. This indicates that more needs to be done to inform students about the initiatives they offer to help minority students persist in college. The findings of the current study also revealed that 59% of students felt that the college's diversity and equity plan had contributed to their academic success. This finding contradicts the study conducted by Slay et al. (2019), which concluded that formal initiatives were found to do little in creating positive changes for students of higher education in the context of their classrooms, labs, and faculty relationships. This indicates that to some extent, some current diversity programs are working, but more needs to be done so that more minority students can reap the benefits of these programs. The last question that was addressed in this study was a mixed-methods question. The results of the data collected for this question revealed three themes: providing more opportunities to students of color, increasing diversity and inclusion of both students and instructors, and providing support for students at the school. The

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literature also supports these statements. For example, Hussain and Jones (2021) noted more diverse peer interactions had a buffering effect against the negative impact that bias and discrimination had on the students' sense of belonging. Moreu et al. (2021) suggested ways that higher education institutions could improve diversity by shifting the focus to creating an inclusive academic environment rather than teaching students to survive and thrive amidst discrimination and exclusion.

The findings of this study contribute to the advancement of the knowledge in the context of diversity initiatives and suggest that the existing programs that have been put in place are not meeting their intended objectives. As a result of the findings of this study, it appears that diversity initiatives have a positive effect on students' perceptions of their school and their academic success, but more could be done in this regard. The findings of this study are in accordance with the findings of other studies. For example, Banks and Dohy (2019) emphasized that these programs must take into consideration the perspectives and experiences of students when they are being created in order to be successful. Thus, in order to provide a diversity initiative program that helps to improve the success of African American students and foster an inclusive learning environment, higher education institutions can provide a more inclusive learning environment for these students and include them in their diversity initiatives. Moreu et al. (2021) also suggested that the focus of diversity and initiative programs should be awarded to the target audience in order to promote the target behavior and address any potential challenges and strengths.

Limitations

The study had several limitations that needed to be overcome in order to increase the trustworthiness of the study. In this study, one of the most significant limitations was that there

was only one community college explored. However, the researcher mitigated this limitation by documenting in the study that the results are only generalizable to the Midwest community college that was included in the study. A second limitation of this study is that the researcher relied on archival data and personal accounts, which have been described as a selective deposit in the sense that the data collected can be biased as a result of its collection (Barnes et al., 2018). A qualitative data collection process was undertaken in order to mitigate the weakness that could be associated with using archival data in order to inform the quantitative data that were used.

Recommendations

This study led to the formulation of several recommendations that can be made in relation to the findings of this study. These recommendations can be compared with those provided in both the current study and the one conducted by Hussain and Jones (2021), as these researchers found similar results. It is important to gain the perspectives of student affairs professionals, program planners, and coordinators; however, it is equally important to gain the perspectives of minority students in order to improve their chances of success by including them in an institutionalized diversity program. When designing a program for a specific group of students, obtaining those students' input is imperative for the program's success. Several researchers (e.g., Drape et al., 2017; Thelamour et al., 2019) have explored the perspectives and insights of minority students, but these studies failed to gain their thoughts regarding the aspects of the diversity programs that could be most beneficial to them. A more inclusive environment that is conducive to minority students' success, as well as a better understanding of their opinions and what they feel is needed to support them during their educational journey, would allow these programs to be more successful in the long run. The more inclusive the environment that is created, the greater chance minority students have for success.

A larger study should be conducted to investigate the diversity, equity, and belonging plan of the college, as less than half of this study's respondents indicated that they were aware of these initiatives. Further research should be conducted to investigate this aspect of the plan. In order to gain a better understanding of how many students are actually aware of the diversity programs that are being implemented within higher education institutions, both qualitative and quantitative studies should be conducted. Further research should also be conducted to determine what can be done to improve student awareness of the diversity initiatives that will be implemented by higher education institutions in order to better inform them. In this study, the results indicated that students believe that their college's diversity plan contributed to their success in being able to realize the full potential of their college. It was also found that ensuring minority students are aware of the college's offerings plays a critical role in increasing their success.

This study found no significant relation between the recruitment process and institutionalized diversity programs. There is a need for further research to be carried out in order to determine how diversity programs implemented in higher education institutions can be improved in order to provide a better recruiting environment for minority students. It may be necessary to conduct research among potential students, teachers, and administrators in order to gain a better understanding of what they feel would help to not only recruit more minority students, but also retain them in programs. Furthermore, research should be conducted on the effectiveness of recently implemented diversity programs in order to determine what aspects of the programs are more conducive to the recruitment of minorities and to determine what aspects need to be improved. It would be possible to make certain changes without disrupting current academic functions if more recent initiatives are studied in order to make these changes. There is

a need for further studies to be carried out to obtain evidence-based information on effective

practices and policies for diversity programs (Proctor et al., 2018) so institutions that are

implementing these types of programs will be able to implement the most effective practices and

policies.

Implications

There are several implications for higher education institutions to consider as a result of

the findings of this study. The findings of this study revealed that none of the questions asked to

the participants received a response rate that was higher than 50%. The results of this study

revealed that although diversity and inclusion programs are somewhat effective in higher

education, more needs to be done in order to satisfy the needs of minority students in higher

education. As Salmi and D'Addio (2021) suggested, diversity and inclusion programs must

consider both financial aid and nonmonetary support to ensure that students have equal

opportunity to succeed. Because institutions depend on grants and scholarships to provide

financial aid to their students and because students utilize student loans, their ability to provide

financial aid is limited. In order to develop diversity and inclusion programs that are successful,

Binning and Browman (2020) suggested that initiatives should be designed by first diagnosing

how each student's level of threat relates to them individually and then tailoring the initiatives to

meet those needs. It is important to note that one of the most significant implications of the

current study is that higher education institutions should do a better job of educating their

students about the diversity and inclusion programs they have implemented and how these

programs can be used by students to increase their chances of success in school. Higher

education institutions could also do more to provide opportunities for students of color and work

to increase the diversity and inclusion of students and instructors.

There are many ways in which higher education institutions can promote diversity and an inclusive environment beyond establishing diversity and inclusion programs. HBCUs were examined by Jones and Phillips (2020), who concluded that conventional campus climate assessment models may not be appropriate for HBCUs due to their structure. It is important for higher education institutions to evaluate the type of climate assessment models that they use based on the characteristics of their student population. In addition, this study outlined that there should be other strategies adopted in order to promote inclusion, success, recruitment, and attainment of minority students as a result of the lack of significance of current diversity programs on minority student success. Killough et al. (2018) suggested that strategies such as the development of a contemporary agenda, promoting the use of technology and social media for eliciting public discourse, and giving voice to the history and culture of African American communities may be effective.

According to the findings of this study, most students felt a sense of belonging. Museus et al. (2018) suggested that diversity and inclusion initiatives should target students' sense of belonging to improve their academic success. Higher education institutions should make every effort to ensure that minority students have a sense of belonging in the school, not just among their peers, but also among their faculty and staff members. Based on Beasley's findings (2021), students were more likely to engage both academically and socially when they were exposed to caring student-faculty interactions, racial centrality, and cultural congruity. Beasley demonstrated the significant impact that a sense of belonging can have on the success of a student in school. It is also important for institutions to hire faculty with diverse backgrounds, as this may also foster a sense of belonging among its students. Jimenez et al. (2019) examined the contribution that faculty members from under-represented communities have made towards

advancing diversity and inclusion in higher education. A higher education institution should not only ensure that the school has a diversity and inclusion program that contributes to student success, but they should also make sure that they use those programs to recruit a faculty body that represents the students from all racial and ethnic backgrounds in the school. Having staff members who are also from the same background as the students can significantly contribute to the sense of belonging that students experience when they can relate to staff members who also share the same background. The current study did not reveal any significant trends in any of the time series of retention rate, recruitment rate, 100% completion rate, and 200% completion rate from 2016 and 2021. However, there are still implications for higher education institutions that should be taken into consideration. It is suggested that when creating diversity programs within higher education institutions, institutions should incorporate the perspectives and experiences of minority students, considering the information provided in the study.

Conclusion

The problem that was addressed in this study is that although diversity and inclusion efforts have been implemented to improve campus climate, issues remain regarding inequities in campus climate and race (Dingel & Sage, 2020; Lewis & Shah, 2021; Telles & Mitchell, 2018). Several studies have been conducted on the perceptions of African American higher education institutions and the impact that institutionalized diversity plans have on these students' academic success. Researchers have focused either only on the minimization of racism within campuses or have specifically focused on how the admissions process can be modified to improve campus diversity (Aibana et al., 2019; Capers et al., 2018; Grbic et al., 2019). This study filled the gap in knowledge on the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan on the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion among African American

students. The results of the quantitative tests indicated that there were no significant trends in any of the time series of retention rate, recruitment, 100% completion rate, and 200% completion rate from 2016 to 2021. Thus, these findings did not provide support to reject the null hypothesis. The qualitative and mixed-methods research questions were sufficiently addressed. The data that pertained to the second research concluded that African American students believed that the school offers a lot of opportunities to students of color, is great in terms of student diversity, and there is support for students at the school. The third research question was answered with data that indicated there are three things that can be done to improve the black students' academic success: providing support for students at the school, providing more opportunities to students of color, and increasing diversity and inclusion of students and instructors.

Further research should be conducted to analyze the variables in this study in detail; specifically, qualitative studies can be conducted to examine the experiences of African American students and their perspectives of diversity and inclusion programs. This study served as a foundation for further research on how to better develop diversity and inclusion programs that contribute to the academic success of minority students. The study also provides empirical data that can assist in resolving the adverse impacts of impractical diversity and inclusion initiatives in higher education institutions.

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Developed by Tyiana Thompson

a. **<u>Participant Invitation Process</u>**: The researcher will send an email to participants inviting them to participate in the first phase of the study. They will be given a brief overview of the study's topic, goal, and significance, as well as how the study may benefit the respondents. Interview sessions with each of the participants will be the first phase of the study.

b. **<u>Interview Setup and Location</u>**:
Interview Location: Zoom interviews with participants in a Midwest community college.

Materials for the Interview: Interview Protocol and a computer

Interviewer: primary researcher

c. **<u>Interview Overview</u>**:
Study purpose: To explore the impact of an institutionalized diversity plan, including the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion among African American students in a Midwest community college

Value of the participant's information: Participants' educational background will be instrumental in informing the arguments in this research and in ensuring the quality of the final report.

How you will share study results with participants: The researcher will share the final dissertation submitted in the personal emails of the participants.

Length of interview: 30-55 minutes

Process for the interview: Before starting the interview, the investigator will ask the participants for their permission verbally. The researcher will ask each question and allow the participant to answer it completely before moving on to the next one. The interview will be recorded digitally. The interview will conclude with the following question: Do you have any questions about this research or interview?

d. **<u>Consent Form/Ethical Considerations (For both interviews and focus group)</u>**: The researcher's initial step in ensuring ethical consideration is to get consent from participants before the interview. The personal information of the participants will likewise be anonymized by the researcher. In addition, the researcher will follow the Program Doctorate Student Handbook's criteria. The IRB will be consulted, and once the researcher has gotten approval, he will approach the specified high schools to request permission to gather data for the study. To safeguard respondents' privacy and confidentiality, the informed consent form will include information about the study's aim, nature, benefits, risks, and expectations, as well as the methodology for conducting the study. In addition, the participants will be informed that they can withdraw from the study at any moment. To safeguard the respondents' privacy and anonymity, the researcher will not collect any personal information. To safeguard the information

gathered, the researcher will keep it digitally, which will require a password to access any files stored on the laptop.

e.

f. **Interview Questions**:

Research Questions: Because you will be constructing two or more interview questions for each research question, list each one separately.	Theoretical Foundation Model or Theory: Describe it, identifying the model's or theory's sub-dimensions or components.	Interview Questions: Develop primary interview questions for each research question, guiding them using the Theoretical Model or Theory.	Probing Questions: Determine whether broad or specialized probing questions you can use to get more information or continue the conversation.
Overarching: What are some of the impacts of an institutionalized diversity plan on the perceived sense of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion among African American students in a Midwest community college?	n/a		
RQ1: What can be done to ensure that African American students perceive their academic success in terms of academic	Systematic Change Model	IQ1.1 What are the perceptions in terms of academic achievement?	n/a

achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion? (Qualitative question).			
		IQ1.2 What are the perceptions in terms of a sense of belonging?	n/a
		IQ1.3 What are some of the perceptions about program completion?	Could you share an example of how you assessed a sense of belonging and program completion?
RQ2: What can be recommended to improve African American students' academic success in terms of academic achievement, sense of belonging, and program completion, as well as the status of meeting the goal 8 metrics of the strategic enrollment plan within the institutionalized diversity plan, from the perspective of African American students?	Systematic Change Model	IQ3.1 How does the perception of academic success determine the status of reaching the goal 8 metrics of the strategic plan enrolment within the institutionalized diversity plan?	Based on your answer, describe what you recommend to improve African American academic success

	IQ3.2 What can be done to ensure that the perception of a sense of belonging determine the status of reaching the goal 8 metrics of the strategic plan enrolment within the institutionalized diversity plan among African American students?	Based on your answer, describe how African American students can reach the goal 8 metrics of the strategic plan enrolment within the institutionalized diversity plan
	1Q3.3 What can be done to ensure that the perception of program completion determine the status of reaching the goal 8 metrics of the strategic plan enrolment within the institutionalized diversity plan among African American students?	
Closing Question: Use this to close the interview.		IQC.1 Are there any other comments you want to make? IQC.2 Are there any questions you have?

Summary/Closing (For interviews): Through the original emails used to contact the participants, the researcher will inform them of the study's outcomes and progress. They will also receive a copy of the dissertation through email after it has been published. The researcher will thank them for their time and useful advice at the end of the interview.

Reviewing Interview Questions with Experts: For input on this interview guide, the researcher will send the entire guide to two doctorate faculty members in his department,

so they can see that the Interview Questions are linked with the theoretical background and research topic of this study.

Who: Identify who you will ask to review and their expertise and role

Individual to Do the Review of this Interview Protocol	Individual's Role (faculty, author in this area, professional in this area, etc)	Identify the reason you selected them	Revisions they suggested making based on their review.

g. **Field Testing the Interview**: It is important to field test the interview with at least three individuals who are representative of your participants and are not members of the target population for the study. The purpose is to test that this process works as well as that they understand and can answer questions during the interview. For this piloting process first, use the guide to conduct the interview. Ask them to identify anything they do not understand as you go through it. In addition, at the end ask them to identify things that should be removed or changed or added.

Individual Interviewed	How are they representative of your final participants (e.g., I will be interviewing college administrators. They are currently college administrators in ….)?	Why you select them?	Revisions they suggested during and after the interview

APPENDIX C: THE GENERAL BELONGINGNESS SCALE (GBS)

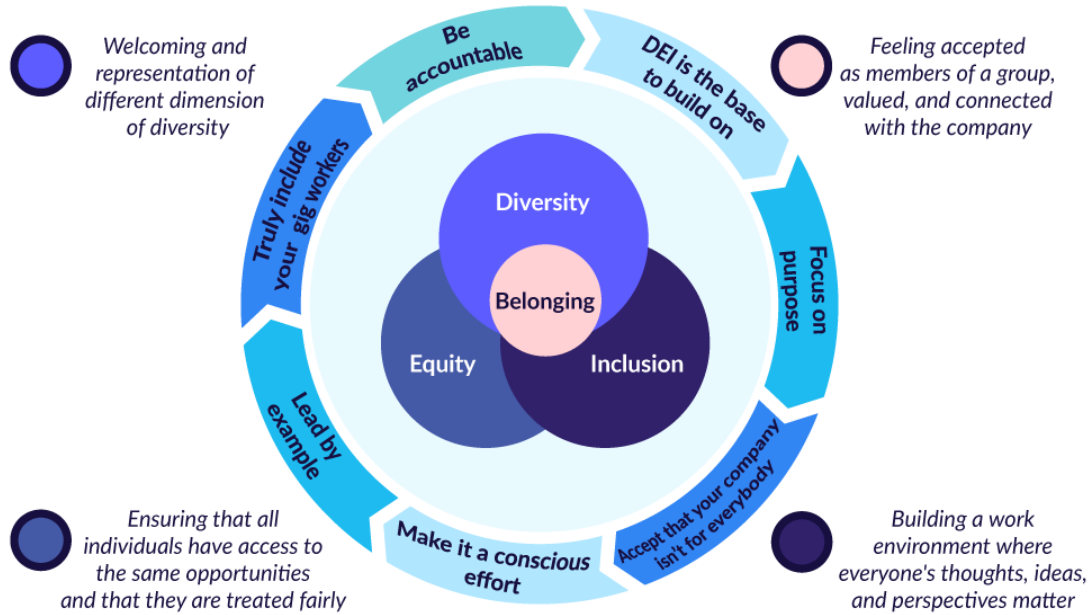The final General Belongingness Scale (GBS) and CFA factor loadings.

Item number	Item description	Loadings
Acceptance/Inclusion		
1	When I am with other people, I feel included	.70
2	I have close bonds with family and friends	.67
5	I feel accepted by others	.65
8	I have a sense of belonging	.67
10	I have a place at the table with others	.70
11	I feel connected with others	.78
Rejection/Exclusion (items are reverse-scored)		
3	I feel like an outsider	.78
4	I feel as if people do not care about me	.66
6	Because I do not belong, I feel distant during the holiday season	.77
7	I feel isolated from the rest of the world	.82
9	When I am with other people, I feel like a stranger	.79
12	Friends and family do not involve me in their plans	.66

Note. Loadings are standardized. The items for the scale reported above may be used for research purposes.

APPENDIX D: METRICS FOR REALIZING GOAL 8, DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) at Organizations

Welcoming and representation of different dimension of diversity

Feeling accepted as members of a group, valued, and connected with the company

Be accountable

DEI is the base to build on

Truly include your gig workers

Focus on purpose

Diversity

Belonging

Equity

Inclusion

Lead by example

Ensuring that all individuals have access to the same opportunities and that they are treated fairly

Make it a conscious effort

Accept that your company isn't for everybody

Building a work environment where everyone's thoughts, ideas, and perspectives matter

AIHR | ACADEMY TO INNOVATE HR

APPENDEX E: IRB APPROVAL

WKU.

DATE: August 9, 2022

TO: Tyiana Thompson
FROM: Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1944907-1] EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF AN
INSTITUTIONALIZED DIVERISTY PLAN ON THE PERCEIVED SENSE
OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVMENT, SENSE OF BELONGING, AND PROGRAM
COMPLETION AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN A MIDWEST
COMMUNIY COLLEGE
REFERENCE #:   IRB 23-009
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: August 9, 2022

REVIEW TYPE: Exempt Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Western Kentucky University
(WKU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit
ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in
accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Exempt Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and
insurance of participant understanding followed by a *signed* consent form. Informed consent must
continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal
regulations require each participant receive a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to
initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED
adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for
this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this
office.

This project has been determined to be a MINIMAL RISK project.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion
of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Robin Pyles at (270) 745-3360 or Robin.Pyles@wku.edu.
Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

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Name: Thompson, Tyiana

Email (to receive future readership statistics): tthompson294@topper.wku.edu

Type of document: ['Dissertation']

Title: CONCURRENT STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF AN INSTITUTIONALIZED DIVERSITY PLAN ON THE PERCEIVED SENSE OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, SENSE OF BELONGING, AND PROGRAM COMPLETION AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN A MIDWEST COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Keywords (3-5 keywords not included in the title that uniquely describe content): black, university, campus, discrimination

Committee Chair: Nicholas Brake

Additional Committee Members: Lester Archer Aaron Hughey DeShawn Burrell

Select 3-5 TopSCHOLAR® disciplines for indexing your research topic in TopSCHOLAR®: Education Social and Behavioral Science Educational Leadership