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SPACES FOR WHOM? : IDENTIFYING PARTICIPATORY STRATEGIES TO FOSTER STUDENTS' SENSE OF BELONGING ON COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAMPUSES

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SPACES FOR WHOM? : IDENTIFYING PARTICIPATORY STRATEGIES TO
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CAMPUSES

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, community colleges have served diverse student populations, including students of color and students with disabilities. While these colleges are celebrated for their access and affordability, student success is not guaranteed. As educators work to continuously improve course and program completion, students' sense of belonging is critical. However, a review of scholarship from education, architecture, and planning revealed how students have navigated campuses that have not met their needs or reflected their experiences and have even been settings for discriminatory behaviors ranging from microaggressions to oppression. Recognizing the potential to increase sense of belonging through student participation and empowerment, this study used critical inquiry to determine how four community colleges recognized by the *INSIGHT Into Diversity* Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award have promoted belongingness as they developed campus spaces. While interviews with college presidents and vice presidents revealed the will to engage students in campus building, none of the colleges achieved the highest levels of student participation during their most recent capital projects. Additionally, the study found that student participation occurred because of leaders' choices, as formal structures to ensure student involvement were not evident. Finally, the study concludes with practical implications for colleges aiming to increase student belongingness and success as they invest in campus structures and features that will last for decades.

Keywords: Sense of Belonging, Community Colleges, Campus Development

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CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

In recent years, institutions comprising the two-year, community college sector have served a large portion of undergraduates studying in the United States. With broad missions and open enrollment policies, these public institutions have attracted students who arrive with diverse and intersecting backgrounds and experiences. At the same time, these colleges have reported student retention and completion rates that trail other sectors by wide margins. Considering the large numbers who attend community colleges, it is imperative that educators identify more strategies, policies, and practices to support students effectively and position them to achieve their academic goals.

A college campus may be one of the most influential parts of a student's experience. From their first campus visits, students interact with contested and, at times, exclusive spaces. Early on, students will take cues from their surroundings to inform their emotional responses and personal impressions of belonging. Internationally renowned architect Peter Zumthor wrote, "I enter a building, see a room, and—in the fraction of a second—have this feeling about it" (Zumthor, 2006, p. 13). He emphasized that, in any space, elements such as form, materials, flow, light, temperature, sound, and objects trigger how we feel about our setting—feelings "of immediate appreciation, of a spontaneous response, of rejecting things in a flash" (Zumthor, 2006, p. 13). As students learn, socialize, work, or live on campus, they navigate and experience buildings, landscapes, furnishings, and other objects that can either enhance or limit their learning, access, safety, comfort, sense of belonging, engagement, and even college choice.

Students overwhelmed by situations and narratives suggesting they do not fit in may find their ability to thrive academically and socially in peril.

What makes campuses provocative? First, we must consider all that a physical campus includes

Natural aspects of the physical environment include such factors as weather, population density, crowding, and the way natural space is used. The human-made physical environment consists of the architectural environment, including building design, location, and layout; constructed pathways and parking lots; furniture and equipment design within buildings; noise; and air pollution. (Evans et al., 2017, p. 226)

Then, we must recognize that students make sense of these and other spatial elements that colleges have organized, constructed, and maintained to accommodate systems, promote behaviors, and reinforce power structures. While describing the significance of architecture, Goldberger (2009) associated the politicization of built space and the emotional effects it has on people as follows:

The making of architecture is intimately connected to the knowledge that buildings instill within us emotional reactions. They can make us feel and they can make us think. Architecture begins to matter when it brings delight and sadness and perplexity and awe along with a roof over our heads. It matters when it creates serenity or exhilaration, and it matters just as much, I have to say, when it inspires anxiety, hostility, or fear. Buildings can do all these things, and more. They represent social ideals; they are political statements; they are cultural icons.

Architecture is surely our greatest physical symbol of the idea of community, our

surest way to express in concrete form our belief in the notion of common ground.

The way a community builds tells you, sometimes, all you need to know about its

values … (Goldberger, 2009, p. x)

As community college students move across their campuses, what values are most

apparent to them?

Over time, intentionally or not, colleges have built campuses infused with

signals—some obvious, some subtle—that can either promote or limit a person's sense of

belonging. At some schools, students have tolerated discrimination on campuses where

blatant racism, sexism, and ableism, including violence, have occurred. At the same time,

many U.S. institutions have peppered campus spaces with structures, objects, and

symbols that reinforce the dominance of Western, White, male, heterosexual, able-bodied

cultures while diminishing the presence of other groups. Other signals are less obvious,

but they still have potential to affect students negatively. Creswell wrote,

Class, gender, and race have so often been treated as if they happened on the head

of a pin. Well they don't – they happen in space and place. By taking space and

place seriously, it was argued, we can provide another tool to demystify and

understand the forces that affect and manipulate our everyday lives. (Cresswell,

2015, p. 42)

What can taking community college spaces seriously teach us about student experiences?

Situation of structures, the style of an exterior, the formality of an interior, noise

or silence, light or shade, recurring symbols and histories, artifacts celebrating specific

people or groups, and upkeep or neglect are just some of the aspects that culminate in spatial experiences. Each characteristic springs from decisions to either invest in or deny resources and privilege to a particular space and, consequently, to users of that space. Consider some common elements of higher education settings. Remote parking for first-year students could suggest that a school prizes employees or upper-level students over new students. The placement of a lectern might convey messages about who deserves attention in a classroom. Limited restroom options could indicate a lack of concern for transgender or parenting students. A classroom building in poor repair might suggest that an institution places less value on subjects taught there. Dim lighting or overgrown shrubbery might relay disinterest in the safety of evening students. Photos honoring mostly White male board members, donors, or college leaders might suggest that people of color or women have less power at an institution. Students drilled to "run, hide, fight" in case of an active shooter event might feel exposed in open spaces with large amounts of glass. As students confront their campuses, messages like these are pervasive and consequential.

As physical characteristics inform a person's perceptions about their "place" in a community, the interactions between students and their campus spaces could influence sense of belonging and prospects for college success. At the same time, employees who spend large amounts of time working on site may become so accustomed to their surroundings that they overlook the effects on students. Therefore, I started this research wanting to know what steps colleges are taking to remain aware of these effects and

promote positive spatial experiences for students, especially as schools must invest significant resources into building and maintaining campuses.

Problem Statement

With commitments to access and affordability, two-year community colleges have served up to 45% of U.S. undergraduates while prioritizing local communities and delivering instruction and services in close proximity to nearly 90% of Americans (Boggs, 2004; Cohen et al., 2014). The schools have attracted a rich diversity of students, including those from marginalized populations. Data from 1,044 institutions revealed that a majority of the 6.8 million credit students who recently attended U.S. community colleges represented minority groups, as only 44% identified as White (American Association of Community Colleges, AACC, 2021). Comprising 57% of headcount, women enrolled at a rate 14% higher than men. Fifty-six percent were age 21 or younger, but older students drove median and average ages to 24 and 28, respectively. Fifty-nine percent used financial aid, and 29% were the first in their family to attend college. About 65% attended part-time, and a large majority worked. One-fifth reported a disability.

Unfortunately, access does not tell the whole story. While community colleges have extended opportunities to diverse student populations, the schools and their students have historically tolerated "snobbery" directed toward the sector (Goldrick-Rab, 2010, p. 442). Some stigma have stemmed from success data that are not yet on par with other academic institutions. The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) has calculated graduation rates by looking only at first-time degree-seeking students who enrolled in college on a full-time basis and completed degrees within 150% of the time allotted—a

definition that has ignored both accomplishments and challenges of many part-time, older, working, parenting, or non-degree seeking community college students (Juszkiewicz, 2020). Using fall 2015 data and the official DOE completion formula, analysts calculated a 28.6% graduation rate for first-time, full-time two-year college students, but when they considered students who finished within 300% of the allotted time, the rate moved to 48%. When they counted transfer students as well, the rate hit 62% and aligned with four-year student completion. Gaps have also emerged between White and racially minoritized community college students. In an analysis of students who entered public, two-year colleges in 2013, Juszkiewicz found that 49.2% of White students completed within six years, but only 28.7% of African American students finished programs.

As leaders, educators, and advocates attempt to explain and close gaps, deep introspection of the institution must be part of the process. While external factors naturally affect outcomes, it is imperative that community colleges also look internally to root out systems, structures, policies, and practices that stunt student retention and success. As part of that introspection, campus spaces—those places where students form some of their earliest impressions of how they fit into a college community—require rigid scrutiny.

What would community colleges find if they looked deeply and critically at their campuses? As I began to explore and research this topic, I predicted that many schools would not only expose situations where power structures penetrate campus spaces, but they would also find instances where these spaces privilege dominant groups and oppress

others. Whether knowingly or not, colleges have designed and maintained spaces that reinforce Western, White, masculine, heterosexual, and ableist cultures while limiting potential for students from marginalized groups to form healthy bonds to their schools.

Purpose of the Study

With a history of enrolling students from diverse backgrounds, two-year institutions have earned reputations as "democracy's colleges" (Griffith & Connor, 1994). However, by missing opportunities to offer more inclusive spaces, some schools might have alienated parts of their student base and, as a result, the wider communities they intended to serve. Driven to find solutions that elevate student belongingness and increase potential for retention and degree completion, I used my research to expose exclusion some students have tolerated, find examples of inclusive practices among leading colleges, and advance strategies leaders might adopt to nurture student success.

In this study, I engaged my assumptions at community colleges recognized for commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity. Considering the major part campuses play in the daily lives of students, it was important to learn if these colleges have considered spatial development as an essential step in building student belonging and ultimately success. By narrowing my focus to award-wining schools, I aimed to learn what potential precedents leading community colleges were setting for others to follow.

Research Questions

My research questions focused on how community colleges are developing campus spaces to promote a sense of belonging among students. Particularly, I was interested in how the colleges' efforts to involve students as they build, upgrade, or

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maintain campus spaces have compared with levels of community involvement on a Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969/2019), which I have considered a proxy for levels of belongingness.

Delimitations

The list of stakeholders interested in campus projects can be long. Lidsky (2006) claimed that campus planning "is a political, social and emotional process that impacts the curriculum, staffing, enrollments, facilities and financial resources" (p. 17). While wide employee involvement in planning is important for reasons both professional and personal, I have not focused on the specific needs of college personnel in this study. Similarly, building projects can be highly publicized projects that draw interest and involvement from constituents in the local community and beyond (Muñoz, 2009). While college and project leaders must be mindful of—and possibly responsive to—those interests, I have also chosen not to address the needs or wishes of community members.

Additionally, I have neither found nor developed standards for building an inclusive campus. While my literature review includes examples of spaces that might remind educators of their own campuses, my intention has been to focus on planning approaches that, in any time or place, could reduce the likelihood of settings and features that limit students' feelings of belonging. Just as community college missions have guided institutions to assess and respond to workforce and other needs in their designated service areas, I have suggested approaches to campus development that are inherently local as well.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, I turned to a combination of critical theories to understand the experiences of people who interact with campus spaces. I also considered theories and models related to sense of belonging and participation. Goldberger wrote,

> We may not all participate in the conversation, but we all have to listen to it. For that reason alone, architecture matters; because it is all around us, and what is all around us has to have an effect on us. That effect may be subtle and barely noticeable, or it may shake us to the core, but it will never fail to be there.
> (Goldberger, 2009, p. x)

When bundled together, I noted the potential for these frameworks to expose systemic problems that affect people in different ways and to generate new approaches that colleges might use to plan and develop campus spaces.

Research Design Summary

With goals of understanding the approaches that leading community colleges have used to develop campus spaces and with aspirations to improve future projects through my research, I selected Critical Qualitative Inquiry as my methodology. This choice was suited for a study that examined how community colleges have perpetuated power structures and forms of oppression across campus spaces.

I identified 27 U.S. community colleges—primarily associate degree granting institutions—that *INSIGHT Into Diversity* magazine recognized for their focus on diversity and inclusion. *INSIGHT Into Diversity* has presented the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award to accredited colleges, universities, and

professional schools that meet criteria for outstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion (*INSIGHT into Diversity*, n.d.). As I selected these institutions, I assumed that, to qualify for the award, these colleges have set diversity, equity, and inclusion goals in alignment with wider approaches to continuous improvement.

Reaching out first to facilities managers, I used a preliminary questionnaire to gather details about the colleges' most recent student-facing projects, including new construction, renovations, or large-scale landscaping jobs. I used questionnaire results to focus on schools with projects completed in the last five years. For each selected college, I completed a semi-structured interview with either the college's president or the vice president overseeing facilities. After recording and transcribing meetings with leaders, I used a combination of a priori and emerging codes to identify activities that related to student participation in spatial planning (Saldaña, 2016). I consolidated coded content into categories that aligned with the three levels and eight types of participation that comprise a Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969/2019) and analyzed how each college's efforts aligned with the model. For instance, I considered whether schools engaged students across multiple "rungs" of the ladder or whether their efforts were concentrated at a specific level. Additionally, I checked for themes in the leaders' responses as well as for patterns of student participation or non-participation across the entire group of institutions.

Researcher Positionality

As a woman, I have encountered some masculine spaces that challenged my sense of belonging, but as a person who also identifies as White, heterosexual, and non-

disabled, I have not experienced exclusion because of my race, ability, or other characteristics. In fact, at times, I have materially benefited from hidden and not-so-hidden ways that socially-constructed systems privilege some and oppress others. As I have considered my positionality, I have focused on my interactions with campuses as both a student and an educator.

As a student, I have attended predominately White institutions (PWIs) that span the state of South Carolina—the College of Charleston, the University of South Carolina in Columbia, and Clemson University. As a student in Charleston and Columbia, I admired the long histories, traditional architecture, and established gardens that dated to 1770 and 1801, respectively (College of Charleston, n.d.; University of South Carolina, n.d.). While I understood that the cities of Charleston and Columbia were centers of government, commerce, and culture in the antebellum and Jim Crow South, I never considered my schools' roles in supporting slavery, racism, or other forms of oppression. I did not think deeply about who planned or built these campuses, under what conditions, or whether the spaces reflected their lives and achievements. Similarly, when I enrolled at Clemson University 22 years later, I was mostly unaware of the school's beginnings as a plantation built by enslaved laborers on the land of indigenous people, and I was not fully aware of present-day controversy surrounding campus memorials to racist historical figures (Carson, 2015; Clemson University, 2020; Kingkade, 2015a, 2015b; Nicholson, 2020). Had I identified with other groups, I might have processed these college histories differently.

My work experience is more complicated. My interest in providing effective learning spaces has spanned a 25-year career at two South Carolina technical colleges. At my first college, I worked as a librarian and later as a learning resources dean with responsibility for planning and operating libraries and computer labs across seven locations. After 14 years, I transitioned to another dean's position at a larger school located about 60 miles from my first employer. Naturally, I compared how students used facilities and services at each college. At one school, the library was often busy, and students seemed to consider it a hub for learning and socializing. At the other institution, I saw students studying in their vehicles while library usage remained relatively light. My observations sparked questions I have contemplated for more than a decade. Did spatial characteristics such as setting, design, organization, or accessibility cause students to either use or avoid each library space?

Throughout my career, I have had opportunities to lead or influence upgrades or renovations that have generally increased student use of libraries and other service centers. Nevertheless, despite my best intentions to exercise a team approach to planning facilities, I may have been complicit in producing spaces that perpetuate systems of oppression and alienate students who bring different experiences and needs when they visit campus. On reflection, I recognize that, like me, many students, faculty, and staff who represent majority populations may be unaware of the prevailing histories and preferences that led to present-day campus structures and landscapes that do not affect all users in the same ways. With research and greater consideration of diverse viewpoints, I have aimed to help fill this knowledge gap.

Limitations

I identified two limitations to my study. First, I had some unknowns about the HEED Award selection process. Secondly, I received a lower than expected response to efforts to reach out to qualifying community colleges.

Award Criteria

INSIGHT Into Diversity (n.d.) provided an opportunity to consider community colleges that—through the HEED Award application process—expressed interest in receiving recognition for their work to promote diversity and inclusion. However, the award criteria presented some limitations. First, the current selection framework, as demonstrated through a sample application form, broadly assessed many measures. While the application included questions about the presence of specific features (i.e., wheelchair access, elevators, gender neutral restrooms, prayer rooms), I did not find evidence of verification processes or deep critical inquiry into schools' approaches to planning spaces or involving students in the process. Secondly, I found no information about changes to the selection process over time. Judges might have evaluated early winners with criteria that were different from those applied to more recent recipients.

Limited Responses

When I first considered participants for my study, I identified more than two dozen community colleges that had won the HEED Award since 2012. However, as I began to search for names and email addresses for my points of contact—that is, the colleges' facilities leaders, presidents, and vice presidents—I encountered some websites that did not provide that information publicly. Furthermore, when colleges did share

contact information, it was sometimes difficult to discern roles and responsibilities based on job titles. In some cases, personnel changes presented challenges. Ultimately, I initiated my outreach by emailing 26 people who seemed to have responsibilities for managing or directing facilities, maintenance, or planning at their respective schools. Six people responded to this round of outreach. When I used those six responses to reach out to presidents and vice presidents, four leaders returned my messages and agreed to interviews. While I was fortunate to engage leaders from a diverse group of schools, a wider response might have yielded more robust information, including a broader range of campus projects and practices, more examples of student participation, and more experience on the part of the leaders themselves.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lays at the juncture of student success, institutional change, and public investment in campus spaces.

Student Success Drivers

Success data commonly have indicated that students who attend community colleges are less likely to complete or take longer to complete a credential than counterparts at four-year institutions. Increasingly, funding bodies have shifted away from student enrollment and toward completion as a measure of community college success (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Consequently, schools have experienced pressure to retain students until they earn credentials—a challenging task considering difficult life experiences and situations that many students have faced. When disaggregated, data indicate that Black and Hispanic students have had lower completion rates than White

and Asian counterparts (Causey et al., 2020). My work relates to colleges looking critically at systems that work for some students but not others.

In a discussion of community colleges' low student success rates, Goldrick-Rab (2010) suggested that college policies and practices were as much to blame for limited completion as gaps in student performance. Related to this assessment, Tinto (1999) criticized institutions for addressing student retention problems by simply adding more courses and initiatives and failing to look closely at college settings. Tinto said,

> Therefore, while retention programs abound on our campuses, most institutions
> have not taken student retention seriously. They have done little to change the
> overall character of college, done little to alter the prevailing character of student
> experiences, and therefore done little to address the deeper roots of student
> attrition. As a result, more efforts at enhancing student retention, though
> successful to some degree, have had more limited impact that they should or
> could. (Tinto, 2017, p. 5)

Considering that many two-year college students have commuted and attended part-time, Tinto suggested that inquiries begin in classrooms where students spend most of their time on campus.

Aging Campuses

Another consideration that makes my study timely relates to aging campus infrastructures that have increasingly forced leaders to consider new construction or renovation. In the 1960s and 1970s, hundreds of community colleges opened in the wake of post-war events such as the Truman Commission, passage of the G.I. Bill, and the

arrival of the Baby Boom generation (Biemiller, 2008; Fetterling, 2018). In these decades, colleges and universities erected 40% of today's academic buildings (Fetterling, 2018). These buildings and even newer structures have strained capital budgets. In a report published by the Association of Physical Plant Administrators' Center for Facilities Research, Mayo and Karanja (2017) noted that, while colleges and universities have deferred campus maintenance due to funding shortages, postponement of repairs could lead to higher costs. They referenced one model that predicted that costs increase five-fold yearly and a second that suggested an exponential increase (by a power of 2) when institutions neglect repairs for too long. As inadequate or failing spaces force colleges and communities to invest in campus development, approaches for building inclusive spaces that serve students well are justified. Each new project is a chance to eradicate disparities that have limited students in the past.

Lack of Focus on Community Colleges

My work to fill a void for researchers and practitioners interested in the effects of exclusive spaces is significant. As I searched the literature, I noticed gaps in information that considered the campuses of community colleges. While I relied on studies that often focused on four-year colleges and universities, I found examples of community colleges that maintained problematic spaces, too. A short list of these included a saturation of cultural symbols celebrating dominant groups, spatial design aligning with preferences associated with White culture, and features that were not accessible to all students. Considering the sector's mission and diverse student populations, exclusion emerging

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from community college campuses might be more likely to limit opportunity than it would at senior institutions.

The Pandemic and Racial Unrest

Finally, recent events elevated the importance of my research. The coronavirus pandemic, which spanned my work on this dissertation, exposed limits on learning and engagement, especially for students of color and students with disabilities (Chugani & Houtrow, 2020; Lederer et al., 2020). Additionally, racial unrest that escalated during my research gained new attention and support for the social justice agenda and forced changes on some U.S. campuses. In May 2020, millions saw video footage of a White police officer using excessive force to kill a Black man detained on a Minneapolis street (McDonnell Nieto del Rio et al., 2021). The death of George Floyd sparked hundreds of protests and other resistance against racism (Buchanan et al., 2020). In the following weeks and months, public outrage led organizations to express support for social justice, including colleges and universities vowing to mend racist histories by removing statues, renaming buildings, and more (Clemson University, 2020; Knowles & Landry, 2020).

If my work leads to strategies that progressive leaders can use to diminish the reproduction of inequalities and develop more inclusive spaces, then whole communities—students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, donors, employers, public officials, neighborhoods, and taxpayers—will benefit. Schools that intentionally examine and reduce exclusive effects of campus spaces will have a better chance of serving the diverse needs of students and their communities effectively.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction

In Chapter 1, I described the problems and questions associated with my research. First, I addressed a lack of critical awareness about campuses—spaces saturated with exclusive features that support systems, behaviors, and power structures that privilege members of majority groups. I explained that academic spaces communicate signals—some obvious, some hidden—that can limit belongingness for some students, especially students from historically marginalized groups. With promises to their service areas hindered by lagging completion rates, I discussed how community colleges are ripe for deep structural change in support of the diverse student populations their campuses serve.

Furthermore, I explained the purpose of my work and the research questions at the center of it. I introduced my research methods as well as the theoretical framework I chose to organize my study. Finally, I discussed my positionality as a White woman, including my own experiences as a student and a community college dean.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the second chapter, I described my review of literature, which centered on the following five areas:

    a) Community colleges in the U.S.

    b) Development of campus spaces

    c) Scholarship about students' sense of belonging and its effects on success

    d) Critical theoretical frameworks

    e) Models for assessing participation in campus projects

While I used my literature review to understand barriers to student belonging and completion resulting from problematic college settings, I also aimed to create knowledge about ways forward for institutions aspiring to neutralize oppressive effects of campus spaces and improve student experiences.

Chapter 3: Research Design

In Chapter 3, I discussed my application of the Critical Qualitative Inquiry methodology to learn what leading community colleges have done to develop campuses that promote student sense of belonging. After interviewing leaders at schools recognized for commitments to diversity and inclusion, I used the Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969/2019) to approximate a measure for student belongingness and assess the level of student participation that colleges have invested in their campus planning.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

In Chapter 4, I considered themes that emerged from my analysis of four interviews with college leaders. The first theme was a tendency for colleges to involve students in campus development, but primarily through "middle of the road" practices that did not break into the upper tiers of Arnstein's (1969/2019) Ladder of Citizen Participation. Moreover, my analysis highlighted implications for student participation when leadership changes as well as leaders' thoughts on involving particular groups of students in campus projects.

Chapter 5: Implications and Conclusions

Finally, in Chapter 5, I considered my findings in relation to literature I reviewed in Chapter 2. Furthermore, I discussed implications of my work for both college practitioners and researchers, drawing ideas from my interviews, participation models that framed my study, and the work of one scholar who demonstrated a model for participation while collaborating with students as research partners. Finally, I raised opportunities for more research with leaders, but I suggested collaboration to empower students as well. Another suggestion was to interrogate digital settings that learners have occupied as colleges restricted access to campus spaces during the coronavirus pandemic.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

For Chapter 2, I surveyed literature related to U.S. community colleges and how they have organized campus spaces in ways that affect student sense of belonging. My review included an overview of the sector's history, defining characteristics, problems with student completion, development of contested physical spaces, and related threats to students' belongingness. Additionally, I investigated critical theories and studies that offered a foundation for my research and presented models of participation with implications for measuring and expanding student sense of belonging.

Introduction

In the U.S., idealized images of college and university campuses have saturated popular culture. While campuses vary widely and change over time, the stereotype is associated with tradition, permanency, wealth, prestige, and power. At first glance, many community college campuses, which largely emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, do not fit the idealized image. Instead, they have generally reflected a more recent time as well as missions to serve local learning and workforce needs along with commitments to access and affordability. Nevertheless, two-year college spaces are not neutral. On close inspection, community colleges, like their four-year counterparts, have offered settings where—either quietly or dramatically—systems of power and oppression have shaped students' daily experiences, sense of belonging, and potential for success.

In this chapter, I will discuss empirical scholarship and other literature that informed the study's research questions:

- How are community colleges developing campus spaces to promote students' sense of belonging?

- How have colleges' efforts to build, upgrade, or maintain campus spaces aligned with levels on the Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969/2009)?

For guidance on these questions, I consulted the literature of higher education leadership, student development, and architectural history and theory in search of scholarship of critical thinkers who have worked to expose and disrupt spaces that promote privilege-inclusion for some while sustaining oppression-exclusion for others. Collectively, they have generated a body of work—studies, texts, speeches, media, designs, structures, and spatial settings—that, when synthesized, can effectively guide leaders, educators, and architects to serve diverse learners and communities more effectively through inclusive campus planning.

Search Description

Throughout my discovery process, I relied on several types of evidence. Scholarly, peer-reviewed sources from the fields of education, architecture, and planning provided information about history, theory, and practice. Primary sources, including texts and speeches of prominent architects and scholars, were valuable as I studied critical influences in architecture and urbanism. Prior qualitative research on student experiences revealed themes across various groups. Journalistic reporting provided coverage of occurrences—from acts of violence and discrimination to openings of new buildings— that collectively demonstrated the contested nature of campus spaces. These sources have

included articles from community and national news sources as well publications written for higher education. Additionally, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), AACC, Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and other organizations provided data relevant to two-year college students and their campuses.

Organization

I organized my literature discussion across three topics. First, I explored community colleges as a sector of higher education in the U.S., focusing on histories, missions, programs, students, and reputations. Additionally, I considered the current state of community colleges, including diverse student populations, rates of student success, and stigma associated with the institutions.

Secondly, starting from the idea that college and university spaces are not neutral, I looked at campus development—first considering campuses across all higher education, then honing in on two-year colleges. As part of this investigation, I compared community college campuses to those of four-year colleges and universities. I also contemplated challenges and opportunities presented by aging buildings and infrastructure that have drained college resources.

Digging deeper, I identified scholarship and reports on exclusion that has surfaced across colleges spaces. I sought examples of how members of majority groups have used these spaces as backdrops for discriminatory behavior. I considered forms of oppression—violence, overt discrimination, microaggressions, minimally accessible features, and aspects of a hidden curriculum—that have surfaced to reinforce traditional power structures.

Lastly, with a focus on belongingness, I considered students' experiences. Drawing from qualitative scholarship, I investigated voices of students as they shared feelings of exclusion when confronted with spaces designed by or for members of the majority. Specifically, I aimed to find and synthesize literature on how greater sense of belonging might fuel student success.

U.S. Community Colleges

Literature on the rise and ongoing development of community colleges set the stage for my research. In comprehensive histories, Cohen et al. (2014) and Brint and Karabel (1989) described institutions established at the start of the twentieth century to stimulate social mobility and provide skilled labor for expanding business and industry. These histories detailed public investment in higher education after the Second World War that pushed pre-war enrollment of nearly 150,000 toward a target of 4.6 million students by 1960. This dramatic growth spurred engagement of diverse student populations and the creation of campuses that are central to my research.

Beginnings. As leader of the AACC, George Boggs reflected on the history of community colleges, describing "uniquely American" institutions (Boggs, 2004, p. 8) that grew to comprise the largest sector of U.S. higher education and became a model for other countries to replicate. The twentieth century rise of community colleges coincided with a growing belief that education—particularly higher education—was a panacea for a multitude of problems faced by the country and individuals (Cohen et al., 2014). The expansion of American business and industry required a trained workforce. While the public associated education with social mobility, those involved in social justice work

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saw higher education as a way to extend access and equality to marginalized groups. As the concept of the "teenager" emerged, higher education had a role to play in developing young adults. Additionally, an American tendency to institutionalize everyday life, including education, fueled demand for formal credentials.

The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, which sparked the formation of four-year land-grant institutions, helped pave the way for community colleges by promoting new fields of study and raising popular expectations about access to higher education (Cohen et al., 2014). Between 1924 and 1960, the country's high school graduation rate climbed from 30% to 75%, and a growing number of graduates expected to pursue college degrees. Support for local instruction that allowed students to continue their education beyond the 12th grade grew, but simply extending high school was not palatable to those who sought prestige like that of senior institutions or to those who wanted state oversight and funding.

Instead of expanding existing schools to accommodate demand, prominent academic leaders, drew from a German model to propose that new junior colleges educate freshmen and sophomores, leaving research and graduate studies to more elite universities (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen et al., 2014). With backing from local school superintendent J. Stanley Brown and University of Chicago president William Rainey Harper, Joliet Junior College opened in 1901 as the first junior college in the U.S, enrolling six students, functioning as an extension of local high schools, and offering an "associate degree"—a term coined by Harper (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Joliet Junior College, n.d.). In the first half of the 1900s, junior colleges offered the earliest form of

community college education, delivering traditional instruction on par with the first two years at senior institutions. In 1920, the American Association of Junior Colleges formed, providing new opportunities for decentralized two-year colleges to collaborate (Brint & Karabel, 1989). By World War II, enrollment reached nearly 150,000 students—an 18-fold increase from twenty years earlier.

As the war was ending, the federal government endeavored to regulate the return of service members to the labor force with the G.I. Bill of 1944 (Cohen et al., 2014). The legislation pioneered financial aid for both tuition and living expenses and triggered increased enrollment. As enrollment spiked, President Harry Truman established a commission to assess the state of higher education (Brint & Karabel, 1989). With a junior college advocate at its helm, the Truman Commission determined that half of Americans could earn credentials equivalent to 14 years of school while a third was capable of completing higher degrees. With a goal to enroll 4.6 million students in higher education by 1960, the Commission proposed more community colleges to expand access.

Growth and Impact. By midcentury, most two-year colleges supplemented their general education curricula with skills-based instruction and terminal vocational degrees that matched the needs of their communities (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen et al., 2014). In the 1950s and 1960s, "community college" emerged as the preferred term for state-supported, two-year schools (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen et al., 2014). Meanwhile, because of its inferior undertones and failure to encompass the idea of terminal degrees, the term "junior college" lost favor. Community colleges have gone by other names (ex. technical college, city college), and some have dropped all qualifying words from their

titles, simply using the term "college." Regardless of their names, "any not-for-profit institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree" (Cohen et al., 2014) would fit the community college definition.

While the rise of community colleges was a twentieth century phenomenon, the schools continued to serve large numbers of students into the new millennium. The sector that included only 20 junior colleges in 1909 grew to more than 1,100 schools by the 1980s and lately has enrolled nearly 12 million credit and non-credit students in every state (AACC, 2021; Boggs, 2004; Cohen et al., 2014). Additionally, as community colleges have served up to 45% of U.S. undergraduates, they have continued to prioritize their local communities, delivering instruction and services in close proximity to nearly 90% of Americans (Boggs, 2004; Cohen et al., 2014). Community colleges "changed the paradigm of higher education in the United States from students having to 'go away' to college to having access to affordable higher learning and job training right in their local community" (Boggs, 2004, p. 8). Consequently, the schools have not only educated individuals, they have also advanced communities.

Today's Community Colleges. Throughout the sector's history, the "otherness" of community colleges has shaped the schools' missions and programs, the students they attract, the campuses they build, and the support they receive. The earliest colleges found themselves caught between high schools and four-year colleges and universities (Brint & Karabel, 1989) and subordinated to senior institutions, employers, and government (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Furthermore, senior institutions—that once aimed to leave young undergraduates to the two-year colleges—responded to fluctuating enrollments during

both world wars by shifting to selective admission of freshmen and sophomores (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen et al., 2014). Consequently, a perception of two-year colleges as second-rate alternatives to more established forms of higher education emerged (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Griffith and Connor (1994), on the other hand, defended two-year colleges, arguing that the success of the schools and their students have been widely misunderstood.

   Mission and Programs. Community college leader and scholar George Vaughan described the broad community college mission as both "protean" and "elusive" (Vaughn, 1991, p. 30), as the schools evolved to anticipate and respond to changes in the economic, social, and cultural landscapes of communities they served. He described a tension that enabled colleges to balance a formal and stable academic curriculum against ever-changing, experimental programs that operated on the institutions' edges. While maintaining a general education core that has characterized all academic institutions, two-year colleges have addressed community needs through credit-based career programs, non-credit bearing continuing education, and developmental instruction that prepares students for college-level work. Similarly, Griffith and Connor (1994) cited flexibility, multi-functionality, community focus, and opportunity as distinctive strengths of the community college model.

   While Vaughan portrayed some community college work as "on the edge," critics have used the term "mission creep," especially as colleges influenced opportunities and even competed at both the high school and baccalaureate levels (Cohen et al., 2014; Vaughan, 1991). Harking back to early concepts of community colleges, dual enrollment

programs re-emerged in the 1970s, allowing students to earn college credit while meeting

high school graduation requirements (Cohen et al., 2014). Through the most

comprehensive early and middle college models, some students have earned high school

diplomas and full associate degrees simultaneously.

Just as dual enrollment allowed community colleges to extend their reach into K-

12 schools, some two-year institutions have blurred categories by putting bachelor's

degrees in closer reach of students (Cohen et al., 2014; Juszkiewicz, 2020). The early

mandate that two-year colleges deliver courses comparable to those in the first two years

at senior institutions opened the door for transfer programs that allow students to apply

their course credits toward four-year degrees. Additionally, community colleges have

fostered transfer options, set up in collaboration with senior institutions, and even offered

their own baccalaureate programs to help some students complete four-year degrees.

Access, Affordability, and Inclusion. To understand community colleges, one

must consider their non-selective "open door" enrollment approach as well as their focus

on affordability—defining characteristics that have shaped student populations. Vaughan

wrote that "the community college's commitment to open access is complex, for it did

not burst forth full-blown from the heads of two-year college leaders" (Vaughan, 1991, p.

31), but it eventually became inseparable from the community college mission as schools

deepened their commitments to teach students from groups who had not traditionally

attended college. Griffith and Connor praised open enrollment as "a vision that knits

[community colleges] into the biggest and boldest system of education in the world"

(Griffith & Connor, 1994, p. xii). Cohen et al. (2014) credited the community college

sector with doing more than others to open higher education to the masses by educating large numbers of students from diverse populations while prioritizing career preparation and employment—not maintaining social structures—as the primary purpose of a college education.

Another factor related to access has been affordability. Boggs (2004) attributed two-year college enrollment spikes to increases in university tuition and fees, noting the growing financial practicalities of community college courses that would also transfer to senior schools. The DOE (2019) provided annual data on tuition, fees, and room and board expenses charged to full-time undergraduate students. On average, since 2000, community colleges have charged students about two-fifths less than all four-year institutions and about one-half the amount charged by public four-year schools. A comparison of tuition and fees for full-time students attending South Carolina's public institutions in 2019-2020 revealed that two-year technical colleges were most affordable with an in-state sector average of $4,629 while costs averaged $7,558 at the flagship university's two-year campuses, $11,940 at four-year teaching colleges, and $14,318 at research universities (South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, 2020).

Inclusion is another hallmark of community colleges. Proponents have described American community colleges as "deliberately inclusive" (Griffith & Connor, 1994, p. 6). While recently accounting for 41% of U.S. undergraduates, community colleges have attracted highly diverse—and sometimes marginalized—student populations (AACC, 2021). In 2020, the AACC reported that a majority of community college students represented racialized minority groups, while only 44% of students identified as White.

Women enrolled at a rate 14% higher than men. One-fifth of students reported a disability. The median age was 24, but nearly half were older, driving the average age to 28. Fifty-nine percent received financial aid, and 29% were first generation college students. About 65% were part-time students, and a majority had either work or family responsibilities. Because of their service to such a varied population of students, U.S. community colleges earned the label "democracy's colleges" (Griffith & Connor, 1994).

Challenges and Criticisms. From the start, two-year colleges fought to legitimize their existence. Brint and Karabel noted that school representatives shared a sense of victimization during some of the earliest meetings of junior colleges—"Perhaps the greatest problem facing the two-year college movement, however, was coping with the low esteem in which institutions were often held. This issue was almost never addressed publicly, but it was acutely felt" (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 32). The problem has persisted, as West et al. (2009) noted that, despite large enrollments, community colleges have received 2.9% of national education media coverage while four-year colleges and universities have attracted 27%. More than a century after their beginnings, two-year colleges must still compete for attention and respect.

Students at Risk. Just as community colleges have held an inferior position in the higher education pecking order, their students have tolerated stigma as well. Cohen et al. described community college enrollment practices as follows:

> The community colleges reached out to attract those who were not being served
> by traditional higher education; those who could not afford the tuition; who could
> not take the time to attend a college full time; whose racial or ethnic background

had constrained them from participating; who had inadequate preparation in the lower schools; whose educational progress has been interrupted by some temporary conditions; who had become obsolete in their jobs or had never been trained to work at any job; who needed a connection to obtain a job; who were confined in prison, physically disabled, or otherwise unable to attend classes on a campus; or who were faced with a need to fill increased leisure time meaningfully. (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 36)

As colleges stuck to their open access commitment, they attracted some students who have borne repeated challenges to their success in college and life.

One stigma associated with community colleges and their students has related to academic preparedness. Cohen et al. (2014) surmised possible reasons for declines in math, English, and reading skills since the late 1960s, including social changes, K-12 curriculum, and a correlation between higher standardized scores and higher family income. In response, two-year schools implemented placement tests to assess incoming students. With mixed results, colleges have directed students who have not demonstrated proficiency to developmental courses and other interventions designed to prepare them for college-level instruction. Goldrick-Rab (2010) reported that more than 60% of two-year college students have enrolled in developmental courses—many after unsuccessful high school careers that generated limited basic skills and sometimes no diploma.

Perceptions of community college students have negatively affected even high achieving students. When Shaw et al. (2019) studied a diverse group of 14 students who transferred successfully to universities, they found shared feelings of inadequacy. Despite

their accomplishments, the students doubted their potential to succeed at the four-year college level. One student referred to a pervasive stigma that his previous college experiences equated to playing in the "minor leagues" (Shaw et al., 2019, p. 658). The authors reasoned that if students felt inadequate after successfully transitioning to universities, students still enrolled in two-year colleges might feel inferior, too.

Non-academic factors have affected student success as well. When comparing sectors based on risk factors, Mullin (2017) found that community college students were four times more likely than four-year college counterparts to face opportunity-limiting circumstances, such as delayed enrollment, responsibility for dependents, or employment while in college. Concerned with the retention prospects for 80% of college students who commute, including most community college students, Braxton (2014) observed students rushing to and from class as they fulfilled work and family responsibilities and had little time for social interaction or use of campus facilities and services. In more dire situations, poverty has affected large numbers of community college students. Recent basic needs data indicated that community college students are more likely to face problems such as food and housing insecurity and homelessness than counterparts at four-year schools (Baker-Smith et al., 2020).

Tendencies of many community college students to attend part-time, transfer to another institution, "stop out" temporarily, or give up completely have resulted in persistence and graduation rates weaker than those of four-year schools. The DOE reported a 28.6% graduation rate for first-time, full-time students who began community college in 2015 and finished a certificate or degree by 2018 (Juszkiewicz, 2020). Citing

Calcagno, Bailey, Jenkins, Kienzl, and Leinbach (2006), Goldrick-Rab (2010) reported that little more than a third of community college students have earned a credential within six years.

Funding and Support. In part, Griffith and Connor (1994) were compelled to write *Democracy's Open Door* out of concern for community colleges that faced diminishing state funding as student enrollments climbed. Despite their contributions, Boggs (2004) explained that two-year colleges have faced financial disadvantages rooted in disproportionate funding per student and received less revenue from research grants, philanthropy, and athletic programs than their four-year counterparts.

Mullin (2017) explained that full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment, as applied across all of higher education, has been a flawed funding metric for colleges that teach many part-time students, reject selective admission policies, and serve inconsistent student numbers as local demographics and employment levels shift. Mullin's analysis revealed a disparity between FTE at land-grant universities, which equated one FTE to approximately 1.2 students, and a community college FTE closer to 2.2 actual students. He argued that each real student has needed services, resources, and spaces that have not aligned with FTE ratios.

Conclusion. Over the last century, the expansion of open access community colleges—and their various commuter campuses—have put higher education in reach for most of the U.S. population. Additionally, the schools have developed missions and programs that uniquely position them to lift the communities they serve. Nevertheless, challenges faced by members of their diverse student populations as well as mismatched

performance metrics have elevated a need for community colleges to find solutions that eradicate barriers to student completion.

Campus Spatial Development

While community colleges have educated millions of undergraduate students, their campuses have received relatively little public attention. Griffith and Connor (1994) observed that, while community colleges have played a major role in educating students, they have performed only a bit part in the public imagery of higher education. West et al. (2009) noted that, at 2%, the national media has given community colleges only a sliver of education coverage—about one-tenth of that dedicated to four-year schools. Despite content contributed by the DOE, a *Wikipedia* overview of U.S. campus architecture did not mention the community-college sector or its various schools ("History of college campuses and architecture in the United States," 2021).

In stark contrast, the country's older institutions have set standards for academic settings. With their seminal work *College Architecture in America*, Klauder and Wise (1929) produced a survey of four-year college and university spaces that largely aligned with Western European-inspired architecture—either formal, symmetrical plans derived from Classical or Renaissance traditions or picturesque settings in the Gothic style.

Contrary to conventional campus development, some recognized a need for academia to break with established architectural traditions. In a review of Klauder and Wise's work, acclaimed critic Lewis Mumford (1930) lamented

> There is a great drag, at present, in the direction of a tame and undistinguished
> traditional architecture, a drag which even the best college buildings, like Mr.

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Irving Pond's Michigan Union, or Mr. Clarence Stein's California Institute of

Technology Buildings—to say nothing of Mr. Eliel Saarinen's non-collegiate

Cranbrook School—have not been able altogether to throw off. While, therefore,

this book is useful as an exhibition of things done and is a judicial survey of the

best practice to date, it does not give a hint of the college architecture of

tomorrow; and I, for one, should dislike to think that college architecture will

remain in the decorous state of mummification it has now achieved. (Mumford,

1930, p. 240)

Klauder and Wise agreed that schools should innovate campus architecture as they wrote:

There is no art in which this country has made more rapid strides than

architecture, and our institutions of learning should embody this national progress,

especially since it so effectively ministers to all other arts as well as to science

and to daily life. (Klauder & Wise, 1929, p. 3)

Still, a tendency for some institutions to replicate Georgian, Gothic, Greek Revival, and

Italian Renaissance architecture has lingered (Biemiller, 2010).

As community colleges emerged, they were less likely to conform to traditional

ideals. Their growth paralleled expansion of federal highways and interstates from the

1920s to 1950s, and many campuses opened on ring roads accessible to commuters on

the outskirts of cities and towns (Cohen et al., 2014). As they developed campuses close

to nine out of every 10 Americans, community colleges needed spaces that primarily

served non-residential students (Boggs, 2004). Cohen et al. (2014) offered campus

proximity as the greatest contributing factor to community college access, noting that

many two-year schools positioned themselves as neighborhood colleges, often in places where older four-year schools already occupied space in the urban centers.

Unlike older institutions, two-year schools that opened throughout the twentieth century tended to follow contemporary architectural trends. However, whether they met Mumford's aspirations for "the college of tomorrow, done by men who have the courage and intelligence and fine feeling to recognize that college architecture cannot remain in a backwater, whilst in every other department a fresh integration is taking place" (Mumford, 1930, p. 241) is questionable.

Biemiller (2008) described the pervasive architectural style that hundreds of community colleges adopted as they responded to a swell of baby boomers. Architects typically chose glass, steel, and concrete to build structures inspired by either Mies van der Rohe or hulking buildings typical of the Brutalist style. In this vein, South Carolina's historic preservation office described buildings constructed at the state's new technical colleges in the 1960s and 1970s:

> Many civic and school buildings from the Modern Architecture period bear
>
> similar characteristics such as two- or three-story rectangular block volumes
>
> arranged around an open courtyard, connected by a two-story breezeway enclosed
>
> on the upper floor. They are also usually brick, with metal strip windows and
>
> operable awning type sash, or metal frame window systems with in-fill panels.
>
> (South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 2014, p. 7)

Architectural trends influenced spatial community-college campus development, but so did mission. Boring El-Shishini (1972) produced an anthology of campus

buildings that included a description of an Ohio community college's spaces, particularly buildings around a central courtyard, a well-lit parking lot for evening students, engineering labs removed from areas requiring quiet, and bands of horizontal windows that allowed for daylight but maximized wall-space for equipment. At another college in Missouri, builders covered exterior walkways to promote outdoor circulation and meetings of students and faculty. A junior college in Florida primarily used concrete to build, which reduced construction costs. While these schools might have successfully organized space to advance missions tied to open access and workforce development, Biemiller claimed that "even among architects, the community college buildings of the 1960s and 70s have a reputation for being third-rate examples of a style that only a handful of first-rate architects really mastered" (Biemiller, 2008, p. B14).

How Exclusion Surfaced and Affected Students

While searching for literature about the history, form, and function of community college spaces, I was particularly interested in how campuses reinforced power structures and various types of exclusion. Space has been contested, political, fluid, historical, interactional, and distinguished by inequality (Samura, 2010). Across all sectors of academia, people from majority groups have commandeered campus spaces to exclude students from historically marginalized populations.

In the most oppressive examples, campuses have been the settings for violence and hate speech. Federal data from the 2015-2016 school year indicated that 1,070 hate crimes occurred at postsecondary institutions, including 178 at public, two-year colleges (Musu et al., 2019). Primarily associated with themes of race, religion, and sexual

orientation, the largest number of these instances, 43%, involved property destruction, damage, or vandalism; another 39% were acts of intimidation; and 9% were assaults.

In addition to violence, journalistic reporting has provided numerous examples of blatantly racist behaviors projected onto campus structures and landscapes. On the last day of Black History Month, two students were detained for scattering cotton balls across the grounds of a university's Black cultural center in a stunt meant to resurrect memories of slavery (Heavin, 2010). Following a rise in campus hate speech, someone uprooted the sign of a building that housed departments for African American and Jewish Studies (University of Florida, 2017a). A few months later, police escorted a disruptive trespasser from the same building after he raised fear among those in the space (University of Florida, 2017b). Police investigated racist graffiti sprayed on the walls of a community college campus stairwell (Brazile, 2019). Instances like these would have contributed to ADL (n.d.) information, which noted a 77% increase in reports of racist materials, such as signs and banners, appearing on college campuses in 2017-2018.

Some campuses have also been settings for problematic histories, including institutions' deliberate efforts to attract certain types of students and exclude others who did not fit the desired model. As Princeton University president, Woodrow Wilson stated a motive for adopting the antiquated architectural styles discussed earlier when he said:

> By the very simple device of building our new buildings in the Tudor Gothic style we seem to have added to Princeton the age of Oxford and of Cambridge; we have added a thousand years to the history of Princeton by merely putting those lines in our buildings which point every man's imagination to the historic

traditions of learning in the English-speaking race. We have declared and

acknowledged our derivation and lineage; we have said "This is the spirit in

which we have been bred," and as the imagination, as the recollection of the

classes yet to be graduated from Princeton are affected by the suggestions of that

architecture, we shall find the past of this country married with the past of the

world. (Wilson, 1902, pp. 199–200 as cited in Brook et al., 2014)

The racist, sexist, and Western connotations of Wilson's words left no doubt that the

university's campus architecture was contrived to preserve the dominance of White,

Anglo-Saxon, Protestant male culture (Brook et al, 2015; Meyer, 2013; Wallack, 2017).

Furthermore, as other colleges and universities modeled campuses on those of the most

elite institutions, they widely replicated messages incorporated into spaces at Princeton

and schools like it (Biemiller, 2010; Brook et al., 2015). Others clung to building names

and symbols associated with racism and other oppressive behavior (Anderson, 2021;

Carson, 2015; Jaschik, 2018; Kingkade, 2015a, 2015b; Knowles & Landry, 2020;

Massey, 2018; Muñoz, 2009; Neuman, 2017; Weissman, 2021, 2020). In the new

millennium, leaders have continued to grapple with the consequences of their institutions'

racist histories, including those at Princeton, who recently removed Woodrow Wilson's

name from both the school of public policy and a residence hall (Princeton, 2020).

So, can most twenty-first century community college leaders rest, assured that

their modern campuses represent a clear departure from the prejudices of the past? The

answer is probably not. While less likely to have campuses with older architectural styles

and long histories marked by prejudice, community colleges are not blameless, as they have also perpetuated features and narratives tied to systems of oppression.

Even newer institutions can inflict ordinary, subtle, and even unintentional forms of oppression on students who negotiate campus spaces. For example, student disability advocates have observed schools barely conforming to minimum accessibility standards (Fletcher et al., 2017; Salmen, 2011). Students who are transgender or disabled have experienced physical discomfort, health challenges, humiliation, and fear in the absence of non-binary restroom options (Bird, 2017; Coyote, 2015). Students have encountered barriers to access, such as gates or checkpoints, that require proof of identity to access a building (Pérez, 2020; Simon, 2013). Students have used libraries where policies and spatial organization stifle collaboration and promote silence—an attribute associated with White culture (Brook et al., 2015). Students from under-represented groups have tolerated saturations of narratives honoring the majority while references to their own groups have been less common (González, 2002; Patton, 2016; Stewart, 2020; Yosso et al., 2009). In one example, students resisted using a campus community garden that conflicted with their historical perspectives of slavery and migrant farming as well as their association of sustainability to White privilege (Pérez, 2020). The list could go on.

Patton noted that "the academy is an overwhelmingly White terrain in terms of physical representation of White students and symbolically in terms of curriculum, campus policies, and campus spaces" (Patton, 2016, p. 320). Similarly, Gusa (2010), who studied racialized spaces at PWIs, claimed that White students' sense of ownership results both from thoughts of superiority acquired at an early age and monoculturalism

that ensures a saturation of majority narratives and perspectives on college campuses. The literature also includes other forms of oppression. As Bialka and Morro (2018) explored how service learning could raise critical consciousness among undergraduate students taking a disability justice course at a PWI, they found multiple examples of students who had given little thought to ableism or their ability privilege. While spaces have challenged students from historically oppressed groups, more privileged students have navigated campuses with a unique sense of belonging and entitlement—often unaware of or insensitive to adversity experienced by others (González, 2002; Gusa, 2010).

Additionally, I found evidence of college employees who have failed to notice or understand meanings attached to their workspaces. Through action research conducted at Portland Community College, an institution that adopted CRT as a decision-making framework, Pérez (2020) interviewed White employees as well as an architect who admitted they had not thought critically about how people from different backgrounds experienced campus spaces. Brook et al. (2015) noted that, even if employees have recognized spaces that have not served the needs or reflected the cultures and experiences of some students, the permanent nature of existing structures or problematic guidelines for creating new spaces have prevented some from voicing concerns.

Barriers to Student Sense of Belonging

Belongingness requires environments in which people are motivated to learn, develop, and reach their goals, and these environments include campus spaces. Even in 1929, Klauder and Wise acknowledged that architecture and landscapes should reflect

"the character of the student body, the method of teaching and the special branches taught" (Klauder & Wise, 1929, p. 18). Nevertheless, students of color, students with disabilities, and other excluded groups have tolerated campuses designed mainly with their White, able-bodied classmates in mind.

In a study of higher education spaces, Muñoz (2009) characterized student-campus interactions as follows:

> Each year millions of students traverse the grounds of a diverse range of institutions of higher education. In doing so they engage in a reciprocal relationship with these landscapes; their experiences are shaped, in part, by the terrain they traverse and the buildings they occupy and these physical elements are in turn shaped through continued use. This complementary relationship is one in which the ideas and actions of people shape and are shaped by the physical environments of the campus. (Muñoz, 2009, p. 53)

In previous sections, I addressed problematic spaces, narratives, behaviors, and practices that students have tolerated. In this section, I will discuss how these realities can shape students' beliefs about how much they are valued and their actions around those beliefs.

Strayhorn wrote, "Everybody wants to belong and one's need to belong is heightened in contexts and settings where individuals are prone to feel alienated, invisible, (pre)judged, stereotyped, or lonely" (Strayhorn, 2019, p. xiv). Hurtado and Carter described sense of belonging as a "psychological sense of integration" (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 327). London et al. equated students' belongingness with "the extent to which they felt welcome, happy to be there, comfort and liking of their professors and

peers, etc." (London et al., 2011, p. 200). Strayhorn also called belongingness a basic

need and a requisite for student success, defining the term as

> … students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of
> connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted,
> respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on
> campus such as faculty, staff, and peers (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 4).

My literature review revealed situations where campus spaces violated student

sense of belonging and jeopardized student success. After interviewing Latino students

who revealed that the saturation of White features on their campuses negatively affected

their stress and energy levels, Yosso et al. observed that

> Students' physical world also elicits cultural alienation, featuring campus
> sculptures, buildings, flyers, and office postings that do not reflect Chicana/o
> histories or experiences. The cars and clothes of the predominately White student
> body further evidence the physical reproduction of White middle-class culture.
> (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 673)

To cope, students drew on cultural capital to make college spaces look more like their

family homes, but they also noted a lack of understanding on the part of White students

who saw the counterpaces as an attempt to separate from the wider college community.

In a study of students attending rural PWIs, Woldoff et al. (2011) found that

Black students who grew up in urban areas associated with Blackness had more difficulty

adjusting to college than Black students from more rural areas associated with Whiteness.

As the urban students adjusted to college life, they faced extra challenges acclimating to a

White community where people had limited experience of Black urban culture, and they felt alienated from both White students and Black students more familiar with rural White culture.

When Sánchez (2018) engaged college composition students to map campus spaces for people with disabilities, he found differences in maps created before and after students read extensively about a specific type of disability. In line with the idea that students might not express or even realize their needs, Sánchez observed differences even among the maps produced by students who revealed disabilities during the project.

Similarly, when Pérez (2020) asked students to consider campus facilities, she found that they initially lacked context for identifying exclusive spaces. To help the students make sense of feelings generated by their campus encounters, Pérez provided tools for "reading space." Her prompts led students to analyze how a setting functioned, signaled social values, and made them feel—even when messages were not always clear.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the problem of exclusive campus spaces and their effects on community college students, I drew on theories and ideas from multiple disciplines.

Theories on Sense of Belonging

While I identified student sense of belonging as a desired outcome of inclusive campus development, scholars have also developed theories associated with belongingness. More than 80 years ago, the American Council on Education (1937) presented the *Student Personnel Point of View*, which established an obligation to recognize and respond to student individuality through holistic approaches. Decades later,

citing Knefelkamp et al. (1978), Jones and Stewart (2016) recommended that educators ask how environment affects a student's holistic development and what environmental factors promote or limit growth. More recently, critical scholars have considered students as individuals while also examining power structures related to their identities (Patton et al, 2016). Just as student affairs personnel and others applied identity and development theory to development of student services, community college decision makers can use these theories to assess and program spaces.

In the late 1980s, Vincent Tinto (1988) introduced student departure theory. With a focus on community colleges, Tinto predicted that some students would lack coping skills and experiences to transition successfully to college. He wrote that "in the 'typical' institution, one would therefore expect persons of minority backgrounds and/or from very poor families, older adults, and persons from very small rural communities to be more likely to experience such problems than other students" (Tinto, 1988, p. 445). Later, as Tinto identified factors that influenced students' decisions to leave college, he included external responsibilities and experiences related to "adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation" (Tinto, 1993, p. 37). With limited time on campus and fewer academic and social interactions, Tinto expected community college students and other commuters to struggle to adjust and persist. In later years, Tinto (2017) named self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and curriculum as key drivers of student motivation and persistence, stating

> Although a sense of belonging may mirror students' experiences prior to entry that
> lead them to fear they do not belong at university, it is most directly shaped by the
> broader campus climate and students' daily interactions with other students,

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academics, professional staff and administrators, whether on-campus or online.

(Tinto, 2017, pp. 3-4)

Hurtado and Carter (1997) and Yosso et al. (2009) criticized Tinto's work, noting a failure to consider racialized climates that students of color have encountered on entering college. While Tinto suggested that students break off prior associations to form bonds with their college communities, Hurtado and Carter (1997) noted the positive influences that family relations have had on Hispanic students. Similarly, Yosso et al. (2009) insisted that students of color needed to embrace—not reject—their cultural identities to cope with White culture. They claimed that students needed "academic and social counterspaces in which they build a culturally supportive community and develop skills to critically navigate between their worlds of school and home" (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 660). Hurtado and Carter (1997) argued that it would not be possible for growing numbers of students who commuted to college and retained family responsibilities to disassociate entirely from networks beyond the college. In short, community college students contend with greater challenges to their belongingness when they are also members of marginalized groups.

Baxter Magolda (2009) included person-environment interaction models among five distinct theoretical clusters of student development theory, but noted that it has received less attention than other clusters. While the term "environment" does not solely imply physical space, there is no question that campus settings are integral to most students' environments and a source of meaning, especially as students make sense of their social identities. Using an ecology model to study experiences of mixed-race

students, Renn (2003) described "microsystems" as an element of college environment that include both relationships and "face-to-face settings containing the individual" (Renn, 2003, p. 388) that affect sense of belonging.

Referencing Maslow's (1962) motivation hierarchy, Strayhorn (2019) noted that love and sense of belonging rank only after essential physiological requirements, safety, and security, and he observed that students might not express those needs. Strayhorn offered the following elements for a model of student belonging:

1. Sense of belonging is a basic human need.

2. Sense of belonging motivates human behavior.

3. Sense of belonging can be more important to certain groups, at certain times, or in certain spaces and contexts.

4. Sense of belonging relates to the concept of mattering.

5. Identity affects sense of belonging.

6. Sense of belonging precipitates other positive outcomes.

7. Sense of belonging requires continuous support, as it varies by situation.

All of these elements relate to how students might experience contested spaces.

Drawing from the work of Hurtado and Carter (1997), Strayhorn (2019) explained that sense of belonging results from a combination of a student's thoughts, feelings, and actions. Driven by a need to belong, students may react in ways that are either productive or disruptive. Brook et al. (2015) presented the example of students who loudly enter a quiet library space as a form of resistance. Additionally, while students may easily

recognize campus features that are blatantly unwelcoming, they may also encounter "normal" spaces saturated with subtle, hidden messaging that also excludes them.

Time and place are relevant to a student's sense of belonging. Schlossberg (1989) claimed that, across the life span, people in transition are likely to feel excluded, and she pointed out that more profound life events will generate more intense feelings. College students going through major life events—beginning their first semester, exploring their identity as young adults, or attending college as a first generation or non-traditional student—are likely to experience alienation in specific times and places (Renn, 2003; Schlossberg, 1989; Strayhorn, 2019). Furthermore, a student's sense of belonging is not constant; a person who feels tightly connected can experience a change as they encounter situations that make them feel isolated.

Another premise is that mattering can increase sense of belonging. From feeling noticed to feeling needed, students must realize that their college community appreciates them and that they matter (Patton et al., 2016; Schlossberg, 1989; Strayhorn, 2019). Exclusive signs emanating from campus spaces can affect students' perceptions about how much their colleges value them.

Three Critical Theories

Critical theories that acknowledge lived experiences of millions of community college students have offered overlapping ideas to inform my understanding of how students apply meaning to campus spaces. The theories have potential to surface systemic problems of exclusion perpetuated across campus spaces and to drive future planning decisions that promote inclusion. Considering the diverse and intersecting groups

community colleges serve, many combinations of critical theories could have applied to this work. I ultimately drew from multiple disciplines, as Wood suggested in the following:

> It is strange then that whilst the social sciences focus on studying social joinings and divisions, their interrelations, their performances, their urban and rural groupings and whilst architecture focuses explicitly on space, what happens inside buildings is dealt with so unsociologically by architecture and so unspatially by the social sciences. And where we spend so much of our time, inside, is where architecture classifies, hierarchizes, gives space, denies space, structures lives and their (dis)connections to other lives, resources, knowledge, opportunities, we tend to forget its workings. (Wood, 2015, para. 13)

I chose two theories widely used in education and applicable to many community college students—Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Disability Studies (CDS). While scholars have used these frameworks to challenge power structures related to racism and ableism, the theories have broader potential, too. Without denying the value of other theories or dismissing the need to consider intersectionality, I determined that ideas common to CRT and CDS have shown that oppression has sometimes affected different populations in similar ways; therefore, they can help investigate experiences of marginalized identity groups relating to sex, gender, faith, class, nationality, and more.

Additionally, I chose Human Geography (HG), an interdisciplinary framework that has woven critical Marxist thought into architectural and planning scholarship for more than half a century (Cresswell, 2015; Price, 2010). Citing Sibley (1992) and

Cresswell (1996), Price wrote that "Critical geographers have long worked with concepts of inclusion and exclusion to contend that what, and who, is socially valued enjoys a presence in the landscape, while that and those who are devalued are kept out of sight" (Price, 2010, p. 153).

Together, these three theories provided a robust framework for how students have experienced the campus spaces at their community colleges. In Table 1, I have summarized key ideas from my selected theories:

Table 1

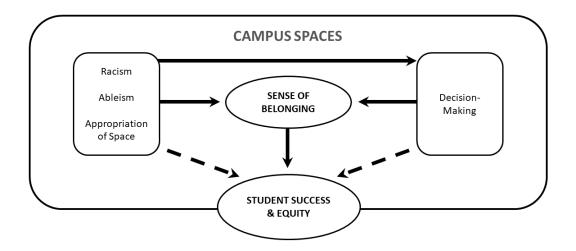*A Summary of Critical Theories Considered in This Research*

Critical Race Theory	Critical Disability Studies	Human Geography
Race is a socio-political construction.	Disability is a socio-political construction.	Place is a socio-political construction that perpetuates human inequities.
Whiteness equates to property.	Non-disabled people have privilege.	Racialized and stigmatized people are erased from places—both literally and figuratively.
Race is common and ordinary.	Liberalism is problematic, as it neglects more subtle forms of ableism..	Liberalism is problematic.
Liberalism is problematic, because it overlooks less obvious acts of racism.	Intersectionality should be recognized, and essentialism should be rejected.	Counter story-telling has transformative potential.
Intersectionality should be recognized, and essentialism should be rejected.	Social justice work can combat ableism.	Social justice work can change opinions and behaviors.
Experiential knowledge and counter-storytelling have value.	(Couillard & Higbee, 2018; Devlin & Pothier, 2014; Evans et al., 2017)	(Blomley, 2006; Price 2010)
Interest convergence fuels progress.		
Black-White Binary leads to denial of experiences.		
Social justice work can combat racism.		
(Delgado & Stefancic, 2017)		

While considering each theory, I looked for overlapping ideas as well as standalone constructs that could spur either alienation or belonging in terms of campus spaces.

Finally, in Figure 1, I have presented a model to demonstrate how systems of oppression have combined with the majority's appropriation of space to influence both students' sense of belonging and leaders' decisions regarding campus spaces. Once made, decisions may further affect belonging, ultimately enhancing or limiting a student's likelihood for equity and success.

Figure 1

A Campus Planning Decision Model Informed by Critical Theories

Critical Race Theory. Considering that 56% of students who recently attended U.S. community colleges identified as members of racial minorities (AACC, 2021), CRT offered a valuable framework for studying how college spaces affect sense of belonging. As the theory emerged from U.S. legal circles in the 1970s, scholars, leaders, and activists from other disciplines, including education, borrowed its tenets to study, explain, debate, and disrupt systems, laws, policies, and practices that have ostracized people of

color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Five core tenets of CRT have fueled progress—(a)

race is a socio-political construction; (b) racism is common and ordinary; (c) liberalism is

problematic; (d) experiential knowledge and counter-storytelling have value; and (e)

interest convergence influences progress. Additional constructs for examining race and

racism include the rejection of essentialism, the understanding of intersectionality, the

denunciation of a Black-White binary, the concept of Whiteness as property, the value of

experiential knowledge and counter-storytelling, and the commitment to challenge racism

and promote social justice. In the following sections, I have provided additional

explanation for some of these concepts and aligned them with examples from my literature review.

Race as a Socio-Political Construction. Scientists researching genetics have failed to identify significant biological differences among humans (Roberts, 2011). Nevertheless, members of the White majority in the U.S. engineered the idea of race to establish privilege and material dominance over people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Extending from slavery, racism became an institution based on shifting definitions and categories that ensured that people of color remained subjugated (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Roberts, 2011).

Racism as Common and Ordinary. Under the system of racism, people have habitually grouped each other by race, affecting everyday aspects of life—family, religion, society, culture, politics, law, and education (Roberts, 2011). Following this separation, people of color have routinely tolerated racism that includes violence as well as microaggressions, or "stunning small encounter[s] with racism" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 179), while members of the White majority have hardly noticed.

Challenging Liberalism. As proponents of liberalism, some members of the White majority have embraced colorblindness and meritocracies that reward people for ability with no consideration of other factors (Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT scholars have challenged this viewpoint as a barrier to progress, explaining that, by refusing to see color, people have essentially absolved themselves of blame for injustices resulting from racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Experiential Knowledge and Counter Storytelling. Critical race theorists have proposed cultural capital as a way for people to resist exclusion from histories recorded by the racial majority (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Recognizing inaccuracies and limited perspectives, scholars have identified experiential knowledge and counter storytelling as essential to historical revision. Similarly, pushing against a deficit view of people of color, Yosso (2005) observed a unique, but largely ignored, body of experiential knowledge associated with aspirational, familial, linguistic, social, navigational, and resistant traditions of communities of color.

Interest Convergence. Explaining that history offers examples of social progress that has served the White majority, Delgado and Stefancic warned of interest convergence, noting that "one must look to matters like profit, labor supply, international relations, and the interest of elite whites" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 25). As an example, they highlighted legal scholar Derrick Bell's claim that the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* decision was primarily motivated by a push to strengthen international diplomacy—not interest in social justice.

Additional Constructs. Several other constructs have provided more ideas for studying race and racism. Demonstrating the construct of praxis, scholars and leaders have combined theory, scholarship, and activism to disrupt racism in many forms (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). They have worked to eradicate essentialism, or the idea that all members of a group share the same thoughts and experiences. At the same time, scholars have recognized the importance of intersectionality—that is, layers of experience resulting from a person's associations with multiple groups. Additionally, CRT proponents have resisted categorization of people into either Black or White groups—a practice denying the realities of other marginalized people and limiting the potential to engage in collective activism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Price, 2010; Yosso, 2005). While recognizing that Whiteness is a fluid concept in the social construction of race, theorists have observed that White privileges have equated to life characterized by normalcy, social position, material advantage, invisibility to other Whites, and a capacity for violence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Owen, 2007).

Critical Disability Studies. To disrupt ableist systems and behaviors, social justice theorists advanced CDS ideas that have sometimes overlapped with those of racism scholars. Like CRT proponents, CDS theorists have merged scholarship and activism to focus on a lack of power experienced by people with disabilities (Devlin & Pothier, 2014). While 20% of community college students have reported disabilities (AACC, 2021), the total might have been higher if students did not tend to underreport out of fear of ableist encounters (Evans et al., 2017; Patton et al., 2016). CDS tenets include: (a) disability is a socio-political construction that is diverse, changeable, and

temporal; (b) liberalism and the medical model of disability are problematic; (c) the relationship between impairment and environment is significant and situational; and (d) the local understanding of experience is critical (Devlin & Pothier, 2014; Ellis, 2015; Evans et al., 2017; Peña et al., 2016). Additional constructs have provided frameworks for examining ableism, including a rejection of essentialism, acknowledgement of intersectionality, the concept that able-bodied people have privilege, and a belief that social justice work can dismantle ableism. In the following sections, I have further explained some of these concepts and shared examples from my literature review.

Disability as a Socio-Political Construction. Ableism has sat apart from other forms of oppression because of the large number of people worldwide who have disabilities, the wide range of characteristics that society considers disabilities, and the potential for anyone to develop a disability at any time (Bunbury, 2019). The term "disability" has been hard to define, complicating work to isolate sources of oppression and achieve social justice.

Evans et al. (2017) described ableism as systematic discrimination that applies socially constructed norms to marginalize people with disabilities. People with impairments face exclusion based on the idea that certain functions are required for what society has defined as a normal life. In response, Devlin and Pothier declared that people only experience disability when environments fail to meet their needs, arguing that

> Whether the social construct incorporates just disability or disability and
> impairment, the point is that the problem is not the person with the disability.
> Rather, it is the pervasive impact of ableist assumptions, institutions, and

structures that disadvantage persons with disabilities. (Devlin & Pothier, 2014, p.

13)

Challenging Liberalism. According to Devlin and Pothier, "the starting point for

liberalism is that disability is about misfortune or bad luck" (Devlin & Pothier, 2014, p.

10). Rooted in neoliberalism, theorists, practitioners, and members of the public ascribing

to the medical model have viewed disabilities as defects within a person, deviations from

able-bodied norms, and deficits in need of cure or rehabilitation (Patton et al., 2016; Peña

et al., 2016). Hehir explained an ableist viewpoint as follows:

From an ableist perspective, the devaluation of disability results in societal

attitudes that uncritically assert that it is better for a child to walk than roll, speak

than sign, read print than read Braille, spell independently than use a spell-check,

and hang out with nondisabled kids as opposed to other disabled kids, etc. In

short, in the eyes of many educators and society, it is preferable for disabled

students to do things in the same manner as nondisabled kids. (Hehir, 2002, p. 3)

The medical model has reinforced beliefs that people with disabilities must be dependent,

less productive, and pitiable (Bunbury, 2019; Strange, 2000), and it has limited society's

perceived responsibility for resolving isolation and discrimination that people with

disabilities experience (Ferri & Kanter, 2013). Unfortunately, Patton et al. (2016) and

Peña et al. (2016) observed that the medical model of understanding disability has

commonly surfaced in higher education.

On the other hand, CDS advocates have promoted a departure from the medical

model. Adopting a social construction or minority model, they have framed disability as a

social identity, not solely a medical characteristic (Ferri & Kanter, 2013). From the CDS

perspective, people with disabilities are not defective, but they do experience

marginalization with roots in the social forces that shape their environments.

      Impairment and the Local Environment. Environment is central to CDS

thought, as theorists have claimed that society is responsible for eliminating barriers from

spaces so that people with disabilities can thrive (Ferri & Kanter, 2013). Evans et al.

(2017) and Strange (2000) encouraged planners to exceed minimum requirements across

campus spaces, and Sánchez (2018) demonstrated the importance of introspection at the

local level. Strange warned that failure to do so could "convey powerful nonverbal

messages" that signal a lack of concern for students with accessibility needs (Strange,

2000, p. 24).

      Evans et al. (2017) explained that people with disabilities have had varied

experiences based on local conditions and the availability of community resources.

Providing advice for education practitioners, they underscored the importance of local

knowledge and experience, providing snowfall as an example of a condition that students

with disabilities might have to navigate depending on their setting. Ott (2014) observed

that technology is another aspect of campus space that can reduce or remove barriers,

stating

      The absence of or availability of a specific device can radically alter the

      environment and can consequently create or remove exclusion: a lift on the bus

      that works, a door handle with a lever arm, a captioning chip. A person in one

situation is independent and in a different environment is disabled. (Ott, 2014, p.

126)

Additional CDS Constructs. Beyond the core tenets, theorists have agreed on several constructs in their research on disability and ableism. Like critical race theorists, CDS scholars have used scholarship and activism to emancipate, engage, and empower people with disabilities (Evans et al., 2017). According to Ott, "People with disabilities experience objectification and essentialization on a daily basis, whether through being invisible to others or as a focus for staring or the aversion of a gaze" (Ott, 2014, p. 124). Disability scholars have rejected essentialism and recognized intersectionality, as students have experienced either increased power or oppression because of overlapping social identities (Couillard & Higbee, 2018; Evans et al., 2017). Finally, scholars have noted privilege among able-bodied people and corresponding reluctance on the part of some students to report impairments so they can blend in and avoid stigma and pity.

Human Geography. Finally, I have pulled my third critical theory from architecture and urban studies. From the social upheaval of the 1960s, critical architectural thought emerged in Europe and the U.S., particularly around the ideas of urbanism and the right to public space—a development relevant to college campuses and the success of students. As the decade ended, Giancarlo De Carlo (1969/2007) observed that, as architects had historically sided with those with power and resources to build, they disassociated themselves from real societal problems. De Carlo challenged traditional roles by asking who was most important—the architect, the patron, or the

people who ultimately use a space. Similarly, architect Denise Scott-Brown said that the social revolution required architecture to serve different people, writing that

> New sources are sought when the old forms go stale and the way out is not clear: then a Classical heritage, an art movement, or industrial engineers' and primitives' "architecture without architects" may help to sweep out the flowery remains of the old revolution as practiced by its originators' conservative descendants. (Scott-Brown, 1971/1998, p. 62)

Distinguishing between "planning for" and "planning with" (De Carlo, 1969/2007, p. 15), De Carlo insisted that architects not only prioritize end users but also empower them as participants. Concluding that "architecture is too important to be left to the architects" (De Carlo, 1969/2007, p. 13), he suggested that participatory planning could be a new source of creativity.

In the *Right to the City*, Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1968/2006) called for urban reform to push against old, irrelevant forms and for cities to work on behalf of inhabitants. Later, geographer and anthropologist David Harvey (2008) drew from Lefebvre's work, reporting that capitalism and neoliberalism continued to shape cities heavily. Harvey wrote, "The right to the city, as it is now constituted, is too narrowly confined, restricted in most cases to a small political and economic elite who are in a position to shape cities more and more after their own desires" (Harvey, 2008, p. 38). Lefebvre's work has supported students' "right to the campus," while Harvey advocated for limits on the influence of small, controlling groups.

In fields such as architecture and planning, HG has aligned with critical theories from the social sciences (Price, 2010). Emerging as an interdisciplinary framework in the 1970s, the theory was rooted in the ideas of Lefebvre and Harvey (Cresswell, 2015). Creswell wrote that "place does not have meanings that are natural and obvious but ones that are created by some people with more power than others to define what is and is not appropriate" (Cresswell, 2015, p. 42). Similar to CRT and CDS, HG proponents have asserted that (a) place is a socio-political construction that perpetuates inequities among people; (b) liberalism is problematic; (c) counter story-telling has transformative potential; and (d) scholarship should promote social justice by transforming opinions and behaviors through praxis (Blomley, 2006; Price, 2010).

Place as a Socio-Political Construction. HG has focused on the concept of place as a way for humans to understand the world (Cresswell, 2015). While people have used the terms "space" and "place" interchangeably, places—whether real or fictional, static or mobile, physical or virtual—are locations to which people have assigned meaning, whereas space is relatively void of human meaning. To build a sense of permanence, people have created places by naming spaces, arranging furniture, growing gardens, enlarging buildings, hanging posters, flying flags, painting graffiti, and influencing others to maintain their property. Materials, social activities, and their relevance to humans have characterized places. Diverse groups have valued—or failed to value—the same place differently. Furthermore, while people have humanized locations by thinking of them as places, they have also excluded people from places they claimed for themselves, dictating who appears in a place or landscape and who does not (Price, 2010).

Challenging Liberalism. Cresswell (2015) described globalism as an enemy to HG thought. If people have used place-making to give meaning to local spaces, globalism—fueled by liberalism—has done the opposite by homogenizing places. Decades ago, Klauder and Wise (1929) observed the threat that homogenizing effects of capitalism and globalism posed to U.S. campuses, writing:

> A criticism justly made of us as a nation by foreigners is the uniformity which
> oppresses them here. This fault is probably due to the centralized control of our
> country, the easy and rapid means of travel and communication and the
> dissemination of news, advertising and other propaganda, the organization of
> industry on the basis of quantity production and selling, with the concomitant

chain store, the chain hotel, the chain restaurant and the chain bank, threatening in

time to make of us all a chain gang. It is not to be supposed that our colleges and

universities will capitulate entirely to the psychological habits of unthinking

imitation which leads to this monotonous uniformity touching all of our lives at

numerous points and presenting a real intellectual and aesthetic danger. It is rather

to be believed that institutions of learning will cherish the influences which are

realized to be distinguishing to each and will so foster them as to insure a

vivifying diversity. (Klauder & Wise, 1929, p. 17)

Cresswell pointed out that a constant tension exists between the potential for places to

compete globally and the desire for places to retain local meaning. Price (2010) suggested

that critical geographers might borrow ideas from other theories—such as counter

storytelling from CRT—to preserve a sense of place.

Theory in Action

Through my literature review, I sought prior studies that related to my topic and

linked to concepts from my chosen theoretical framework. In this section, I have

provided an inventory of relevant research from which I drew lessons to support and

strengthen my own work.

Applying CRT, Muñoz (2009) denied the racial neutrality of campuses and

claimed that schools have organized spaces and filled campuses with artifacts that

preserve the culture of the White majority. At the same time, he found gaps in

scholarship relating to campus spaces across all sectors of higher education and indicated

a need for additional inquiry. Muñoz's observation held up in my research as well. Most

of the literature I discovered was either set at four-year colleges and universities or applied to all of higher education. I found few instances of studies that focused particularly on community colleges and the experiences of their students.

Yosso et al. (2009) studied the effects of campus climate, including physical spaces, on Latino students attending predominately White universities. Their findings indicated that students experienced increased levels of stress, decreased energy and enthusiasm, and a lack of understanding from White students as they felt overwhelmed by the dominant narratives permeating their campuses. In line with CRT and CHG constructs, which offer counter narrative as a form of resistance, some students in this study tolerated their situations by drawing on personal cultural capital to create spaces where they could retreat from the Whiteness of their campuses. In addition to supporting the idea that campus space can limit student sense of belonging, the authors concluded a need for further research to consider students attending community colleges.

Viewing the academic library as a microcosm of the larger institution, Brook et al. (2015) tackled White narratives and behaviors embedded in campus settings where I worked for nearly two decades. Drawing on critical theories on both race and geography, the authors explained the heavy Western influence on library space—for example, the Mount Holyoke College reading room modeled on spaces associated with the British parliament—as well as behaviors related to space, including staff oversight of libraries and policies to maintain quiet, a feature of White culture. Brook et al. not only exposed specific examples of how campus spaces can limit inclusion and student sense of belonging, but they challenged my positionality as a researcher and former librarian, too.

With a focus on PWIs, Woldoff et al. (2011) compared the experiences of two groups of Black students—those coming from rural areas and those who grew up in urban communities. The researchers found that students from rural areas were more accustomed to White culture as they began at their PWIs, highlighting intersectionality as a factor in student experiences and outcomes. The study also raised the point that wider communities in which their campuses are situated have shaped students' experiences—a factor that could especially affect residential students' sense of belonging.

Highlighting consequences of ableist culture, Sánchez (2018) engaged college composition students in mapping and research activities that required them to examine access for people with disabilities on campus. To teach students about the social construction of disability, Sánchez asked students to map campus spaces they frequently used twice—both before and after learning about a specific impairment. Sánchez found differences in the pairs of maps, including maps created by students who revealed disabilities during the assignment. This study highlighted privilege among students without disabilities and demonstrated that the needs of students with disabilities can be concealed.

The most relevant study to surface in my literature was also one of the most recent. Pérez (2020) applied CRT as well as participatory, action research methods to examine experiences of Portland Community College students who worked as co-researchers. Highlighting colorblindness, Pérez and her team found that some White college employees were unaware that people from different backgrounds experienced campus spaces differently. Some employees expressed frustration in the absence of clear

guidelines for creating inclusive spaces—a "one-size-fits-all" approach reminiscent of the colorblindness associated with the tenet of liberalism. Pérez influenced my use of participation models as well. Through her research, I saw value in students' participation in critical interrogation of space as well as in the revelations that emerged from their work. At the same time, through space-reading exercises, Pérez offered ways for students not yet initiated to planning to influence spatial organization in powerful ways.

Two Models of Participation

Pérez (2020) encountered criticism from community college employees who claimed CRT was difficult to understand, negative, or exclusive—some wanted a non-theoretical set of planning standards while others expressed concerns about groups of students who have faced oppression for reasons other than race. In the absence of standards and in the service of diverse populations of students, I contend that increased participation is an approach that could lead to more inclusive spaces and increased sense of belonging for students. Focusing on community participation in planning, architecture scholar Sanoff (2000) wrote that

> Public participation can rarely involve the general public, but the general public should be informed about an issue so that people can decide whether to participate. However, those who are most affected by a decision should have the greatest voice in that decision. People should be informed about the consequences of not participating. They should also know how to participate if they wish to do so, and all viewpoints and interest groups within the community should be sought out. (Sanoff, 2000, p. 18).

In addition to critical theories, I have considered two models of community-based participation that offer inclusive, anti-deficit strategies to disrupt unequitable power structures and overrepresentation of majority narratives on campuses.

While advanced decades apart, both Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969/2019) and Sturm's concepts of Full Participation and Institutional Citizenship (Sturm, 2007; Sturm et al., 2011) can help colleges assess participation in campus planning. I was taking a course in architectural history and theory when I first encountered the work of Sherry Arnstein, an influential public policy analyst and strategist who worked to improve hospitals, housing, schools, and general conditions for people oppressed by racism and poverty (American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine, n.d.). In 2020, I first learned about the work of Susan Sturm, a professor of law and social responsibility at Columbia School of Law (Columbia School of Law, n.d.), as I attended a research conference organized around the theme of "Advancing Full Participation" (Association for the Study of Higher Education, n.d.). I mentioned these first encounters because our best remedies for reducing exclusion and improving lives may very well emerge from cooperation among professions and fields of research. While Arnstein and Sturm produced their work years apart and from different disciplinary perspectives, both offered models that could lead to more inclusive spatial organization.

Arnstein's Model. With the "Ladder of Citizen Participation," Arnstein

(1969/2019) introduced a hierarchy to assess public involvement in planning initiatives.

Rationalizing the need for robust citizen engagement, she wrote:

> The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it
>
> in principle because it is good for you. Participation of the governed in their
>
> government is, in theory, the cornerstone of democracy—a revered idea that is
>
> vigorously applauded by virtually everyone. The applause is reduced to polite
>
> handclaps, however, when this principle is advocated by the have-not blacks,
>
> Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Indians, Eskimos, and whites. And when the
>
> have-nots define participation as redistribution of power, the American consensus
>
> on the fundamental principle explodes into many shades of outright racial, ethnic,
>
> ideological, and political opposition. (Arnstein, 1969/2019, p. 24)

Arnstein (1969/2019) modeled community engagement on three levels that

ranged from exclusive to inclusive—non-participation, tokenism, and citizen power.

Manipulation and therapy fall in the non-participation category while informing,

consulting, and placating are behaviors associated with tokenism. In these lower levels,

those in charge might meet with stakeholders to inform or gather opinions, but they do

not actually hand off decision-making power. Instead, power holders retain the right to

final judgements, drive their own agenda, and effectively maintain the status quo. At the

top of the ladder, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control present the most

legitimate opportunities for community engagement where the power to negotiate and

make decisions is either shared or relinquished. Arnstein defined "citizen control" as "the

redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future" (Arnstein, 1969/2019, p. 24).

While Arnstein (1969/2019) offered her model as a simple measuring stick for public involvement across many disciplines, including education and planning, she recognized its shortcomings, including potential for those in power to manipulate the model for their own purposes. She admitted that the model did not account for systems of oppression that have historically limited participation or for the controlling group's resistance. Additionally, her model neither reflected deep mistrust that grassroots participants might have for the process nor addressed knowledge gaps that might limit engagement. Nevertheless, when combined with critical theories that do account for these limitations, I have proposed that the Ladder of Citizen Participation could be a viable tool for scrutinizing student involvement in campus spatial development while also serving as an approximate measure of sense of belonging.

Full Participation and Institutional Citizenship. The Ladder of Citizen Participation has provided a tool to assess participation in specific projects (Arnstein, 1969/2019), but aligning with Arnstein's highest levels of participation, Sturm (2007) championed ideas with implications for transforming institutional culture to affect many levels of decision making. Sturm has focused on institutional citizenship—a state where all people, regardless of identity or background, can reach their potential as full participants, sharing both the responsibilities and benefits associated with community membership. She claimed that attainment of institutional citizenship is a transformative

process that requires critical scrutiny to identify and remove barriers to full participation, and she recognized clear links between this idea and student sense of belonging.

Sturm et al. (2011) asserted that the potential for full participation is rooted in values and culture and, therefore, institutions must scrutinize decisions, norms, and structures to create conditions for people to flourish. Sturm and her associates advocated for institutions to cultivate shared mindfulness about inclusion that considers the "who," "what," "where," "when," and "how" of organizational change.

Considering my focus on campus spaces, Sturm's use of an architectural metaphor to describe full participation interested me. She wrote, "An architectural approach is essential for constructing the conditions and practices enabling institutional mindfulness—careful attention to decisions that accumulate to determine whether women and men of all races will have the opportunity to succeed and advance" (Sturm, 2007, p. 412). More recently, Sturm (2012) noted literal potential for projects in architecture to engage and empower people as full and equal participants. In work defined by the group, members can produce narratives rooted in their communities' cultural knowledge, culminating in connections to stakeholder identities and promotion of individual success. Sturm recognized that "As place-based institutions, colleges and universities can leverage significant social, economic, and cultural capital to improve access and success for underresourced groups" (Sturm, 2012, p. 1).

Summary

Throughout my literature review, I found multiple sources that confirmed that research on campus spatial development, especially in a community college setting, was

ripe for interdisciplinary study. Author after author expressed potential for scholars to unite in their social justice pursuits (Blomley, 2006; Creswell, 2015; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Price, 2010). On the subject of cities, David Harvey indicated a lack of cooperation between academics and professionals who have largely stayed within their silos, but he stressed the value of interdisciplinary cooperation when he wrote that

> Any general theory of the city must somehow relate the social processes in the city to the spatial form which the city assumes. In disciplinary terms, this amounts to integrating two important research and educational traditions—I shall call it building a bridge between those possessed of the sociological imagination and those imbued with a spatial consciousness or a geographical imagination. (Harvey, 2009, p. 23)

Just as opportunity exists for theorists to unite around research on the city, it exists for those aspiring to improve student engagement while planning college campuses. When perspectives converge, both scholarship and campus spaces can become more inclusive.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

In Chapter 3, I explained the study I designed to learn about actions diversity-focused community colleges have taken to increase student belongingness while building or updating campus spaces. Selecting the Critical Qualitative Inquiry methodology to discover who has power in planning decisions, I identified institutions and planned interviews with executive leaders where questions centered on recent student-facing projects. Additionally, I have described my plan to analyze data using the Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969/2019) as a guide.

Problem

While community colleges have earned praise for extending accessible and affordable learning opportunities that attract diverse groups of students, they have drawn criticism for underwhelming student success. In response, colleges have applied a variety of strategies to build retention, course success, and program completion. However, as community colleges work to close the gaps between two-year and four-year student success rates, they must also take a deep look at the systems, structures, policies, and practices that affect their students' outcomes.

A community college's sub-systems include many functional units—academics, continuing education, student intake and support services, financial services, administration, human resources, the physical plant, and more. Similar to organs in the human body, these departments keep processes moving. However, I would argue that the physical campus is the part of the college that functions most like the human body's largest organ—the skin (U.S. National Library of Medicine, n.d.). While skin has been a

natural barrier to external elements that threaten our internal systems, our human-engineered campuses might be repelling students that some members of the majority have not historically considered rightful recipients of educational opportunity. If community colleges intend to attract and keep students, they must ensure that students are not colliding with spaces programmed to shut them out.

Purpose

Through my literature review, I uncovered numerous examples of how students have tolerated contested spaces and artifacts that have limited their sense of belonging while reinforcing power structures that perpetuate forms of oppression, including racism and ableism. Nevertheless, I have found few examples of community colleges that have incorporated this idea into campus planning. For this project, I developed a study to investigate this gap in the literature and set out to learn if, in fact, there are college leaders who are aware of and responding to this problem effectively.

Research Questions

I was guided by the following questions as I selected an overarching research methodology and specific methods for my study design:

- How are community colleges developing campus spaces to promote students' sense of belonging?

- How have colleges' efforts to build, upgrade, or maintain campus spaces aligned with levels on the Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969/2009)?

Delimitations

  The topic of campus development is ripe for inquiry that is both deep and wide, but I intentionally limited this particular research to the effects of power-laden physical spaces on community college students, their sense of belonging, and their academic success. While important, I have not used my research to address questions related to encounters that employees and other stakeholders have with campus spaces. Nor have I broached the topic of digital environments—academic spaces which are also contested.

  Additionally, I have not tried to produce a universal checklist of solutions for project leaders. In fact, my research suggested that guidelines would be counter-productive, since the point of my work is to advocate full participation on the part of a diverse group of people. There are no perfectly inclusive solutions as needs are based on both place and time. A checklist could not address the needs of a wide range of people, especially as situations change constantly. Similar to colleges' efforts to assess and respond to their communities' specific workforce needs, participation in spatial planning is inherently local and continuous and, therefore, not supported by prescriptive standards.

Methodology

  For my research, I chose Critical Qualitative Inquiry as my methodology. Every campus project has reflected the needs, wishes, and actions of some powerful group in a particular place and time. I needed a qualitative approach that could help me understand what community colleges have done to develop campuses that promote student sense of belonging. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016),

Critical research focuses less on individuals than on context. Critical educational

research, for example, queries the context where learning takes place, including

the larger systems of society, the culture and institutions that shape educational

practice, the structural and historical conditions framing practice. Questions are

asked regarding whose interests are being served by the way the educational

system is organized, who really has access to particular programs, who has the

power to make changes, and what outcomes are produced by the way in which

education is structured. Thus, critical qualitative research raises questions about

how power relations advance the interests of one group while oppressing those of

other groups, and the nature of truth and the construction of knowledge. (Merriam

& Tisdell, 2016, p. 61)

Hence, this methodology suited a study that examined the implications of power—or the

absence of power—across structures, landscapes, and artifacts.

Participants

As I worked to understand how campus spatial development might promote

student sense of belonging, I focused on leading U.S. community colleges. Since 2012,

the publication *INSIGHT Into Diversity* has presented the Higher Education Excellence in

Diversity (HEED) Award annually to groups of accredited higher education institutions

that demonstrate outstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion (*INSIGHT into

Diversity*, n.d.). The award presented an opportunity to pinpoint schools that consider

diversity, equity, and inclusion as they set goals for continuous improvement. To separate

community colleges from the rest of the field, I used the College Navigator database

(NCES, 2019) to determine which award winners primarily granted the associate's degree. I removed two community college districts from my list of participants because I could not associate the award with an individual institution. In the end, 27 institutions met my criteria.

It is important to note that, while institutions that applied for HEED Awards initially self-identified as diversity champions, there is little in the application process to identify promising strategies for inclusive campus development. *INSIGHT Into Diversity* (n.d.) posted a sample application for institutions seeking awards in 2021. I studied the form to determine whether applicants might have already responded to questions about campus spatial development in the award process. The application included 58 questions covering general information about the institution, student demographics, administrator and faculty demographics, student recruitment and retention, faculty recruitment and retention, leadership and accountability, branding and communication, and the role of the chief diversity officer. I found a question about the existence of a "committee to address possible historical ties your institution may have to past injustices (building names, statues, etc.)" (*INSIGHT Into Diversity*, n.d.). Another question asked about the presence of a Diversity Office as well as offices dedicated to international, veterans, LGBTQ, religious, or multicultural affairs. Specific questions about the availability of gender-neutral restrooms, designated spaces for prayer, wheelchair access, and the availability of elevators addressed a few spatial issues. Beyond these examples, however, I found little evidence of inquiry about campus spatial development in the HEED Award process.

Setting

Further exploration of the College Navigator database (NCES, 2019) revealed that the selected colleges have served a variety of communities across the continental U.S. Florida was home to four schools; Arizona, California, Illinois, Maryland, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas had two colleges; and Alabama, Colorado, Connecticut, Michigan, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin had one college (NCES, 2019). Seventeen schools were in cities (eight large, four mid-sized, five small); seven were in suburban areas (six large, one mid-sized); and three operated in rural areas. Undergraduate enrollment from 2019-2020 ranged from 3,083 to 56,151, with an average of 17,140 and a median of 12,503. The three smallest schools each enrolled less than 5,000 students, and the three largest enrolled more than 50,000. Additionally, enrollment did not always align with setting; for example, some city and suburban colleges had fewer students than rural counterparts, and the college with the second highest enrollment operated in a large suburban area, not a city.

Methods

After identifying participants, I planned processes to determine what these diversity-focused colleges might be doing to increase student belonging and participation in terms of campus spatial development. I landed on two methods to gather information. First, I developed a brief online questionnaire that I sent by email to facilities managers. The questionnaire's purpose was to verify that a college had, in fact, completed a major, student-facing project—new construction, building renovation, or landscape changes—in the last five years (i.e., since 2016).

Seven of 26 facilities managers responded to my request to complete an online questionnaire. From these responses, I concluded that all seven institutions met my criteria because they had completed a significant construction, renovation, or landscaping project to serve students in the last five years. As facilities managers affirmed that their institutions had completed projects that matched my criteria, they shared contact information for presidents and vice presidents as well.

Next, I requested online interviews with either the college president or the vice president responsible for capital projects at each school. Leaders at four of the seven colleges agreed to participate in online interviews. Two leaders were college presidents, and one was a vice president with oversight for facilities. A fourth college referred me to a senior leader responsible for institutional advancement for information on their campus project. Three of my interviewees were with men. While I did not ask this question directly, I determined that at least one of the leaders identified as non-White based on a biography on their college's website. Two of the four participants were not yet employed at their colleges when the most recent projects were finished.

I used the Zoom webinar platform to lead semi-structured interviews, which ranged in length from 13 to 40 minutes. Zoom allowed me to record and transcribe each interview and to learn about the stories and experiences of the leaders. Their words provided source material for fact-checking and analysis.

The leaders described their institutions' work on campus projects that included a new college center designed to bring educational opportunities to an underserved neighborhood in an urban area, a science building renovation, a new student center, and a

streambank stabilization project that included landscaping for a walking trail.

Geographically, the responding leaders were from institutions scattered across the

continental U.S.—two were in different states in the Southeast, one was in the Midwest,

and one was in the Southwest (NCES, 2022). One college was in a large city; two were in

small cities; and one served a rural area. NCES data sets indicated that enrollment at the

four institutions ranged from approximately 4,300 up to 16,300 students in fall 2020.

Two of the four colleges served populations where the majority of students identified as

people of color.

Data Collection

I designed data collection processes to explore themes related to the experiences

of leaders at colleges that have completed recent, student-facing projects.

Expert Review of the Process

As guided by Glesne (2016), I needed to ensure that my research design would

make sense to participants before launching my official data collection. While my

employing institution was among the 27 community college HEED Award winners

identified for the study, I chose to exclude the college and use it to trial my research

methods instead, seizing an opportunity to evaluate and practice each step of my process.

I anticipated that early feedback from administrators at my home institution would lead to

clearer instructions and increased fairness, depth, and breadth of interview questions. By

isolating my employer from the larger participant group, I sought to develop a more

effective inquiry while also reducing partiality based on bias, incorrect conclusions, and

conflicts of interest. The college's director of facilities provided feedback on the

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questionnaire that I intended to send to people in similar roles at other award-winning colleges (S. Wilbanks, personal communication, August 2, 2021). Based on the director's comments, I replaced the term "major campus project" with "major capital improvement project." Additionally, based on feedback that facilities managers may be more focused on building specifications than on goals for the project, I added an "Unsure" option to the list of possible goals that a college might set for a project. Similarly, I met with the college's vice president who oversaw facilities and capital projects (J. Dimaggio, personal communication, August 3, 2021). In addition to the interview questions that I proposed, the vice president suggested that I add a question about barriers that colleges and administrators might have regarding working with students. Another suggestion was to consider how the schools used student input or complaints to shape their project.

Preliminary Questionnaire

After gathering procedural feedback from colleagues at my home institution, I emailed facilities managers at the 26 remaining schools to ask for help with my research. My email included a link to an online questionnaire that asked managers to report on a campus project completed in the last five years—a new build, renovation, or large landscape project. I asked that the space be a long-term addition or improvement that students see and use regularly and that required government approval and significant resources. Specifically, I requested the project name, a brief description including primary purpose(s) and stakeholders, estimated budget, and completion date. I also asked the managers to check 13 possible goals that might have driven their project, including an open-ended "Other" question. Finally, I asked for contact details for the college president

and the vice president charged with facilities oversight. Seven facilities managers completed the questionnaire and confirmed that their colleges had completed a student-facing campus project that met my criteria in the last five years.

I mainly used online questionnaires from facilities managers to identify those HEED award-winning community colleges that had recently completed a major campus project and to collect contact information for senior leaders. However, responses from the facilities managers allowed me to learn basic information about projects, including project scope, completion dates, and estimated cost, before I interviewed leaders.

Leader Interviews

For my second data collection step, I aimed to interview either the president or vice president at each college where a facilities manager had returned a questionnaire and reported that their college had completed a major, student-facing project since 2016. Using contact information collected from the facilities managers, I emailed each leader to request an online interview. Senior leaders at four of the seven institutions agreed to participate in a virtual interview, including two presidents, a vice president for finance, and an executive director for institutional advancement who was referred to me by the institution's vice president for finance.

My interview objectives were to gain a deeper understanding of (a) each college's recent approaches to organizing spaces that align with their diversity, equity, and inclusion goals; (b) their efforts to involve students in the development of campus space; and (c) their lessons from recent projects. I designed a semi-structured interview format to collect this information. After asking each interviewee to describe the project put

forward by their school's facilities manager, I asked about (a) diversity, inclusion, or equity goals tied to the project; (b) the project team; (c) student involvement; (d) project successes and failures; (e) unexpected outcomes; and (f) approaches for future projects. After each interview, I reviewed the recording and edited Zoom's speech-to-text transcript to remove inaccuracies caused by speech patterns, dialects, etc.

My interviews with college leaders comprised my primary data set. Using a semi-structured interview format, I asked each leader to begin with a description of their college's recent project, including an explanation of what led the school to develop the space and the groups for which it was designed. In ensuing questions, I asked about project team composition; ways in which the college involved students; diversity, equity, or inclusion aspirations or concerns tied to this project; overall project outcomes; and the leaders' ideas about future approaches to developing campus projects. For the two leaders who were not yet working at their college when the school's project was completed, I asked for basic overviews; however, wishing to eliminate the need for the leaders to share second-hand information, I generally steered questions toward project outcomes that are currently known and the leaders' thoughts on future projects. Interview length ranged from just over 13 minutes to 40 minutes. Within a week of each interview session, I followed up with leaders to share unedited, full-length recordings and transcripts and asked them to notify me of inaccuracies.

Data Analysis

After completing all four interviews, I conducted two cycles of manual coding to analyze interview transcripts. With guidance from Saldaña (2016), I set out to analyze

responses as consistently as possible. For both coding exercises, my deep reading of

interview transcriptions led me to identify common words and themes, which I organized

into categories, subcategories, and codes.

While I previously discussed the Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein,

1969/2019) as a theoretical framework, the model provided an analytical tool as well.

Before collecting data, I decided to assess each college's efforts to involve students by

aligning their strategies to three levels, or "rungs," and eight types of participation

comprising the ladder—non-participation (manipulation and therapy), tokenism

(informing, consultation, and placation), and citizen control (partnership, delegation, and

citizen control). Before conducting interviews, I created a table to match practices I

anticipated hearing to each rung and level (see Appendix A). For example, I associated

the practice of merely displaying project plans in the non-participation level. If a college

held a single student focus group to inform a project, but did not continuously involve

students in project negotiations, I categorized this activity as tokenism—the middle level

of participation. In this case, college leaders consulted students, but the students did not

gain the same level of control as more powerful individuals guiding the project. At the

highest level of participation, I determined that institutions might compensate student

volunteers from underrepresented groups as equal members of a project's planning

committee. After I completed the interviews, the ladder was a useful way to organize

practices discussed by leaders and a tool for approximating the levels of belongingness

experienced by students. As I engaged in my first round of coding, I aligned leaders'

statements with a priori codes that I developed in advance, and I looked for instances where schools engaged students at various points on the ladder.

In my second round of coding, I used a more inductive approach. This time, I searched for emerging codes that suggested patterns of attitudes and behaviors among college leaders involved in campus spatial development. Keywords, phrases, and passages related to control/power; diversity, equity, and inclusion; barriers to student participation; and project outcomes emerged from the interview transcripts. From this work, I developed a code list in which I organized ideas into a series of thematic categories and subcategories.

Strategies for Trustworthiness

For this study, I used four strategies to reach trustworthy conclusions. My intentional selection of participants, preliminary expert review process, use of recordings and member checking, and pre-determination of coding categories contributed to more reliable results.

Selection of Participants

INSIGHT Into Diversity (n.d.) accepts applications from institutions that present themselves as champions of diversity and inclusion as they vie to win the HEED Award. By applying for the award, my institutional participants documented their interests in recognition as champions of diversity and inclusion in the higher education sector. Based on a sample application provided by the magazine, winning institutions have completed an extensive application of nearly 60 questions. Additionally, since the selection committee scored each application using a two-part review process, considering both

quantitative and qualitative responses, I concluded that colleges in my study stood up to appropriate and systematic scrutiny.

Expert Review of the Process

Secondly, my decision to engage expert colleagues at my own institution allowed me to test my assumptions, processes, and interview questions on administrators who could provide early feedback on fairness and understanding. By conducting this review, I isolated my college from the larger participant group and recused myself from evaluating an institution to which I was closely connected. As a result, I avoided conflicts of interest and reduced my risk of drawing biased or incorrect conclusions.

Recordings and Member Checking

The Zoom online meeting platform provided a third way to build integrity into my study. With permission to record each session, I used Zoom to create MP4 video files and separate transcript files that I could edit for accuracy. I followed up with each interviewee, sharing the recording and the full text of the transcript. This was an opportunity to employ member-checking—a strategy in which the qualitative researcher seeks affirmation of accuracy and understanding from study participants (Glesne, 2016; Saldaña, 2016).

Predetermined Coding Classification

Finally, before contacting participants and collecting data, I used the Ladder of Participation to anticipate where various approaches to involving students in campus development might land among the three levels and eight types of participation modelled by Arnstein (1969/2019). By establishing guidelines for sorting coded keywords and

phrases in advance, I could resist temptations to put more or less emphasis on a particular

college's approaches to campus spatial development.

Conclusion

Following a Critical Qualitative Inquiry methodology, I set out to understand the

distribution of decision-making power as community colleges planned their most recent

campus spaces. By interviewing leaders at schools already recognized nationally as

diversity and inclusion champions, I aimed to learn what strategies might increase

inclusion and, consequently, student sense of belonging.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

My literature review revealed that institutions of higher education have historically developed campuses with features that can impact a student's sense of belonging. In some cases, students could associate campus spaces with acts of discrimination that occurred on school grounds. In other instances, students have tolerated symbols that reinforced the power of majority groups. Community colleges have been part of this tradition. Hence, I designed my study of award-winning community colleges—celebrated for diverse, equitable, and inclusive practices—to learn about strategies that schools might adopt to promote student belongingness while developing campus spaces.

Chapter IV contains findings that emerged from my critical inquiry of the following research questions:

- How are community colleges developing physical campuses to foster belongingness among students?

- How do college's efforts to build, improve, or maintain campus spaces align with Ladder of Citizen Participation levels (Arnstein, 1969/2009)?

Findings

My interviews with leaders revealed how four community colleges that won the HEED Award from *INSIGHT Into Diversity* magazine have involved students in recent campus projects. My findings aligned with three major themes. First, a theme of moderation emerged as each leader's description of student engagement in the planning

process aligned with middle levels of Arnstein's (1969/2019) Ladder of Citizen Participation. In my second round of analysis, I focused on the interplay of people, processes, and practicalities in more detail. From this work, leadership turnover stood out as another important theme. The third major idea to result from my research related to who is at the table when campus projects are planned.

Middle of the Ladder

Arnstein's (1969/2019) Ladder of Citizen Participation provided a framework for considering campus development practices that either limited or promoted participation by students, particularly students from groups who have historically held less power. Looking across Arnstein's three major categories (i.e., non-participation, tokenism, and citizen control), I noted that all four colleges followed practices associated with the middle. In the following sections, I have described how practices aligned across the three levels, starting with the most common.

Middle Rungs. Arnstein (1969/2019) grouped informing, consultation, and placation in the middle of the ladder. These approaches would be more inclusive than those at the non-participation level, as they would give students some part to play in campus development processes. Nevertheless, they could also lack significant two-way communication, and the leaders who follow these practices would not give up control over key decisions.

Before starting my data collection, I listed strategies that would exemplify tokenism, including:

- Sharing plans publicly, but offering limited opportunities for input

- Using one-way communication for project updates (ex. websites, press releases)

- Holding student focus groups or town hall events

- Surveying students about needs or preferences

- Asking students to vote on project elements

- Incorporating student-selected artifacts to represent students

- Hosting student competitions (ex. art) judged by college or community leaders or other students

- Adding hand-picked students to design teams (ex. student government leaders)

- Inviting students to project events (ex. groundbreaking ceremonies, openings)

In the interviews, I heard about some practices that were non-participatory as well as some that were more inclusive, but the middle rung was the norm. Leaders mostly shared examples of student participation that aligned with the middle sections of the ladder, particularly consultation and placation.

When I asked college leaders what they would like to do as they develop future campus projects, all expressed expectations of involving students as consultants. Indigo Community College's leader explained that they would want to host design charettes and "account for all students," but the leader also stressed the importance of hearing from students who have been less engaged—not just those who have been active on campus. Crimson Community College's leader described the need for institutions to engage students in the design phase, stating "that's got to be a ground roots effort." While acknowledging the benefits of involving faculty, the leader said that "students—both past [and] present—are equally, if not the most important stakeholders."

One leader described the inclusion of students in open listening sessions facilitated by architects for a new center that Emerald Community College built for residents of an under-served urban area. The college particularly wanted feedback from current and prospective students who lived near the building site. The leader from Emerald noted that their practice of holding architect-led sessions had been more inclusive as the sessions had limited potential for college leaders to steer the conversation, stating "it was always helpful to have people that were kind of hands off just leading the discussion."

Leaders of both Crimson and Indigo Community Colleges acknowledged the potential to engage more students through online meetings, particularly non-traditional students who would have difficulty attending campus events. At the same time, Crimson's leader insisted that online meetings should not replace other forms of communication, noting

> We're able to engage and utilize tools digitally … [tools] that make collaboration efficient and effective, and I've participated in sessions like that myself, but there's also … many things that cannot be duplicated in a virtual world. … some students, especially minority students, might not be comfortable in a virtual environment. So, it's important … to provide opportunities to participate in the process face-to-face as well. … Those should be done in person as well, because again, there's an equity lens that needs to be applied to our work and that equity lens needs to acknowledge that certain cultures—certain student populations—

just are more comfortable in person. So, we might not get the best end-result if we're not offering the ability for students to engage both virtually and in person.

Demonstrating Arnstein's (1969/2019) placation level, two leaders shared stories of how students played stronger roles in their schools' campus projects. The leader of Amber Community College described how a group of health and physical science students became involved in the school's streambank restoration as part of a club project to promote exercise. Club members wanted safe places for students to exercise and experience nature. The leader described their participation as follows:

Now, I guess you would call students being involved—not directly involved, but indirectly they were—because they had made the proposal of building the walking trail through there. That was always part of the plan. We would show that walking trail and talk about whether that would create any problems with the project. So, the architects and engineers worked it out so that we could have that space for students and move forward with that proposal. … They were on the design team indirectly because they had put forth the drawings for the walking trail, the location, how it would need to have crushed gravel … to make it conducive for students to access and walk through. Their designs were definitely incorporated into the overall remediation project.

Describing another student-centered project, Emerald Community College's leader explained the commission and design of a bronze sculpture "to make sure that our students felt a part of the facility." The sculpture, which was located on the grounds of the school's new center, depicted two students—a Black woman and a White man. The

woman was standing and moving forward while grasping the hand of the man to pull him up from a seated position. In the Zoom interview, the leader shared a program from a dedication ceremony that described symbols and features the artist incorporated into the piece after receiving student feedback. The leader described how students were involved in the process, as follows:

> So, we would take some design work to them from the artist. He would do a drawing, and they'd be like "man, that person's too old" … "that doesn't look like us." So, we went into classrooms and actually asked the faculty to survey their students, and that's how we honed in on the look of the sculpture. … The hand grasp is strength and respect. We were trying to show the things that we would expect of our students who attend there, but we also took the lead from them as we designed it, which was kind of a cool process.

The leader said the figures depicted in sculpture were not models; instead, their appearances represented a combination of features students felt were important. Project leaders were intentional about gathering feedback from students in a variety of classes and disciplines, especially ones most likely to be offered in the new center. While Emerald Community College involved students to some degree in the planning of the actual building, the project team did not engage students as much as they would have liked. The sculpture, therefore, was a positive way to help rectify the situation.

Lower Rungs. Arnstein (1969/2019) placed manipulation and therapy at the non-participation level. Before conducting interviews, I equated these behaviors with actions such as failure to involve students, decisions based on assumptions about what students

would want or how they would wish to be represented, and accessibility decisions that did not truly consider the needs of students with disabilities. My interviews revealed little evidence of community colleges completely failing to engage students in some way, but I encountered two related instances.

As the leader of Amber Community College described work to reinforce banks of a stream that flowed across campus, they indicated that students were not included on the project team because "any misstep could have jeopardized the water control, which would have been a nightmare for us if that had occurred." The leader said the project's highly technical nature meant that even employees serving on the design team had less decision-making authority than usual and the roles of college employees were limited to supporting third-party experts who would ultimately ensure the integrity of the work. College leaders relinquished their authority, but for this project, they transferred power to environmental experts—not students or other stakeholders.

Another leader was not employed at Indigo Community College when a new Student Center was built, but when they did join the college, they inherited problems resulting from access barriers for people with disabilities, unexpected traffic flow, and underutilization of student spaces that have followed the building's completion. Noting that "spending construction dollars is a lot easier than trying to go back and retrofit or refurb," the leader has wondered "How come this wasn't this addressed during the construction phase?" While the leader could not provide specific details about student involvement in the project's planning, they noted that a previous facilities director's

tendency to comply with—not exceed—minimum accessibility standards and a lack of foresight from another project leader might have contributed to ongoing problems.

Nearing the Top. At the most inclusive end of the ladder, Arnstein (1969/2019) characterized citizen control by partnership, delegation, and even complete transfer of power to stakeholders. At a minimum, leaders promoting citizen control would share decision-making authority equally, and they might even relinquish all authority. Prior to data collection, I considered behaviors that would align with citizen control, including allowing students to self-select for a project team, compensating students for time and expertise, training students to serve on a design team, or giving students authority to lead parts of a project. While the leader interviews revealed examples of projects where students influenced—even strongly influenced—design choices, none of the participating leaders described times when their colleges fully crossed into citizen control with students gaining equal or greater decision-making power.

Leadership Transitions

As I was still scheduling interviews with participants, I saw a second theme of leadership transition beginning to emerge. As we corresponded, I learned that only one of the four college leaders that I initially contacted had first-hand, start-to-finish knowledge of their school's most recent campus project. Within the last five years—a requirement I had set for the projects in my study design—one person joined their college in the middle of the school's project. Two others were hired after projects were completed, and one of these leaders described changes in four other senior positions as well, including the presidency.

At first, turnover at three of the four participating colleges seemed to impede my research, but on deeper reflection, I determined that leadership change was highly relevant to how schools approach project planning. Despite some concerns expressed by the leaders in new positions, I encouraged them to participate, assuring them that they would have valuable information to offer during the interviews. The leader who assumed their role mid-project suggested that I invite a peer with more knowledge of the project's history to join our interview session, but on the day of the meeting, only the longer-serving leader could attend. In the end, I heard from two leaders who engaged in their projects from the start and two leaders who, having arrived after completion, were uncertain about procedural details. As leaders in new positions at Crimson and Indigo Community Colleges described their school's building projects, I asked them to focus on project outcomes and how they would like future initiatives to involve students.

The Indigo leader described several negative outcomes that followed the completion of their building project—accessibility issues linked to the college's adherence to minimum compliance standards, underutilization of spaces by students, and students asking for changes to the finished building. As the leader discussed ongoing efforts to rectify problems, they noted, "I have to credit a lot of this to my new director of facilities. The prior person was all about 'Hey, we're complying with the ADA'." The leader from Amber Community College talked about an expectation that a vice president who was recently hired for a new diversity and engagement position would be conducting frequent student focus groups to inform decisions about administrative processes, including those related to facilities. Both of these examples helped me understand the

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influence that people in key positions have had as decisions about campus projects were made. In fact, as I reviewed my transcripts, it occurred to me that the inclusive practices I had heard about were fueled by leaders' expectations. None of the people I interviewed discussed systematic efforts—codified in policies or procedures—to ensure student participation. Instead, inclusive practices were fueled by priorities and expectations of leaders. My takeaway from this theme was "If the leaders set the tone for how projects are carried out, what happens to student participation when leadership changes?"

Seats at the Table

As Lidsky (2006) and Muñoz (2009) noted in their work on planning, campus projects have attracted interest from many stakeholders. In addition to students, leaders named numerous groups who were involved in some way—public officials, community and religious leaders, employers, partners, architects, engineers, facilities managers, other faculty and staff, and former students. However, by getting feedback from so many groups—a practice entrenched at schools sharply focused on communities—are colleges diluting the voice of current students who seek belonging? On top of the need to manage multiple and competing interests, leaders voiced concerns about completing projects with structural integrity and limited cost—practicalities that were preventing leaders from empowering students more fully.

Involving the "Right Students" and Barriers to Student Participation. Before starting my data collection, I considered practices that would equate with the highest levels of student participation, including allowing students to self-select for project teams. When I asked college leaders what they would like to do as they develop future

campus projects, all expressed expectations of involving students as consultants, but Indigo Community College's leader discussed getting feedback from the "right students" as well. The leader qualified this statement as follows:

> [I mean] making a deliberate decision not to go ask our … Student Government, because the Student Government students are generally the traditional matriculating students. They are younger. They're here all day. They're engaged. They're already drinking the Kool Aid. So, what we're actually doing is going to one of our first-year experience classes … to solicit volunteers from there, specifically from the non-traditional route or commuters.

The leader recounted their own experiences as a non-traditional community college student who worked and therefore could not fully participate in campus activities. The leader observed that the college might miss valuable input from similar students if they only sought feedback from the most engaged students.

Crimson's leader emphasized the importance of getting input from a cross section of the student population while also considering diversity and equity, noting that

> Many students have different needs, so not all students are created equal. … They come from different backgrounds. A student in chemistry has a different experience than a student in English. A student in the trades has a different set of expectations than a student in our entrepreneurship program. So, it's critically important that we get a broad and diverse range of perspectives and that we ensure that those perspectives are diverse and that each contributor be able to apply an equity lens to their contributions as part of the process.

As the leaders expressed ideas about involving the "right students" as campus spaces are developed, I recognized their understanding that increased equity will not come from treating all students equally.

While leaders demonstrated their commitment to equity as an essential value, they were also torn by the realities of campus development work. Leaders sited cost and complexity as reasons to limit student involvement in campus projects. Emerald Community College's leader noted a point where student participation might end—a threshold when "everything gets to be [about] the financial decisions as opposed to the fun decisions." Indigo's leader was conflicted, expressing a desire to offer spaces that ensure good student experiences while remaining mindful of decisions that could add expense. In the streambank revitalization project, Amber Community College's leader had ruled out student involvement due to technical intricacies while also sharing frustration about mounting costs associated with the work.

Community as a Proxy for Students. Remarks from the leader of Crimson Community College demonstrated the long tradition of colleges working to identify and fulfill the needs of the geographic areas they are tasked to serve:

> I've recognized that strategically successful community colleges are deeply
> embedded in the communities they serve. Each one defines community
> differently. In some cases, … community could mean industry. In more rural
> institutions, could be the more traditional definition of community—as in
> community organizations, thriving nonprofits base, K-12 partners. … However,
> the first part of meeting students' needs comes from the community, because the

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communities we serve are important to community colleges. That's our middle

name. So, I think it starts with the community … engaging the community

through community-based organizations is the first step.

Similarly, the leader from Emerald Community College emphasized the importance of

feedback from employers and religious leaders with interests in the neighborhoods that

the college aimed to support with the building of their new center. For example, the

leader said that "a lot of the ministers were telling us 'this is what our parishioners

need'."

Gathering input from community stakeholders ties to the sector's mission, and it

can be an inclusive strategy when feedback is collected from people who have been

disenfranchised. In fact, two leaders seemed to consider community engagement on

equal—or nearly equal—footing with feedback from students, indicating that the colleges

might not prioritize student voices over those of other stakeholders. However, if we

consider the intersecting characteristics of students and their lived experiences, it is clear

that community feedback is not a proxy for the student voice, and it does not

automatically ensure student belongingness.

Research Questions and Discussion

After completing both phases of analysis, I was eager to revisit my research

questions to see if I had the answers I had been seeking. I discovered that each of the

themes helped to answer my research questions.

As I reconsidered my primary question—*How are community colleges developing*

campus spaces to promote students' sense of belonging? —I noted that my study engaged

four community college leaders who cared about supporting diversity and inclusion while developing campus spaces that work effectively to meet the needs of stakeholders. The leaders all envisioned a role—although a moderate one—for students in campus projects. In interviews, leaders described students taking part in focus groups and design charettes, giving feedback on particular aspects of a project, and even submitting a plan that was incorporated into an overall design. While it did not emerge from my interviews as a dominant theme, some leaders also pointed out that the preferences of students with privilege and the needs of underserved students might differ.

All of the leader-participants expressed the view that planning must be done through a lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion, but I heard little discussion of how campus features might affect student demographic groups differently. Only Emerald Community College's leader demonstrated awareness that form, function, and cultural experiences could affect students' satisfaction with campus settings. While Emerald's leader shared practicalities pertaining to the school's building project, the leader expressed the need for features, such as art installations and paint selections, that appealed to or represented students of color as well.

I did not find clear evidence of colleges setting specific diversity, equity, and inclusion goals as they launched campus improvements. The leader from Emerald Community College came closest as they discussed a deep dive into population data and maps to understand the demographics of people who might use their new center. Amber Community College's recent hire of a diversity and inclusion leader responsible for drawing out the student voice to inform administrative decisions was another positive

finding. However, discussions about more concrete goals did not emerge from my interviews.

To consider findings for my second question—*How do college's efforts to build, improve, or maintain campus spaces align with Ladder of Citizen Participation levels (Arnstein, 1969/2009)?*—I compared levels of participation and actual college practices. I recognized that the schools in my study commonly took a "middle of the road" approach, which was mostly associated with tokenism, to engage students in campus development. Moreover, initiatives to involve students were tempered by leaders' practical concerns related to cost and other project deliverables. Leaders recognized students as important stakeholders, but they did not make students partners or leaders in the design process. The most inclusive examples of student participation were the nature trail at Amber Community College and the bronze statue at Ember Community College, but even these projects were moderated by experts—the engineers and the sculptor—at the direction of college leaders. Additionally, I found that levels of student participation depended on the priorities, values, and sensitivities of those in power—not formal systems that ensured student engagement regardless of who was in charge.

Ultimately, a handful of inclusive strategies emerged from my interviews with community college leaders. They included:

- Allowing more neutral parties, such as architects, to lead discussions with students, thereby reducing potential for college leaders to control the conversation
- Using both face-to-face and online meetings to interact with students about campus spaces

- Visiting classes to gather feedback from all students, not just those students who actively participate in campus activities, such as clubs and associations

- Ensuring that students who are most likely to be affected by a space are invited to the conversation

- Engaging students in specific projects, such as the trails associated with Amber Community College's streambank revitalization and the sculpture erected on the grounds of Emerald Community College's center

Next, I considered how my study findings aligned with existing literature. The literature review, which I described in Chapter 2, covered the history of U.S. community colleges as well as how exclusive campus spaces and behaviors that took place in those spaces have limited sense of belonging and completion, particularly for students of color and students with disabilities. I explored critical theories and participation models that offered tools for measuring student belonging as well.

Complementing and expanding extant literature, my findings demonstrated that the potential to develop spaces that do not meet the needs of students remains. For, even community colleges recognized for their diversity, equity, and inclusion work have not yet fully engaged students in campus development. Under engagement of students, particularly students of color and students with disabilities, will remain a problem of practice as colleges make long-lasting changes to their physical spaces. Furthermore, until colleges take steps to empower students through formal policy, work that does engage students will result in buildings that are not as effective as they could be.

Unengaged Student Groups

Leaders I interviewed understood the importance of engaging students from groups who have not been involved heavily in the past, especially students who spend less time on campus than others. One college leader referred to them as "the right students." This theme reminded me of Tinto's (1988, 1993) work on student departure theory and community college students—work that is still discussed in community colleges. Tinto anticipated that lack of experience and coping skills among students of color as well as students who were older, poorer, or from rural areas would impede their ability to fit in on campus. In more recent work, Tinto (2017) shifted away from a deficit view of the student to call on colleges to create conditions for students to find increased sense of belonging. Leaders from the colleges in my study expressed compatible perspectives, agreeing that colleges had to involve these students. To this point, my findings aligned with the literature. However, considering the pervasiveness of exclusive academic spaces and features I found through my literature review, I would assert that colleges are not only responsible for helping students find greater sense of belonging but they are also responsible for applying critical inquiry to uncover the root causes of disconnections that students experience.

Critical, Multi-Disciplinary Examination of Space

My work narrowed a gap in research centered on the exclusivity of community college campuses from educational, architectural, and planning perspectives. At the same time, it highlighted potential for these disciplines to come together to create more inclusive approaches that respond to the needs of underrepresented students. Whether we

consider a single project or the complex and layered development of grounds, buildings, and interiors over many years, community college campuses have required collaboration and expertise from various disciplines. None of the initiatives that leaders discussed in my interviews were completed in a silo; instead, the leaders described project teams that engaged educators, architects, designers, engineers, planners, and others. In fact, some leaders described times when authority was transferred to third party team members who directed projects or gathered stakeholder feedback, illustrating that non-educators could heavily influence a project's course. Therefore, while I conducted research as a community college leader, I intended for my findings to guide professionals in other fields, too. Harvey (2009) the geographer and anthropologist, Sturm (2012) the legal scholar, and Wood (2015) the education scholar and social scientist all insisted that multiple fields of study could inform this work. Multidisciplinary research, like mine, has emphasized that exclusive campus development is not simply an academic or architectural problem of practice, but an issue to be embraced owned by all members of the project team.

Similarly, the use of multiple critical theories strengthened my work. If scholars and leaders do not draw on critical theories to question the status quo, we will fail to see the effects of exclusive campus spaces on the diverse populations of community college students who seek instruction and services. Without deep scrutiny, members of majority groups might remain unaware of places that solidify their own belonging while others tolerate the replication of exclusive settings and symbols that have denied access, recognition, power, and ultimately success to people for centuries. As some public

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officials and others have challenged CRT in recent years, my work was fortified by other critical theories, namely CDT and CHG, that also supported my case that some campus spaces have advanced the interests of those with power while neglecting or oppressing people from other groups. By uniting theories, I could see that messages communicated through campus spaces have excluded students across demographic categories.

Inclusive Progress Requires Intentional Work

Situated in literature advocating full participation and institutional citizenship (Arnstein, 1969/2009; Sturm et al., 2011), my research revealed colleges attempting to advance equity and inclusion without foundational structures in place to drive these priorities. Instead, leaders—not institutional policies and procedures—were behind routinely moderate efforts to engage students. This situation left institutions vulnerable to situations such as regime changes, fluctuating priorities, or fears about cost or complexity that could suddenly limit strategies to engage students. My research underscored intentional measures that community colleges must take to affect meaningful and lasting change that maximizes equity, inclusion, and increased sense of belonging among students from underrepresented groups.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In 1929, architects Klauder and Wise explained in their seminal work that college and university campuses could reflect an institution's potential and affect students' lives profoundly. They wrote

> It is with this physical aspect of the college or university that we are to deal. By the telling effects of the architectural setting is the graphic portrayal of the institution made possible. This portrayal centres [sic] attention upon and soon comes to symbolize the institution, for however beautiful a natural scene, landscape alone can not [sic] identify itself until architecture enters and completes the pictorial quality. If this architectural garb is well conceived and wrought, it will minister to the daily smooth running of student and faculty lives, it will conduce to convenience and contentment, to the financial well-being of the institution and to its standing in the educational world and before the public; it will, in fine, command the admiration of this and future generations. (Klauder & Wise, 1929, pp. 1-2)

Understanding that sense of belonging has fueled student success, I was interested in what leading community colleges were doing to ensure that "architectural garb" and other features of their campuses coalesced into nurturing settings where diverse groups of students, particularly students of color and students with disabilities, could develop strong bonds with their institutions. As I designed my project, I set out to answer these

questions by interviewing leaders of community colleges recognized for practices that have promoted diversity and inclusion:

- How are community colleges developing campuses to advance students' sense of belonging?
- How have their efforts to build, upgrade, or maintain spaces aligned with levels on the Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969/2009)?

Through my literature review, I explored connections among the following topics: the history of U.S. community colleges, spatial development of campuses, student belongingness and success, relevant critical theory, and models for how students might participate in campus building. My questions and literature review led me to conduct a critical inquiry of how award-winning colleges have worked to involve students as the schools built or updated campus spaces.

Implications

As I considered my findings, I identified implications for community colleges that want to invest in inclusive projects that increase student belonging and, consequently, success measures such as enrollment, retention, and completion that support institutional sustainability. Moreover, recognizing that this topic demands additional study, I contemplated options for future research on the topic of student belonging that must emerge from the spaces and settings where colleges expect students to learn and thrive.

Practical Implications for Community Colleges

Through my study, I found leaders who were open—sometimes passionately so— to building inclusive campuses and gathering input from students about the direction of

campus projects. Some described how their colleges have already involved students in focus groups or design charettes, and all expressed expectations that they would solicit feedback—particularly from minority students or under-engaged part-time students—as they embark on future spatial development. However, most of the recent practices that the leaders described represented moderate attempts at engaging student voices. Some student participation was encouraged, but leaders did not transfer significant decision-making authority to students. Colleges have acted inclusively, they have not yet stretched their students' involvement into the realm of full participation (Arnstein, 1969/2019) or institutional citizenship (Sturm, 2007; Sturm et al., 2011).

Additionally, I found little evidence of colleges involving students in formal or systematic ways. Instead, I observed the goodwill, influence, and priorities of individual leaders—not policies and procedures—resulting in students having roles in informing the campus spaces that they must navigate to achieve their academic goals. Without established policies and procedures to dictate student participation, institutional commitment to inclusive planning could shift suddenly with a change in leadership. Long gaps between capital projects or changing administrative priorities could jeopardize any school's progress toward full participation, especially as leaders come and go.

So, what are some strategies that colleges might adopt to ensure meaningful student participation in the future? I have drawn recommendations from my leader interviews, the concept of Institutional Citizenship (Sturm, 2007; Sturm et al., 2011), the Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969/2019), and the work of one other scholar who I encountered in my literature review.

First, colleges can draw lessons for involving students in dialog from the leaders who participated in this study. The Amber Community College leader explained that a vice president for diversity and engagement was tasked with hosting routine student focus groups on administrative processes, including ones related to facilities, before leaders recommended actions to the college's governing board. The leader from Emerald Community College indicated that a third-party team of architects had facilitated focus groups, minimizing potential for college personnel to influence dialog during feedback sessions. Additionally, Emerald's leader shared an example of empowering students to draw on their cultural capital to collaborate with the artist of a student-centered sculpture that was added to the grounds of their new building. Finally, leaders at Crimson and Indigo Community Colleges suggested using technology to facilitate engagement with a wider range of students, while remembering that—depending on their backgrounds—not all students will be comfortable with some modalities.

Secondly, community colleges can use Arnstein's (1969/2019) Ladder of Citizen Participation to assess their progress toward full student participation. College leaders could identify both the levels of participation they want to achieve and the students they aim to involve before taking deliberate steps to engage those students and even help them take ownership of key decisions. A list of a priori codes I developed before launching my leader interviews are one source of ideas. Encouraging students from marginalized groups to self-select for planning teams, acknowledging students' cultural knowledge, compensating them for time and expertise, and even empowering them to lead parts of the process are ways a college might grow participation, belonging, and ownership.

Going even further, the model of Institutional Citizenship (Sturm, 2007; Sturm et al., 2011) contended that full participation must be engrained in an institution's values and culture. To approach a state of Institutional Citizenship, colleges would first need to reflect on—and possibly revise—vision, mission, and values statements as well as policies and procedures that support those aspirations before taking on a specific initiative like a campus building project. Leaders would have to consider how much control they can and will relinquish in return for greater student participation and, consequently, increased belonging. Leaders would have to decide which students to engage in the process as well. Multiple leaders in my study stressed a need to look beyond students who are already active in campus life. In this same vein, Sturm (2012) asserted that institutions engaging people as full partners in building on their own cultural capital will reap rewards of increased belongingness and success. Hence, to increase student belonging, colleges must purposefully create situations for students who are not well-represented or well-served to take meaningful parts in decision-making processes.

My last practical recommendation was inspired by the work of Amara Pérez (2020). Pérez conducted a participatory study alongside students of color attending Portland Community College—a school that has adopted CRT as a decision-making framework for campus planning and other aspects of college operations. By engaging and empowering students in her research, Pérez led a study that could be an effective model for student participation in actual campus projects. Pérez advertised research opportunities, and students applied to participate for set periods of time. Each student had specific duties to perform—taking photos, journaling, interviewing other students, and

making recommendations to college leaders and other stakeholders. Depending on their roles, students earned either monetary payment or gift cards for their contributions. The students attended workshops where they learned to think critically about space, considering conditions, objects, and symbols that signaled exclusion. Ultimately, the students joined Pérez for conference presentations to educators, college planners, and architects. Pérez empowered her research team with new experiences and perspectives that benefited them as learners while also leading them to influence professionals who might carry their work forward to shape future inclusive campus spaces.

Finally, I propose that acting inclusively is not enough for leaders to achieve high levels of student belonging. When diverse groups are involved, community engagement, for instance, may be an inclusive behavior, but it may not lead to increased belonging among students. Even if community members are from the similar underserved populations as students, they may not hold the same points of view. In particular, community leaders may have amassed power in ways that many students have not. Intersectionality could be at play as well, limiting the ability of leaders to speak on behalf of students or prospective students who might have different levels of income or educational attainment or who might be younger or identify with different genders. Stakeholders representing many agenda and points of view will compete to influence high profile campus projects, but leaders who focus intensely to prioritize voices of students from underrepresented are most likely to affect belongingness.

Future Directions for Research

As I embarked on this research design, I decided to interview college leaders; however, I see potential for exploring these topics further with both leaders and students.

Deeper Conversations With Leaders. As I analyzed transcripts, I found fewer instances of leaders actually naming specific populations of students than I had expected. While I did not explicitly ask for information about populations attending each school, I had imagined leaders sharing details about their student bodies. However, in approximately 95 minutes of interview dialog, the term "African American" was used just once. Another leader mentioned minority males very briefly. One leader referenced students with disabilities multiple times, but shared no information about how many students were in this group or what types of disabilities were most prevalent among the school's students. In other statements, leaders mentioned differences between traditional and non-traditional students, which might suggest differences in age, and one leader made a case for considering the needs of students based on their disciplines of study. Only the leader from Emerald Community College emphasized the cultural—if not the historical—contexts of their building project. More extensive dialog with leaders might have surfaced data that explained the populations enrolling—and not enrolling—at each school as well as differences in their experiences and the related success measures that leaders have observed among these student groups.

Additional Research With Students. When I first decided to study how community colleges have promoted student belonging through campus spaces, I envisioned working closely with students. Initially, I planned to use the Photovoice

method (Carlson et al., 2006; University of South Carolina, 2011) to engage in research that culminated in an exhibition of students' images of school settings that fed feelings of either belonging or exclusion. As the coronavirus pandemic forced colleges to restrict interaction on campuses (Diep, 2021; Kennedy & Turner, 2020), I concluded that the study design would not work well for my dissertation project. Nevertheless, I have continued to view the Photovoice study as an opportunity to engage and empower students through research centered on their experiences and beliefs.

Post-Pandemic Research Opportunity. The pandemic has led me to recommend another topic for critical inquiry, that is an interrogation of virtual college spaces. For more than two years, the coronavirus has increased colleges' reliance on virtual channels to deliver instruction and services. The pandemic forced students who might prefer to get their instruction and services on campus to deal with digital systems. Digital systems— like physical campuses—are also saturated with features that affect behavior and either advance or deny a student's sense of belonging. Phrases like "you're on mute" or "please mute your mic" have entered our daily vocabulary and affected the students that we see and hear. Webcams have given instructors and classmates a view into students' private spaces and lives. In the absence of a camera or microphone, a student could simply disappear. Users who lacked reliable internet access or strong technology skills were sidelined. The digital spaces where college students must engage and interact deserve interrogation similar to that of traditional college campuses. As colleges continue to use technology to teach and support students and promote other forms of engagement, we need to understand ways that the technology can be used equitably and ensure that

students are not lost in the process. Critical theories, multidisciplinary perspectives, and new data can help us understand student encounters with digital spaces, just as I have used them to explore interactions with physical ones.

Final Thoughts

Despite the rise of digital learning, bricks and mortar still matter to students attending community colleges. As they touch down on campus, students immediately pull from their histories, experiences, and expectations to assign meaning to space. For many students, these associations will be rooted in their understanding of the local community. Perhaps subconsciously, they will evaluate whether they will find order, learning, service, engagement, protection, prestige, fulfillment, and recognition on the school's grounds. If that evaluation includes a sense of disconnection, there is a danger that doubt will replace confidence and jeopardize success. If campus structures, features, and landscapes do not work—functionally or aesthetically—for large numbers of students, what good are they as resources for fulfilling our institutional missions? With this work, I urge community colleges to consider the lasting effects that failure to address diversity, equity, and inclusion across the the built environment will leave for decades to come.

As I began this work, I carried deep pride for the community college mission, respect for the work of fellow educators, and faith in the potential of students we serve. My research, however, underscored the need for humility and deep introspection. Only with humility and introspection can we own mistakes that have limited opportunity in the past and acknowledge biases and gaps that influence our understanding of how others experience the world.

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APPENDIX A. Ladder of Citizen Participation A Priori Coding Framework

NON-PARTICIPATION	
Level 1: Manipulation. Those in power convey a plan to gain student support.	• Did not involve students
Level 2: Therapy. Those in power convey a plan in order to educate students on what is best for them.	• Decisions based on assumptions about students' feelings • Accessibility decisions that do not consider students with disabilities • Leader selected features to "represent" students
TOKENISM	
Level 3: Informing. Those in power inform students of progress, but communication is generally one-way.	• Displayed plans in public areas, but offered no way to provide feedback • Provided project updates via web site, email communications, or press releases • Invited students to project events
Level 4: Consultation. Those in power seek student feedback via surveys or meetings, but they do not use the feedback in a significant way.	• Asked students to vote on a few features • Added student-selected artifacts to represent students • Held student focus group or town hall event at start of project • Held student competitions judged by college or community leaders (ex. art) • Surveyed students about needs or preferences

Level 5: Placation. Those in power select some students to participate and retain the right to determine whether their input is worthy.	- Asked students to vote on many features - Added several student-selected artifacts to represent students - Held multiple student focus groups or town hall events throughout project - Held student competitions with winners selected by students (ex. art) - Hand-picked students for team
CITIZEN CONTROL	
Level 6: Partnership. Those in power share responsibility equally and negotiate with students during decision-making.	- Accepted students for team who - Self-selected - Identified with marginalized groups - Received compensation - Had equal say
Level 7: Delegation. Those in power give more control and decision-making authority to students than they give to other team members.	- Accepted students for team who - Self-selected - Identified with marginalized groups - Received compensation - Held team leadership roles
Level 8: Citizen Control. Those in power give students complete control to plan and manage decisions.	- Recruited students for team who - Self-selected - Identified with marginalized groups - Received compensation - Received training related to their role - Led the process