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## The Erasure of Rural West Texas Voices in Higher Education Institutions an Autoethnographic Study of Minoritized Students of West Texas in Their Journey to Obtain Success in Higher Education Institutions

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THE ERASURE OF RURAL WEST TEXAS VOICES  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF MINORITIZED STUDENTS  
OF WEST TEXAS IN THEIR JOURNEY TO OBTAIN SUCCESS  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design

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by  
David Benjamin Weems, Sr.  
May 2023

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Accepted by:  
Dr. Rhondda R. Thomas, Committee Chair  
Dr. David Blakesley  
Dr. Ufuk Ersoy  
Dr. Andrew Pyle

## ABSTRACT

I was once told there is a person in the world who has locked within his or her mind the framework for the cure for cancer or even the ability to create an energy model that will revolutionize how society consumes natural resources. Now imagine if I told you I have seen that person alive and well working as an oil well driller on a rig in Mentone, Texas. The first question most people would ask is, “Why is the person drilling in the middle of nowhere Texas instead of impacting the world by way of displaying his or her incredible innovative potential?” This scenario is the basis of my study. I want to bring to the forefront the stories of the rural minoritized students whose innovation has been discarded, overlooked, and erased because it has consistently been deemed irrelevant or unimportant by the collegiate world.

In consideration of the alienation and isolation that these minoritized students face, I am proposing an autoethnographic study that merges cultural and social issues related to the divisive code-switching rhetoric minoritized students are forced to utilize in institutions of higher learning and the narratives about the architecture of the academic buildings they are forced to inhabit. I will analyze how higher education institutions negate these students’ ethnic diversity and innovative potential by coercing them into silence or submission, forcing them to assimilate, discouraging them through persuasive reasoning, or isolating them in the built environment. These students leave the safety of their small environments hoping to learn from or contribute to the collegiate world, only to discover that the universities they have aspired to join will overlook and devalue them until they leave or assimilate into the predetermined role the school has designed for

them. My interviews with various high school students will document their experiences with the collegiate world and how their vision, direction, and contributions to higher education institutions were stifled, controlled, neglected, or silenced.

## DEDICATION

To

My Grandmother (Big Mama)

Blanche Lee Smith

You were the first to believe in me. When no one else saw my potential, you reminded me it was there. Words can not express the continued blessings I received from your countless prayers as I grew into the man I am today. I love you Big Mama. Know that your memory guides and inspires me to this day.

My Dad

Willie Michael Weems

Although we never met... I began to know of you through the memories of those that you touched throughout your life. I was driven to achieve the impossible because I was driven to find you. Discovering your existence at age 48, three years after you had passed, was disheartening. However, being accepted and loved by the family you left to me was everything, and I vow to make them and you proud.

“THE INNER CIRCLE”

My Children

Daria Lorraine Weems, Dayla Iliana Weems, David “DJ” Benjamin Weems Jr. My world... You all empowered me, inspired me, and rejuvenated me. My life will be forever changed because of your love, support, and trust in me being your DAD.

## My Wife

Norma Lee Weems

The essence of who I am...The blessing that evolved my potential and possibility into reality. You not only believed in me but loved me, you pushed me to believe in myself. You set the expectations that aligned with my God-given talents and held me to the standard where I achieved and produced... not merely dreamed and spouted hopeless conjecture. I love you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this time to acknowledge a few people that made the time and picked up the mantle to guide me through the process of completing this doctoral dissertation. First and foremost, I must acknowledge my chair, Dr. Rhondda Thomas. I recalled being in awe of your body of work. Your impact on the university and the sheer aura surrounding your presence throughout all the many avenues of higher education. It was your guidance, continued support, and belief in not only my work but me that allowed me to gain confidence in what I was accomplishing and how I was going to bring it to flourishing.

Secondly, I would like to thank Dr. David Blakesley, you, sir, are a wealth of knowledge, and your pedigree is unmatched. I'm truly thankful that you not only inspired me through your classes at Clemson but also how your dedication and insight were so in tune with my work that you were able to direct me to the necessary resources to develop and further the body of work that I have created.

Next, I would like to thank Dr. Ufuk Ersoy. Your patience is tremendous, and it allowed me to feel comfortable coming to you for advice and guidance. Your class allowed me to see a different perspective of architecture that I never thought existed. It transcended my work into recognizing the structural environments that impact the many students and people within my own environment. I will always be in your debt for that.

And last but certainly not least, Dr. Andrew Pyle. You took on this project of helping me without knowing a lot about me. Simply just knowing about the content that I was creating and growing your innovative contributions and directions gave me the

necessary backbone needed to strengthen my stance no matter the platform that I was presenting it on.



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## INTRODUCTION

Can you judge a book by its cover?

“HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS.”

—Pliny the Elder, a.k.a. Gaius Plinius Secundus

*Come and listen to my story about a man named Jed,*

*A poor mountaineer barely kept his family fed,*

*And then one day he was shootin at some food,*

*And up through the ground come a bubblin crude.*

*Oil...that is... black gold... Texas tea.*

*Well the first thing you know ol Jed's a millionaire,*

*The kinfolk said “Jed move away from there”*

*Said “Californy is the place you ought to be”*

*So they loaded up the truck and they moved to Beverly*

*Hills, that is. Swimmin' pools, movie stars.*

—“The Ballad of Jed Clampett,” *The Beverly Hillbillies*<sup>1</sup>

*The Beverly Hillbillies*, a number-one syndicated television show, ran for nine seasons throughout the sixties and into the seventies, entering the homes of millions of viewers nationwide in America. Before social media and the internet, television was the largest media to impact society. This show played a major role in what many Americans thought, as well as influenced what people should think. Its premise represented a perspective of what to do and where to go when you become successful. Within the show,

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<sup>1</sup>“Ballad of Jed Clampett.” Bluegrass Lyrics, <https://www.bluegrasslyrics.com/song/ballad-of-jed-clampett/>.

a small-town family man, Jed Clampett, discovered petroleum oil on his property, making him a millionaire. As the lyrics to the opening soundtrack state, he needed to move his family from their small-town environment to a new environment that not only cultivated success but had also been predetermined as where success resides. The representation of this success was deemed to reside in a metropolis environment, the city of Beverly Hills, California, where movie stars, swimming pools, and all the luxuries of prosperity were found. But who determined this is where prosperity and success could be found? Who set this standard? This dissertation examines why to this day, small-town residents, specifically minoritized students from West Texas, still aspire to leave their humble surroundings to acquire prosperity and success in the metropolis, including higher education institutions, without really considering if the environment they are traveling to is an environment they are prepared to live in and thrive in.

In 1996, I myself changed environments when I moved from the big city of San Antonio, Texas, to the small town of Fort Stockton, Texas. It was definitely an environmental and cultural change. I saw a change in diversity and the population's sheer size. Moving from a city of over 800,000 people with a variety of ethnicities and cultures around every corner to a relatively homogenous town of fewer than 8,000 people. With 77 percent of their population Hispanic<sup>2</sup>, I realized I had become so accustomed to the metropolis environment that when it shifted and changed, I found it very difficult to identify who I was as a new member of this community. Even though the people were friendly and welcoming, the experience was unique and unfamiliar.

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<sup>2</sup>“Quick Facts: Fort Stockton City, Texas,” U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts: United States, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/fortstocktoncitytexas/AGE295221>.

Therefore, a complex mental dilemma began to resonate within me. I started to contemplate: What is my priority? How do I determine who I am within this new environment? What is considered minoritized versus being a minority? How do I obtain the credentials needed to become successful in any environment? How much of a role does the environmental narrative play in my or any person's success within that newly inhabited environment? I would soon come to realize that I was not the only person struggling with this conundrum. There is the possibility that there is a narrative that people must be acclimated to in order to maneuver toward success within that environment effectively. That may require a change or switch from what I and others are accustomed to. It is apparent that all environments, familiar and unfamiliar, have minorities living there. However, it is essential to understand that there is a difference between the words minority and minoritized. *Odyssey Online* discusses minority versus minoritized in their forum Politics and Activism. They state:

minority should be defined as “a group of less than half of the total, a group that is sufficiently smaller in number.” I believe that “groups that are different in race, religious creed, nation of origin, sexuality, and gender and as a result of social constructs have less power or representation compared to other members or groups in society” should be considered minoritized.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>I. E. Smith, et al. “Minority vs. Minoritized.” *The Odyssey Online*, October 17, 2019, <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/minority-vs-minoritize>.

Throughout my research, I will be using the term *minoritized* as opposed to minority in the depiction of the students in my research group. This terminology will allow a more transparent representation of this population or group.

While living in West Texas for the last twenty years, I have learned that many people within small communities like Fort Stockton, where there are local lucrative employment opportunities, feel that financial success does not necessarily come from obtaining a college degree. As a matter of fact, many of the community members within small towns of West Texas equate success to how well local residents contribute to their small-town environment. They teach their children that being an active part of the community is what creates a solid and positive reputation that will, in turn, incorporate a significant bond between one's values and identity in society. However, even though this is one of the staples that is associated with the upbringing of students in the small towns of West Texas communities, some students still pull away from the lure of financial success within the oil and agricultural industries and yearn for higher education to fulfill their hopes of escaping small-town life.

During this time, I was fortunate to work side by side with people who were employed in different oil field locations. I heard various stories from different people who had incredibly innovative gifts that they displayed in their job performance. Countless times, they went above and beyond the ability of some industry engineers who had graduated from universities and had a wealth of credentials from their higher education institutions. I later worked in the field of education as a high school at-risk counselor, and I was able to see many avenues that were provided to students as they

were introduced to the endless possibilities waiting for them at college. Many different programs urged students to go to college to obtain a successful future. Later, I began working in Imperial, Texas, a town of fewer than 500 residents who supported a pre-K through 12th-grade school district with less than 260 students. My son and daughter attended school in this district for over three years. Many high school graduates showed academic promise and set their hearts on attending a prominent, well-known university. The students' exposure to these universities was mainly by participating in sports teams in the school's athletic program and by participating in sports and academic camps.

These small-town students became enthralled with the possibility of being accepted and attending the urban university of their dreams. Unfortunately, many of their stories did not end with amazing people with incredible untapped academic potential reaching their dreams. Instead, many students returned to West Texas and shared their stories of disappointment and collegiate shortcomings with anyone who would listen. They talked about their college and its environment as if these entities were the evil antagonist in the story of their life. At that time, I worked as the counselor for a small school district and moonlighted as a coach and at-risk counselor for a nearby homeschool program. For over three years, I had the opportunity to witness first-hand, as well as hear first-hand, the stories associated with students that were regarded as some of the top academic achievers and athletes to graduate and go off to college in the area. A vast amount of students in the top 10% of their class applied and were accepted to some of the most prominent colleges throughout the United States. I witnessed the excitement, joy, and recognition their communities gave them for such high levels of achievement. But

then I noticed “the pattern”: students would return to small-town communities in West Texas without completing college. Year after year, I started seeing top students’ returning to their communities. For example, in back-to-back years, the salutatorians and valedictorians of this small rural town returned home empty-handed. Many in the top 10% of academic achievers and athletes were leaving their respected and highly sought-after universities to return to their small-town communities after only attending college for a few semesters. Many of their families stated they had no idea why the students came back or what diminished their previous aspirations in such a short time frame. It was here that I began to wonder what would happen to my own children as they entered college. Would they return with chagrin as well? Why were these students returning to small towns in West Texas without their degrees?

In *The Anti-Education Era*, James Paul Gee states that attention must be placed on our perspective and where we place value.<sup>4</sup> If our worth is not placed on the actual members who make up the environment, then the sense of worth and contribution is affected; thus, it impacts the entire process of creating a thriving learning environment. I believe that the environment, social, academic, and physical, in which the minoritized students of West Texas are aspiring to become a part is actually the environment that is destroying their opportunity for a successful future and, more importantly, their identity. But what proof do I have that this theory is true? I have begun to realize something was adversely impacting the minoritized students of West Texas. My research will focus on finding out why the students are unsuccessful.

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<sup>4</sup>James Paul Gee, *The Anti-Education Era: Creating Smarter Students through Digital Learning* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2013).



I am proposing an autoethnographic study of why minoritized students from rural small towns in West Texas return home from urban universities instead of completing their degree programs. I will conduct interviews to document their accounts of their experiences in higher education institutions. My study will accomplish three essential tasks: First, it will seek answers to determine what factors inhibit the success of minoritized students from small towns in West Texas at large universities. Second, I will utilize an autoethnographic approach to provide a platform or forum where the public and educators can hear the students' stories. Lastly, this research will enable me to offer insights into how universities can better serve the needs of minoritized students from small towns in West Texas and other regions.

My approach to this study is informed by Heewon Chang's definition of autoethnography in *Autoethnography as a Method*:

The autoethnography that I promote in this book combines cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details. It follows the anthropological and social scientific inquiry approach rather than descriptive or performative storytelling. That is, I expect the stories of autoethnography to be reflected upon, analyzed, and interpreted within their broader sociocultural context.<sup>5</sup>

I am using autoethnography in a similar fashion. I want to provide an analysis and interpretation of the experiences of minoritized students in West Texas who are in their new collegiate environments for the first time within an associated sociocultural context that also considers their use of code-switching when communicating with professors,

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<sup>5</sup>Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*. 46.

educators, and their peers, and their engagement with the architectural landscape of their schools. I, like many educators, had my own interpretation of this experience, but an autoethnographic research approach allows for a more transparent and realistic rendition of this phenomenon. This approach, in turn, will help others who work in the field of education throughout the world. I do not want to merely transcribe the students' depictions and perspectives but also lay the groundwork for stakeholders like school districts, pre-college programs, and universities to reconsider how they support minoritized rural students' preparation for and transition into the university of their choice.

These students are valuable, and their perspectives are critical to the evolution of innovative classrooms. They embark on journeys that span thousands of miles away from home as they enter various universities and colleges nationwide with their own sense of values and morals that could play a significant part in establishing their contribution to that particular university. However, regardless of the path they choose to enter in the collegiate world, minoritized students of West Texas seem to be losing their voices and the unique perspectives they represent. Society must understand that their contribution does not stop in the classroom or upon obtaining a college degree. The credentials they seek could very well be what is needed to provide a particular service or have a career that will ultimately allow them to return home and positively impact small West Texas communities. These students can breathe life into these small towns that, without revitalization, would become extinct.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

When reviewing literature regarding why rural West Texas minoritized students leave colleges and universities, I found little research on this exact issue. Since the late 1980s, many scholars have conducted studies to determine why minority students leave college. Although much of their research, relevant examples which I include in this review, followed a qualitative method format, none concentrated on rural West Texas minoritized students. These scholars also did not examine minoritized students' experiences through the lens of narrative architecture and code-switching rhetoric. When these two ideas are combined with an autoethnographic approach, a sense of urgency toward the recognition of the problem can be felt. There exists a dire need for attention to be placed on this specific aspect of minoritized students' collegiate experiences. The supporting literature for this personalized study regarding the issue of why rural West Texas minoritized students leave colleges and universities without obtaining a degree is a research area in which the author is both the subject and the researcher, which proves to be both significant and unique.

First, I will examine literature based on autoethnography. Why autoethnography for my study? Additionally, I have chosen to focus on two distinct perspectives that best support my study and the chosen methodology of autoethnography. First, the **narrative architectural structure** and its environments consist of looking closely at the structural environments physically and metaphorically. The researchers that I chose helped guide me to understand and demonstrate the recognition of the narrative and how it plays a part

in the minoritized student's discovery and mastery of an unfamiliar environment. Then, I will look at the literature that is based on code-switching rhetoric. This is here where Narrative Architecture meets Code-Switching Rhetoric, and the discernment of assimilating and acclimations begins. Code-switching rhetoric proves crucial in the development of my autoethnography research because it opens up the viable comprehension of what linguistic obstacles lie underneath the surface of environmental acceptance in unfamiliar surroundings. Next, I will call upon liberation literacies<sup>6</sup>, which focuses on the spoken narrative that gives a predetermined rhetorical disposition on how an environment exists and the code associated with access and entry into this environment.

These key areas of literature sustain the qualitative form of inquiry by reinforcing autoethnography and giving an overall guiding viewpoint into the concepts associated with the environment, assimilation, and the impact they have on people in society. My study primarily focuses on how transitioning from one environment to the next will impact success in that environment and how it helps people discover, sustain, or develop their identity in new environments. Regardless of the incredible amount of work that has been done in this area of research, showing the various pitfalls that minoritized students face when attending college will increase the pace with which society develops resolutions to this growing problem.

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<sup>6</sup>Jamila Lyiscott, "5 Ways to Use Liberation Literacies in Your Classroom: Practical Strategies," October 26, 2016, <https://blog.heinemann.com/liberation-literacies2>.

## Why Autoethnography?

Utilizing the direction and guidance of Heewon Chang's book *Autoethnography as a Method*, it becomes easy to see that autoethnography research transcends other methods when it comes to bringing a particular social problem's perspective to the forefront. There was a critical excerpt that strengthened my proclivity toward Chang's book: "Stemming from the field of anthropology, autoethnography shares the storytelling feature with other genres of self-narrative but transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation."<sup>7</sup> Throughout her book and her research, Chang made creating a lane for autoethnography a priority. For those who utilize it for research, Chang has laid out a suitable blueprint for embarking on an autoethnographic depiction of social problems that may be going unnoticed. She explains how to keep intact the various stakeholders and storytellers who will be used throughout the presentation of an autoethnographic approach.

However, Chang is not alone in this field. Robin Cooper and Bruce Lilyea, provide an informative article titled *I'm Interested in Autoethnography, but How Do I Do It?* from *The Qualitative Report* that lays out the guidelines for autoethnography research. Autoethnography fills a gap in traditional research where the researcher's own voice typically is not overtly included as part of the research. As you develop your autoethnography, it is key to keep in mind that the base unit of analysis is you, the author, and the researcher.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 43.

<sup>8</sup>Robin Cooper and Bruce V Lilyea, "I'm Interested in Autoethnography, but How Do I Do It?", NSUWorks, <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol27/iss1/14/>.

## *Studies about the Plight of Minoritized College and University Students*

### **Invisible Working Class Students in Higher Education Institutions**

UCLA professor and scholar of literacy, Mike Rose shed light on working-class students who are often the unseen and the unheard group in Higher Education due to a lack of recognition of some major environmental obstacles. His study of a variety of neglected, minoritized students investigates the teaching deficits between the faculty and students.<sup>9</sup> He focuses on these forgotten students who inhabit a blue-collar, working-class environment to determine how teachers lose these students. In Rose's *Lives on the Boundary: a Moving Account of the Struggles and Achievements of America's Educationally Underprepared*, he asserts his belief that the voices of students with working-class backgrounds were overlooked not only by the universities they attended but also by themselves.<sup>10</sup> He felt that they had a lack of self-esteem or support systems, so he created strategies that improved the writing centers and remedial courses in which these students began their post-secondary education journey. His main goal was to ensure that the student's intellectual abilities were galvanized and channeled into their academic potential. He honed in on remedial classes and writing centers, where he tackled many of the challenges plaguing the students' success. Helping them to transform themselves into successful college graduates was not the only heroic feat that he accomplished. Rose also documented his methods as well as his students' stories so they could be used as a tool

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<sup>9</sup>"In Memoriam, Mike Rose, 77, UCLA Professor Who Chronicled the Power of Learning," Home - UCLA School of Education & Information Studies, <https://seis.ucla.edu/news/in-memoriam-mike-rose-77-ucla-professor-who-chronicled>.

<sup>10</sup>Rose, Mike. *Lives on the Boundary: the Struggles and Achievements of America's Underprepared* (New York: Penguin), 1989.

for students at other universities who were affected by the same disadvantages and hopeless mentality.

### **Factors Increasing College Student Attrition**

Vincent Tinto, Syracuse University Sociology professor, published *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition* which draws attention to the tremendous resources that help illuminate the key factors that are limiting the university's ability to retain students from disadvantaged or minoritized backgrounds.<sup>11</sup> He focuses on the causes, as well as some viable cures for the students' development and retention. He utilizes some stories as well as qualitative research to isolate and understand the critical components of students' failure in the metropolitan university. These students have predetermined distractions and obstacles established by this relatively new and uncommon atmosphere and the narrative associated with an unfamiliar academic environment. The other distraction is represented in the buildings, the mindset, and the culture in which these students have grown up and have been forced to succeed. However, Rose does not focus on students from rural communities. The urban environment is completely different for these students, for the distractions in the rural environment do not mirror those in urban settings. Thus, this population is left without a voice.

### **The Plight of Migrant Students in Higher Education**

Researcher and Ohio State University education professor Ann Marie Nunez laid out the significant groundwork on the plight of the migrant population as the keynote

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<sup>11</sup>Vincent Tinto, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

speaker in “What Migrant Students Can Teach Us about College Access and Opportunity.”<sup>12</sup> Keynote speech – Migration/Education: A Conference on Agriculture, Seasonal Migration, and Access to Higher Education.”<sup>13</sup> Nunez proved to be one of the most pivotal researchers who explored post-secondary experiences and directions (pathways) of Latino, first-generation, and migrant students—with specialized attention placed on students and faculty. Her focus was geared toward providing a voice to some students and faculty members relating to their experiences in post-secondary education. She depicts all the various interactions that they had and how those played a part in their retention but also in their success in the academic world at the university level. She drew attention to how large the gap was between minority students’ success and completion versus their privileged peers. She also spoke to the lack of support and recognition as well as the lack of attention that may have plagued the success of minority or disadvantaged students in creating a surrogate support system when they entered college.

### **Rural Institutions Serve Rural Communities**

A second researcher, Andrew Koricich, a professor of education at Appalachian State University, focuses on quantitative data analysis and the institutional lack of knowledge and data needed to understand better and serve rural communities. He ponders the notion:

What does it mean to be a rural serving institution, and what are the things RISRC do, and we have to identify those so that we can then think more about what data

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<sup>12</sup>“About: Anne-Marie Núñez, Ph.D.,” Mysite, <https://www.annemarienunez.com/>.

<sup>13</sup>A. M. Nuñez, “What Migrant Students can Teach us about College Access and Opportunity. Keynote speech – Migration/Education: A Conference on Agriculture, Seasonal Migration, and Access to Higher Education,” Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, 2014.



allow us to capture those things, and we've come around to these handfuls here they facilitate post-secondary educational access to rural communities they also offer academic programs and other programming that are meant to meet the unique needs of rural communities so what about them is specifically serving rural communities.<sup>14</sup>

He researched where ideal rural serving institutions are located by creating a metric map system with scaling and data points indicators to rate and categorize the institutions.

Koricich and his team provide essential insights into our understanding of the reality of the rural community, as well as the socio-economic environment associated with the community. His work creates an essential metric system for finding community colleges that effectively focus on rural students. Indeed, that community colleges may have the faculty, staff, community, and infrastructure with the necessary tools to equip students from rural communities to succeed. This combination of resources supplies the network to connect these rural students to their future. The study also focuses on higher education institutions, which proves a significant contribution to this type of research.

### **Elite Colleges Fail the Privileged Poor**

In *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students*, Anthony Jack, Harvard University Education professor, uses qualitative methods for researching minorities entering private schools and upper-echelon universities and how they are still facing issues of access. Jack explains that the neglected population of students is written off based on the universities' perceived success using the resources

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<sup>14</sup>Andrew Koricich, "Creating a Metric to Identify Rural-Serving Postsecondary Institutions - Dr. Andrew Koricich." *YouTube*, YouTube, September 14, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aX9mDNIXKdk&t=82s>.

they have implemented for student access to increase retention of this specific population. He depicts the limited first-hand knowledge of the economically challenged students that the universities are trying to aid and support. His data includes stories and accounts from individuals associated with the group he calls the “privileged poor.” Jack’s research centers around the population considered privileged because they were enrolled in private schools or engaged with the upper echelon and privileged socioeconomic groups within society.<sup>15</sup> However, these students were poor and still had disadvantages associated with their socioeconomic class and race, according to Jack. His research is pivotal because it sheds light on the discrepancies connected to the limited success that some minoritized, poor students achieve.

### **Higher Education’s One Size Fits All Approach**

In the article “The Best Four Years of Your Life? Dropping Out helped Me see the Lies we were sold about the College Experience,” Rainesford Stauffer interjects that:

Some students love their social lives at school, whereas others experience incidents of harassment and assault, discrimination, or ostracization that they felt were embedded in their campus’s culture. Stuffing college into a one-size-fits-all, glorified cornerstone of young adulthood leaves a lot of people out; their higher education experience was not just okay — it was awful.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, this limited mindset is detrimental to students. This sentiment led me to discover Jamiel Lyiscott’s contribution to this field of study. Lyiscott, the co-founder and

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<sup>15</sup>Anthony Jack, *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

<sup>16</sup>Rainesford Stauffer, “The Best Four Years of Your Life?” *Vox*, July 19, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/22573842/the-best-four-years-of-your-life>.

co-director of the Center of Racial Justice and Youth Engaged Research,<sup>17</sup> says that “if we think about what it means in our institutional spaces to continue participating in the erasure and oppression of people from historically marginalized groups instead of incorporating, validating, and celebrating who they are in these institutional spaces, then we are doing a disservice to ourselves and to our world”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Lyiscott’s argument rings true within the West Texas college community who are also from a marginalized and minoritized group.

### *Narrative Architecture Studies*

#### **Environmental Impact on College Student Success**

In his second chapter, “Radical Terrain,” from his book *Narrative Architecture*, British architect Nigel Coates plunges into the various reasons why a person’s success and production in society are intertwined with their familiarization with their environment:

As Baudelaire had discovered, cities are both spatial and atmospheric and give structure and shape to experience. The process of familiarisation with any one urban environment requires endlessly complex and risky experiments, with every main route encountered deepened by experiments in wandering, or what the Situationists called *dérive*. These are the experiences that compose narrative patterns and help make up the mental maps which, like a taxi driver, chart sequences in space that correspond to certain periods, days, or time spent with

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<sup>17</sup>Jamilla Lyiscott, “Jamila Lyiscott Phd,” Jamila Lyiscott PhD, <https://jamilalyiscott.com/>.

<sup>18</sup>Jamila Lyiscott, “Why English Class is Silencing Students of Color,” TEDx, The Benjamin School, <https://youtu.be/u4dc1axRwE4>.

particular people. With every journey, you are inclined to construct a story in which you are both protagonist and audience.”<sup>19</sup>

Within their digital publication, the Mackintosh Glasgow School of Art also recognizes Coates’ perspective and supports the notion that buildings and the environment are telling a story. The issue is their story encourages a level of acceptance or rejection:

All the elements chosen by the architect should be functional and coherent to the story that he/she wants to tell. However, the visitor can interpret the building, and hence the story, with a certain degree of freedom because the building can also tell something that wasn’t originally planned by the architect, and the same elements can be interpreted in slightly different ways.”<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, the building tells a story that not only includes “where it is located” but also the aspects in regard to the environment that surrounds it. If this simple interpretation is not considered, then university stakeholders may miss the level of importance that students are placing in their initial experience and exploration of the university and its resources. In other words, the students need to feel like they have some form of understanding of their new surroundings if they are going to be successful in the classroom. This realization has to take place first, and at this point in time, no one is paying attention to the notion that students cannot be successful in the classroom if they are concerned with trying to be successful in their familiarization and understanding of their new environment.

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<sup>19</sup>Nigel Coates, *Narrative Architecture* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley, 2012), 11.

<sup>20</sup>Danilo Di Mascio and Tom Maver, “Investigating a Narrative Architecture,” *Digital Heritage* 1 (2014): 654, [http://papers.cumincad.org/data/works/att/ecaade2014\\_143.content.pdf](http://papers.cumincad.org/data/works/att/ecaade2014_143.content.pdf).

Architect William A. Browne Jr. discusses this interpretation in the *Planetizen* article “Narrative Architecture Storytelling”:

Our story will build on the asset and its existing narrative, but we will expand to provide a new layer of meaning for the congregation. We are also starting the design of a new pavilion for a green space in front of a new hospital. In this project, we will try to tell a wellness and healing story within a very expressive artistic architectural envelope. Its story, we hope, will synthesize the narrative of an entire hospital complex into a welcoming moment at its new community front door.<sup>21</sup>

The goal is to use the built landscape to provide a healing narrative that invites patients into a nurturing community. Might the same approach be adapted for the university’s built landscape?

However, this level of acceptance is not solely resting on the shoulders of narrative architecture in developing an understanding of the environment. Space and time play major roles, and French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur’s research, provides the necessary vantage point to this interpretation that the students within my research are occupying.

They weave together an intimate memory and one shared by those close to one. In memories of this type, corporeal space is immediately linked with the surrounding space of the environment, some fragment of inhabitable land, with its more or less accessible paths, it’s more or less easy to cross obstacles. The first milestone

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<sup>21</sup>William A. Browne Jr., “Storytelling in Architecture,” *Planetizen Features*, November 2010, <https://www.planetizen.com/node/46878>.

along the way of the spatiality that geography sets in parallel with the temporality of history is the one suggested by a phenomenology of “place” or “site.”<sup>22</sup>

Within this statement, it is easy to see how much emphasis is placed on the person’s memory and understanding of their environment and the specific space that they are occupying within their community. Ricoeur’s portrayal of how identity and one’s interpretation of self are intertwined within a shared memory. This establishes one’s interpretation of their surroundings. By understanding a person’s space within an environment, it becomes easy to connect how their lived experience carries weight. It precedes their understanding or their outlook. It, in fact, supports or hinders their survival or their development within that space.

Throughout his research and literature, Ricoeur made incredible strides in connecting the fragile journey within the development of the self and that culminating belief in one's existence within a space, familiar or unfamiliar.

Whether it be fixed space or space for dwelling, or space to be traversed, constructed space consists in a system of sites for the major interactions of life. Narrative and construction bring about a similar kind of inscription, the one in the endurance of time, the other in the enduringness of materials. Each new building is inscribed in urban space like a narrative within a setting of intertextuality. and to be read. In it, narrated time and inhabited space are more closely associated than they are in an isolated building.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 143.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid, 150.

Ricoeur describes how transitioning to a new space may be as small and familiar as one's home in comparison to an environment that is grand and unfamiliar, like exploring a newly experienced metropolis for the first time:

The city also gives rise to more complex passions than does the house, inasmuch as it offers a space for displacement, gathering, and taking a distance. There we may feel astray, rootless, lost, while its public spaces, its named spaces invite commemorations and ritualized gatherings.<sup>24</sup>

In some of Ricoeur's other works, like *Time and Narrative*, he lays out the implication of code, symbols, and language. Their influence on shaping a message to the masses, as well as how the masses interpret and accept the various messages society illustrates as fact for a particular group to follow: Before being a text, symbolic mediation has a texture. To understand a ritual act is to situate it within a ritual, set within a cultic system, and by degrees within the whole set of conventions, beliefs, and institutions that make up the symbolic framework of a culture.<sup>25</sup> The power of radio further accelerated the process of creating a shared national culture that had started when railroads and telegraphs widened the distribution of newspapers. Radio was far more effective than these print media, however. Radio created and pumped out American culture onto the airwaves and into the homes of families around the country. For example, "Syndicated radio programs like Amos 'n' Andy, which began in the late 1920s, entertained listeners around the country. In the case of the popular Amos 'n' Andy, it did so with negative racial

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<sup>24</sup>Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 151.

<sup>25</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

stereotypes about African Americans similar to those portrayed in minstrel shows of the previous century.”<sup>26</sup>

The code carried such a high level of importance because of the fact that it was the tool or resource that could further exemplify how to control a group while at the same time representing how to control the access of a group into specific environments. How to essentially impact the narrative in this form of media, at this stage and time, commanded an authoritative control that seems to subconsciously keep in line with rules and regulations that were not spoken simply felt by all walks of life. It would be a key revelation in solidifying the foundational structure of privilege. The radio was able to reach so many people in such vast and dense areas within such a short time period; it was truly an exceptional catalyst to any movement, good or bad, any trend, new or old.

### **Using Code-Switching to Create a Sense of Belonging**

That is why I state that the code is one of the most important factors in development and entry into an environment. If one speaks the code, then one gains an advantage in obtaining access to an environment. If they do not speak the code, then they may not feel like they belong; they may not receive access, and they may have to endure obstacles that others would have had the privilege of skipping past. However, entry and access just do not stop at knowing the code. Discerning between the code of where one is from versus the code of where one is going is a choice that tends to lend itself to the development of a person’s identity.

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<sup>26</sup>“Movies, Radio, and Sports in the 1920s,” Khan Academy n.d., <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/rise-to-world-power/1920s-america/a/movies-cinema-sports-1920s>.



The researchers and authors that focus on code-switching in this study and literature review will demonstrate the necessary tools needed to switch within the code. By code, I mean the spoken language code associated with how one speaks to establish access into an environment or access to a group of people who make up an environment. That may mean verbal extrapolation or mastery of the language, such as Spanish versus Tagalog or urban slang versus rural slang. Nevertheless, deciphering this code has proven to be a necessary means of navigating within the structural environment.

In this case, the code may have been a resource for transitional acceptance or assimilation from a small rural community into a large metropolitan community. These authors have aided in my interpretation and understanding that code is going to require a certain level of research that pays attention to the various environments and communities that exist in one habitat but may exist differently in another.

In society, there is that innate desire to belong, and it may cause some students to want to assimilate or do and say whatever is necessary to acclimate themselves into an environment. It is here where I feel it is necessary to focus on the contributions of Vershawn Young, University of Waterloo Black Studies Professor; his research explains the interior essence of code-switching rhetoric.<sup>27</sup> It is within this interview that Young goes into complete detail explaining the differences between code-switching and code-meshing and the relative ways in which they come up and spoken language, and also the historical implications that factor into environmental acceptance or societal acceptance by

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<sup>27</sup>“Vershawn Young,” *English Language and Literature*, November 30, 2022, <https://uwaterloo.ca/english/people-profiles/vershawn-young>.

which a person or group uses and applies these terms in their everyday experiences.

Young explains:

Code-switching to be but not limited to the educational context that's using both of them together using standard English together in one context you're not reserving your standard English strictly for school or work, and you're not reserving your black English strictly for your friends and family but and its ok to use them in each setting.<sup>28</sup>

Young's research is a major revelation into the discovery of how students move or maneuver toward success based on their comfort level within their new environment.

Their mastery of switching or meshing the linguistic implementation of their known code or language with that of standard English and the environment where standard English is prevalent is crucial to their success. If these students do not understand the code that is expected of them, unforeseen obstacles and acceptance will emerge.

In his book *Other People's English*, Young goes into great detail about using code-meshing versus code-switching and the standards that are set by the academic world, as well as the standards that are set by Society's depiction of how President Obama is able to switch between his use of his black English versus standard English. This ability to code-switch is an essential key in the discovery of how students are able to successfully maneuver in their new academic settings as well as their new habitat or academic environments. Young asserts:

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<sup>28</sup>Vershawn Young, "Connections," Public Broadcasting Service, February 7, 2014, <https://www.pbs.org/video/connections-dr-vershawn-young/>.

Most had never heard of the various labels African American English, African American Vernacular English, Black English, Ebonics, and African American Language. All of this new information about their language-its history, politics, and description-they struggled to reconcile with the attitudes they had already formed in a culture of standard language ideology, an ideology that subordinates all other dialects to the one promoted as uniformly necessary for academic and professional communication in speech and writing.<sup>29</sup>

It is within his explanation in passages like this, that Young accurately records the undertaking that students are not privy to until they are completely engulfed in their academic environment. His research is essentially recording or giving an account of what is happening within the students as they realize that even though they might not feel there is anything wrong with embracing all the dialects with which they have been taught to communicate, some entities may not fully accept them unless they chose to speak the standard dialect while in an academic setting. Young's research conveys that students' lack of knowledge of this dialectic expectation is limiting their ability to demonstrate their entire range of expression within their language skills, which begs the question: *How are students affected when they feel that they are limited to expressing themselves linguistically? Does it have any bearing on their ability to persevere in strenuous surroundings?*

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<sup>29</sup>Vershawn Ashanti Young, et al., *Other People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African American Literacy* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2014), 122. See also Jenny Krichevsky, "Other People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African-American Literacy," *Composition Studies* 43, no. 2 (2015): 234+, *Gale Literature Resource Center*, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A544601696/LitRC?u=googlescholar&sid=googleScholar&xid=f084731b>.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This research sets out to determine why minoritized students from rural small towns in West Texas return home from universities in urban spaces instead of completing their degree programs. This research will be conducted using an autoethnographic approach with narrative architecture and code-switching rhetoric as secondary theoretical frameworks to develop a qualitative study. Through interviews, I will explore the students' accounts of their experiences in higher education institutions located in urban settings. My hypothesis is that their experiences in urban higher education institutions negate their ethnic diversity and innovative potential by coercing them into silence or submission, forcing them to assimilate, discouraging their success through persuasive reasoning, or isolating them in the built environment. When rural minoritized students leave the safety of their small-town environments, they are excited with hopes and dreams of all the things they are going to learn from or contribute to their university. However, many often leave school before obtaining a college degree. As a parent of students who have graduated from schools in rural West Texas, I remember the level of confidence and certainty my children felt about their direction and how everything would align when they transitioned into college. Within this crucial phase of adolescence transitioning into adulthood, students may feel more confident about their interpretation of life and how the world works. Unfortunately, they believe they fully understand how the collegiate experience will benefit and cultivate their future endeavors, the same way the university may feel they have figured out all the needs and delivery of all resources

for all their incoming students. Using the autoethnographic method as a guide, I will be able to present my experiences, interactions, and findings so that these students may describe their experiences at the universities they aspired to attend. The perspectives of how students left or assimilated into the predetermined role the school has designed for them will be revealed.

So why autoethnography? What does this style have to offer? Who does it benefit? Storytelling is an age-old art form that has been around since the dawn of time. It is an effortless way in which mankind can recall accounts and experiences in a fashion that allows them to leave a footprint on the journey that connects the past, present, and future. This connection is made so that one's experience can benefit society through documenting the account to create a more holistic society that benefits all.

Autoethnography ensures that a genuine perspective is taken into account when designing this blueprint for the ideal structured society. All architectural work starts with a blueprint that represents the narrative, and that narrative tells the story of the space that's being constructed. In my study, quality far outweighs quantity. It is more valuable to hear and understand the true essence of the people in a case study. Their interviews, experiences, struggles, trials, and tribulations push past the perceived conclusions that other disciplines may become fixated on. Tony Adams et al. describe autoethnography as:

a qualitative research method that: 1) uses a researcher's personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences; 2) acknowledges and values a researcher's relationships with others; 3) uses deep and careful self-reflection—typically referred to as

“reflexivity”—to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political; 4) Shows people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles; 5) balances intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity; and 6) strives for social justice and to make life better.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike other methods, an autoethnographic approach can generate solutions that are more authentic and customized for the problem at hand.

In my research, I will also emphasize the need to define the “space” that is being pursued by graduating high school students who are staying in college and graduating or returning to West Texas empty-handed and unfulfilled. Indeed, all “spaces” are designed for a reason, and they are designed with the intent to encourage or discourage access to that “space.” That design is thereby influenced by the architects, provided that they are the designers. Therefore, close attention must be paid to who or what entity is functioning as the designer because the designer, in many cases, is the person or entity in control of the space. Whether people realize it or not, the “space” speaks. It speaks in a narrative that gives people permission to belong somewhere, exist somewhere, or have access to somewhere. But when the narrative is controlled by a particular entity whose mission may be tainted toward achieving one group’s superiority over another, society then humanity suffers.

Therefore, an exploration of space is necessary to help uncover the discrepancies and neglect associated with this particular group of people from West Texas. I propose

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<sup>30</sup>Tony Adams, Carolyn Ellis, and Stacy Jones, *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.

utilizing theoretical resources to examine the thick of matters that incorporates this specific problem that is plaguing them—and I use the word “thick” purposely—because there is no better way of diving into the “thick” of a problem than using actual events and stories presented by the members engulfed within the problem. This use of stories makes the autoethnographic method ideal for researching effectively for an efficient resolution. To affirm this decision, I didn't have to look much further than Clifford Geertz's 1973 book *The Interpretation of Cultures*. In this book, he discusses the thick description and thin description, which are vital factors that need to be brought to the focal point of my research. Geertz states:

From one point of view, that of the textbook, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these things, techniques, and received procedures that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, “thick description.”<sup>31</sup>

These key factors, when applied to the snuffed-out voices of the minoritized rural West Texas student, become apparent. The thin description is currently what supports society's interpretation of this particular gap in the educational systems as it relates to the rural minoritized students of West Texas. The collegiate system, as it stands now, implores a superficial belief predicated to continually produce predetermined resources of aid and support for students as a whole. Colleges have been allowing the same prepackaged

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<sup>31</sup>Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 6.

agendas, rules, and rhetoric to develop their “spaces” for supplying resources for their diverse student populations for decades. These institutions assume they are cultivating the needs of their diverse student populations. However, this is wrong and far from what is taking place because it is without the thick description, which is it is without the actual representation of life experiences that needs to be heard from this group. An example of this ideology found in Geertz’s “thick description” is an analogy that serves as a great example of ethnography working in conjunction with the narrative to help cultural interpretation.

In the example, Geertz depicts a photo of a person squinting. In this analogy, he expresses that there is no real explanation as to what emotional state that person is feeling or how this emotional state is impacting what the person is doing in the picture. In other words, it cannot be determined if the person is winking, possibly flirting with the photographer, or if that person may have a nervous twitch and is uncomfortable with the actual photographer.<sup>32</sup> But, if we have an actual explanation given by the person in the picture, then we get a depiction of how and what they are feeling. An autoethnographic explanation of the representation of this photo is vital in understanding the complexities within a simple photograph and how easy it is to manifest a convoluted interpretation of what emotional state the subject in the photo is in. The same holds true for this minoritized population. If there is going to be a solution formed for their success, then there needs to be a rhetorical analysis to which they contribute. But no one is considering their geographical representation, and no one seems to care about researching their

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.



communities; instead, their stories with detrimental implications remain simply waiting to be discovered and heard. Brown and Hill describe this as:

Contemporary ethnographic research looks at what may be considered ordinary or mundane to those living within a community: for example, shopping malls, corporations, towns, cities, cyberspace, garbage, libraries, parks, etc. ethnography, as a first-hand, detailed account of a given community or society, attempts to get a comprehensive understanding of the circumstances of the people being studied.<sup>33</sup>

As stated, contemporary ethnographic research looks at what may be considered ordinary or mundane, like the rural communities where my research students come from. My research encompasses my personal connection while examining how a community, minoritized students of rural West Texas, within a university environment is being impacted by a commercialized commodity designed for profit and preserving an age-old hierarchy of majority rule over diversity inclusion, whether it is deliberate or due to a growing misconception of priorities. Universities are facilitating this debilitating experience within this small population, and it is restructuring their hopes of obtaining educational prosperity.

This study proves critical because it illuminates an otherwise intrinsic presentiment of cynicism that surges unchecked during a pivotal transitional period for rural minoritized students. I became aware of this transition from adolescence to adulthood in my own journey of transitioning from one environment (a metropolis in Texas) to another (rural West Texas small communities). Then I witnessed my own

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<sup>33</sup> *African American Heritage and Ethnography: A Self-Paced Training Resource*, Ethnography Program, National Park Service, Washington, DC, 2006, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/ethnography/aah/AAheritage/index.htm>

children embark on this journey, moving from their known environment (rural, small-town community of West Texas) to that of the unknown environment (the major metropolis of their chosen college). The transition from adolescence to adulthood is already complicated, and students from a small rural West Texas community are no different from students worldwide navigating this complex stage of their lives. Without this study, rural minoritized students of West Texas will continue going to universities that may have a predesigned infrastructure to limit their propensity for success.

As it stands today, these students are confronting great challenges, to begin with, simply by choosing to go to college. These students have acquired the same hopes and dreams as students from previous generations, which, coupled with the tried and proven geographical opportunities of the oil industry, creates a difficult decision for a young adult from this region to make. The challenge for the families and the communities is just as difficult: investing and giving support to a decision that may be a first-time experience for the family or, worse, a recurring experience that produces no degrees or credentials, just debt and time wasted. Additionally, it has been thought that these students are not successful simply because these students are not “college-ready,” or perhaps the students are not the “college type.” Speculations have also been made that their connection to their community and family is so great that they feel compelled to drop out and assist in financially stabilizing those left behind.

Historically, there have been many theories on this phenomenon of why students are not completing their educational journey and the obstacles they had to face that detoured them. There has been time, money, and energy put towards creating a resolution

to these obstacles that plague rural minoritized students not completing their academic dreams. But when we treat a growing problem with remedies that are nonspecific, then our outcomes will continue to mass-produce subpar results. Within every field that surrounds the aspect of service, one of the most crucial components is “the initial intake.” In the medical field, when a patient has an ailment or disease, the doctor’s initial intake of the problem is vital because it is directly linked to the remedy. The world of rhetoric facilitates this ideal as well. Therefore, it is of dire importance to ensure that there is a correct intake, one that depicts an understanding of the complications from the people impacted by the problem.

Students who have gone off to college assume that they will be supported, their dreams cultivated, and they will obtain the credentials needed to become innovative, successful, and respected, and their academic recognition is valued. Also, within the same scope, the universities they attend assume that they provide the necessary resources to help minoritized students reach success and obtain their respective degrees. However, there is a disconnect that creates frustration and disappointment across the board.

Two key components and factors that are connected with the methodology of my research are narrative architecture and code-switching rhetoric. They are two vital pillars that enable the true representation of what is happening to students as they transition from one space to another. While at the same time, these pillars allow a level of analysis of the various survival tactics that are employed by some students as I bring into account narrative architecture and the reasoning behind using it as a method. I think about how the narrative is the story connecting architecture, environment, and space; using this

premise allows for a culmination of interview questions with the design of decoding the message assigned to the experience students are unraveling in their first year within a new environment. Therefore, narrative architecture is relevant in discerning how students achieve success or failure; Paul Ricoeur alludes to this in his work *Architecture and Narrativity*:

To begin with, I would like to put an analogy in place, or rather something that appears at first sight to be only an analogy: a narrow parallelism between architecture and narrativity, in that architecture, would be to space what narrative is to time, namely a ‘configurative’ process; a parallelism between on the one hand constructing, that is, building in space, and on the other hand recounting, employment in time.

In the course of this analysis, I will ask myself if one ought not to push this analogy much further to the point of a genuine intertwining, an entanglement between the architectural configuring of space and the narrative configuring of time.<sup>34</sup>

Narrative architecture becomes an essential tool for the development of this type of analysis between how the spatial environment tells the story of access or tells the story of exclusion. In examining the student’s transition from a small community to a major metropolis community, the rural minoritized students of West Texas’s problematic complexity in obtaining a degree has oftentimes been explained as happenstance and may be contained to just one particular point in time historically. However, my research has

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<sup>34</sup>Paul Ricoeur, “Architecture and Narrativity,” *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricoeur Studies* 7, no. 2 (2016): 31-42.

revealed that this problem spans several decades, as I utilize students who graduated at various times within the last 40 years. West Texas minoritized students' inability to be cultivated toward completion of a college degree from their initially selected college is a real problem with varied intricacies. Therefore, applying a mixed-method approach that included narrative architecture was truly the only format that could justifiably represent all aspects within the comprehension and explanation of the issue. This direction was further solidified in my discernment after reviewing one of Ricoeur's most prolific points of view in his works. He states in his teaching and his recognition that the architectural configuring of space and the narrative configuring of time plays a significant role in establishing a predisposition of acceptance, which is unrealized by these transitional students and further compounded substantially by the minimal research within this area.

Code-switching rhetoric, one of the pillars of this research, intrinsically complements narrative architecture as supporting foundational tools in this auto-ethnographic research. There are a couple of key pivotal points of view or perspectives when discussing code-switching rhetoric. Two key viewpoints to look at are that of a cultural code-switching perspective and a linguistic code-switching perspective. This combination is a very important and key element within my research utilizing code-switching has much more layers than the average person may anticipate. Simply looking at the students coming from a small West Texas community, they are oftentimes the descendants of a group of people who are from border towns on the Texas-New Mexico border. This border rhetoric tends to give a higher level of consideration and importance being placed on code-switching rhetoric as a means of showing a higher level

of proficiency in the English language and the traditional Spanish language. I am reminded of this within the works of Cecilia Montes-Alcala. She focuses on oral and written code-switching in Spanish - English bilingual youths. Linguistically, she finds through some of her quantitative research that students are accepting of their use of code-switching. She examines the type of code-switching that deals with intersentential and intrasentential code-switching.

This type of code-switching is different from a cultural code-switching perspective which aligns more with researchers like Vershawn Young or Beverly Tatum. In an article published in *Health Magazine*, Tatum states:

A bilingual person might use one language to speak to some people, and another language to speak to others—or one language at home, another at school," Tatum told Health. "Cultural code-switching is similar, but not only limited to language. It could refer to other cultural expressions as well—style of dress, physical mannerisms, and other forms of self-presentation.<sup>35</sup>

It is here where one can see that there is a distinct correlation between how students from West Texas may determine how they will use code-switching as a tool. Yet learn, as they transition into a new environment, they will be required to incorporate far more than just their linguistic code transition. They will be required to assimilate in order to gain access and mobility in their new space. Also, what may be taking place is the revelation that the stakeholders within the metropolis space and the university space may not place the same level of value on code-switching as small-town community members. In “Cross-Cultural

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<sup>35</sup>Taylyn Washington-Harmon, “Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?” *Health*, May 23, 2022, <https://www.health.com/mind-body/health-diversity-inclusion/code-switching>.

Code-Switching: The Psychological Challenges of Adapting Behavior in Foreign Cultural Interactions,” Andrew Molinsky asserts:

In other words, code-switching and code-meshing can be looked at as a derogatory function explicitly showing the lack of mastery in the academic dialectic collegiate narrative and outer visual presentation. As Dr. Andrew Molinsky wrote in a journal for the *Academy of Management Review*, “Cross-Cultural code-switching forces an individual to consciously override this dominant, culturally ingrained response (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1991; Feldman, 1984); it entails deviating from accustomed behavior in one’s native culture in order to engage in behavior appropriate to a foreign culture.”<sup>36</sup>

This tool is not where this journey concludes because there is more involved within the code-switching premise than what meets the eye. The university’s culture within the major metropolis and the identity that is expected for these minority students of West Texas to take on create a requirement in a sacrifice for these students that may not have entirely been explained. The other factor that is not being taken into consideration is the fact that the newfound environment in the major metropolis has a particular identity that they think all students need to aspire to obtain in order to gain the access they desire. In “Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?” Taylin

Washington-Harmon points out that

Tatum agreed with code-switching being a way to gain acceptance. “When a person from a stigmatized group (which could be based on race, ethnicity,

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<sup>36</sup>Andrew Molinsky, “Cross-Cultural Code-Switching: The Psychological Challenges of Adapting Behavior in Foreign Cultural Interactions,” *Academy of Management Review* 32, no. 2 (April 2007): 622–40, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2007.24351878>.

language, sexual orientation, etc.) is interacting with people in a non-stigmatized group, they may code-switch to play down their group membership in order to fit in and be accepted,” Tatum said. “That might help them advance in their career or feel included at school.”<sup>37</sup>

This is an important statement because of the fact that students will want to feel included; they will want to feel that they are connected with the resources that can advance their careers or at least the credentials needed to obtain entry into their careers. However, some of these students feel that they do not have a voice in these new spaces in the major metropolis collegiate classrooms. This lack of voice is why code-switching rhetoric narrative architecture helps to formulate the second set of questions which allows the students to voice what they felt was being silenced during some of their first semesters in the major metropolis spaces. Whether it was silenced in the classroom, in an environment outside of the university, or simply in the environment of a major city, these students felt silenced.

I interviewed members of three different ethnic groups: Mexican, African American, and biracial students, who represented both Mexican and African American. There were 5 biracial students (three males and two females), seven Mexican students (four males and three females), and lastly, five African American students (three females and two males). All of these students graduated from a small-town school in West Texas. The age range was 18 and older; the only stipulation was that the students graduated from a small-town community school or were homeschooled in rural West Texas and went to a

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<sup>37</sup>Washington-Harmon, “Code-Switching,” 23.



university in an urban city. Interviewees were asked to sign a waiver release to use their responses in this study, as well as if they would like a pseudonym for the interview. The interviews documented their stories and experiences within the urban collegiate world, including how their vision, direction, and contributions to higher education institutions were impacted.

I devised six questions that dealt with the exploration and transitional phase of students moving from one known, familiar environment to a new, unfamiliar environment. I interviewed these students via a Zoom session and then created a naming convention that allowed for the students' identities to be kept confidential. I categorized the common responses and highlighted those interviews that expressed the overall views of the interviewees. The chosen highlighted responses resonated with the unspoken truths about the obstacles that were impacting these rural minoritized students of West Texas.

The first set of questions was designed to allow students to give insight into what support they received or what resources functioned as a surrogate/substitution for the student's familiar home environment:

1. Why and how did you think going off to college was going to impact your future?
2. What resources did you engage with from your university to cultivate your future goals?
3. Were there any circumstances that changed your view of completing a college degree? Explain.

The next questions centered around acclamation, agency, access, and achievement as ways to uncover the student's climb toward success or fall toward departure from the

unfamiliar environment. These questions will utilize Jamila Lyiscot's five paradigm principles regarding silencing students of color in post-secondary education institutions. In Lyiscott's 2018 TEDx Talk<sup>38</sup> She lays out this blueprint to create a paradigm shift to approximate reality to get institutions to reimagine themselves and how they will impact this diverse population that occupies the academic spaces within their campus. She discusses the need for new paradigms that will be new roadmaps toward the complete integration of diverse populations to combat the current system in institutions that have not been changed since the days of slavery, where diverse students simply occupy space but are not integrated into the university. The five paradigms are *awareness, agency and access, actualization, achievement, and alteration*. I begin with a question based on the paradigms, which are basically based on the five A's. I would take that particular set of paradigms and utilize that as a way of allowing these minority rural students of West Texas, past and present, to share their voices. I want to give them a platform where each student can organize and channel their voice to allow its power to be heard. First, I will explain how each paradigm relates to my research, and then I will provide the questions used in the interviews.

The first paradigm is *awareness*. To demonstrate how *awareness* will be used, interview questions focused on the awareness that a student has of themselves when they are in their West Texas rural community. The awareness that students have is going to be different than those of community members who have been influenced by the draw of the oil field. Thus, when students are faced with strife and the complexities of their

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<sup>38</sup>Lyiscott, "Why English Class."

educational future, they lean on their community to inspire and push them. However, they have a limited number of people who are aware of the metropolitan academic infrastructure. It is within this atmosphere the desire to want to attend post-secondary education opportunities is skewed, and striving to be impactful collegiate students can be hampered.

The second paradigm addressed questions that are about breaking down the combo terms *agency* and *access*. The intent is to depict what transpired once a rural student of West Texas entered their urban institution of choice. It is important to understand the agency and the access that is granted or provided to them. In a rural West Texas upbringing, students are conditioned to expect certain support systems to assist and guide them in obtaining access to resources. It is a preconceived notion that the university will allow them to see the amount of value placed on their contributions, and they will be provided with an agency within that university to support their connection to their access.

The third component of this paradigm is the term *actualization*. This speaks to what the rural community students deem actualizing or accepting when it comes to the narrative or the truth about their voice and their depiction of their experience. A question must be asked in regard to their feelings toward this experience. Some students may have stories that center around views of conformity and self-loathing. The actualizing of their identity, who they are, and what resources and opportunities they deserve to have will help bring about change. Understanding and realizing that there are students who come from different backgrounds and realizing that the only thing different from them is that they are not a minority or they are not from a West Texas rural community, and therefore

that was sufficient enough to provide them with resources and opportunities to sustain viability and longevity in the collegiate experience.

The fourth term within this paradigm principle is *achievement*. Achievement is going to be in the voice of how these rural West Texas Community students identify their own achievements. They might identify the achievements provided by the resources, support, and cultivation of the University versus the achievements provided by the support and cultivation of the oil industry or the agricultural industry of West Texas. They could also attribute this to the support system provided by a small community striving to ensure that their students—past and present— still feel that they are valuable contributions to the community.

The last paradigm principle is *alteration*. The students' voices need to be able to express what alterations need to be made within the mindset of the students that follow. What must be said so that new students will not undergo the same mistreatment? Also, what alterations do they feel the university needs to make in hearing these in order to bring power, perspective, and possibility, something that was promised previously.

Based on these principles, this second set of questions was presented to the interviewees:

**Awareness:** Did you feel the resources within your rural community were going to aid your future? Why or why not?

**Agency and access:** Did your university support you as a student from a rural community? If so, how? If not, what did you have to do as a student to

compensate for the university's limitation in supporting you as a student from a rural community?

**Actualization:** How does a student from a rural community experience college in an urban setting? How did you utilize code-switching to help you navigate the collegiate environment? Provide an example of the harsh reality you experienced as a student from a rural community in college.

**Achievement:** How does your geographic location at home and at college impact your own view of success?

**Alteration:** What did your university need to provide to help cultivate and assure your current and future success?

I have come to the despairing realization that no one was listening to the voices of this particular group, the rural minoritized students of West Texas. Nor was anyone concerned with the growing gap in the world of academia that was occurring due to the decline in this group's presence as participants in college graduations each year. My research will show that this has significant implications for society. By taking the actual accounts from the students who had authentic issues and compelling circumstances, my research will reveal the undeniable problems that kept them from feeling a level of success and belonging within what initially was the "space" they deemed viable and essential towards their growth in the collegiate atmosphere.

But this alone was not going to be enough. These revelations needed to be coupled with my first-hand analysis, which, unfortunately, in many cases came as I functioned as a school district administrator in rural West Texas, witnessing the distraught

riddled students as they returned to the community. Oftentimes, this also occurred as I took on the role of a sounding board for parents as a coach or church member in the community. Listening to the anxieties that were being conveyed as many parents and guardians were coming to terms that their students were ill-prepared for the next phase of their life at a higher education institution in the big city. Too often, emphasis is placed on research from professionals seeking to solve student success by using outdated data, professional entities who think their research in the area of student success is more important than the actual students succeeding. They believe their interpretation is more important than the views of the people who are directly related to the work, all the while bypassing the actual students' voices. I am sure universities fear that voice because it is the voice of students wrapped in emotional accounts that have been labeled rash and irrelevant.

So what results can we expect to see from the autoethnographic approach? Getting “into the thick” of this problem will allow for a more authentic analysis of the problem. Viable and substantial solutions will be generated. This generation will lead to impactful discussions within the various stakeholder organizations on college campuses and even within the small communities where these students originate.

When diving into the “thick” of the matter, I gained first-hand knowledge of how the students' joy and excitement for transitioning into a new, promising environment developed. This certain level of newfound confidence would disguise some of the inner workings and questions that should have been asked to many who felt they understood what the students were going to experience. However, being in the school system and

more closely connected to what the students were going to experience, I could see through the disguise of this confidence. I felt they were going to have to live through and survive these uncomfortable collegiate experiences in order for them to achieve the success they so anxiously wanted. I knew this because I could see and remember the experience I underwent when I transitioned from a metropolitan environment to a small town in rural West Texas, where I became an administrator. I was not only advising and giving guidance to those students whom I was employed to take care of but also my own children were attending a small rural school. All of the students seemed to be displaying the same confidence and understanding of how their first year in an urban collegiate space was going to be. Thus, an autoethnographic approach ensured that my personalized and real connection to this dilemma was going to be available as a measurement tool needed to accurately assess the type of questions required to bring forth the stories of these rural minoritized students of West Texas and their true experiences.

Often, solutions have been composed of methods or ideas that are related to the success of the institution's vision. These presentations paint a commercialized picture of all the possibilities available to the students as well as all the resources they can take advantage of. Advisors, counselors, and resources all provide the impression that will lead to the student's success. But not all students have access to this success, and without the actual voices and concerns from students who have come to realize this misconception, then this cycle of unfulfilled dreams will continue. These various avenues of projected success and implementation of resources for the students signify strides and accomplishments that are superficial to the minoritized students of rural West Texas

communities. Current research overlooks the actual phenomenon associated with rural minoritized West Texas students' lack of completion of a college degree and applies a band-aid fix for a significant wound within this culture. Geertz alludes to how and why we as a society need to get to the "thick description" of a problem and not the "thin" or superficial issues surrounding it. He states, "It is not against a body of uninterpreted data, radically thinned descriptions, that we must measure the cogency of our explications, but against the power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers."<sup>39</sup> If these problems are not addressed, they can turn into major issues with societal impacts. The stance within the simple makeup of small towns in West Texas is often overlooked by universities because the perception of small towns, especially ones in West Texas, is that they are merely a component of the oil industry, and their main purpose is simply to support the oil industry. It is forgotten that many students carry the potential to return and contribute to society by contributing to the development and innovative evolution of their small towns. To have a college not cultivate these students creates a deficit in these communities. These towns are deemed functioning efficiently because of the fact that they are still able to contribute in some form or fashion to the oil industry.

But what happens when these towns dry up? What happens when these towns can no longer function self-sufficiently? Many of these towns are beholden to the possibilities that are provided when a student completes his collegiate journey. For example, the town that I live in, Fort Stockton, Texas, is a small west Texas town of about 7,000 people. It

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<sup>39</sup>Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 16.



has one dentist's office and one eye doctor to serve the entire population. So for a student going to college to obtain their optometry degree or their orthodontist degree, this carries a major impact on this small town. If that student just so happens to be a minoritized student, such as Mexican-American, he or she has the ability to create a level of rapport and familiarity within the community, especially if they were born and raised there. They do this by providing a needed service that allows a community to grow and thrive independently. However, if that student's collegiate journey is cut short, and combined with the retirement of an optometrist or an orthodontist, the town is now crippled as that service is no longer available. These are some unforeseen catastrophes that illustrate that a domino effect can occur, which not only hurts the small communities of West Texas but also hurts the collegiate classroom community.

James Paul Gee compels us to remember that the removal of a viable contributing factor within the classroom will ultimately put a glass ceiling on the possible evolution of creativity and innovation. This travesty must be exposed to align the needs between the college and its students. I feel a megaphone needs to be given to the members of the rural minoritized students of West Texas so that they have a seat at the table, where they are invited to represent and speak on their needs. They need a platform for their stories to be told so that we can address the negative feeling they are associating with their contributions to the collegiate atmosphere. The powers that be within the collegiate environment and the educational systems that feed them believe they are providing the ideal resources to allow for the contributions of the rural minoritized students to improve. This disconnect creates a rhetorical gap between what the university feels it is

communicating to its student body versus what the students feel is being conveyed to them. It is because of this continued conflict that harm to the students continues to grow in conjunction with the erasure of this minoritized group's representation in collegiate graduations.

Moving forward, I plan to implement an emic perspective autoethnography. The *emic* perspective is different from the *etic* perspective in the fact that the emic comes from detailed observations within the culture, and that is my focal point, getting the actual insider perspective. Taking actual interviews from the students who have left their community in West Texas, entered their selected college, and then left that college. A perspective like this will require me to ask a specific set of questions that allow the former students to speak freely in relation to their experience. This freedom will reconnect them to the mental complication that they previously endured in the hopes of creating a viable solution for future students who will choose to venture off to college under similar circumstances. What will essentially follow is an authentic etic view which I feel is grossly misused in autoethnography as researchers can tend to create an ideal but not a genuine representation of the members within the group being studied.

Using an auto-ethnographic approach allows me to give a more detailed and genuine view from inside the depths of the actual cultural and environmental phenomenon. My desire is to ensure that the research setting, conclusions, and interpretations are not skewed. The same can be said due to this contextual phenomenon in the collegiate environment, where misguided and underutilized resources are created and placed in an atmosphere where only a select few understand where these resources

are located and how to obtain them. At the college campus, the etic view is tainted where administrators, staff, and even the actual space transition into the outside influences that shape the rural minoritized students' behaviors and beliefs based on their own perception created by how they have had to maneuver within their new space.

Thus an understanding of the two narratives, the narrative of the communities of West Texas on their feelings in relation to their students' direction and how to support them versus that of the new environments of the collegiate world and the metropolis and the expectation of students entering this environment become a focal point of interest. Common questions that are asked of me by many stakeholders of these small-town communities are, "What happens when you have students who have been exposed to all the traditional resources taking place in West Texas? Are we creating temptations for our students to return?" These questions are asked because it is within this region where we find students who are exposed to successful vocational opportunities before entering college. They are obtaining jobs paying well over \$40,000 a year before they leave high school woven within the oil industry or within the agricultural farming and ranching industry. When these students choose to attend a college that is located outside of their familiar environment, it is important to know why. When these students choose different fields of study, such as medicine or technology, and then leave or drop out and return home, we need to understand what happens to their confidence and security that lead to their decision to go to college in the first place. These are situational perspectives that may be foreign to their family members from these communities, which means they may face scrutiny and not feel support. Questions like these can not be analyzed in a

quantitative method effectively. This will not hold true in a breakdown of statistical findings. I need to have a format that allows me to respond to questions like “What happens to those students when they do not have access to some of the resources they would easily find at home?”

My goal is to use autoethnography, code-switching rhetoric, and narrative architecture as solid methods and tools for creating the platform for students and my research to produce viable solutions to the issue faced by students of West Texas. The culmination of these methods will unmask the growing overwhelming confusion as to what identity the minoritized students of West Texas must portray in order to access the resources they need for success in the new foreign environments they are now occupying. It is no wonder that these students, with all their potential and all their available financial support, terminate their college journey and return home prematurely.

## CHAPTER 4

### MINORITIZED STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

In the film *The Wizard of Oz*, directed by Victor Fleming et al., Dorothy says, “Toto, I have a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”<sup>40</sup> I distinctly remember recalling this quote as I entered Fort Stockton, Texas, my wife's small town of 7,000 people, for the very first time. The revelation was attributed to sheer shock and awe at this unfamiliar environment. My wife wanted to show me downtown, which is generally the heart of any city. I expected to see a wide variety of buildings, including skyscrapers, various corporate structures, newly developing small businesses, lavish hotels, and some excellent eatery spots. I expected to see a tremendous amount of people hustling and bustling around, going to work or on their lunch break. However, this was not the case. Instead, I was introduced to a small one-lane street (with two-lane traffic) that resembled the set of an old Western movie. I expected to see a saloon or some people riding horses coming down the street (I did see people riding horses in other parts of the town). I didn’t see the hustle and bustle of many people. As a matter of fact, our car was one of only a few cars on the street.

After about 15 minutes of driving around, yes, within that 15 minutes, we completed our tour of downtown...all of downtown. Right then, I knew the look, the feel, the people, and even the buildings were foreign to me. But I also was foreign to the people in this environment. I was something unfamiliar as well to this environment. As

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<sup>40</sup>King Vidor, et al., *The Wizard of Oz*, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939.

we left to head back to the city of San Antonio after visiting my wife's family for the weekend; we stopped at a gas pump on the outskirts of town. As I went inside to pay, the cashier, who just so happened to be the owner, asked, "Hey, you're the Fabela's future son-in-law?" I said, "Yes, I am!" But I was utterly surprised that he knew me out of the hundreds of people who came and went for gas at his station. Soon I would learn that my assumption was skewed. This type of observation was a normal characteristic for the small-town atmosphere but abnormal for those people who are accustomed to city living. I should have known my way of thinking, and environmental observations were only useful in the city. In the city, it is quite normal to be in a place where no one knows anyone in the space. There are spaces and places where the only common characteristic is how each person is using or going to use the space, almost as if it's an environmental "speakeasy," but instead of allowing people access to illegal alcohol, spaces in the city often reveal access to resources. Nearly everyone who lives in a big city is perfectly fine with moving about in a space like a gas station where every patron is a stranger.

This is not a characteristic that is associated with small towns because in small towns of West Texas, everyone knows everyone, and anyone who resembles someone who is out of place, someone who is not from there, well, that person immediately becomes a conversation piece worth exploring. To his credit, the gas station owner's response was, "Oh yeah, I kind of figured... We don't have many people like you around these parts." People like me, I assumed, meant a young black male, or maybe it was the fact we were an interracial couple gassing up on our way out of town. A "city slicker," as they like to call people, who gave off a certain effervescence of fast rhetoric and dicey

schemes. Much like Dorothy's emotional state upon entering Oz for the first time, I felt anxious and uncomfortable, for I was coming to the realization that I was not prepared to live in an environment like this. As a military brat, I had grown up attending schools in many of the major cities across the United States and had recently left the city of San Antonio, which had close to one million people, before arriving at this small town of 7,000 residents. When you have become accustomed to a particular environment like cities, that environment becomes all that you know, and it may give an unrealistic impression that all environments will resemble the one with which you are familiar. I remember thinking how this Fort Stockton, Texas, environment is just so new and different, and I never imagined that there were places like it in the world.

In Dorothy's story, she was uplifted by a tornado and transported into her new environment. Leaving Kansas and then landing in Oz changed Dorothy's life tremendously. She knew she was in a different environment, but the true question is, when did she realize that she was not prepared mentally for the environment she had landed in? How was she going to handle being forced to acclimate or assimilate to ensure her survival? After I migrated from one environment (the city) to an unimaginable place (a West Texas small town), just like Dorothy, I, too, started to think about my survival and how to navigate this new space. Of course, I also started to think about how I would get back home. However, I did not return home to San Antonio, Texas. Instead, I made Fort Stockton, Texas, my home, where I began to witness some of the top minoritized high school students returning home prematurely without completing their degree after

displaying such confidence and potential in their desire to attend their chosen college in a major city.

It was this experience that led me to question what may be happening to my own children who identified as Biracial (Mexican and Black and countless other minoritized high school graduates who would leave the small towns of West Texas and embark on their journey into unfamiliar metropolises to pursue collegiate success. Thus, this became the focus of my research. I felt it was necessary in order to help any of the future minoritized students from rural towns in West Texas who were going to these densely populated areas to know about their predecessor's trials and tribulations leading to their success or failure. I wanted these students' stories not only to be heard but documented in hopes of societal change and treatment of this neglected group of rural minoritized students of West Texas. I devised a few questions that would help these students depict their collegiate journey and the experiences that many of them faced, which led to either their return to their small towns or their survival in the metropolis of their college.

To determine if the rural minoritized students of West Texas encountered the same revelation that Dorothy and I experienced when we were dropped into our new environment, I asked: **“When you went off to college, was there a harsh reality that said, ‘I’m not in my small town anymore?’”** It was astonishing to learn that every student who was involved in the interview process experienced a harsh reality. One hundred percent is impactful, so to discover that every student I interviewed had a high probability of encountering a harsh reality in their transition from their familiar small environment to their unfamiliar major metropolis puts into perspective that these students



need to adapt to the environment more so than they need to adapt to the demands of their studies. One particular example I want to highlight is that of a student whose alias is Lorraine. Lorraine graduated from a high school in a West Texas town of about 300 residents within a county of 15,000 people. Her high school graduating class was eight students. She received an academic scholarship to a small Ivy League college located in Hartford, Connecticut. During Lorraine's first year of college, Hartford had a population of just under 125,000 people and a metro area (similar to Texas county size) of 1.2 million people. Lorraine's response to my question was riveting:

I think the first real moment that I had where it was like, Whoa! I'm not in my small community anymore, I would say... was visiting Walmart. It's so funny, because, like Walmart down in a small town in West Texas, it's open 24 hours. You can go at any point in time. It kind of feels safe, like you could walk around Walmart and not see some weird things. But out in the New England area, in Hartford, specifically populated by a diverse amount of people, and I think I remember walking in and just feeling like, Oh, my gosh!

There are people who look like me... There are people who don't look like me... There are people who speak other languages and work, all going into Walmart.

Of all places! So that was the first time, I think, where I had to like triple-check myself with like. *Did I lock my car? Did I lock my car? Did I lock my car?* Also, like going to Walmart for the first time at night and, you know, like right before the store closes, because it's a five min drive or whatever. Then I

have some homeless people coming up to me, and like not being able to turn to a parental figure or like somebody to be the person to tell them off. But me having to be like, “No, I can’t,” or you know... “I don’t have anything for you...,” and then, like you know, walking to my car, I had to be very mindful again. Being a young woman walking around in the city, so, just like those little lessons....<sup>41</sup>

Lorraine’s harsh reality was evident because it was closely connected to her feeling of safety and security, which was wrapped in the representation of the community. The community was always on display no matter where you went within a small West Texas town. Even the local Walmart in the middle of the night would have a friend, a friend’s family member, or your family member working the graveyard shift. Someone that knew of your family, your people were visibly around. Just like what occurred when I first came to Fort Stockton, at the gas pump, I was discovered, and I was recognized, and my dealings with the town needed to be determined. That consistent evaluation of who is amongst the community reestablishes a sense of belonging and community support. That is now no longer present for Lorraine; she is alone and is being required to rapidly make sense of how to protect herself and guide herself safely within this new environment with no guidance. More importantly, the structures that represented community and safety, even though they may look the same as what existed in her small town, did not function or provide the same resources of comfort and security.

When students leave their familiar environment and small community to acquire academic credentials that are necessary to achieve their envisioned destiny, many feel

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<sup>41</sup>Lorraine (minoritized female graduate), interview by the author, September 25, 2022 (See Appendix C).

that they have been provided everything that they need for success. They also assume that any other resources needed can be obtained at the university of their choice. Students from a small West Texas town are no different in this thought process. However, when starting a new adventure, it is essential to have the tools needed to decipher where they are going and where they have access to go. In her interview, Lorraine explains the importance of having a clear understanding and feel for the new environment students will be occupying:

Unfortunately for people of color, you are being the minority in the United States anytime you're going to a different space. You're likely going to transition into being a minority because that's just the population. So yeah, it's always gonna be a different experience for students of color.<sup>42</sup>

It is here where I believe my two supporting areas become the main focal points in a student's navigation within these new and unfamiliar surroundings. Code-switching rhetoric and narrative architecture are those tools that identify whether a student is encouraged or discouraged from becoming a contributing component of the academic system that is designed to help them fulfill their educational destiny.

Figuratively speaking, if a minoritized student's educational success is "housed" in the university they have selected, then establishing what "key" is needed to open the "door of access" is vital. As students begin to establish themselves at college, they learn quickly that certain students have access based on having the appropriate "keys." This question of access led me to ask: **"What did you have to do to compensate for the**

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<sup>42</sup>Lorraine (minoritized female graduate), interview by the author, September 25, 2022 (See Appendix C).

**university's limitation in supporting you as a student from a rural West Texas community?"** I asked this question in this particular way because I wanted students to be able to articulate and describe their recognition that access to resources for educational success they needed to obtain was housed at the university. While the resources are housed at the university, the key to unlocking this treasure of resources is not clearly spelled out. It is here that I discovered another area in which all the students interviewed believed they had to compensate for the university's limitation in supporting them as students from rural West Texas communities. Throughout the various interviewees' responses, what rang true was that the students realized that they had to be go-getters and trailblazers who knew what they wanted and were outgoing enough to go and get whatever they needed. That could be simply finding the Writing Center or discovering how to sign up for office hours or work-study in order to receive or be presented with the resources that were available to them. Alas, to the students' surprise, what they determined was outgoing was not outgoing enough; the characteristics needed to unlock their access and demonstrate a willingness to succeed were not evident. Their version of what an outgoing trailblazer looks like was vastly different from what others in the big city collegiate environment deemed it should be. Therefore, students from rural West Texas communities came across as shy, reserved, and unmotivated.

I spoke with counselors in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a high school program whose mission is to prepare students in the academic middle for four-year college eligibility, especially those students under-represented in post-secondary institutions. AVID is designed to create or increase the entry of high

school students attending college.<sup>43</sup> These counselors describe a first-year student who is a trailblazer as one who builds rapport in a group setting and a person who communicates at a high and effective level. But what is not taken into consideration is that minoritized students of West Texas may exhibit these characteristics in their small class of eight students but reflect something entirely different in the settings of a large collegiate metropolis campus. Therefore, based on that perception, many of the small community-based students admit to the diminishment of their confidence in large settings. Seeing groups of 300 students in a biology class or even a small group of 60 students gathering for a multicultural meet-and-greet mixer, it became painfully obvious to the small-town students that it was too great of an environment for them to feel comfortable and confident.

Sadly these situations had to be learned firsthand; many of the students discussed that they felt as if they were failures simply because they did not have the courage to ask for help or guidance in these spaces where they should have sought out the resources that the university was providing. This lack of courage appeared to be an ever-evolving issue because asking for help or establishing a relationship with those within the university community that could help them was not a natural function of small-town students. The students came to the understanding that they were going to need to step outside their comfort zone. They also realized that their comfort zone was associated with the small community with which they were familiar.

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<sup>43</sup>Advancement Via Individual Determination - Texas,  
<https://www.senate.texas.gov/cmtes/79/c525/02062006.c525.friou-1.pdf>.

Two particular interviews come to mind as they told their stories about the adjustment in the environment and the type of persona that they felt was going to be a requirement for their survival and a means of mobility within their newfound environment. The first interview was with a student named Ben who, like Lorraine, graduated from a high school in a town of about 300 people within a county that included 15,000 people as well. He graduated a few years after Lorraine with a graduating class of 18 students, which was one of the largest graduating classes at his high school in the past 10 years. He attended a college near Boston, where the metro area was well over 4 million people during his first year in this new environment. Ben explained why he had to change how he spoke and processed people from when he lived in his small community in West Texas to this new community in the New England area:

I changed in order to, I guess, be successful... probably... I had to be just acclimating to the people...I mean, the people were completely different in terms of just how they spoke...their dialect... to how they acted in society... I felt like what I said earlier...time... moves faster when I was in the city... It was more so because everyone was moving at speed literally faster than what I was getting in Texas... and people were just so driven and, you know, had their “blindness on,” Meaning that they just were so adept to tune out the noise and people... that you know... you had to kind of pick up to that pace, or else like I said earlier, you would get left behind...I think also another big thing too was just getting acclimated to the land in, like, you know, I guess, geographically. <sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Ben (minoritized male graduate), interview by the author, September 25, 2022, (See Appendix C).

In defining code-switching rhetoric and how it pertains to the development of rural minoritized students from West Texas, there are some elements that impact how they obtain these keys. They have to adapt to what they must do, how they must act and look in order to enter the door where their success is housed. Code-switching is often used in their transition into their new educational space. It is a key they will use at some point but at what cost? Code-Switching is a rhetorical device that these students use to integrate themselves into the collegiate environment. But I want to explore the notion that Vershawn Young uses in an interview on the show “Connections” when he asserts, “Code-switching is then an act of racial compromise for African American English users, one that code-meshing pedagogy desires to move beyond.”<sup>45</sup> The United Language Group defines code-switching as “the use of different dialects, accents, language combinations, and mannerisms within social groups in order to project a particular identity.”<sup>46</sup> Ben and other minoritized students from small towns in West Texas believed they needed to “acclimate to people” by changing the way they spoke and acted to protect the identity of a college student in an urban setting.

This concept is where my autoethnography overlaps with and speaks to my interviews. I think back to when I was coming into the environment of the small town of 7,000 in Fort Stockton, Texas, versus the major city of San Antonio, Texas, which was close to a million people. I realized that my ideas, my thoughts, and my ambitions I expressed when I was working either in the school system or the oil industry made me

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<sup>45</sup>Young, “Connections.”

<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A544601696/LitRC?u=googlescholar&sid=googleScholar&xid=f084731b>.

<sup>46</sup>“Linguistic Code-Switching: What it Is and Why It Happens,” United Language Group, <https://www.unitedlanguagegroup.com/blog/linguistic-code-switching>.

come across as intimidating, controversial, and challenging to many of the people within the community. For example, my job duties and title were that of an administrator whether I was in the oil industry as a part of the directional drilling field or as an employee in the school district; it was a relatively uncommon position for a black man to have. Both positions were positions that required people to support my recommendation because of my title, which conveyed experience and knowledge. Yet oftentimes, my recommendation was questioned or not trusted simply because of my appearance. Within the oilfield, upon entering drilling locations in West Texas, the location superintendents would often ask my white assistants for their recommendation over mine. My assistants, in turn, would defer to me because I was their superior and more knowledgeable. Therefore, whenever I was stern in my guidance, or I refused to change my recommendations to suit or comfort these location superintendents, I was immediately found to be controversial or challenging. Similar to the occurrences that would take place when I was an administrator within the school district, any rules or procedures I implemented as a director of technology it was oftentimes deemed unnecessary and intimidating because my changes were new or uncommon practices for West Texas, even if they were rule-of-thumb practices in the city. In areas that were traditionally safe zones, like a Saturday afternoon recreation center basketball league for elementary students, my temperament and my ways of communication with my 5th and 6th-grade basketball players were perceived as aggressive and ferocious. The number one visual representation that stood out was I was the lone black volunteer coach in a sea of Hispanic and white coaches, students, and fans. I was constantly questioned in regard to



how I felt about coaching such a young age group. Questions like: Was I angry at my players? (Because I yell out plays or directives) How do I discipline my son when he gets in trouble at school? (he never was in trouble at school, but they wondered about my discipline practices) Why does my son celebrate after he does a good play? (Because they believed it was disrespectful)

So I began to code-switch as I was slowly conditioned into changing how I spoke so that the parents, my peers, and other coaches would accept me as an African-American coach. By volunteering to simply be a part of my child's Elementary Sports League, I had to acclimate to my new “Oz” environment. I had to start understanding how African American males historically interacted, communicated, and voiced their opinions within this community and what was acceptable or not acceptable. This understanding became the basis of why I wanted to ask a question about the limitations or the environmental changes anticipated by the university and the student when their two worlds collided, just like when my two worlds collided. The world of my familiarity and historical upbringing in the big city of San Antonio collided with the nuances and developments that were spun from my interaction in this new small-town environment. I utilized these interviews to give me insight into the vast dichotomy and situational environments in which the students have become accustomed to living in.

My small situation of simply wanting to do a good job of coaching an elementary basketball team caused so many unnecessary communication problems but created the ideal space for practicing and perfecting my ability to code-switch. Code-switching was necessary so that all the stakeholders would feel comfortable with my form of coaching

and teaching. I started to ask myself how understanding code-switching might impact my own children along with the many students that I would coach and teach who eventually would become students going off to college. What did I give up by code-switching? What were my students going to have to give up as they code-switched? How does code-switching rhetoric hinder a student's progress? For starters, student progress becomes stagnant because the student is putting their own individual identities up for trade. Each moment that they code-switch in order to gain access or receive these keys to their respective spaces located in the house that contains their educational future, there is a cost. Who they represent and where they come from are not being taken into consideration, and that becomes the payment required for entrance.

Ricardo, who graduated from high school in a class of about 350 students, soon learned that being known as a student-athlete was the price he must pay for acceptance at his urban university. His city had a population of about 7,000 people with a demographic of about 80% Latino. He would leave West Texas with an athletic scholarship to attend a college on the southside of Chicago which had a population of 2.8 million people when he arrived. Although his encounter with urban academic space and response to the second question, although aligned with the other interviewees, was very different in how he came to his conclusions, he, too, felt the weight of needing to code-switch for his survival. Ricardo spells this out in his interview as he describes his first day walking into his first class.

I think the most help we got was really from our coach, just being able to help us get used to the culture. You know, I went from a small town where you had a

couple of families of African American in the area that I lived in. It was not dominated by African Americans...not like this...I was probably one of the only light-skinned people I could probably count how many light skin people there were, and I still remember to this day, walking in the first day of class and just the feeling that I got was like you don't belong and not because people didn't like me or people you know they didn't know who I was I didn't know anything I didn't have anybody there other than the guys that we all live together in the house that we were at and walking in there was just... it was a culture shock... you know I was just like... Man! Like I don't belong! To you know, and it didn't feel like a bad like you don't belong there it just didn't feel right... because it wasn't comfortable... so... But as time went on, you know, after I think maybe like a couple of weeks there... people started asking questions of who I was, where I was from what I was doing here, you know, I mean I stuck out like a sore thumb Teachers came up to me like... How come you didn't go to school in Texas? or What you doing over here? and I just told them...I said you know, I tried out for this coach, and he gave me an opportunity.<sup>47</sup>

In this situation, Ricardo discovered that there is a particular narrative that has already been established within the educational system of universities. That educational narrative is the general basis of what and who is acceptable. Therefore, when a student enters the university, they learn that they are not allowed to resemble the communities that made them who they are. Instead, they must switch to the version of themselves that grants

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<sup>47</sup>Ricardo (minoritized male graduate), interview by the author, September 17, 2022 (Appendix C).

them access to the resources that are created for students that fit the predetermined mold. In this case, Ricardo, a Latino student from a predominantly Latino small town of West Texas, was only given access to a predominantly African American college on the south side of Chicago by resembling or transitioning into the mold of a student-athlete participating in collegiate sports.

It is in the midst of this vicious exchange students lose themselves, and they become unfamiliar and uncomfortable with what and where they can contribute to the overall college experience. This unfamiliarity is a major problem and a tremendous conflict because these students are no longer connecting in their classrooms. There was nothing to prepare me for the countless conversations that I had with students who shared their perspectives of encountering an unanticipated environment that was essentially the driving force that controlled their existence within this new environment at their higher education institution. They no longer deemed themselves vital to the academic world.

However, that is not the only pitfall that is being created. There is also a pitfall that is taking place within the university itself. Universities expect a particular student to emerge from their classrooms. There is an expectation they have imagined for the specific student they want to see walking their halls and conversing throughout their grounds. But who is this student that is expected to reside in the university? And what happens psychologically to all the others who are not or can not meet this pre-configured academic expectation?

Mary Retta writes in her article “The Mental Health Cost of Code-Switching on Campus” that assimilation takes a toll on the student.<sup>48</sup> Many have noted that people who use AAVE–African American Vernacular English–are incorrectly viewed as less intelligent, making white-edited English the language of academia. That weight is felt by rural minoritized students of West Texas as well because not only do they have their intelligence scrutinized, but they are also dealing with the complexity of finding that space in which they belong. According to Reeta, “For Black college students especially, code-switching can at times feel like a requirement for fitting into a space so heavily saturated with white peers, professors, and standards of academic excellence” (Reeta). Yet Ricardo faced a similar experience as a Latino student in a majority-*Black* academic environment, feeling pressure to fit into a space full of *Black* peers, professors, coaches, and academic standards. That space is where students construct who they are and how they are valued, and without having a space where they are valued, they are lost. This loss of value causes these students like Ricardo to look back at the last place or environment where they felt valued, a place where people knew who they were and what they represented, and their individuality was respected. Many times that means returning to the communities that supported their beliefs, their ideas, and, more importantly, their identity, as well as how they speak and what they speak about.

What is not readily available in a person's appearance is the inner talents and contributions that they may be able to bring to a space. In this particular situation, Ricardo was an athlete, and his talents were on the baseball field. The baseball field

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<sup>48</sup>Mary Retta, “The Mental Health Cost of Code-Switching on Campus,” *Teen Vogue*, September 18, 2019, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/the-mental-health-cost-of-code-switching-on-campus>

allowed a student from a small west Texas town to demonstrate a talent that could be utilized by an athletic program in the south side of Chicago. However, his talents were not visible upon him entering the classroom for his first class; the only appearance that was visible was his race, and that communicated his unfamiliarity with the space he was in. Students of rural West Texas often step into the environments and those environments are unaware of the contributions or the historical attributes that are associated with these students. Take, for example, Loretta, she was a student who graduated in the early 1990s. She came from a family who had migrated over from Mexico one generation before. Her grandfather worked in the fields of West Texas installing the electrical and telephone poles that brought resources to many of these relatively small West Texas towns of 5,000 and 6,000 people. She was part of one of the thousands of Mexican families whose heritage came from the abundance of work associated with the ranches, farm country, and cotton gin work along the West Texas landscape. Historically these migrant workers established and lived by a primary principal, and that was to obtain, through hard work, a brighter future for the up-and-coming generations that followed. Loretta represented that brighter future for this historically hard-working bloodline. However, she demonstrated her talents in the classroom, in the fields of education and academics; similar to Ricardo, this may not be visible when she is sitting in a classroom of 400 biology students or a financial aid office of 70 students where she is the only one who doesn't know what questions to ask or who to ask them to. Loretta explains:

I know that for us, some of my family specifically, we came from a family of Migrant farmers, and so my mom, when she came from Mexico at age 10, she was helping pick different fruits and vegetables at a local farm and so for her to think about a child just wanting to expand their education that was great for her... She... you know... She was so excited... My grandparents were so excited about that. So they supported me in the fact that I felt like I could do it, but they didn't have the resources, like they could not help me with homework. They didn't know how to navigate me going to college like financial aid or support groups. Or just, I mean, we had never really been to San Antonio. Where I went to college before I left for college, I mean, I think my parents have been maybe once or twice, and I had only been there once or twice, so I... we were constantly getting lost in traffic. I was constantly getting lost at my University, but the support from them was more of like moral support, not necessarily like resources they could not help me financially they couldn't help me with, you know, homework and things like that, but it was just moral support that I felt that was needed for me to be successful.<sup>49</sup>

It is important to look at who is speaking when we use the geographical area of West Texas. Anne-Marie Núñez, PhD a researcher and professor at Ohio State offered amazing details that mirrored Loretta's concerns in her keynote speech "What Migrant Students can Teach us about College Access and Opportunity<sup>50</sup>" at the Migration/Education: A Conference on Agriculture, Seasonal Migration, and Access to Higher Education. It is not

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<sup>49</sup>Loretta (minoritized female graduate) interview by the author, September 17, 2022, (See Appendix C).

<sup>50</sup>Núñez, "What Migrant Students."

an easy task when dealing with a combination of various cultures that come together to form a group like the Latinx population. Geography, size, and origin play major roles in how the different groups within the Latinx culture interact when placed in unfamiliar spaces. One of those groups is the Mexican community along the Texas border. These communities produce students whose families originated from Mexico, many coming from the border towns located along the Rio Grande River in Texas. Many migrated into various communities in these small towns and have answered the call of the growing agricultural needs within this economic system. Their contributions are that of migrant and ranch workers, as well as oil industry workers. They exhibit a relentless work ethic under tumultuous environmental and labor conditions. The dynamic makeup of the citizens ranges from small minimum wage pay earners associated with migrant and ranch workers to the substantial pay earners who are connected to the oil industry at its highest levels. For many, the long hours combined with the high demand require a deep connection to the support of family and community.

Mike Rose touches on this incredible resilience in his book *Lives on the Boundary: the Struggles and Achievements of America's Underprepared*. However, his focus is aimed at the working-class citizens of California as they set their sights on improving their livelihood by going to college. He creates an ethnographic platform where the reader can hear the struggles that are associated with the Latino working-class group's juggling: supporting a family while working a demanding job with a subpar educational background. Rose states, "One of the reasons I wrote *Lives on the Boundary* was to present an alternative view of such people, to offer other ways to consider their



histories and to illustrate some beliefs and practices that might foster their development.”<sup>51</sup> However, this perspective inadvertently excludes the students associated with the geographical location of West Texas entering college in their early formative years. They have not established a relentless work ethic of juggling a career, family, and maintaining an educational promise. They have not had this work ethic modeled to them, thus causing them to second guess their decision to be in school.

While Rose’s research and focus are on the working-class citizens of Southern California who became college students, I will focus on the minoritized population within the rural community of West Texas. These rural students are not exposed to the various opportunities and distractions of the metropolis within their community. The population that I am researching has a support system that understands the rural environment in which they live. It provides financial stability without the requirement of a college degree. Rose’s students were faced with the sense of urgency that if they failed in college, they would not have the financial stability to support their families. Within the Texas rural community, students that I will research can obtain the financial freedom that is necessary to take care of themselves and their future families by working for the oil industry. Therefore, the distraction is not within their lack of confidence or their unfamiliarity with the necessary places that are needed for their success; there is an intrinsic understanding within the rural community of the lure of the oilfield and its powerful voice providing lucrative opportunities and resources that mirror or compete

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<sup>51</sup>Mike Rose, *Lives on the Boundary: the Struggles and Achievements of America’s Underprepared* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 248.

with the financial and academic securities and freedoms that are provided from within the post-secondary academic world in urban universities.

Without paying attention to this voice, many universities have come to the realization that their methods for nurturing success for this population are insufficient. Therefore, they apply a generic one-size-fits-all band-aid in the hopes that it will suffice in retaining rural minority students. Unfortunately, this method, or cure, does not speak to the culture of the rural environment. Nor does it speak to the structures and foundational culture that are associated with a community's population that may be well under 8,000 people. I feel there is a sense of urgency and priority that must be placed on this community's lack of rhetorical representation in the urban university setting.

I have listened to the stories of these rural minoritized students expressing how the pull and attraction to return back to their respective communities to support and help their community and their families is more evident in their thought process. I feel that their perspective is not being highlighted. However, that perspective needs to be highlighted because the questions must be answered: What is the draw? What is the attraction? Something grows inside these students and causes them to set their sights on leaving the community and the environment that they are loyal to for the possibility of cultivating a brighter tomorrow. There is obviously a disconnect, a miscalculation within the spoken rhetoric that is expatiated within minutes of their initial arrival to college. What follows is an excerpt from a college inclusion program designed to make first-year students and students of color feel accepted and included. (I have removed content that

would identify this college because my intent is to focus on the premise behind the communication, which is inclusion.):

*(\*\*insert major college multicultural organization\*\*)* will be the cornerstone of information needed to be a successful student at *(\*\*insert major college\*\*)*. There will be a sharing of essential resources, like opportunities in leadership, academic deadlines, career services, community connection, organization involvement, and activities. These resources will be shared through a variety of means, specifically through the *(\*\*insert generic mentorship group\*\*)* and *(\*\*insert generic community involvement group\*\*)*. The first year of college can be a rough transition, but we are trying to make it easier.

We look forward to seeing you and hope you take advantage of this opportunity to learn more about life at *(\*\*insert major college\*\*)*. Please be on the lookout for more information. If you have any questions, please call....<sup>52</sup>

I feel there are some assumptions being made within this communication. The intent is undeniable, but the follow-through is questionable: to be able to create a program is difficult, and a program that is designed for inclusion can be an insurmountable task. It will definitely require ideas and methods to match a variety of obstacles and resources that must come together for the success of that particular program designed to help novice students entering a campus for the first time. On top of that, a sense of urgency must be placed upon the follow-through as one of the main pillars in order to maintain a

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<sup>52</sup>Shamariah Vanderhorst, "Column: Students Should Utilize Campus Resources to Improve Their College Experience," *The Daily Gamecock*, University of South Carolina, Garnet Media Group, October 26, 2022, <https://www.dailygamecock.com/article/2022/10/column-students-should-utilize-campus-resources-to-improve-their-college-experience-opinion-vanderhorst>.

pedigree of achievement for an organization of this nature. Because these entities fail to consider the introduction phase for students that are entering an unfamiliar space like a major metropolis, it is easy to overlook this little excerpt. It is also assumed that students will understand how to create rapport with a particular group in order to find a more intimate relationship with a particular person who will formulate their connection within this mentorship group and community involvement groups that the students are being asked to participate in. Coming from small communities, these students, by way of simple population size, are conditioned to have a one-to-one relationship with like-minded people, generally with someone who will then bring them into the fold of a much larger organization. It is assumed that the students would have no difficulty stepping into the fold and having the one-on-one relationships transpire after they've established a bond with the group. This neglected assumption fails to take into consideration that some students may skip this pivotal access point and, therefore, not be connected to the resources needed for their success.

These students are entering the university's atmosphere without any idea that their school has determined their identity for them and how this identity will be able to exist within its system. The collegiate system has recognized the various idiosyncrasies that makeup who the students should be. Who they are at their core before they arrive does not matter. This recognition is seen throughout all the various multicultural organizations that are allowed to exist on that campus. The organization's programs and clubs, religious, athletic, or otherwise, have to be approved by the university's directional board, and that acceptance and admittance are a representation of the gatekeepers who determine

what the fabric of a university's environment will look like. The organizations that are not accepted, as well as the organizations that are accepted, subscribe to a particular blueprint which is essentially determining what the university considers valuable. Who these students are expected to be and how they are expected to talk in order to have access to the resources needed for their success is all that matters.

When it came to understanding the resources that were available to students from small West Texas towns, a vast majority of the students felt that these resources were available, but the acquisition of using or receiving, or even applying these resources was the fine print or the small print that was left out. This was the feeling of the majority of the students I interviewed. It is highlighted by interviewee Lorraine as she describes her experience in using the resources of her new environment:

I feel like what I had to do as a student, was when it came to those resources, sometimes I felt a little bit of **shame** in utilizing those resources because it was like I should know how to utilize office hours, or I should know how to study for this specific exam or how to write well because I should have had that taught to me in high school but not everybody had the same high school experience... so I think I had to become very confident in asking for support academically which was not something that I had to do in high school. I was always a superstar student good at math but never really had to ask for help, I think for me too... I had to use my student network to try to find a community on campus...for the black student organizations... those I had to use my support networks among students... say “Hey how do you all stay connected to your community?” Which

was not something that was you know **flag posted** for me as a student of color. I guess there's kind of like an **expectation** that you'll end up finding **people who look like you** and if it's one thing that I wish about my college experience **I wish I would have found those spaces sooner** especially places like the diversity equity and inclusion offices. So, Yeah we kind of have to go out of our way to locate those resources even if they're there.<sup>53</sup>

Regrettably, students from rural West Texas begin speaking their border rhetoric; they begin to code-switch based on the tried and proven methods of success that are acquired in a variety of spaces. Spaces meant for remediation, like the writing centers at the campus, financial aid offices, or student support centers geared to assist with work-study employment and delineated toward minoritized student success. However, the success and access these resources are meant to supply come from a hierarchy that expects a mastery level of polished American-edited English and that language does not synthesize a student's talents with the university resources. Rather, in order to receive access, it demands they disguise the natural spoken language and behaviors they once used to communicate within their border towns or small-town communities. This problem is not just limited to the Latin X community originating from the rural West Texas geographical location; it is also associated with some African-American students of this region with similar characteristics entering these universities and major metropolis areas. They, too, have to code-switch in order to express a certain level of credibility in their pursuit of acceptance and obtainment of resources.

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<sup>53</sup>Lorraine (minoritized female graduate), interview by the author, September 25, 2022 (See Appendix C).

But as Vershawn Young asserts, there is so much more than simple linguistic expression being switched in African American English transitions between what is deemed standard English. He notes that there is also a shift in complacency as minoritized students begin to assimilate based on the expectations of a pre-existing privileged white culture. This dichotomy is rooted in the expectation of students speaking standardized English; it is associated with Western culture and is accepted because it is deemed to be the “norm.” If these students do not adjust to speaking language that is the “norm,” they are associated with being the “other,” the ostracized. Their intelligence is questioned, as well as their work ethic, abilities, background, and even their social-economic classification. Some of the ramifications that can come from this labeling are limited access to study groups, limited support from advisers, limited access to the department chairs, as well as simple access to the “office hours” with their professors. If their professors, as well as the various collegiate educators, are unaware that minoritized students are code-switching, then they are unaware of the attributes that are associated with these students. Therefore, they are unaware that some of these students come from a small-town atmosphere that causes them to be intimidated by the large size and configuration of buildings that are so different from where they previously resided. For some, the fact that a professor’s title has Ph.D. lettering behind their name is overwhelming. Students may have resources that they are not utilizing because they feel those resources are set aside for specific members of the student body. This all plays a major part in the educational “space” that these students are trying to gain access to.

The next question came into play when I started thinking more in regard to the space in my new rural West Texas town and continuing on with the metaphor of *Dorothy and The Wizard of Oz*. The yellow brick road played a major point of reference throughout Dorothy's adventure because it impacted her interactions with others within the environment. It drove the narrative that was associated with the space she was occupying. The people of that society, The Land of Oz, recognized that Dorothy's home was transported and fell on top of the wicked witch, which meant that Dorothy's previous environment might have been viewed as having a negative or positive impact on their environment. This perception caused a completely different experience for Dorothy each time she met an entity that resided in Oz. The ruby slippers that Dorothy wore were symbolic because they visually connected her to the structure of her previous environment while still impacting the various people in her current environmental temperament because a narrative had been created that was connected to how she arrived in Oz.

This connection to Oz is a metaphor for what rural minoritized students of West Texas shared in their interviews. I recall discussing with my son as an adult how things were for him when he was a child playing Recreational Sports in the small town of Fort Stockton for the first time. He reminded me of a situation where people were afraid that he was taking opportunities away from their children. My daughter would also allude to this concern as well as she recalled being an athlete and cheerleader in junior high in the small town of Fort Stockton. Both of my children, as adults, explain that there was a predetermined hierarchy or expectation of who was going to be the star quarterback, who



was going to be the head cheerleader, who was going to be the spelling bee champion or the valedictorian. In this small town, these particular roles have already been assigned, and that dates back several generations. A family would have generations of producing the beauty pageant Queen or the star quarterback, and therefore, it was expected that this particular family, whoever they may be, would produce this role for generations. So when our family was introduced to the town, we were an anomaly that was not expected. My son explained how when we moved in, he was the top athlete and therefore pushed for the recognition of his talents to be chosen over that of the historically predetermined family who produced the Star athletes. The same was said with our daughter. We were not the historically Mexican or white head cheerleader and Star Quarterback; we were a biracial family whose biracial students were occupying key positions within the community's student population.

Just like within the *Wizard of Oz*, there were going to be people who supported Dorothy's role and how it impacted the various members of Oz, and then there were going to be people who were against her. As the anomaly whose introduction to the town was so dramatic that she took out the wicked witch's sister and actually took over using the ruby slippers that were originally belonging to someone else. The narrative is taken for granted, and oftentimes entities will not place enough attention on how the narrative will shape the emotional state in which people transition into various spaces. Because oftentimes, people's feelings can be tied to a space by either its history, its historical names, or even the visual representations that are attributes of its structures in that environment. In West Texas, you find examples of this when you discuss people's

attachment to the symbols of the confederacy and its historic members, like towns and schools named after Robert E. Lee. There are visuals that demonstrate acceptance and introduce an entity to a space. Those markers or signposts were created as an invitation for all parties looking to occupy that space. They make a space welcoming, encouraging acceptance of all people, or they make a space undesirable and discouraging to all people.

I distinctly remember the first time I drove to my interview to become a basketball coach and administrator for the small school district in a town Imperial, Texas; a town of fewer than 400 people. I first noticed that there were no buildings over three stories in the entire town. There were no traffic lights. In fact, there were only a few stop signs. There was only one church to represent each religion, i.e., one small Catholic Church, one small Baptist Church, and one small Christian Church. Those buildings visually represented what religions were publicly recognized, as well as what structures established the status quo. My own children were shocked by the realization that their geographic location did not contain architectural structures like parts of towns named after famous Black figures that oftentimes represented the “Black” side of town. They were shocked that there were no YMCAs and Boys and Girls Clubs, which represented places where student summer activities and areas for kids were located. They knew these places existed in the city but did not realize that these spaces did not exist in this small community. I also noticed how people looked at me as I walked the halls of the school. I was the first Black employee that anyone had seen before, and when I explained that I was applying for a technology administrator position, they looked astonished. I would be

doing that job duty while applying to be the Head Basketball coach as well. It was unheard of because the school had never had a Black administrator in its 70-year history.

This experience spurred another interview question as I wondered about those students that were born and raised and grew up in this environment: **How would the lack of exposure to other geographic locations and architectural structures impact their views of success and those who were allowed to occupy that space?** For many of the students, the cap or the limit to their growth was simply due to the cap or the limit to their exposure. Since they can't see that there are various different architectural structures or various different geographic locations that they can occupy, then it makes it very difficult for them to see success in any other form. The educational "space" is where the potential and their future are housed, and the dreams that attracted them to the university in the first place reside. How to gain access to this space is an inherent question that the students of rural West Texas will pursue until the obstacles, struggles, and hidden agendas they are facing become too prevalent for them to defy any longer, and a life-changing decision is then made. So why is physical space so important? Why does it carry such a tremendous weight in relation to student success? It also plays a part in the university's success with the students.

In order to answer this question, there is a need to explore its connection to narrative architecture. Looking at some of the scholarly works of Paul Ricoeur, we can see that the students are constructing themselves as they live in this new academic environment. In his work *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur clearly talks about the

construction of oneself from past, present, and future.<sup>54</sup> This creation all takes place among the students on a university campus. They are utilizing their past as a foundational placeholder in their mind as they build their present status, with the university having a key representation of their possible future self. However, the narrative is changing because they are realizing that their universities are not genuinely interested in their past, their heritage, or their identity, and their authentic self is not being represented within that academic environment. Let's take a hypothetical situation to define this more clearly. What if a university has a resource center, and within this center, there are various entities that can help with the student's writing and academic remediation, or it even has various advisors and counselors that can help them with managing some of the mental demands that are associated with its students' first two semesters in college? However, this resource center is housed in a seven-story building surrounded by similar buildings of greater size and technology. Additionally, this building is a busy, heavily populated, student-filled quadrangle. For a student who is coming from a small West Texas town whose largest building is a two-story surplus warehouse for oil industry parts, entry into this resource center will seem overwhelming.

It is going to be an impossible feat that requires an enormous amount of dexterity as this student will have to encounter the various diversity differences among the students that are walking past them as they try to enter a building that is within a space that is uncommon and unfamiliar to them. That space that holds their tools for success becomes inaccessible, and only those who are aware of this student's authentic self will realize this

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<sup>54</sup>Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, 52.

student's reluctance to enter the space that lodges their success. In his book *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur states, "To put it another way, time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence."<sup>55</sup> This narrative condition reiterates that students are then faced with a conflict as to who they are as they acknowledge the attributes of their past in connection with who they are in the present. If they are not being nurtured in their new environment, then they are not facilitating who they are trying to become in the future. Who they are trying to become is predicated on their success within the university environment. This prediction is why many feel that their longevity in a collegiate program can fail so quickly.

Thus, as it stands today, these students are forced to either erase their knowledge of who they were in the past to assimilate or change dramatically who they are in the present, all in order to have access to what and who they are trying to become in the future. It should not be at the expense of their true identity; their whole self does not have to be offered up as a sacrifice. Many are not willing to relinquish their identity, which leaves them no other choice than to return to the community that respected and facilitated their past, present, and future. Ricoeur alludes to the representation of stories we tell as a revelation of who we are and, at the same time, who we are becoming. But without any viable space for this process to exist, students in this scenario are simply calling it quits and pursuing other avenues in search of success.

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

In architecture, the public space refers to an area or place that is open to all people regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age, or socioeconomic level. These spaces can be sensory, restorative, or supportive in nature, but the educational space should be designed to encourage entry, not discourage entry, especially if it is meant to be accessible for all those who encounter it. This accessibility is the expectation and attraction that all students feel when entering college. It is what draws them from their respective communities, no matter how big or small. So it is pivotal to know what perception is at play when they walk on the steps of their university of choice for their first experience. In the world of narrative architecture, the narrative lens plays such a major role in establishing who is allowed to exist in a particular space, and therefore knowing the influence certain structures have on the design of that space and the reasons behind their design is critical.

Is this space inviting? What narrative is being portrayed in order to validate the invitation to the university? Why is the narrative so important? In her Ted Talk “Whoever Controls the Narrative Has the Power,”<sup>56</sup> Gretchen Busl discusses the research of scholar Walter Fisher and his study of the narrative paradigm versus the rational world paradigm. Busl’s focal point in her Ted Talk:

Everyone of us uses our own individual framework our own knowledge our own values our own experiences of the world in order to tell stories about each other and ourselves...The narrative paradigm is what explains why not just a single

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<sup>56</sup>Gretchen Busl, “Whoever Controls the Narrative Has the Power,” Tedx Talks, June 6, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNuzkAosEDw>

image but any single phrase or word can conjure up an enormous very complex story behind it.<sup>57</sup>

It is the narrative or story that is ingrained into the minds of everyone of us as members of society. The narrative is therefore argued in these two premises as the complex explanation of how humans rationalize their purpose and movement in the world.

Therefore, whoever controls the narrative has the power... The power to persuade people, influence people, as well as include or exclude people's access or belief in what they have access to.

When we take this and combine it with Kenneth Burke's *War of Words*,<sup>58</sup> or his novel *Rhetoric of Motives*.<sup>59</sup> It is easy to see the impact that the story's text has in regard to culture, experience, and expression. In these works, Burke brings to light the notion that our identities and attitudes can be manipulated, shaped, and influenced by the story or narrative. An example of this may be found in rap music. The songs or "stories" may be persuading or creating a shift in behavior for the audience members that identify with the particular perspective the artist is conveying. This shift in behavior can be seen by those who may feel privileged, or in the "know." It represents a sort of unspoken guide of how to acquire resources for mobility in the prestigious space at universities. Unbeknown to the unprepared West Texas students who focus their attention on the classrooms and academics, once they arrive on campus. However, they become aware of the under-the-surface rhetorical anomaly taking place within their university, and the need to

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Kenneth Burke, et al., *The War of Words* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018).

<sup>59</sup>Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013).

understand their identity in their new environment is more important to their survival than success in academics.

The story of the university and its space is one that projects a sense of being the cornerstone that advocates for their student's success, which transcends into society's success, and the progression of humanity. However, it is within that perspective that we find "holes" in this promise not just for the minoritized students of West Texas but students who represent various groups similar to this one who go off to college. The university is the facilitator for creating the growth needed for students to become integral parts of society's innovation and advances. However, that is not happening if students from this group and others no longer want to graduate or they graduate with no innovative thoughts toward progressing their communities and society. If they come to the conclusion that they must use other avenues to obtain credibility without the support of these collegiate environments, the universities are not doing their job. So it stands to reason that we must look at the university itself.

In consideration of the university, I was drawn to the scholarly work of Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins*. He presents an indispensable piece that is also being overlooked, just like the minoritized students in this research:

... quality is not the ultimate issue, but excellence soon will be, because it is the recognition that the University is not just like a corporation; it is a corporation.<sup>60</sup>

He speaks of the university becoming commodified. Even though this book was written over 25 years ago, Readings seems to be a prophet because he discusses the globalization

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<sup>60</sup>Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 22.



of the nation-state within the views of the university. That is a key piece in understanding the lack of success in various departments and resources that are associated with the narrative that the university is professing to embody. If the intent of the university is simply to create the facility or the structure so it can demonstrate to the masses that it is providing a resource for a specialized group without any conceptual understanding of the needs and the identity of that group, then it is just producing a commercial product with no desire to determine if that product has any viability. Following this viewpoint allows the university to feel complacent and that it is doing everything within its power to support the various groups of students that enter its halls. All the students throughout the interview felt that the university had a tremendous amount of resources for first-year students the problem was who was granted access to use those resources and when were they granted this access many of the students that I interviewed assumed that somehow somewhere, students were taught in some special hidden classroom to use these various resources that would put them light years in front of the small-town students of West Texas, I recall one of my interview students Loretta who remembers exactly how it was when she and her family exited their car at the parking lot of the university's first day of family orientation:

It was just too big! Like, I don't know... maybe giving us a tour of the school...even though I got there and we did it.. **a tour**...like I didn't, I don't know...**Feel it?** Like I feel that the tour guide was like not personable to us... like they could have said oh, you know, on Mondays, you need to make sure you go here...or here's the library, and this is a spot where you can go to meet other

students who are in this class... or just...it was just that it was too big...

Signpost!!! You know, like I said, I got lost several times on campus. Signpost! I didn't have to pay attention to them in the city that I grew up in because it was so small. But like I'd be walking, and I would miss a lot of these signposts because I didn't have to look for that at home. So I would get lost or miss a turn or end up in the wrong building or different things like that to where I was just always left frustrated. The university could have just helped us out by being on the lookout for freshmen like me or, you know, going through the resumes or the college applications and looking and seeing, oh, this group of students is from a small West Texas school maybe we need to pay a little bit more attention to this group of kids, or this is a first-generation college student maybe we need to have a financial aid.. 101 for this student or Wow! This kid is not used to 300 people being in a class maybe we need to put them in a smaller class or really sit and advise them with what the graduation plan looks like or degree plan looks like so that they don't take 10 classes that they're not going to need checking in with us every once in a while through email phone call something so that we can feel connected to the university cuz again it was like you're on your own you... I... just didn't feel like anybody there cared if I stayed or left.<sup>61</sup>

Often, universities give the impression that they simply want to be able to check the box that states they are providing the necessary tools for a specialized group, such as providing a building or a location where a group like the rural minoritized students of

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<sup>61</sup>Loretta (minoritized female graduate) interview by the author, September 17, 2022, (See Appendix C).

West Texas can meet so they can become successful. However, they are doing this without any clear understanding of the groups' true needs. Furthermore, they have not established a checks and balances system to determine the characteristics and traits that are associated with that group so that the space can be accessed and, at the same time, actually be utilized as it was intended to be used.

I recall the story of a student that was told to go to the Latinx building because it was going to allow him the ability to acclimate himself to the new environment of the university. He was excited because of the fact that he was going to be around the Latino culture and customs. He felt this would function as a surrogate family for him since he missed his family dearly back at home. The university was very proud of this building and this department; however, on a closer look, the student realized he was the only Mexican from a border town in Texas. The students, advisors, and counselors were mainly of Dominican and/or Puerto Rican descent. They were simultaneously fascinated with how different this new student was from their environment. From their perspective, the student was unique, but from the student's perspective, he was unusual, with a deformity, and "other" within a structural system that was designed to be a resource for him. Because of this, the student did not feel comfortable accessing this resource that was supposed to be helpful for his transition into the new collegiate environment.

This situation is not the only place this perspective exists, ensuring that there is a deep dive into the creation of structures and spaces for minoritized students is important. Simply changing the name of a building does not erase or change the space; understanding the space and its intended representation is a far more substantial premise

that should not be overlooked. If the university's premise is simply to create and decommission various buildings and structures in its attempt to check boxes that it has resources or has decommissioned inappropriate structures, then it is just validating the notion of the pursuit of being a corporation. Being a commercialized commodity whose main goal is to be profitable, it is no wonder that these specialized students are falling through the cracks and therefore falling out of the campus student body.

There is an underlying format with a pre-existing ideology used to scrutinize any other narrative that does not fit the white post-colonial standardized student of academia. This student and the space that they occupy are represented throughout the overall college experience: in the buildings' structures and in numerous clubs, organizations, and departments. In fact, it is this subliminal rhetoric that perpetuates the desired commercialized mold chaining the masses of students and faculty to produce the expected product. Nonetheless, who is deemed the unfortunate or fortunate student—depends on one's view. Do we place value on the student who begins to recognize that if they do not fit that mold, they will not succeed? Or do we value the student who loses their identity as they try to fit the mold to succeed?

Understanding this paradox will lead to understanding how much importance is placed on students assimilating to conform to a preexisting formula of the historically "ideal" college student versus the evolutionary creation of an innovative student who is growing from the acceptance of creativity and free will. There is a need to explore where universities are falling short in meeting the needs of all their students, no matter the specialized area, no matter the demographic, and no matter the geographical location. My

research focuses on the descriptions presented by the students themselves, the students whose voices have not been heard. Allowing their voices to express the needs that were presented and promised but not fulfilled is a powerful tool. Those needs may be hidden under the gaze of superficial resolutions that, on paper, meet the needs of commercialized appeal but do little to support actual students. In turn, this does nothing to support the actual classroom, and that is the space where innovation meets creativity via a variety of diverse contributing facets for the betterment of societal growth.

We are seeing a conveyor belt mentality in universities that simply creates a system that spits out prototypical students who speak a prototypical language that is associated with a traditional value system for the “ideal” member of academia. That becomes the overall desire for employers; their narrative lens (blindness) condition them to look for one “type” of a student because that is what the university is telling organizations involved in research what success looks like. It is just giving everyone that cookie-cutter prepackaged graduate. So what can be said about the cookie-cutter, pre-packaged student who graduates from the university that is controlling the narrative to produce the type of students who they deem successful? For starters, we should look no further than the trauma being caused to those students who do not fit that mold. Students are experiencing mental trauma because they are being forced to either assimilate and lose their identity or transform themselves into something they do not recognize. All in order to belong to a space that is merely a facade in nurturing their future.

When I left San Antonio to live in rural West Texas, I felt like I was somewhat a failure in the sense that I could not be successful in the city. I had to move back to an

environment that was more comfortable for me. Even though I had earned a degree that represented success, rural West Texas was a place where I was more comfortable. I had a lot of mixed feelings about being in the city. I didn't feel that I was successful in the city. A lot of my feelings came from the simple fact that the city presented way more distractions than I was able to deal with. The city had a lot of various communities, spaces, and people that allowed for a tremendous amount of avenues to either get into trouble or to have opportunities for earning a living. With so many distractions and so many avenues to success or failure, it was difficult to build trusting relationships within spaces, and within people, I was overwhelmed. I could not in good conscience determine what was the appropriate or the best solution for me to harness my talent towards a successful future. I had a difficult time channeling my energy to become excellent at a particular "craft" because I was instead channeling my energy to becoming "good" at a lot of "crafts." I believe the age-old phrase is: A jack of trades but a master of none. The small community of West Texas helped me because it limited my exposure to the perceived limitless amount of opportunities and resources I had available to me and allowed me to truly master my understanding and mobility in my small space. When I left San Antonio, I knew that I had a lot of growing up and living to do before I could navigate life in a city again.

My research addresses this mental trauma in a similar way that a counselor would deal with trauma by applying a clinical assessment and creating the appropriate treatment plan to eradicate the trauma. Barbara Jefferson, LCSW, clinical director with the Center for Child Protection, writes in her article "Evidence-based Does Not Mean One Size Fits

All” (2018)<sup>62</sup> that it is important to understand and recognize that not one single treatment intervention is going to work for every child and every family impacted by trauma, though it can provide a good place to start. So, the students and the university are all experiencing trauma initiated by the commercial narrative that has grown out of control, as predicted by Bill Readings. It is safe to say we must begin with providing the right intervention, which can only be created by considering what story is being told to each student. We would then take those stories and use them to start the conversation to repair the spaces students inhabit on the campus. In theory, we would repair the actual spaces themselves, from the classrooms to collegiate structures past and present, changing how these spaces speak to the students. We must repair how these spaces speak to the students. People may not know this...BUT A SPACE CAN SPEAK. For example, it can bear the name of a Confederate veteran, so when we call its name, we speak exclusion once again. Spaces can speak dominance and disgust so that what was negatively spoken historically becomes timeless. An architectural narrative can say, “Only the chosen can be privy to acceptance. The rest must switch or shift to survive.” It’s as if spaces with too much ethnicity or diversity must shift to a demoralizing past model for them to demonstrate credible mold or stature. Why is this historical post-colonial mold the “ideal” standard?

In her book *Black Appetite, White Food: Issues of Race, Voice, and Justice Within and Beyond the Classroom*, Jamila Lyiscott discusses a need for a paradigm shift to allow for the acceptance of the whole student, a mesh of all the characteristics that represent

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<sup>62</sup>Barbara Jefferson, “Evidence-Based does not Mean One Size Fits All,” Clinician’s Corner: The EBP Issue, Texas Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing, 2018, [https://txicfw.socialwork.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CliniciansCorner18\\_WEB2.pdf](https://txicfw.socialwork.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CliniciansCorner18_WEB2.pdf).

who they are without forcing them to code-switch.<sup>63</sup> This need is echoed by Vershawn Young who asserts, “This is why I ask: Why not reduce if not avoid social linguistic and educational conflicts by allowing students and professionals to merge their English, to produce the best prose from a combination of all of their language resources?”<sup>64</sup> A mesh or a mix of minoritized students’ foundational starting point produces the best prose, but let’s not just stop there. We must examine the prose because it is our students’ narrative which is a composite culmination of their environment. The university’s environment should function as a melting pot where they can mix their past and present to form inspirational contributions used by all. Those contributions will be felt only if we allow the students to speak their truth and allow it to shape the space of the institutions where they have chosen to exist.

My research places importance on the individual contributions of all students, with emphasis placed on their geographical origins. The innovators within an academic classroom of higher education give impactful visions and perspectives; it is crucial that the perspectives and experiences of minoritized students from the rural West Texas community not be left out. These students’ voices have not been heard and are ignored, just like the students targeted in Anthony Jack’s research on *The Privileged Poor*.<sup>65</sup> The *Privileged Poor* and my research both acquired the interviews of students who were entering the collegiate space for the first time. These students were minoritized students

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<sup>63</sup>Jamila Lyiscott, *Black Appetite, White Food: Issues of Race, Voice, and Justice Within and Beyond the Classroom* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019).

<sup>64</sup>Young, “Connections.”

<sup>65</sup>Anthony Abraham Jack, *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).



who were leaving a known and familiar environment to attend college in an unknown environment. Other noticeable similarities include students having difficulty obtaining resources, students lacking the confidence or knowledge about requesting support from the resources provided by their university, and the student lack of familiarity with code-switching rhetoric as a necessary tool for building credibility and rapport. The students in both studies entered the new environment and learned that there were various narratives that were associated with minoritized students' survival in the world of academia. However, the students in my study do not come primarily from private schools and are not primarily associated with students of privileged and affluent backgrounds; they are not afforded the gateway or bridge that leads them directly into the resources that can be found in these established and prominent academic environments within urban universities. Thus, I seek to discover how rural minoritized students from West Texas who have limited examples of success view the colleges they enter as institutions that are invested in their success.

Again I am reminded of Loretta, who, like every single student that I interviewed, viewed her college as a magical oasis. If she could just get there, it would facilitate her acquisition of all the success and credentials needed to improve her community back home to ensure her family would be proud of her and help them achieve a level of financial stability through her accomplishments at the university. However, this feeling, Loretta explained in her interview, was fleeting after her arrival in the city:

What I felt like when I left, I was like at the top... because I graduated early. I was an "A" student. I wanted to succeed in college like I did in high school. Like

I was just, you know... I was a smart person, so not getting the grades I wanted or not being outgoing as I thought I was... It was very frustrating because **I felt like I was losing myself** in that I felt that I was changing who I was because this **experience for me was so disheartening.**

I felt like I had failed... I felt like I failed because when I was having to go home or not even really home but closer to home. Because I couldn't navigate my way in a larger space, even though I really wanted to be there...

But no, for me, it was the size of the city I was in, and the size of the university I was in... It was just too big! I won't say I felt like an alien, so like, just out of place. I was never accepted there; it was just too much for me. I just never felt a part of the space that I was in, and so it wasn't until I went to a smaller university that I felt like, Okay, I really can do this. I am smart, you know? I can do this. I was just in the wrong space and time...<sup>66</sup>

While Loretta transferred to a smaller university, other minoritized students from West Text are influenced by the temptation to work in lucrative jobs in the oilfield and in the agriculture industry. When rural minoritized students go to urban areas, they encounter some unfathomable visual structures within the stately academic buildings with the people who work at these institutions. Most of these minoritized students come from towns that only have one-story buildings. They are introduced to a variety of different cultures, customs, and values, and they are then left wondering if these experiences will positively or negatively affect them. One example where this is evident is within the areas

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<sup>66</sup>Loretta (minoritized female graduate) interview by the author, September 17, 2022, (See Appendix C).

of language and appearance. For the minoritized rural West Texas student, they associate a Spanish speaker to be primarily from areas within the country of Mexico. If they see Latino people on campuses, they will most likely associate them with being Mexican, and they will associate those cultures and customs with those people. This association with this environment upon entering an urban metropolitan world of higher education can skew their belief about Mexico, and it may be just a small piece of the Spanish-speaking environment. In fact, the rhetoric associated with a diverse urban higher education institution can include many other languages and cultures. This new collegiate environment will connect students to a future that could be potentially foreign and unfamiliar to them. Their familiarity will be located within the resources from the areas they are accustomed to associating success, which has been modeled to them through so much of their adolescent life that it is almost like they have a siren call to come luring them away from their potential future and back to the oil economy of West Texas. Students hear that siren call not only from their family and community but also from the perceived viable access to financial opportunities that would enable them to have a future that has been tried and proven to produce financial stability.

This attraction to the major colleges in the most profound cities created some research that focused on the student's selection of their ideal college. Andrew Koricich, a professor of education at Appalachian State University, focuses on quantitative data analysis of the various institution's lack of knowledge on serving rural students. His data uncovered the possibility for student success was heavily connected to the location of that university and the emphasis that was placed on specific rural student-based collegiate

resources. Therefore, the high school seniors of rural West Texas had a better understanding of which universities served rural communities more effectively. Then they stood a better chance at selecting a college that aligned with their needs, and that would increase the probability of staying at their selected college until they graduated.

My research complements Koricich's work but then takes the research a few steps further because my study focuses on the actual voices of rural students in an ethnographic study that enables them to share their rural community and collegiate experiences. It is vital that we hear directly from students who have been overlooked. The university must manage a fine line: On one side of the line of ethics, university stakeholders need to ensure that taking care of the university and its longevity is at the top of its list of priorities. On the other side of this line, the students, their families, and their previous communities represent stakeholders who need the university to establish what and how to give students access to resources that will cultivate their success, especially the resources designed for the various minority groups that are equipped to handle the needs of the students like those that represent the rural minority community. Universities must solidify these specialty groups' survival as their longevity is connected with their ability to evolve and continue to facilitate the needs of the communities they serve. If importance is placed upon the specialty group's survival and attention is placed on their longevity, then they're going to be particular characteristics that are taken into consideration that are important for the development of the student's identity within their new environment.

One of the major differences between Nunez's research and mine is that I again focus on the actual voices of students from small communities and towns in West Texas. This focus amplifies the voice and interactions that take place between the faculty, the rural student, and the actual infrastructure and environment where they all intertwine, which is seldom recognized. Nunez speaks to the need to place attention on migration and agriculture, which I feel is important. But more importantly, it has become apparent that the small community has an environmental aspect that needs recognition. Key figures assume that all individuals from the minoritized rural communities will sufficiently and adequately support themselves for the betterment of their future. My research insists the main focal point should be the voices of minoritized students in order to understand what drives them toward their academic success as well as their academic demise. We must understand that these underappreciated students historically have had a structural environment and narrative that looks completely different from that of a student from the metropolis. This explains why "the big city feel" is not as soothing to the students who come from small communities. Those who grew up in a metropolis with various familiar environmental signs are able to use those childhood experiences as a survival guide when they enter the college world. This mentality is taken for granted by the students of the metropolis as well as the faculty, staff, and key figures who designed the institutional support system that is supposed to aid non-traditional students. Taking into account the size, cultural, and environmental differences between a rural student and an urban student is essential. But taking into consideration what impacts a rural student in West Texas and the driving force of the oil field must also be brought to the forefront,

blatantly disregarding the various agricultural resources and how they play a part in the dynamic in which a rural community student sees and feels their contributions to the world, or how they feel they will be accepted or admired or valued, is demoralizing to that student. Having this ethnographic approach will allow many students throughout the various communities in rural areas throughout the United States to have a voice, one that creates a foundational starting position that can be a spark to ascertain more important developments for this type of community and support of this type of student. This research will help solidify a new beginning of value and a dismantling of neglect. But the new development can materialize without mention of how these students' exploration within their new environment impacts their progression.

The voices of the unheard, neglected, and misguided can tend to lead a group to destinations that are predetermined but potentially not true in essence. Listening to the voices of these students, young and old, as they recall their environment at one of the most pivotal times in their life. Essentially these students were at a crossroads between what they believed to be true and the realization of their new truth. These students had a predisposition, a feeling that had resonated within them, which led them to believe the similarities between their environment and this new environment would allow easy migration. A facade of a safe haven that would leave them with no real dilemmas or obstacles that could impede their journey toward success. But this was merely a faux mirage with emulated possibilities of the future that was not obtainable with the resources they had been provided.

CHAPTER 5  
TO BE HEARD: CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

**Conclusions**

As life would have it, I was blessed this year to have the opportunity of helping my son fix up his English III high school classroom. He was in full housekeeping mode as he prepared for his first year of teaching in his first professional job after graduating from college. In the midst of moving desks and boxes around, I found myself daydreaming about my research and the primary question I was trying to answer. The question, of course, was *Why do minoritized students from rural small towns in West Texas return home from urban universities before completing their degree programs?* This has been a question that I have pondered and stressed over for many years; it even had me second-guessing what would happen to my own children. However, I realized my son had returned home to West Texas, yet he (unlike many other minoritized students of West Texas) had a college degree.

I thought about my son being ranked in the top five of his graduating high school class of 17 students, yet besides him, only the salutatorian had completed college and obtained a degree. I wondered why these two made it through successfully and what the reasons were the other graduates had come back to the small rural communities of West Texas empty-handed. I could not help but worry about my nieces, nephews, friends, as well as my family's children who will be graduating in the upcoming years. I watched several of them throughout the years of conducting my research. I started witnessing new up-and-coming high school seniors from the rural areas of West Texas becoming

fascinated with the various major colleges they were inspired to attend. The students are now wearing their apparel, cheering for their teams, and have begun to follow their respective colleges on just about every format out in the digital world. As the love of their colleges grows, I thought to myself, here we go again... Once they are accepted, another group of students will leave their small-town familiar environment to attend a university that will more than likely not understand their unique identity but may feel that, as a university, it is prepared to cultivate and grow these inspiring minds within innovative classrooms.

This study is unique because it took an autoethnographic approach and allowed me to become engulfed with the nuance of students from small rural West Texas communities embarking on their exploration into the collegiate world in the hopes of having and producing the credentials a college degree provides. These rural minoritized students want to be given the ability to become a viable part of society. Through the use of code-switching rhetoric and the narrative architecture lens, I created interviews with high school graduates from various small towns throughout West Texas communities. These interviews allowed the rural minoritized students to give pivotal insights into what plagued and prevented them from being able to obtain a degree from the school they aspired to attend and earn a degree.

It was necessary to use the autoethnographic methodology because I had first-hand knowledge of some of the challenges these students were experiencing. But these students' representations have been a missing component within the many studies associated with supplying support to bridge this rapidly growing gap between students



who withdrew from their college prematurely versus the students who remained and obtained a degree. In fact, minoritized students of West Texas, including my own, had to navigate and learn to navigate without any instruction or guidance. Ironically, this was not a new problem but an old dilemma. I recalled a conversation with my wife, who also graduated from a small west Texas town. She had set her sights on attending and graduating from my prominent university; like the many students associated with my case study group, she felt confident in how her journey would proceed. Mainly due to her familiarity with knowing the potential that she possessed in the classrooms of West Texas K-12 institutions. I, too, possessed a tremendous amount of viable resources for this type of dilemma, and it made it easy to see that an autoethnographic approach was going to provide me with the opportunity that few researchers would have in an area of collegiate educational growth that demands exposure and attention.

The methodology of autoethnography played a major role, but also the lens of code-switching rhetoric combined with environmental comprehension that was developed from the narrative architecture perspective. These three methodologies are crucial to understanding that these students were not just impacted by universities not being prepared to develop them or provide them with the necessary resources and skill sets needed for their survival within this new environment. There was a lack of understanding and appreciation by both the university and the student population coming from the rural West Texas communities. Both entities underestimated the toll that would be taken on by having to assimilate or acclimate into the new, unfamiliar environment. Both parties underestimated how vital it is to someone's success and how closely connected

environmental survival was to the academic success of minoritized students of West Texas obtaining and completing degree programs. The answer that has come from my research question is that of students and colleges not code-switching or code-meshing with the newly acquired unfamiliar environments when the minoritized students of West Texas arrive at college in the major city. Instead of focusing on the environmental stressors, many students place all their attention on being able to express themselves verbally and academically within their classrooms and with people or organizations. However, minimal effort is placed on the comprehension of the environment, which is what has shown up as the hard-to-escape complication that inevitably impacts students' longevity on a college campus.

Within the elements of code-switching rhetoric, it is obvious to see that students needed to code-switch or code-mesh in order to be able to navigate within their new environments. They also need to be able to speak with a level of linguistic fortitude when speaking with professors. In using these three methodologies, it was clear that the answers to why these students were not obtaining college degrees and why they were affected so profoundly needed to be analyzed.

## **Discussion**

Do my findings answer my research question? My findings centered around the fact that rural minoritized students were not considering the challenges associated with moving from one environment they were familiar with to an environment with which they were unfamiliar. This dilemma was also complicated by the simple fact that universities think the resources that they traditionally use to help students would be

sufficient enough to help these minoritized students from rural West Texas. My findings show that because these students and the universities they attended did not create an environment in which the students were prepared to mesh into, the environment was going to become an overwhelming factor in their success or failure. In his discussion of code-switching and code-meshing, Vershawn Young explores linguistic and cultural aspects that are tied into this desire to code-switch to belong. However, because my research also applied a narrative architectural lens, I was able to uncover through the interviews that the environment in which the students were trying to navigate did not match the environment from which they came. The disconnect between the students' unfamiliarity with the new collegiate atmosphere in urban space and the university's role as the gatekeeper of monitoring and helping students occupy this newfound space is the critical problem. This issue is creating an insurmountable problem with students' longevity in the collegiate space that they have chosen to inhabit. The students and the university are unaware of the stressors that will be generated as students try to acclimate to their new urban environment while simultaneously demonstrating their academic potential in the classroom, that are often located in structures that are unfamiliar as well. It then becomes only a matter of time before the student succumbs to the rigorous demands that the environment is placing on them. Their social and mental fortitude are compromised as they ponder and worry about life circumstances and necessities such as safety, support, belonging, and identity.

But this brings to mind a question that this research begs to answer that centers around the students' identity within their environment. As previously stated, Vershawn

Young discusses the linguistics of code-switching and/or code-meshing, which has been a consistent factor that has appeared several times throughout this study. But the discussion of code-switching should not be limited to the student's linguistic urge to belong and fit in. I have discovered that there is a need for students to code-switch or code-mesh as they interact with the structures within their unfamiliar environment because the structures are speaking to them. The structures are also weighing on the student's ability to belong, and code-switching must be taken into consideration as a necessary tool for students who want to acclimate into an environment for the purpose of navigating the space and stabilizing their identity. Throughout my many years in education, Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been an important resource engrained in educators as a resource in developing our students. The top three pillars within this hierarchy of needs deal with purpose, identity, and community. This is an essential factor in the development of my findings for this research because it is a guide to discovering the analysis behind why the students are not merely trying to establish their identity within the groups that they engage with through communication and rhetoric.

### **Implications**

After interviewing the students with this research I realized their experiences are foundational blocks to model the ideal innovative college class that helps students gain exposure to various diverse groups who may be entering an unfamiliar environment or provide exposure to students who are learning to be advocates and resources for those students who have gained experience in navigating an unfamiliar environment (See Appendix A).

An Autoethnographic Rhetoric class could be an effective orientation class or even a dual-credit class, which would assist students in examining how groups occupy and exist in variable “spaces.” From a rhetorical autoethnographic lens, students would learn how to assess groups of people in transitional interactions with unfamiliar and familiar spaces. In autoethnography, becoming intertwined into a community or group to identify different types of behaviors and idiosyncrasies is key in developing an understanding of how various groups of people are successful or unsuccessful in establishing a positive relationship in an environment. This course would aim to increase the student’s awareness of the intent behind the creation of certain spaces. By investigating the customs, social norms, complex hierarchies, and behaviors that are present in the collegiate environment, they could develop an understanding of what areas are promoting inclusion versus the areas that are exuding members of the diverse populations that attend college. The intent would be to expand and strengthen rhetorical advocacy within students taking this class, as well as the diverse population they would study. Students could apply ethnographic methods like observation, interviewing, structural analysis, and narrative architecture in discovering and examining how spaces and people can cultivate acceptance in environments and communities.

After entering and settling into their new environments, students will do more than just unpack their belongings. They will also establish their identities through their engagement or lack of engagement with the structures within their new, unfamiliar environment. Students may obtain credibility and acknowledgment in relation to communication amongst various groups of entities, such as professors and fellow

students. But it should be also taken into consideration there is a need to code-switch and code-mesh within the structural environment as well in order to not just communicate but to actually navigate successfully within this new environment. Metaphorically, communication can be perceived as a tour guide of rhetoric; therefore, the way students communicate with buildings and structures in the environment is their ability to navigate how these spaces will facilitate or decimate the development of their identity within those spaces. The downtown area of a metropolis atmosphere or environment would speak to individuals as a starting point or a centering/grounding apparatus. Venturing out for someone who has a solid understanding of who and where they are within an environment creates a solid foundation. That would encourage them to communicate with the central location and develop their confidence to explore not only the environment, such as the downtown or center of a city, but also the various groups and their perceived identity within those groups.

Downtown or the center of town in a small rural community looks and is represented structurally completely differently than in a major city. A farmer or rancher standing on his land and surveying the horizon would understand his place and his position within the world by his stature and size in comparison to his produce or the livestock running across his field. That visual representation gives him a sense of value, control, privilege, and worth over the environment. This level of importance that is acknowledged creates credibility and comfort within their perception of their environment, habitat, community, and their home. However, this perception does not transcend very easily into new environments like a metropolitan center or downtown. The

“horizon” and the visual representation of everything horizontal is depleted and replaced with everything vertical architecturally.

This is where I believe the visual narrative begins to create an atmosphere or a visual representation of inferiority to that same rancher or farmer who knew his existence based on his physical visual representation within his environment, that same rancher or farmer whose son or daughter is aspiring to go to college. They may very well have grown up on that ranch and established the same understanding of their physical and visual representation and purpose within the environment that they are cultivating within their land. That is, they are the focal point of the land; their purpose and identity are therefore solidified until they move from the land. In rural West Texas, a flat, dry, desolate landscape, the view of the “horizon” can be experienced and observed for endless miles in any direction, an abundance of confidence that is being provided by the environment and not just the community. But when you move a student, the sons/daughters from the likes of a ranch or a farm in West Texas, to the metropolitan area, surrounding them in a sea of high-rise buildings, apartments, dorms and collegiate structures within a maze of downtown high-rise businesses, then it stands to reason their identity will be completely impacted. Their visual perception of who they are and the value that they have placed upon themselves within their stature as it relates to their status in this new environment will be affected. Their spatial awareness that was previously determined to be a product of a horizontal horizon is now diminished in the midst of massive vertical infrastructure within the urban architectural system. In their March 2021 publication, NEUROARCHITECTURA brought attention to this perspective

in the article “Architecture As Applied Science.”<sup>67</sup> The discussion about field theory by Kurt Lewin, which is considered a form of the Gestalt Matrix, depicts how society’s behaviors depend on the living spaces as well as on the people living in these spaces. Thus, bringing forth the importance of Lewin’s field theory is important in developing some resolution to this problem because of the relationship that binds architecture to neuroscience and psychology all together this further demonstrates a person’s perception and identity, along with their value is connected to how they feel about their stature or status within a space or within an environment.

Horizontal and vertical elements of form play an important role in defining space in design and art. Horizontal elements, such as lines and flat surfaces, create a sense of stability and calm, while vertical elements, such as lines and tall structures, create a sense of height and drama. It is an unfortunate reality that within the college selection process, after academic and behavioral expectations in regards to student acceptance into the college, little attention is placed on the development of their environmental compass. Students that were familiar with the large, cultural and physical differences were able to adjust and then able to focus on the academics that they were brought to the school to develop. If the intent is for students to demonstrate their academic strengths and abilities, then the students need to be freed of some of the simple distractions like six-lane highway traffic and high-rise buildings. Something as common as downtown looks completely different when comparing downtown Fort Stockton, Texas, to that of downtown Chicago, Illinois. Underestimating the size, pace, and speed in which students

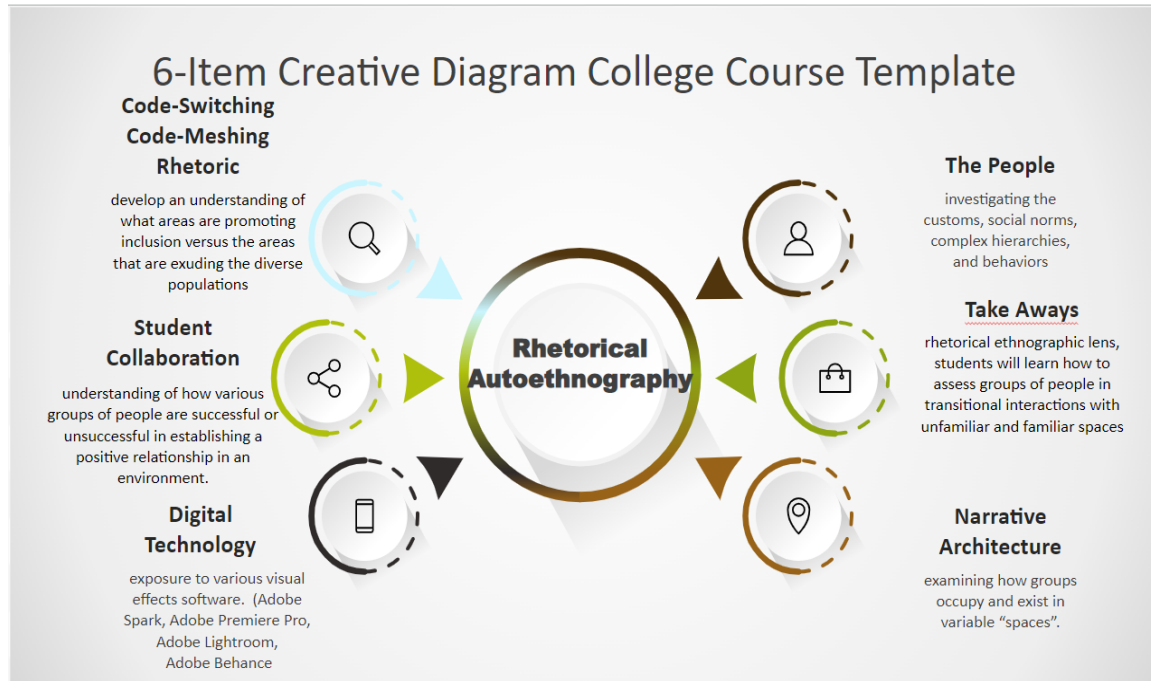
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<sup>67</sup>“Architecture As Applied Science,” NEUROARCHITECTURA (March 17, 2021), <https://www.neuroarchitectura.com/articles/2021/3/17/architecture-as-applied-science>.




must acclimate or assimilate does not prepare those students for success, nor does it prepare the university or college to facilitate the delivery or acquisition of resources that are intended to be used by the student for success at the university. Within these shortcomings, students and the university fail each other. The focus or the lack of preparedness and understanding of the difference in the environments continue to impact students and colleges during the transitional phase within some of students' initial experiences in their new unfamiliar environment. Introducing resources that can benefit both students and the university while promoting innovative classroom, living, and social spaces would be a great first step.

## APPENDIX A



## APPENDIX B

### Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application and Attachments and Interviews

	Updated By: David Benjamin Whaley Sr. @ 19-May-2022 12:24:40 PM
<b>DETERMINATION QUESTIONS</b>	
* Protocol Number: IRB2022-0062	* Submission Number: IRB2022-0062-01
* 1. Does your project involve human subjects as described below? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
According to the regulations [45 CFR 46.102(e)], human subject means a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research: a) Obtains information or biospecimens through <b>intervention</b> or <b>interaction</b> with the individual, and uses, studies, or analyzes the information or biospecimens; OR b) Obtains, uses, studies, analyzes, or generates identifiable <b>private information</b> or <b>an identifiable biospecimen</b> .	
Contact the <a href="#">IRB Office</a> for assistance in determining whether or not a project constitutes research involving human subjects.	
* 2. Does your research study meet the definition of research as described below? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Research is defined as a <b>systematic investigation</b> , including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. Activities that meet this definition constitute research for purposes of this policy, whether or not they are conducted or supported under a program that is considered research for other purposes.	
Please visit the <a href="#">IRB Website</a> for more information on what is considered research.	
Contact the <a href="#">IRB Office</a> for assistance in determining whether or not a project constitutes research involving human subjects.	
* 3. Select type of application: Exempt Research Application	
<b>Only PDF documents will be accepted for upload into the application.</b>	
Select a Submission Type	
01	
Is this a new protocol? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI) AND IRB EFORM EDITORS**

Select the Clemson Principal Investigator (PI) and study team personnel, if any, who will be responsible for making changes to the IRB protocol.

**NOTE: The PI must be a Clemson faculty or staff. Graduate students may not be the PI, including employees completing the research study for their graduate degree. View [Clemson's Assignment of PI Policy](#).**

**ALL PERSONNEL LISTED ON THIS PAGE WILL HAVE PERMISSION TO EDIT THE PROTOCOL RECORD DURING THE SUBMISSION PROCESS AND AFTER THE INITIAL APPLICATION IS APPROVED.**

To add the PI and study personnel who will edit the IRB record, click the yellow plus (+) symbol and search for their name. The individual's name must appear on the list to be added on this page. If you want an individual to have permission to edit the IRB record and their name does not appear on the picklist, send an e-mail to the [IRB office](#). Only individuals with a Clemson e-mail address may be granted permission to edit the IRB record.

The PI may be changed on this page. Add the name of the new PI first, then check the "Primary Investigator" checkbox to identify the new PI. If the former PI is no longer working on the study, enter the "End Date" to change the status of that person from the protocol.

Upload [CITI human subjects research protections training](#) documentation under "Certifications" for each study personnel.

**If you are a study team member completing this protocol AND NOT the PI, you MUST ADD YOUR NAME to this page to have access to edit the protocol record. If you do not add your name, you will not have permission to reenter the IRB record.**

Do not enter all study personnel on this page. Only select individuals responsible for editing the IRB application. Limit the number of individuals to 3 or less to avoid access issues.

▼ **Personnel - Review**

\*

\* Name

Thomas, Rhondda Robinson

Primary Investigator

\* Position

Faculty

\* Please specify:

\* Project Responsibilities:

Primary Investigator

Certifications

Certification	Begin	End
-	-	-

**DO NOT CHANGE THE DATE INFORMATION. The start and end dates on this page are NOT the research timeline for the study. These dates indicate how long the individual is working on the study. The start date will automatically populate. The end date is disabled until the submission is approved and you want to change the PI or remove an individual listed on this page.**

\* Start Date

End Date

IRB Training / Certifications:

\* Upload:

[Dr. Rhondda Thomas](#) 30-Apr-2022 09:24:50 PM

\*

\*

**OTHER PERSONNEL**

Manually enter other study personnel who will be working on the study, and are not listed as IRB editors on the application, including external collaborators not affiliated with Clemson. Add study personnel by clicking the yellow plus (+) symbol. Upload [CITI human subjects research protections training](#) documentation for each study personnel.

Update study personnel by deleting names of individuals no longer working on the study. A history of the changes is available under Form History.

External collaborators not affiliated with Clemson University will not be covered under Clemson IRB review unless an IRB Authorization Agreement (reliance agreement) is in place between the two institutions. Clemson IRB does not enter into reliance agreements for Exempt level determinations. Exempt determinations have to be reviewed separately at each cooperative research sites (collaborating institutions).

External collaborators (including Health Sciences of SC members/partners) are responsible for notifying their respective institutions' IRB office of their involvement in the research study.

Name:					
Email:					
Position:					
Project Responsibilities:					
IRB Training / Certification:	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>File(s):</td><td></td></tr></table>			File(s):	
File(s):					

**GENERAL QUESTIONS**

\* 1. Enter Project Title:

The Erasure of Rural West Texas Voices in Higher Education Institutions

**You must change the Project Title (Question 1) NOW or the protocol will not be approved.**

\* 2. Describe the purpose and goals of the research using plain language (avoid technical terms, acronyms or jargon, unless explained):

The purpose of this research is to bring to the forefront the stories of the rural minoritized students in West Texas who hail from the various small West Texas rural towns. These students' innovation has been discarded, overlooked, and erased because the collegiate world has consistently lacked in cultivating their contributions. We will highlight the stories of how higher education institutions negate these students' ethnic diversity and innovative potential by coercing them into silence or submission, forcing them to assimilate, discouraging them through persuasive reasoning, or isolating them in the built environmental structure within the collegiate metropolis cities. The interviews with a variety of minoritized West Texas high school graduates will document their experiences with the collegiate world and the various ways in which their vision, direction, and contributions to higher education institutions were stifled, controlled, or silenced.

\* 3. Describe the potential benefit(s) to the participants and/or society that may be reasonably expected as a result from this study:

Minoritized students of West Texas will gain a better understanding of how to navigate the college experience, utilize collegiate resources, and access viable support systems, without feeling they are expected to sacrifice who they are and the communities they represent. This, in turn, lowers the student drop-out rate as it will aid universities in cultivating these students to avoid pitfalls that destroy the student's connection to belonging to the University.

\* 4. Describe how research results will be shared (e.g., academic publication, evaluation report to funder, conference presentation):

The research is part of a dissertation. The audios could potentially be identifiable audios that may possibly be shared in academic publications, conference presentations and educational forums.

5. Research Timeline: Allow time for IRB office review. Start date must be a future date and not today's date.

\* Anticipated Start Date:

11-Jul-2022

\* Anticipated Completion Date:

23-Dec-2022

\* 6. Enter projected number of participants that will be enrolled in the study:

30

\* 7. Select all group(s) specifically targeted for this study.

- Clemson students
- Clemson faculty/staff
- Adults not affiliated with Clemson
- Minors, including wards of the state, or any other agency institution or entity
- Non-English speaking individuals specifically targeted
- Individuals with intellectual disabilities specifically targeted
- Individuals with impaired decision-making capacity specifically targeted
- Individuals economically or educationally disadvantaged specifically targeted
- DoD personnel (includes civilian employees)
- Pregnant women specifically targeted
- Prisoners
- Other:

\* 7. Select all group(s) specifically targeted for this study.

- Clemson students
- Clemson faculty/staff
- Adults not affiliated with Clemson
- Minors, including wards of the state, or any other agency institution or entity
- Non-English speaking individuals specifically targeted
- Individuals with intellectual disabilities specifically targeted

#### EXEMPT RESEARCH CATEGORY

Select one or more of the categories below that applies to your research AND provide the information requested for each category selected.

- Category 1 (may be applied to research involving minors):** Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

\* **a. Are the research activities a part of the normal class activities?**

\* Describe how the activities will not adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content:

\* **b. Does the project involve a team member who is responsible for evaluating the performance of the instructor(s)?**

\* Describe how the activities will not adversely impact the assessment of the instructor(s) providing instruction:

\* **c. Will the class instructor(s) be evaluated on the performance of the research activities?**

\* Describe how the activities will not adversely impact the assessment of the instructor(s) providing instruction:

- Category 2 (MAY NOT include interventions; may be applied to research involving minors if NO identifiers will be linked to the research data):** Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the criteria listed below is met. Observation of public behavior must occur in public settings where there are no expectations of privacy (i.e. public park, concert) and researchers to not interact with participants.

\* **a. Does your study meet at least one of the criteria below?**  Yes  No

- The information obtained is recorded in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.
- Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement or reputation.
- The information obtained is recorded in a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

- Category 3 (MAY NOT be applied to research involving minors):** Research involving benign behavioral interventions in conjunction with the collection of information from an adult subject through verbal or written responses (including data entry) or audiovisual recording if the subject prospectively agrees to the intervention and information collection.

\* **a. Does the research involve benign behavioral intervention(s) as described below?**

For the purpose of this provision, benign behavioral interventions are brief in duration, harmless, painless, not physically invasive, not likely to have a significant adverse lasting impact on the subjects, and the investigator has no reason to think the subjects will find the interventions offensive or embarrassing. Provided all such criteria are met, examples of such behavioral interventions would include:

- having the subjects play an online game;

**RESEARCH METHOD**

\* 1. Select all data collection instruments/tools.

- Blood, urine, or saliva
- Digital data (i.e., computer, cell phones, other equipment/devices)
- Drug, substances, or biologics
- Focus Group
- Individual Interview
- Investigational medical device
- Observation
- Protected Health Information (HIPAA may apply)
- Student educational records (FERPA may apply)
- Surveys/Questionnaires
- X-ray, DEXA scan, or other device using ionization radiation
- Other

\* Describe digital data.

\* Describe X-Ray, DEXA scan, and ionizing radiation.

\* Describe blood, urine, or saliva.

\* Describe drug, substances, or biologics.

\* Describe investigational medical device.

\* Describe student educational records

\* Describe protected health information.

\* Describe the other data that will be collected or used during the study.

\* 1. Select all data you will collect:

- Surveys/Questionnaires
- Individual interview
- Focus group
- Observation
- Student educational records (FERPA may apply)
- Protected Health information (HIPAA may apply)
- Digital data (i.e., computer, cell phone, other equipment/devices)
- Other: describe

\* Describe student educational records.

\* Describe protected health information.

\* Describe digital data that will be collected.

\* Describe - other.

2. Upload all data collection instruments/tools (i.e. surveys, interview/focus group questions, screenshots of computer simulations, photos of equipment/devices) for review.

\_\_\_\_\_



**RESEARCH SITES**

\* 1. Identify where or how participants will complete all research activities:

- Online or Remote
- Clemson Campus
- Non-Clemson Site (within U.S.)
- International (outside of the U.S.)

\* 1a. Enter site location(s):

We will be in West Texas conducting the interview in the Participants Home via telephone and Zoom meetings

**Non-Clemson Site(s):** Off-campus site permission may be required for non-public locations. Contact appropriate office/department and upload site/support letter or e-mail approval. If collecting data at another institution that has an IRB, you may need permission from each participating institution's IRB office. See [Guidance on the Submission of Research Site/Permission Letters](#) for more information.

**International Projects:** Additional approval may be required. See [FAQ's](#) and [OHRP International Compilation of Human Research Standards](#).

Upload:

\* Upload off-campus site permissions.

**DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN**

\* 1. Will you collect or have access to identifiable information during the study, for example: names, signed consent form, student ID numbers accessible through Canvas, audio/video recordings or photographs, demographic data that could identify a participant based on small sample size, master log with names and ID numbers, etc.?

Yes  No

\* 2. Describe all of the identifiable information you will collect, record or have access to during the study.

Data collection will be done through audio recording, Zoom Video/Zoom transcripts, and note-taking by an MP3 recorder or Zoom conference audio recorder.  
All sessions will be recorded. audio/video recording of participants' responses to the questions, and photos of the participants will be the identifiable data collected.  
A signed media release will be collected from all participants.

\* 3. Describe, in details, your data management plan for storing and securing the identifiable data, protecting the privacy of participants, and maintaining confidentiality of data.

Data will be stored on a google drive that is owned by the researcher.  
2-step verification password will be implemented on the drive.

a number system to protect the identity of participants:

Random name assigned to each student  
Number assigned to each school (1-5)  
Letters assigned for an ethnic group (BA - Black American, M - Mexican American, L - Latinx, etc)

So the identifying number would look something like this:  
Chris-1-BA

That way, their identity is completely protected.

\* 4. How long will you retain identifiable data (i.e., names, audio/video recordings, photographs, digitized data, codes, or links to identifiers)?

7 years

\* 5. Will you share identifiable data with other institutions, agencies, or companies?

Yes  No

**INFORMED CONSENT**

\* 1. Describe the informed consent process, include who will obtain consent from all participants, when, and how this will be done. If participants are not competent to consent for themselves, then describe procedures for obtaining consent from legally authorized representative.

For online surveys, the informed consent document must appear as the **first** page of the survey. If applicable, describe your online survey consent process below.

Participants will receive the informed consent form via their provided email. They will need to sign and return before they can participate. Consent forms will be stored in the research google drive account.

\* 2. Upload all informed consent document(s) (i.e., information letter, online script, and/or oral script) for review. Current informed consent templates available on [IRB website](#). Older versions of the informed consent templates will **not** be accepted.

\* File:

\* 3. Will you use concealment (incomplete disclosure) or deception in this study?

Yes  No

\* 3a. Describe concealment or deception and provide rationale:

\* 3b. Upload debriefing form. Debriefing templates available on [IRB website](#).

See guidance on [Research Involving Deception or Concealment](#).

**PI CONFIRMATION**

\* 1. Conflict of Interest Statement/Financial Disclosure: Could the results of the research provide an actual or potential financial gain to you, a member of your family, any of the co-investigators, or give the appearance of a potential financial conflict or other conflict of interest (COI)? Refer to [Conflict of Interest](#) page for more information.

Yes  No

\* b. Indicate the status of the COI and/or financial disclosure:

Submission from the PI certifies that:

- The information in the application is accurate and complete.
- The PI is familiar with the [Federalwide Assurance \(FWA\) for the Protection of Human Subjects](#) held by Clemson University and institutional guidelines regarding human subjects research and agrees to abide by the provisions of the Assurance and the determination of the IRB.
- The PI is responsible for assuring that all team members listed on the protocol are properly trained and adverse events, research-related injuries, or unexpected problems affecting the rights or safety of research participants are reported promptly to the [IRB office](#).
- The proposed research study is in compliance with the PI's department policies and procedures.
- The PI understands that failure to adhere to any of these guidelines may result in immediate suspension or termination of the research.

\* Principal Investigator:

Dr. Rhondda Thomas

\* Date

03-May-2022

**This is the last page of the form. Do not click "Next." Click the Submit button on the top right to send the submission to the IRB office.**



Completion Date 10-Apr-2022  
 Expiration Date 09-Apr-2024  
 Record ID 47874465

This is to certify that:

**David Whaley Sr.**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

**Human Subjects Protections Course**

(Curriculum Group )

**Group 1 Investigators Conducting Social and Behavioral Science Research (SBR) at Clemson University**

(Course Learner Group )

**1 - Basic Course**

(Stage )

Under requirements set by:

**Clemson University**



Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wbd6cfe9f-1ffd-4066-a911-443e8c1e3af2-4787446](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wbd6cfe9f-1ffd-4066-a911-443e8c1e3af2-4787446)

5



Completion Date 25-Apr-2022  
 Expiration Date 24-Apr-2024  
 Record ID 48477748

This is to certify that:

**Rhondda Thomas**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

**Human Subjects Protections Course**

(Curriculum Group )

**Group 1 Investigators Conducting Social and Behavioral Science Research (SBR) at Clemson University**

(Course Learner Group )

**3 - Refresher Course**

(Stage )

Under requirements set by:

**Clemson University**



Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w180ed09d-8ae0-4582-94e3-423428eeeb17-4847774](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w180ed09d-8ae0-4582-94e3-423428eeeb17-4847774)

8

**EForm Name:** Application

Form

**Page:** General Questions

**Section:**

**Question:** Upload

**File Name:** David Whaley IRB Script

Hello, my name is David Whaley-Weems, and I'm a Doctoral Student at Clemson University. I am calling because I am conducting research about minoritized students who graduated from a small, rural school and left for college. and I am interested in your experiences as to why you did or did not graduate from your initial school.

The purpose of the research is to gain a better understanding of how minoritized students can be supported by universities to increase their graduation rate. Your participation will involve one informal interview that will last up to 1 hour. This research has no known risks. This research will benefit the academic community because it helps us to understand the needs of minoritized students who come from small and rural schools in West Texas. Please know that I will do everything I can to protect your privacy. Your identity or personal information will not be disclosed in any publication that may result from the study. Notes that are taken during the interview will be stored in a secure location. Would it be all right if I audiotaped or Zoom Record our interview? Saying no to the audio or Zoom recording will have no effect on the interview.

**EForm Name:** Application Form

**Page:** Research Method

**Section:**

**Question:** Upload file here:

**File Name:** David Whaley Interview Questions

#### Dissertation Interview Questions

1. Why did you think leaving for college was going to impact your future?
2. What resources did you engage with from your university to cultivate your future?
3. Were there any circumstances that changed your view of completing a college degree?
4. Awareness: Why did you feel the resources within your rural community were not going to aid your future?
5. Agency and access: What did you have to do as a student to compensate for the university's limitation in supporting you as a student from a rural community?
6. Actualization: Provide an example of harsh reality as a student from a rural community in college.
7. Achievement: How does your geographic location at home and at college impact your own view of success?
8. Alteration: What did your university need to provide to help cultivate your future?



**EForm Name:** Application Form

**Page:** Research Method

**Section:**

**Question:** Upload media release form (templates available on IRB website).

**File Name:** Dissertation Audio\_Video release form for adults.

### **Clemson University Authorization for Use of Photographic/Image/Video/Voice Recording**

Program Name: Clemson University Rhetoric Communication Informational Design  
Doctoral Program

Dates of Program: 6/2022-12/2023

Clemson University Contact: Dr. Rhondda Thomas or David Whaley-Weems Sr.

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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Participant's Signature

Date

**EForm Name:** Application

Form

**Page:** Informed Consent

**Section:**

**Question:**

**File Name:** Erasure of Rural West Texas Voices-adult-consent (revised).pdf

Information about the Research Study  
Clemson University

**The Erasure of Rural West Texas Voices in Higher Education Institutions**

**Key Information About The Research Study**

**Dr. Rhondda Thomas** is inviting you to volunteer for a research study. **Dr. Rhondda Thomas** is **Calhoun Lemon Professor of Literature** at **Clemson University** conducting the study with **David Whaley-Weems Sr.** Doctoral Graduate Student at **Clemson University**.

**Study Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to bring to the forefront the stories of the rural minoritized students in West Texas who hail from the various small West Texas rural towns. These students' innovation has been discarded, overlooked, and erased because the collegiate world has consistently lacked in cultivating their contributions. We will highlight the stories of how higher education institutions negate these students' ethnic diversity and innovative potential by coercing them into silence or submission, forcing them to assimilate, discouraging them through persuasive reasoning, or isolating them in the built environmental structure within the collegiate metropolis cities. The interviews with a variety of minoritized West Texas high school graduates will document their experiences with the collegiate world and the various ways in which their vision, direction, and contributions to higher education institutions were stifled, controlled, or silenced.

**Voluntary Consent:** Participation is voluntary, and you have the option to not participate.

**Activities and Procedures:** Your part in the study will be to answer a few questions about your experience as a West Texas High School graduate who enters college. The

questions are just to allow direction in giving your experience and opinion of the collegiate experience.

**Participation Time:** It will take you about 1 hour to answer the few questions in this study. Participants may be contacted at a later date for follow-up questions.

**Risks and Discomforts:** We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study.

**Possible Benefits:** You may not benefit directly from taking part in this study, however with your information, minoritized students of West Texas will gain a better understanding of how to navigate the college experience, utilize collegiate resources, and access viable support systems, without feeling they are expected to sacrifice who they are and the communities they represent. This, in turn, lowers the student drop-out rate as it will aid universities in cultivating these students to avoid pitfalls that destroy the student's connection to belonging to the University.

### **Exclusion/Inclusion Requirements**

#### **Inclusion criteria:**

- A High School graduate of a small West Texas school system (public or private or homeschooled)
- The age range will be 18 and older.

### **Audio/Video Recording And Photographs**

- Data collection will be done through audio recording, Zoom Video/Zoom transcripts, and note-taking by an MP3 recorder or Zoom conference audio recorder.
- All sessions will be recorded. audio/video recording.
- A signed media release will be collected.
- There is the possibility to use audio for future collegiate forums, educational presentations at conferences, or research based platforms

### **Protection Of Privacy And Confidentiality**

The results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations.

- Data will be stored on a google drive that is owned by the researcher.
- A 2-step verification password will be implemented on the drive.

A number system to protect the identity of participants:

- Random name assigned to each student
- A number assigned to each school ex. (1-5)
- Letters assigned for the ethnic group ex. (BA - Black American, M Mexican American, L - Latinx, etc)
  
- Identifiable information collected during the study will be removed and the de-identified information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from the participants or legally authorized representative.
  
- Identifiable information collected during the study will be retained for **7 years** but will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or [irb@clemson.edu](mailto:irb@clemson.edu). The Clemson IRB will not be able to answer some study-specific questions. However, you may contact the Clemson IRB if the research staff cannot be reached or if you wish to speak with someone other than the research staff.

If you have any study-related questions or if any problems arise, please contact **David Whalley-Weems Sr.** [dbwhale@g.clemson.edu](mailto:dbwhale@g.clemson.edu)  
**432-889-3927 cell**

### **Consent**

By participating in the study, you indicate that you have read the information written above, been allowed to ask any questions, and you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research. You do not give up any legal rights by taking part in this research study.

## APPENDIX C

### Audio Interview Links

Ben (minoritized male graduate), interview by the author, September 17, 2022.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUwPCkaNBUo>.

Carlton (minoritized male graduate), interview by the author, March 26, 2022.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pm1V-ZxNOs>.

Chris (minoritized male graduate) interview by the author, September 17, 2022.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KuRMSyJqvQc>.

James (minoritized male graduate) interview by the author, September 25, 2022.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=poBGBEVfxyg>.

John (minoritized male graduate) interview by the author, September 17, 2022.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orLwDBPZ5ig>.

Kelly (minoritized female graduate) interview by the author, September 18, 2022.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DWZK7V\\_lFw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DWZK7V_lFw).

Lorie (minoritized female graduate) interview by the author, April 2, 2023.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0a52hOYPAg>.

Lorraine (minoritized female graduate), interview by the author, September 25, 2022.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8qShVJZ4xQ>.

Loretta (minoritized female graduate) interview by the author, September 17, 2022.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzRRrPRf2jY>.

Oscar (minoritized male graduate) interview by the author, September 17, 2022.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvEWIdrugRI>.

Ricardo (minoritized male graduate) interview by the author, September 17, 2022.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O\\_57kUwUg5M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_57kUwUg5M).

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