

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Arlyn T. Palomo for the degree of Doctor of Education in Adult and Higher Education presented on December 15, 2022.

Title: Does Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Include Everyone? A Phenomenological Case Study of Underrepresented Minority Professional Staff in Higher Education

Abstract approved: _____

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The proportion of professional staff on higher education campuses has significantly grown in recent decades. Despite this growth, the racial makeup of this employee population still does not reflect the increasing diversity of students in higher education. While higher education institutions pronounce their commitments to developing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices among their campuses, very little research has focused on the individuals carrying out those institutional commitments: professional staff. Even more problematic is that many DEI efforts fail to be inclusive of professional staff. Much of the focus of these efforts primarily revolves around students. The purpose of my study was to explore if, and how, institutional DEI efforts impact the experiences of underrepresented minority (URM) professional staff and influence their retention as employees. This study specifically asked the research questions: “Are higher education institutions inclusive of URM staff in their campus’ DEI efforts? How?” and “Do institutional DEI efforts promote or hinder URM staff retention?” with the aim to address a void in current research regarding retention of URM professional staff in higher education institutions. Data for this phenomenological case study was collected through a dual-method approach consisting of a document analysis of institutional artifacts outlining DEI efforts and

semi-structured interviews with 17 URM staff members of a higher education campus. Findings from the research present that despite staff being included in the institutional documents addressing DEI goals, the perceptions and experiences shared by URM professional staff in this study indicate a less than welcoming and supportive environment that hindered URM staff retention. Four themes were presented based on the study's findings that discuss a climate of symbolic inclusion, recruitment and retention, lack of communication and responsibility of campus DEI efforts. Key recommendations constructed from the findings indicate the need to establish broader organizational beliefs, define what a welcoming and supportive environment is, implement of a two-way communication plan, along with several other recommendations.

Keywords: Underrepresented minority (URM), Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), professional staff, recruitment, retention

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Does Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Include Everyone? A Phenomenological Case
Study of Underrepresented Minority Professional Staff in Higher Education

by
Arlyn T. Palomo

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APPROVED:

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Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Arlyn T. Palomo, Author

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION & PROBLEM STATEMENT

After graduating high school in 2002, I decided to pursue my postsecondary education and purposefully chose to attend a college that was known for having a diverse student population. As an underrepresented minority (URM), I felt that a diverse environment would provide the support and community I needed to be successful in an academic setting. While attending the new-student orientation, I felt like I was among my peers sitting in a large group of diverse individuals. In that moment, I did not feel like a minority, which was a rare occurrence in my educational experiences thus far. As the orientation continued, I noticed the college employees present did not represent the same diversity as the student audience. With the exception of one staff member, everyone leading and working at the orientation was white. Reflecting back, since the time of my orientation to college, which was my first exposure to higher education, up through the completion of my Master's degree, this scenario remained consistent: predominantly white faculty and staff working in institutions that had an increasingly diverse student population.

The disproportionate representation of white professional staff was also true in 2004 when I began my own career in higher education. In the earlier years of my profession, many, and at times, all, of my colleagues were white. It was not uncommon that I was usually the minority amongst my work peers. Often times, I was singled out by upper administration, leadership, and colleagues to participate in diversity discussions to “represent” URMs. At times, I experienced circumstances revealing that many of my peers perceived that I was hired, or gained my position, due to being a “diversity hire” meaning I was hired to give the impression of a more diverse employee population, rather than based on my educational background, skills, and professional experiences. There have been countless instances where colleagues directly

expressed these opinions to me throughout my career, even in present day. Some even casually sharing their perceptions without the consideration that this mentality was highly offensive since, to them, it was a normal thought process and an acceptable mindset.

In the most current years of my career in education, I have noticed an increase in URM staff throughout the various higher education campuses at which I worked. The attempt to recruit and hire for a more diverse workforce has been seen as an increasing priority among institutions, especially those that are expanding in diversity among student populations. In a 2006 article discussing new paradigms for diversifying faculty and staff in higher education, Kayes writes that within the previous decade, predominantly white colleges, universities, boards, and agencies have augmented their efforts in hiring a workforce through the implementation of various programs, initiatives, and strategies all aimed at increasing the number of URM faculty and staff. Yet, there are many who view these efforts as short-term fixes that do not result in cultural changes to promote retention of these newly hired staff. As Kayes (2006) mentions in her article, these efforts only resulted in “temporary and cosmetic changes in diverse hiring statistics” as opposed to “real, long-term diversification of the faculty” (p. 65). There have been several empirical studies since Kayes’ (2006) article that discuss the importance and benefits of recruiting a diverse workforce, which include suggestions to offer professional development on hiring practices (Meuth, 2009; Fujii, 2010; Williams, 2012; Houston, 2015; Briggs, 2017; Lara, 2018; White-Lewis, 2019). However, the majority of studies that are centered on hiring a more diverse workforce in higher education institutions primarily focus on faculty and exclude professional staff.

Even as I experienced environments with more diverse colleagues around me, I began noticing another pattern: as more URM individuals were hired into positions, turnover of this

specific population seemed higher in comparison to my white colleagues. The reasons for lower rates of retention remain largely anecdotal as little research has been conducted on this phenomena. A former colleague comes to mind as a specific example. For the purpose of this narrative, I will refer to him as Mason. Mason's experience during his hiring process was vastly different to his experience after he began his employment on campus. He recounts a perception of a diverse and welcoming campus that boasted their excitement of having him be a part of the community to strengthen the DEI efforts. His perception was based on the discussions centered on DEI that were brought up during his interview process and employee orientation. However, over his nine years of employment on campus, Mason lists several counts of micro-aggressions directly experienced that he ascribes as part of the institution's cultural norm. As an advocate for students, the job description he was hired under largely focused on improving student life and experiences. Yet, Mason often felt invalidated when he brought up issues pertaining to student inequities and would often be dismissed by many of his peers and colleagues within the institution as being "racially hypersensitive". After a few years in the position, he found he was often excluded from several campus committees and discussions. Mason experienced what he stated as "avoidance" by other campus administrators. He began to feel as though DEI discussions became minimized or pushed out of many agendas. After several years, he finally decided to leave his position after experiencing alienation and believing he was ineffective in initiating changes that would move the institution towards greater racial equity- the very reason the institution expressed excitement upon his hire. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident experienced by a sole individual. Throughout my career in higher education, I have witnessed many similar stories. While these experiences are based on personal accounts as opposed to facts

of research, it is the very reason research pertaining to retention of a diversified URM professional staff is urgently necessary.

My experience, along with voiced experiences of tokenism, exclusion, being “othered,” and racial microaggressions shared by other URM professional staff throughout the years, has prompted me to focus my research and dissertation on a population of employees that has often experienced invisibility on higher education campuses. This study aims to address the gap in research concerning DEI efforts on URM professional staff and how these efforts may promote or hinder URM professional staff retention. This chapter discusses the background of the research problem, the purpose of my study and the research questions that will guide it, as well as the significance of the study’s contribution. Lastly, I will conclude with an explanation of the chapters to come in my dissertation.

Background of the Problem

Over the last two decades, the population of the United States underwent significant changes not only in its racial and ethnic makeup, but in educational attainment throughout the country’s population (American Council on Education [ACE], 2020). Between 1997 and 2017, the nation’s population increased by over 50 million people, which also included an increase of people of color. ACE (2020) reports that over this 20-year span, the U.S. population also became more educated with a historically high increase of adults completing postsecondary education. Despite these monumental increases in education, however, disparities in educational attainment by race and ethnicity remain high.

The drastic change in the national population reflected a shift in student demographics across higher education institutions, prompting an increase in colleges’ and universities’ efforts in the areas of DEI. Smith (2014) writes that “historically in higher education, diversity and

inclusion began as a concern about access to higher education for historically underrepresented students” (p. 3). The work largely focused on providing access to diverse communities into postsecondary education. However, presently, there is recognition that diversity goes beyond just student access to higher education. Student experiences, once they arrive on campus has become a focus for institutions. For example, in an article on campus diversity (Harper and Hurtado, 2007), the authors concluded that “students of color at predominantly white institutions perceive campus climates as less welcoming and tolerant of diversity than white students” (p. 12). Given these documented disparities, there is increasing research dedicated to understanding how diversity impacts campuses’ institutional “mission, strategic and programmatic efforts, institutional climate, knowledge transformation, teaching in increasingly diverse societies, hiring, institutional climate, leadership, and accountability” (Smith, 2014, p. 3).

Acknowledgement that DEI should encompass all aspects of higher education has quickly become a central focus on many campuses.

Importantly, Barnett (2020) points out that “it is not just academic experiences that affect a student’s ability to achieve desired educational outcomes... Faculty, staff, and administrators have an opportunity to model what they expect to see in the student body” (p. 26). As such, staff should be representative of the student populations institutions currently serve as well as student populations they anticipate serving in the future as this could contribute towards student success outcomes. It is also imperative to recognize that DEI efforts are not significant solely to student populations within our higher education communities and systems. Faculty, staff, and administration are a large part of the campus community whose diversity should also be a focus. In a recent report, ACE (2020) writes:

Across all positions and seniority levels, faculty, staff, and administrators remain less diverse than the student bodies they serve. What's more, the most diverse positions tend to be outside of the classroom and leadership. [Underrepresented minorities] are much more likely to encounter people from similar backgrounds in clerical, technical, and service staff positions than among faculty, department heads, administrators, or mid-level professional positions.

This statement suggests URM professional staff, like the students they support, are experiencing racial disparities throughout higher education institutions based on the positions they hold. Staff who are not in administrative leadership roles, are often charged with carrying out institutional DEI efforts, even when these efforts may exclude from consideration these same people that advocate and perform the work.

Racial Demographics of Professional Staff

As discussed, the overall proportion of professional staff has significantly grown in recent decades. Despite this growth, the racial makeup of this employee population still does not reflect the increasing diversity of students in higher education. Also previously mentioned, the changing national demography and increased access to higher education has created a significant shift in student demographics across the nation's college and university campuses (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). This has shaped a need for predominantly white higher education institutions to reconsider their overarching mission and goals in response to public demands of providing equitable access to sources of opportunity, which includes postsecondary education (ACE, 2019). Strong advocacy for higher education institutions to promote cultural competency and equitable opportunities has become a heightened focus. Yet, discussions and actions on DEI in higher education are often solely centered around student populations and have

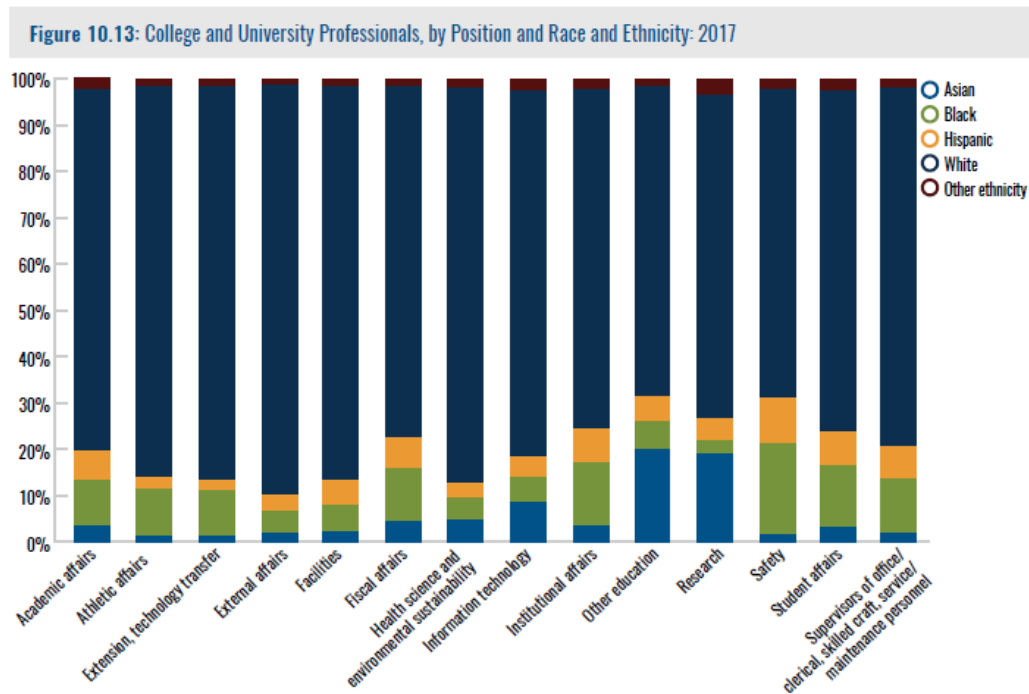
long-overlooked the need for diversity among faculty, staff and leadership throughout campuses (ACE, 2019). This leaves university and college campuses predominantly white in their organizational operations, which mismatch the increased diversity of the student populations they serve.

The following figures, 1.1 and 1.2, illustrate the racial and ethnic representation among two different workforce groups: 1) Professional positions which include “institutional affairs, student affairs, fiscal affairs, external affairs, facilities, information technology, research professionals, athletic affairs, and safety professionals, among others” (Bichsel, Li, Pritchard, & McChesney, 2018a, p. 262) and 2) Staff positions which include “office and clerical staff, service and maintenance staff, technical and paraprofessional staff, and skilled craft staff” (Bichsel, Li, Pritchard, & McChesney, 2018c, p. 262). This highlights an additional concern that although professional staff have increasingly become the backbone of campus operations and student success, it is staff of color who represent the largest proportion of roles in the lowest paying jobs across campuses.

Figure 1.1 Racial and Ethnic Representation Among Professional Workforce

Professional

Whites also represented the majority of all professional positions, although there was great variation in the shares of people of color across different professional areas.



Source: Bichtel, Jacqueline, Jingyun Li, Adam Pritchard, and Jasper McChesney. 2018. *Professionals in Higher Education Annual Report: Key Findings, Trends, and Comprehensive Tables for 2017-18 Academic Year*. Knoxville, TN: CUPA-HR.

- People of color represented more than 30 percent of positions in the professional areas of safety (33.4 percent), other education (e.g., statistician and data analyst) (33.2 percent), and research (30.1 percent). However, safety and other education positions represented less than 1 percent of all professional positions in higher education.
- Student affairs (e.g., student programming and housing) and academic affairs (e.g., advisors and librarians) professionals made up the largest share of the professional workforce (19.2 percent and 16.2 percent, respectively). Over one in five academic affairs professionals identified as a race or ethnicity other than White (22.1 percent), and slightly more than one in four student affairs professionals identified as people of color (26.5 percent).
- External affairs professionals (e.g., advancement services and alumni relations) were the least racially and ethnically diverse, with Whites representing 88.3 percent of all individuals in this role.

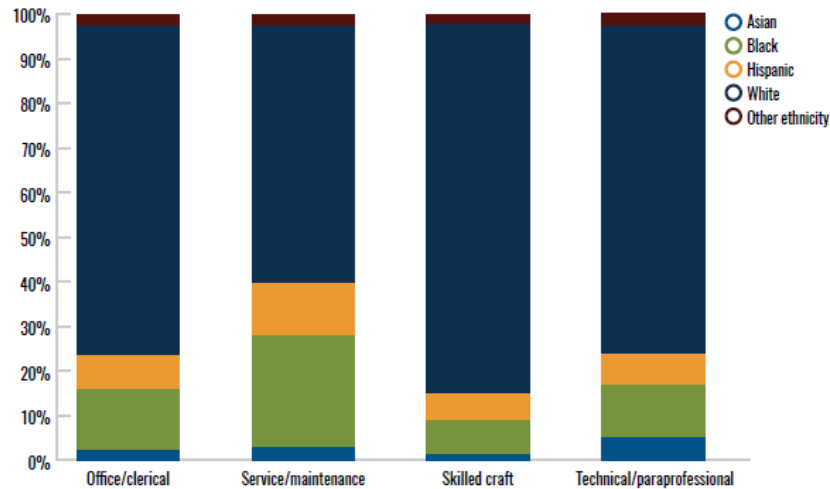
(Source: *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education*, p. 264: Professional)

Figure 1.2 Racial and Ethnic Representation Among Staff Workforce

Staff

Whites represented the majority of all staff positions. However, there was more racial and ethnic variation among staff than other positions on campus, with the percentage of people of color ranging from 17 percent to over 42 percent.

Figure 10.14: College and University Staff, by Position and Race and Ethnicity: 2017



Source: Bichsel, Jacqueline, Jingyun Li, Adam Pritchard, and Jasper McChesney. 2018. *Professionals in Higher Education Annual Report: Key Findings, Trends, and Comprehensive Tables for 2017–18 Academic Year*. Knoxville, TN: CUPA-HR.

- The largest group of staff on campus were office and clerical staff (e.g., administrative assistants and records clerks). Roughly one-quarter of all office and clerical staff identified as people of color (25.9 percent), with 13.7 percent identifying as Black, 7.4 percent as Hispanic, 2.5 percent as another racial or ethnic group, and 2.2 percent as Asian.
- About 42 percent of service and maintenance staff (e.g., construction and facilities) identified as people of color, with 25.2 percent identifying as Black, 11.6 percent as Hispanic, 2.7 percent as Asian, and 2.7 percent as another race or ethnicity.
- More than one-quarter of all technical and paraprofessional staff (e.g., paralegals and IT systems specialists) identified as a race or ethnicity other than White, with 11.7 percent identifying as Black, 7.1 percent as Hispanic, 5.1 percent as Asian, and 2.9 percent as another race or ethnicity.
- Skilled crafts (e.g., electricians and carpenters) had the largest share of staff that identified as White (82.8 percent).

(Source: Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education, p. 265: Staff)

These graphs illustrate that upper administration faculty and staff remain less racially- and ethnically-diverse in comparison to the student populations they serve (ACE, 2019). However, according to the ACE's 2019 Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education status report, representation of staff of color among professional staff is higher in comparison to faculty and administrative positions. A 2018 research brief published by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) presented data collected from their

annual survey of “individuals employed at institutions of higher education across the country” (ACE, 2019). The data provides demographic representations of various groups in upper-level education jobs, showing that people of color are grossly underrepresented in higher roles of faculty and administrators (Frye & Fulton, 2020).

To provide greater understanding of the background of the problem, it would be useful to discuss the key terms of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Because the terms “diversity,” “equity,” and “inclusion” are often combined and considered as a single entity, this section defines each key term to disentangle their concepts. Afterwards, I will discuss the statement of the problem for this study.

What is “Diversity,” “Equity,” and “Inclusion”?

“Diversity,” “equity,” and “inclusion” are terms that are often conflated with one another to describe an institutional commitment, towards racial justice and social equity which are often times made public. Yet few institutions offer an organizational definition for each of these terms, nor do they clarify how these concepts influence the institution’s mission, vision, policies, and practices (McCleary-Gaddy, 2019). Often times, the organizational vagueness around DEI has allowed institutions to approach any and all issues pertaining to DEI as a singular, combined issue (Tamtik and Guenter, 2019; Thomas, 2020). This approach not only consolidates all objectives and activities into a narrow focus, but more importantly, as Thomas (2020) demonstrates in his book *Diversity Regimes: Why Talk is Not Enough to Fix Racial Inequality at Universities*, it weakens the acknowledgement and understanding of more serious forms of inequities. As such, it is important to disentangle these three concepts so they are understood, and addressed, individually.

Diversity

The European University Association (2018) defines diversity as individual or group-social differences among persons such as ethnicity/ethnic origin, gender and gender identity, cultural, political or religious affiliation, age, sexual orientation and identity, physical or mental condition and health, socio-economic status, and prior educational background. In American higher education, the term diversity is widely used to refer to the human differences (as listed in the previous sentence) that represent the campus community and broader society. These characteristics can affect access and success to obtaining a higher education degree or pursuing an academic or administrative career in a university (European University Association, 2018). Dalton and Crosby (2013) state in their research titled *Diversity, Multiculturalism, and Pluralism: Moving from Hospitality and Appreciation to Social Inclusion on Campus and Beyond* that the act of promoting diversity in higher education is to encourage attitudes that “support civil behaviors toward others who are different than one’s self, although one may not approve of behaviors or manners related to these differences” (p.283). One considerable problem with this concept is that while the student and staff body of a university can be diverse, with regard to all the above-listed characteristics, the campus can still operate without being explicitly inclusive to these differences (Dalton and Crosby, 2013).

Equity

The non-profit organization, Equity Education, defines educational equity as “the provision of personalized resources needed for all individuals to reach common goals” and adds that “the goal and expectations are the same for all students, but the supports needed to achieve those goals depends on the students’ needs” (Equity Education, 2019). To add to this, the Center for Public Education states that educational equity is achieved when all students are given the

resources needed to successfully achieve common educational outcomes such as graduation. Often times, the terms equity and equality are used interchangeably. However, equality in education refers to the same treatment and access to similar resources for all students across the board. In their article, *The Changing Roles and Contributions of Campus Diversity Offices and Their Influence on Campus Culture*, Suarez, Anderson, and Young (2018) draw a distinction between equity and equality by stating that “the equity perspective assumes that it is the institution that bears the burden of creating pathways to success, rather than institutions using a framework based on a cultural deficit that assumes the student is solely at fault for academic failure and thus the university bears no responsibility for inequitable outcomes” (p. 13). Essentially, institutions hold the responsibility to provide equitable environments that dismantle the idea that students are responsible for their own academic failures.

Inclusion

Diversity promotes exposure to differences, whereas inclusion and inclusiveness is the act of valuing and integrating those differences. Inclusion and inclusiveness refers to “diverse backgrounds being valued in a group or by the institution, which, as a pre-requisite, needs awareness about differences and privileges” (European University Association, 2018, p. 5). Dalton and Crosby (2013) describe inclusion as “an accommodation of human differences through a process of engaging dialogue and social action” with the intent “to create a better society for all members” (p. 286). In the field of education, the term ‘inclusion’ originally referenced students with disabilities being included in general education for at least a portion of the day, rather than isolated in a separate program (Friedman, 2021). Nirje (1993) suggests that this act signified “a concept of ‘normalization’, positing that those with disabilities should have lives that are similar to the lives of people that don’t have disabilities. Goode (1993) adds that

those with disabilities should be given the opportunity to create and pursue such “normal” lives and should be valued and have the same rights as people without disabilities (Goode, 1993). In present day, the term has expanded beyond disabilities. It encompasses the individual and group social differences within diversity (e.g., ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and age).

Over the years, it has become evident that the goal of ‘diversity’ is simply not enough within higher education institutions. In a 2011 study of 80 US higher education institutions, 75% included the term “diversity” within their mission statements (Wilson, Meyer, & McNeal, 2011). Thus providing a performative environment that did not increase or enhance student outcomes. However, many respondents felt that institutional approaches to diversity only served as “cosmetic desires” to make the university appear inclusive but, in actuality, failed to provide a genuine commitment to students of color (Wilson, Meyer, & McNeal, 2011). Thomas (2020) states there is stark incongruity between the ideals of diversity and how it is ultimately given meaning through practice. He writes “despite the proliferation of commitments to diversity and inclusion, record enrollment of minority students, and record growth in diversity infrastructure, colleges and universities remain ripe with racial conflict and inequality” (Thomas, 2020, p. 143). This statement provides further illustration to the findings from Wilson, Meyer, and McNeal (2011) .

Making statements that illustrate commitment to diversity but offering no action or accountability only perpetuates disparities further (Wilson, Meyer, & McNeal, 2012). In fact, Everett and Harris (2012) state in their article, *Challenges to Integrating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Programs in Organizations. A Model for Institutional Equity*, that there are studies that suggest “not only does higher education often reproduce rather than remedy patterns of marginalization, exclusion, and oppression, but also that substantial disparities remain between

and among groups in terms of access, performance, and wellness indicators” (p. 2). In order to produce the benefits of DEI, those aims must universally, and distinctly, be incorporated into organizational goals.

Statement of the Problem

While higher education institutions pronounce their commitments to developing DEI efforts practices among their campuses, very little research has focused on the individuals that carry out those institutional commitments: professional staff. Even more problematic is that many DEI efforts fail to be inclusive of professional staff. Much of the focus of these efforts primarily revolve around students, but there has been an increase in attention to faculty within recent years. In a study of 80 institutions, for example, Wilson, Meyer, and McNeal (2011) reviewed mission and diversity statements and found that only 50% of the baccalaureate-granting institutions they reviewed made reference or acknowledgement of the changing demographics of students and/or faculty population. Overall, 52 of the 80 institutions provided a diversity statement but only 12% of those institutions with diversity statements addressed organizational goals that state the institution’s motivation to “increase minority representation in the study body and faculty ranks in order to broaden the cultural landscape of the campus” (p. 137). Furthermore, only 12% of the institutions who provided a diversity statement also provided an action plan. Wilson, Meyer, and McNeal’s (2011) study states that, “these plans listed initiatives such as engaging the campus community on diversity efforts, charging them to take action, and addressing the recruitment and retention of minority students/faculty ” (p. 137). The research provides no insight on professional staff included in the diversity statements or plans throughout the studied institutions. This may be due to either a lack of mention of professional staff in the

institutional diversity statements or action plans or that staff were overlooked by researchers of this study.

The focus on diversity throughout higher education has increased over the last decade since the findings of Wilson, Meyer, and McNeal's (2011) study were released. This is reflected by a broad pattern of institutions that provided highly detailed diversity statements or heavily mentioned "diversity" in their overall mission statements (Phillips, 2019). Many higher education institutions across the country are now incorporating DEI efforts into their strategic plans. For example, Stanford University, provides a detailed Provost's statement on Diversity and Inclusion, which includes the following statement:

We strongly believe that a diverse student body needs to learn from an equally diverse faculty. We are excited to see the growing diversity of our undergraduate and graduate students, which reflects more and more of the dynamic nature of our country and our world with a broad range of geographic, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, cultural and educational backgrounds. However, our efforts to increase the diversity of our faculty have not been successful. (<https://ideal.stanford.edu/about-ideal/diversity-statement>, 2021).

In this excerpt, Stanford University discusses the importance of diversity and prompts that "institutions that are truly inclusive and embrace and advance diversity everywhere- in every program, every school and every operation- will be the most successful" (<https://ideal.stanford.edu/about-ideal/diversity-statement>. 2021). However, nowhere in their Diversity and Inclusion statement are professional staff acknowledged or included in the mission.

Another example, by Texas A&M University, provides the following mission statement from their Office for Diversity:

The mission of the Office for Diversity is to implement and coordinate Texas A&M University's Diversity Plan by providing leadership and support to the academic and administrative units as they embed diversity, equity, and inclusion in academic and institutional excellence. The Office for Diversity works to advance accountability, campus climate, and equity across the university while resisting racism, bias, and discrimination. (<https://diversity.tamu.edu/About-the-Office#mission>, 2021)

While Texas A&M University makes a statement that is dedicated to the whole university, their 2020-2025 Strategic Plan only targets goals pertaining to the increase of URM minority undergraduate enrollment, decreasing academic equity gaps, and increasing the diversity of faculty to "better reflect the diversity of our student body" (<https://diversity.tamu.edu/Home/Strategic-Planning>, 2020). Similar to Stanford University, professional staff are not mentioned in any part of the university's strategic plan.

These are a few examples, among many institutions throughout the country, that discuss in great detail their plans for DEI across campus but fail to be inclusive of all campus members. In some institutions, the lack of acknowledgement or recognition of professional staff members as contributors to the institution's mission, vision, and values leave this workforce population essentially invisible, yet the offices and programs responsible for, or oversee, institutional DEI efforts are largely operated by professional staff. The exclusion of professional staff in DEI efforts also merits the question of whether retention for these individuals is considered a priority for the institution. In order for a campus to truly make progress towards successful outcomes

pertaining to DEI, professional staff, especially those who identify as URM, need to be equally recognized as an important entity of the institution and included in these efforts.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study identifies two specific problems. First, a perceived lack of consideration of professional staff within DEI efforts and, second, the impact this lack of inclusion has on staff retention. The purpose of this research is to explore how institutional DEI efforts impact the professional experiences of URM staff and influences their retention by considering the following research questions:

- 1) Are higher education institutions inclusive of URM staff in their campus' DEI efforts?
How?
- 2) Do institutional DEI efforts promote or hinder URM staff retention?

Significance of the Study

The lack of research on professional staff, especially URM professional staff, is notably absent from present understandings of higher education. As such, this research aims to document the lived experiences of URM professional staff in higher education to better recognize, understand, and support this population of employees. The findings from this study will be a significant venture in promoting the importance of the professional staff role and highlighting the need for higher education institutions to be actively inclusive of URM professional staff in their DEI vision, mission, values, and goals. This study will not only benefit higher education organizations, but also URM individuals. By understanding the needs of URM professional staff and what could promote or hinder their retention, higher education organizations can incorporate this study's findings to implement policies and practices that strengthen their ability to retain a diverse workforce. More importantly, this study highlights the opportunities for universities and

colleges to be holistically inclusive of their entire campus community. Lastly, the research presented serves as a future reference of researchers on URM professional staff, DEI efforts, and retention.

Organization of Dissertation and Upcoming Chapters

Chapter Two provides a literature review of professional staff in higher education institutions and their growth as an employee population. This chapter discusses their increased roles across campuses, and specifically highlight, their involvement in DEI practices. Prior research on professional staff pertaining to employee recruitment and retention has been limited, particularly on URM employees. Chapter Two identifies the need to address the gap in research, which has neglected to articulate if and how institutional DEI efforts are inclusive of employees of higher education institutions, specifically URM professional staff. Finally, the theoretical framework for this study, Bean's (1981) Model of Work Turnover, will be introduced and discussed.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach and research design proposed for this study. It provides justification for why a phenomenological case study approach using document analysis and semi-structured interviews was the appropriate research method to explore URM staff experiences. This chapter includes further details on the rationalization for the chosen research site, criteria for selecting and recruiting study participants, the data collection and analysis process, as well as trustworthiness, credibility, and limitations of the study will also be discussed.

Chapter Four discusses the findings from the document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Overall, while, the document analysis of this study revealed professional staff were heavily included throughout areas of all DEI documents, data from the semi-structured

interviews showed that participants from the research site did not feel the campus successfully provided substantial support or a welcoming environment for all diversities based on their lived experiences. This chapter provides further details on the experiences and perspectives of URM professional staff on campus in comparison to the statements in the document analysis. The findings chapter identifies four key themes discovered: 1) Climate of Symbolic Inclusion, 2) Seen, but not Heard: Recruitment and Retention, 3) Lack of Communication, and 4) Accountability for DEI efforts.

Finally, Chapter Five presents an interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter Four along with how these findings contribute to a limited field of research on URM professional staff on higher education institutions. A discussion on how each theme contributes to prior research and theories are presented. Based on the findings and discussion of this research study, I conclude with practice-based recommendations that include real-world applications and suggestions. These suggestions involve improvements, changes, and expansions to organizational practices and policies.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

A growing amount of higher education institutions have increasingly made public statements regarding their commitments to DEI. However, URM staff, who are a rising employee population among colleges and universities, have often been excluded from consideration among these efforts as they are primarily geared towards retention and student success. These staff members often hold responsibility for upholding and/or originating DEI initiatives throughout the campus, and yet little has been studied about their own inclusion in campus DEI programming. Prior research is also limited on the influence institutional DEI efforts have on their employment retention within the organization. While the population of professional staff has grown over recent years, the overall diversity of this group remains low in comparison to the expanding heterogeneity among student populations in higher education. The purpose of this study is to explore how institutional DEI efforts impact the perceptions and professional experiences of URM staff and if these efforts influence their retention by considering the following research questions:

1. Are higher education institutions inclusive of URM staff in their campus' DEI efforts? How?
2. Do institutional DEI efforts promote or hinder URM staff retention?

This chapter is comprised of two main research topics that guided the literature review for this study: 1) institutional DEI efforts and 2) higher education professional staff. In order to provide background that allows for better understanding of this study's research questions and their importance, this chapter begins with a discussion on prior research conducted on DEI efforts throughout higher education. I will then provide an in-depth discussion of higher education professional staff. This will include an overview of who professional staff are, a

description of the professional staff employee population and how their roles and responsibilities have shifted within higher education institutions. Specifically, this section discusses what the professional staff employee population means to the organizations they are in.

An examination of the literature available on the racial demographics of URM professional staff as well as higher education staff retention is also presented. This section, once again, justifies the need for more research on this working population. The two main focuses within this literature review, institutional DEI efforts and the professional staff employee population, provide a better understanding of how DEI efforts are intertwined with URM professional staff. By providing discussions on the role URM professional staff participate in within their institution's DEI efforts and whether professional staff are included in those same institutional DEI efforts, my intent for this literature review is to provide clarity and justification behind my study's research questions.

Lastly, this chapter introduces the theoretical framework used in this study: Bean's (1981) Model of Work Turnover. Bean's (1981) theory, while originally applied to student attrition, is used as the theoretical framework to investigate URM staff retention as it primarily focuses on variables that influence retention at a higher education institution. The Model of Work Turnover is a culmination of several theories. Each theory is categorized into four classes of variables that have been identified as having direct or indirect effects on a student's intent to leave: background, organizational, environmental, and outcome and attitudinal variables. This section of the chapter will isolate the organizational variables identified in student retention and attrition. Explanations as to why these variables were utilized as the framework for staff retention and attrition in this study will be discussed.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Higher Education

In light of the rapidly changing demographics within higher education, university and college campuses across the globe are increasingly compelled to establish and sustain environments advocating DEI. Conventionally, in the United States, higher education institutions were largely established on predominantly white histories and founded on policies, practices, and traditions that stem from colonialization (Thelin, 2004; Brint & Karabel, 1989). As the demographics throughout this country have shifted, the realization that some of these foundations do not equally contribute to the success of the entire community has become a growing concern.

Institutions have made attempts to respond to systemic inequities by implementing targeted programs, support services, and funding of institutional strategies (Pidgeon, Archibald, and Hawley, 2014). These programs aim to promote diversity, develop equal opportunity policies, and increase participation and resources for underrepresented groups including lower socio-economic backgrounds and ethnic minorities (Pidgeon, Archibald, and Hawley, 2014). For many institutions, these programs include the creation of dedicated administrative positions and/or offices that specialize in DEI (Everett & Harris, 2021; European University Association, 2018). The upcoming section of this chapter focuses on the differentiation of DEI efforts in higher education. I also discuss the role professional staff play in their advancement on campuses.

Role of Professional Staff in Campus DEI Efforts

An important question to consider is “Who does the DEI work on university and college campuses?” The incorporation of DEI into higher education institutions cannot be disentangled from professional staff since much of the work of campus DEI efforts have become the

responsibility of, and executed by, the individuals in these professional staff roles. As previously mentioned, higher education within the United States is continuously undergoing substantial demographic change (Everett and Harris, 2012). As mentioned in Chapter One, student populations, now more than ever, are becoming more representative of the rich diversity of the country (Clauson and McKnight, 2018) which could be attributed to institutional approaches specifically targeting recruitment of underrepresented minorities. However, an increase in the amount of data shows that successful outcomes for these minoritized groups has not been proportionate to their population growth (Everett and Harris, 2012). A 2001 study conducted on the relationship between diversity and campus climate, faculty compositions, and the content of research and teaching found that “simply admitting more minority students does not produce the substantial changes to obtain the full benefits of diversity” (Milem, 2001, p. 234). In the article, *The Origins and Effects of Corporate Diversity Programs*, Dobbin and Kalev (2013) indicated “institutions must now employ a more comprehensive approach that encompasses retention, support, development, and measurement- all of which extend beyond compliance, status quo, and ‘business as usual’” (p. 2). Essentially, the authors argue that institutions must go beyond their work of attracting diverse students to the campus and commit as much time and effort to their student experiences in order to work towards having successful student outcomes.

These studies prompt that there is still much-needed work beyond getting diverse students into the institution that needs to be considered. Some would argue there is a heightened importance to the work required around student success after they enter the institution that was previously neglected. A comprehensive approach, mentioned by Dobbin and Kalev (2013), often requires the work of professional staff who have been charged within their role to develop and oversee campus-wide activities that incorporate diversity education programs. These programs

should enhance students' awareness and sensitivity and include workshops and trainings for student organizations, leadership trainings, diversity awareness and celebration-themed weeks, guest speakers, affinity groups, as well as a plethora of other educational activities (Dalton and Crosby, 2013). Dalton and Crosby (2013) also add that "staff often have responsibility for promulgating and administering institutional rules and policies that promote the rights and welfare of diverse student groups and individuals on campus." (p. 283). Largely, professional staff play a vital role in advancing the work of DEI efforts.

The work demand mentioned above is also exemplified through a notable pattern seen over the past decade: the increase in hiring of DEI-specific positions throughout institutions. More colleges and universities are reconstructing or creating new DEI-focused offices, which require increased staffing. This includes an upsurge of newly created Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) positions throughout campuses nationwide. CDOs are sometimes identified as "executive-level positions that provide strategic guidance when developing diversity capabilities... [they] seek to incorporate diversity into the organizational structure" (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2007, p. 1). The authors point out an increase in leadership positions across higher education institutions to take on the responsibility of implementing diversity programming throughout campuses.

Appointments of CDO positions have grown significantly throughout higher education, with many institutions recently seeking their first diversity officer (Parker, 2020). CDOs are often tasked with enacting and navigating change by developing sustainable diversity-centered initiatives, constructing culturally engaging programs, and building effectual relationships to encourage institutional change on college campuses (Parker, 2020). In addition to CDOs, a variety of additional professional staff roles have been charged with the task of implementing

diversity programs that are found to be vital components of campus programming (Dalton & Crosby, 2013). An example of this is diversity programming that is included during orientation processes, which aim to ensure incoming students are “aware of the diverse college community they are a part of and their personal responsibility to creating and contributing a positive environment throughout the campus” (Dalton & Crosby, 2013, p. 284) Without professional staff, ranging from CDOs in administrative levels to those who implement and organize orientation programming, DEI work would largely not be carried out as it is at present. Yet, there is a minimal amount of scholarly documentation on the efforts and impacts professional staff have on institutional operations and their success. The upcoming section of this literature review discusses the professional staff employee population in greater depth.

The Evolution of Professional Staff

Before diving deeper into the discussion, it is important to define a key term in this study, professional staff. It is also important to understand the background of this growing employee population among campuses. Staff in higher education institutions who are not considered faculty (employees with teaching and/or research as their primary roles such as professors, lecturers, and academic researchers) have lacked a defined term that categorizes these employees. Until the mid-2000s, terms such as “non-academic staff,” “academic-related staff,” “general staff,” “support staff,” “managerial professionals,” and “para-academics” have been used to describe what is now commonly referred to as “professional staff” (Whitchurch, 2017). The population of professional staff often encompasses management roles, student support services, specialists in academic departments and schools, and even various specialty areas within finance, human resources, information technology and estates (Whitchurch, 2017). While the higher education landscape has evolved and the number of employed professional staff

members continues to increase over the last several decades, there have not been proportional increases in research on professional staff across higher education.

Growth and Involvement of Professional Staff

In recent decades, the number of professional staff members across higher education institutions experienced a steady pattern of growth (Frye & Fulton, 2020; Bennett, 2009; Desrochers & Kirshtein, 2014). Researchers contribute this growth to four factors: (1) increase in environmental demands, which include federal and state regulations, corresponding reporting requirements, and greater accountability measures from a variety of external sources (Frye & Fulton, 2020; Kirk, 2014; Rhoades, 2007); (2) “alterations to organizational structures in higher education” (Frye & Fulton, 2020, p. 9); (3) “evolution and disaggregation of the faculty role” (Frye & Fulton, 2020, p. 9); and (4) student demand (Desrochers & Wellman, 2011; Desrochers & Kirshtein, 2014). These factors interrelate in various ways. One example of interrelation is how the changing role of faculty members throughout college and university campuses has had a significant impact on the organizational shifts that have occurred within institutions. Higher education institutions have evolved to incorporate a business-like structure of management, which has led to the specialization of the faculty role to focus more on research and instruction (Frye & Fulton, 2020). This shift generates a greater need for additional staff to manage the business operations of the college. Responsibilities that were once part of faculty job duties and workload, including academic advising, grant writing, and community outreach, have been distributed to nonfaculty staff members (Frye & Fulton, 2020; Gumpert, 1997; Rhoades & Torres-Olave, 2015). Additionally, colleges and universities have developed new professional roles to satisfy the demands in various areas of student services, instructional technology,

business and campus management, and internal and external relations (Leslie & Rhoades, 1995; Rhoades & Torres-Olave, 2015).

Another example of interrelation is that of student needs. Student needs have also drastically impacted shifts in organizational structure within higher education institutions. Increases in enrollment, changing student demographics, and acknowledgement of various resources that promote student success and outcomes have created a significant need for additional staff and expertise to carry out various institutional functions (Frye & Fulton, 2020; Desrochers & Wellman, 2011; Desrochers & Kirshtein, 2014). Whitchurch (2017) writes in his article titled *Professional Staff Identities in Higher Education*, “with the changing context of higher education, professional staff are working in changing environments in which they need to take on new responsibilities and increasingly complex work” (p. 4). Stakeholders, which include potential students, faculty, donors, and state and federal funders, have created various demands and expectations upon institutions. These expectations have directed changes in how institutions approach student achievement, retention and graduation metrics by highlighting the focus to the student experience on campus environments as a means to increase successful student outcomes (Prottas & Curran, 2017). As such, Prottas and Curran (2017) state that “professional staff have become increasingly responsible for day-to-day operations of campus while providing services that directly and indirectly affect the student experience” (p. 642). Professional staff roles not only attend to campus operations, but they also have considerable influence over students’ experiences.

The 2006 study titled *New Paradigms for Diversifying Faculty and Staff in Higher Education: Uncovering Cultural Biases in the Search and Hiring process* discussed 13 propositions for student support that are recognized as enhancing student outcomes in regard to

retention, persistence, and achievement (Prebble et al., 2004). These propositions are displayed in Table 2.1. Prebble et al.'s (2004) study only focused on faculty (noted in their study as “academic staff”) involvement in student success without any acknowledgement of professional staff and their contributions to student outcomes and institutional accountability. Yet, most of the propositions discussed in the study are heavily reliant on current professional staff job roles and responsibilities. Graham (2012) offers that “the intellectual capital, required to ensure the functioning of the university” comes from both staff and faculty, which, for many institutions may be an equal split among the total employee population on campus. Despite this, professional staff, as a whole, are often unresearched, underfunded and tend to be a specific population excluded from retention efforts as these efforts primarily focus on students and faculty.

Table 2.1 highlights a few of the student support propositions that are believed to improve student outcomes of retention, persistence, and achievement. Prebble et al. (2004) proposes that student outcomes are likely to be enhanced when there is a dedicated focus on three specific areas: 1) institutional integration, 2) institutional services, and 3) institutional adaptation.

Table 2.1- 13 Propositions of Student Support Adapted from Prebble et al. (2004)

Institutional Integration	<p>Student outcomes are likely to be enhanced when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional behaviors, environment, and processes are welcoming and efficient • The institution provides opportunities for student to establish social networks • Academic counseling and pre-enrollment advice are readily available to ensure that students enroll into appropriate programs • Teachers are approachable and accessible inside and outside of class time for academic discussions • Students experience good quality teaching and management workloads • Orientation/Introduction programs are provided to facilitate both social and academic integration
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students working in academic learning communities have good outcomes
Institutional Services	<p>Student outcomes are likely to be enhanced when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive range of institutional services and facilities are available • Supplemental instruction is provided • Peer tutoring and mentoring services are provided
Institutional Adaptation	<p>Student outcomes are likely to be enhanced when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The institution ensures there is an absence of discrimination on campus, so students feel valued, fairly treated and safe • Institutional processes cater for diversity of learning preferences • The institutional culture, social and academic, welcomes diverse cultural capital and adapts to the diverse students' needs.

Note. Adapted from “The impact of student support services and academic development programmes on student outcomes in undergraduate tertiary study: A synthetic research” by T. Prebble, H. Hargreaves, L. Leach, L., K. Naidoo, G. Suddaby, & N. Zepoke, 2004, (http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/tertiary_education/5519)

The propositions listed in Table 2.1 are often lead and implemented by professional staff. These responsibilities are often a) placed on new staff roles that the campus identified as a need or b) are the result of shifting some of the responsibilities and duties formerly expected from faculty roles (Frye & Fulton, 2020) to professional staff. While there is increasing recognition of the vital contributions professional staff provide, available research has yet to be inclusive of recognizing and acknowledging professional staff member’s contributions on campus.

Prior Studies on Staff Perceptions of DEI

As previously discussed, the number of positions responsible for the daily tasks of administering and endorsing policies that support the rights, welfare, and successful outcomes of minoritized students has significantly grown over the years, however, Webster (2019) expresses

those who are in these positions often feel that they carry less power throughout the institution in comparison to their peer colleagues who oversee other functions of the campus operations. Yet, these specific roles are required to do the heavy work of upholding the institution's values of diversity (Webster, 2019). Another consideration that has surfaced is many of those who hold these positions are likely to be part of the URM community. In a study pertaining to staff diversity at public universities, *Assessing Staff Diversity at Public Universities: A Quantitative Analysis of Staff of Color Representation*, Kwon (2016) identified that URM staff members were "overrepresented in the lowest job classifications and underrepresented at the highest," If URM staff comprise mostly of positions with less pay and power, this only contributes to the problem of perpetuating systemic inequities of URM and continues to pose a cultural divergence among student populations and campus staff. Furthermore, the lack of acknowledgement on URM professional staff's contributions and existence on campus maintains the very societal inequities that many higher education institutions claim to make dedicated efforts to dismantle.

The literature review shows diversity has become a central focus for a growing number of campus communities. This review also highlights that many institutions aim to offer world-class education in an environment that centers a large part of their institutional mission on diversity (Williams & Clowney, 2007; Wilson, Meyer & McNeal, 2011) and global learning. In his article, *Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education: Emerging Perspectives on Institutional Transformation*, Smith (2014) writes that institutions have recognized the importance of understanding and appreciation for diversity as a necessity for the preparation of college graduates as they are expected to be future workforce leaders. Yet, the lack of diverse representation among college and university staff, especially in comparison to student populations, prompts the question of whether those institutional commitments do, in fact, include

all members throughout higher education communities. As much of the current research available has solely focused on student success and retention, this next section focuses on the retention of URM staff.

Retention of URM Employees

While professional staff have become essential to and responsible for the work in DEI, they are often excluded or forgotten from institutional DEI goals, plans, considerations, and follow-up. Studies have only recently begun to emerge highlighting professional staff employee recruitment and retention on campuses, yet this field of research is still in its infancy. This is made apparent in this section, which is notably short due to the limitation of scholarship on retention of professional staff, particularly that of URM professional staff. Although mostly focused on faculty, prior studies have identified varied practices that increase hiring odds of racially minoritized employees. These practices include incorporating diversity descriptors and goals in job announcements (Smith et al., 2004), using strategically-placed advertising in targeted journals and list-servs (Gasman, Kim, & Nguyen, 2011), and recruitment through personalized networks (Gasman et al., 2011). However, these studies do not explicitly discuss the recruitment of professional staff in non-academic roles. Furthermore, the primary focus tends to be on recruitment and hiring of diverse employees on campuses but not on supporting their long-term tenure.

It is imperative to remember that recruitment does not equate to retention of the diverse individuals who have been hired. A study by Sachau (2007) found that an employee's work experiences will often have an influence on their willingness and desire to stay with an employer. Of the few studies that discuss URM employee experiences after hiring, common patterns can be identified. One resounding theme is the weight of responsibility and pressures that URM staff

carry from being underrepresented (Salesho & Naile, 2014; Webster, 2019; Liera, 2020). Several studies show that URM staff express concerns of working twice as hard as their white counterparts, fatigue from carrying the responsibility of transforming organizational cultures from predominantly white cultures to being more inclusive, feeling tasked with representing all people of color at their institution and being tokenized, and also feeling excluded from campus serving on committees throughout campus (Webster, 2019; Liera, 2020). These factors all contribute to experiences which may affect their desire to stay with their employer, thus affecting retention.

Another significant theme that emerges in several studies is the absence of official policies, procedures and strategies that address hiring and retention of URM staff (Webster, 2019; Liera, 2020). A recent study by Webster (2019) on enablers and barriers influencing African American administrators' career advancement at predominantly white institutions of learning asked participants in an interview about their institution's strategies for promoting diversity (Webster, 2019). Most participants responded that they felt strong encouragement from upper administrators to emphasize diversity, but there was a severe absence of written guidelines and policies (Webster, 2019). Despite the sense of encouragement, there was nothing official to reference this support. Alternatively, another study provided conflicting findings that showed that institutions that do have written resolutions, policies and mandates regarding DEI still resulted in 80-90% of faculty and staff who are white despite implementing various programs, initiatives, and strategies that were intended to aid in the goal of increasing staff of color in predominantly white institutions (Kayes, 2006). While several studies recommend that leaders need to create diversity goals; advocate for employee diversity; and train staff, faculty, and administration on the specific issues racially minoritized employees encounter in the workplace

(Bensimon, 2007; Turner, Gonzalez and Wood, 2008), the question remains whether DEI efforts can aid or hinder retention of URM staff, the very people charged with carrying out those efforts. To frame the approach in answering this question, the use of a theoretical framework provides as a guide to exploring the research questions posed in this study. The next section discusses the theoretical framework that I chose to utilize for this study.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is derivative from an existing theory (or theories) that has previously been validated by others and considered a generally acceptable theory in the scholarly literature (Grant and Osanloo, 2014). The intention of the theoretical framework is to connect existing knowledge to the research questions of this study. The research questions act as a liaison between the existing knowledge and the problem you want to solve (Grant and Osanloo, 2014).

In this study, I chose to use Bean's Model of Work Turnover as my theoretical framework. The theory assumes that members "leaving an organization may do so for similar reasons, regardless of whether it is an employee leaving a work organization or a student leaving a university or college" (Bean, 1981). I used Bean's (1981) theory and prior study as existing knowledge that enlightened this present study's exploration of institutional DEI efforts and whether they promote or hinder URM staff retention.

While Bean's (1981) Model of Work Turnover was applied to the student attrition process, it was employed in this study as the theoretical framework to investigate URM staff retention in higher education institutions. There are other theoretical models that could be applied to this study, yet, the Model of Work Turnover is one of few theoretical models that largely focuses on variables that may influence retention at a higher education institution by combining a multitude of theories. The culminated theories strongly concentrate on

organizational factors that may also be applicable to research on professional staff populations. The theories of work turnover integrated within Bean's (1981) culminating theory also directly illuminate work turnover among institutional employees. Bean (1981) identified twenty-three variables that accounted for nearly half of the variance in university freshman dropouts in his study of 854 freshman subjects at a major midwestern university. Table 2.2 illustrates the four classes of variables identified to have direct or indirect effects on a student's intent to leave: background, organizational, environmental, and outcome and attitudinal variables.

Table 2.2 Variables from Bean's Model of Work Turnover

<p style="text-align: center;">Background Variables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mother's Education • Father's Education • High School Grades • Achievement Test Scores • High School Size • Home Town Size • College Preparatory Curriculum • Distance Home • State Resident • Head of Household Occupation • Parent's Income • Religion 	<p style="text-align: center;">Environmental Variables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity (transfer) • Opportunity (job) • Family Approval (institution) • Family Approval (major) • Family Responsibilities • Likelihood of Marrying • Difficulty of Financing School • Military Draft • Economic Indicators (employment rate) • Social Fads
<p style="text-align: center;">Organizational Variables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation of Life at School • Repetitiveness of School • Communication of Policies • Close Friends • Helpfulness of Advisor • Informal Contact with Faculty • Grades • Participation in Decision Making • Memberships in Campus Organizations • Curriculum (availability of preferred courses) • Housing • Job • University Services Used • Peer Culture • Leisure Activities • Financial Aid • Discussed Leaving with Outsiders • Discussed Leaving with Insiders 	<p style="text-align: center;">Outcome and Attitudinal Variables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical Value • Institutional Quality • Self-Development • Satisfaction • Boredom • Confidence • Adjustment • Certainty of Choice • Fairness of Treatment • Competitiveness of Academic Program • Loyalty (institutional commitment) • Major Certainty • Occupational Certainty • Educational Goals • Absenteeism

There are several theories integrated within Bean's (1981) Model of Work Turnover that could directly inform the study of professional staff. These theories include student attrition models by Tinto (1975), Spady, (1970) and Rootman (1972), Price's turnover in work organization (1977), Durkheim's suicide theories (1961), and Pascarella's model on student/faculty informal contact (1980). These theorists share the view that certain variables influence job satisfaction and propose that "increased satisfaction with one's work is expected to reduce turnover" (Bean, 1981, p. 9). A common foundation among these theories is the primary focus of institutional commitment and structural variables that higher education institutions have control over. In this study, I sought after a deepened understanding of how URM professional staff employees view varying factors within their campus environments. These factors, pulled from Bean's (1981) Model of Work Turnover include shared group values, peer support and close friends, and overall social and academic integration. This study documents how URM staff perceive these variables, along with other variables that were discovered in the data collection process and how these variables may have an influence retention.

Bean's (1981) theory aims to represent information an institution "would need to know about itself, and its students, so that at a particular time, students with high potential for dropping out could be identified along with the probable reasons for their leaving school" (Bean, 1981, pp. 1-2). While Bean (1981) applies the variables in his model to student attrition, I used this theory as a guiding frame to inform my study on adult attrition at work in order to gain understanding on why URM employees leave their school. The unit of analysis in this study is the organization. As such, I isolated the organizational class of variables to examine how URM employees perceive institutional DEI initiatives as encouraging or discouraging factors to employee retention. Organizational variables are defined by Bean (1981) as:

... indicators of the student's interaction with the organization. They are intended to reflect the student's objective experience of the organization. These include structural variables- variables which can be administratively manipulated. For example, if informal contacts with faculty members reduce attrition, these contacts could be encouraged or required by the institution. [Another example is] if students do not participate in decision-making drop out of the institution at a high rate, student participation in decision making could be increased. (p. 18)

Using URM staff retention as an analogy to the student retention and dropout process, this study further explored how some of Bean's variables influenced URM staff retention through qualitative research focused on individual experiences and perspectives.

One example from the theoretical framework offered by Durkheim (1951) concludes that integration into a community reduces the likelihood of someone leaving an organization. There are several studies to date that suggest social integration is a key factor in transition and retention in higher education (Wilcox et al., 2005; Henry, 2010; Hommes et al., 2012; Davidson & Wilson, 2014; Thomas & Hanson, 2014; San Antonio, 2015). To what extent does integration improve retention? Is this also applicable to URM staff? As mentioned before, campuses' DEI efforts are a prime example of institutional commitments to integration and community building. Institutions often use DEI statements to convey shared group values and institutional strategies including targeted programs and support services that focus on creating environments conducive of peer support and social and academic integration. Deeper understanding of which aspects of institutional values and strategies support and hinder URM professional staff is also a pathway towards improving their rates of retention.

Additional variables for Bean's (1981) model that were also identified as having direct or indirect effects on the intent to leave were collected from the combined theories of Boshier's (1973) models of student participation, Sewell and Hauser's (1972) status attainment, and Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) relations between intentions and behaviors. These variables are categorized under the classes of background, environmental and outcome and attitudinal. While these are important factors, they are too specifically narrowed on student attrition and may be less applicable to adult staff and are, thus, not considered in this study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

As discussed in previous chapters of this dissertation, research on DEI efforts in higher education primarily place emphasis on student communities. These studies often center around institutional policies, procedures, and programs, which aim to increase college access for diverse populations and retention of URM students through a wide variety of dedicated student service programs. Most of these studies have neglected to articulate, however, if these institutional efforts are inclusive of the entire campus community, which includes the employees of the institution, specifically URM staff, who are often responsible for overseeing campus DEI efforts. As I've mentioned in Chapter Two's Literature Review, the research conducted on professional staff within higher education is limited. This study aimed to add to this field of research as well as provide insight to higher education institutions on supporting URM professional staff.

The purpose of my study was to explore if, and how, institutional DEI efforts impact the experiences of URM professional staff and whether they influence their retention as employees. This study specifically asked the research questions: "Are higher education institutions inclusive of URM staff in their campus' DEI efforts? How?" and "Do institutional DEI efforts promote or hinder URM staff retention?" with the aim to address a void in current research regarding retention of URM professional staff in higher education institutions. This chapter details the study's research design of a phenomenological case study, the procedures for conducting phenomenological research, and why this method was chosen along with the qualitative methodologies used: document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Next, I introduce the rationalization for choosing the identified research site and the data samples. This will include historical details, geographic location, and demographic information along with their relevance to this study. This section of the chapter also outlines the criteria used for selecting and

identifying study participants along with the participant recruitment process. I will also provide details on the data collection and data analysis procedures employed throughout this study. Lastly, I discuss the trustworthiness and credibility within this study, the role of myself as the researcher to include my reflexivity statement, and the limitations to this study.

Research Design/Methodology

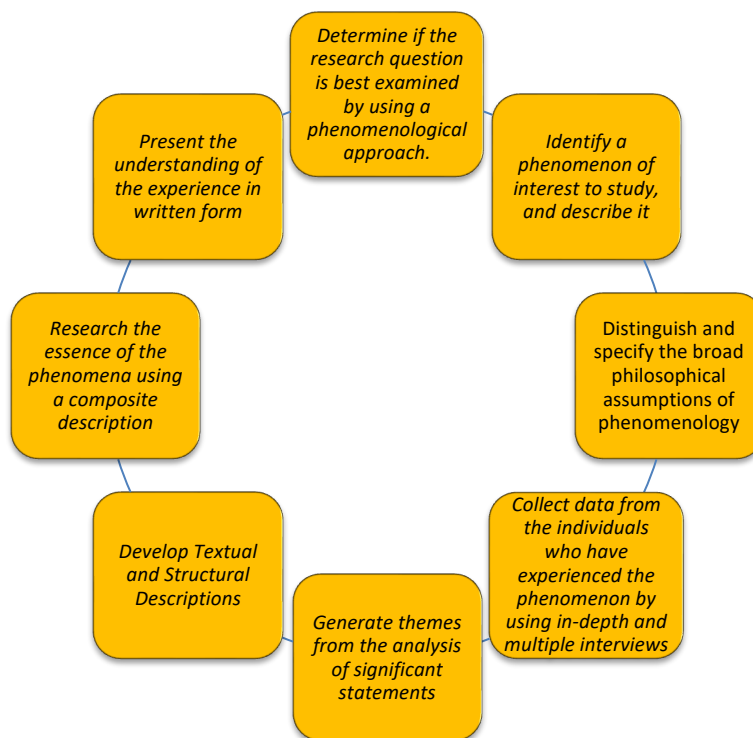
The focus of this study was on the subjective experiences of URM staff in higher education institutions as it attempted to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena based on the meanings that people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Specifically, the research employed a phenomenological case study design that used a dual-method approach incorporating document analysis and semi-structured interviews to address the research questions. This section details the intentions of this study and reasons why the research design and methodology were specifically chosen.

Phenomenological Case Study

Phenomenological research is a qualitative method in which the researcher focuses on a specific group of people, in this case, URM professional staff in higher education institutions with the intent to discover meanings perceived by those individuals. This method concentrates on discovering meanings as seen by those who are being researched and to understand a phenomenon, which for the purpose of this study is the perceptions of institutional DEI efforts' influence on staff retention. Therefore, this phenomenological case study aims to advance our understanding of the lived experiences of URM professional staff who are underrepresented in research literature. Figure 3.1 outlines the procedures for conducting phenomenological research as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018). This image serves as an overview of the structure of

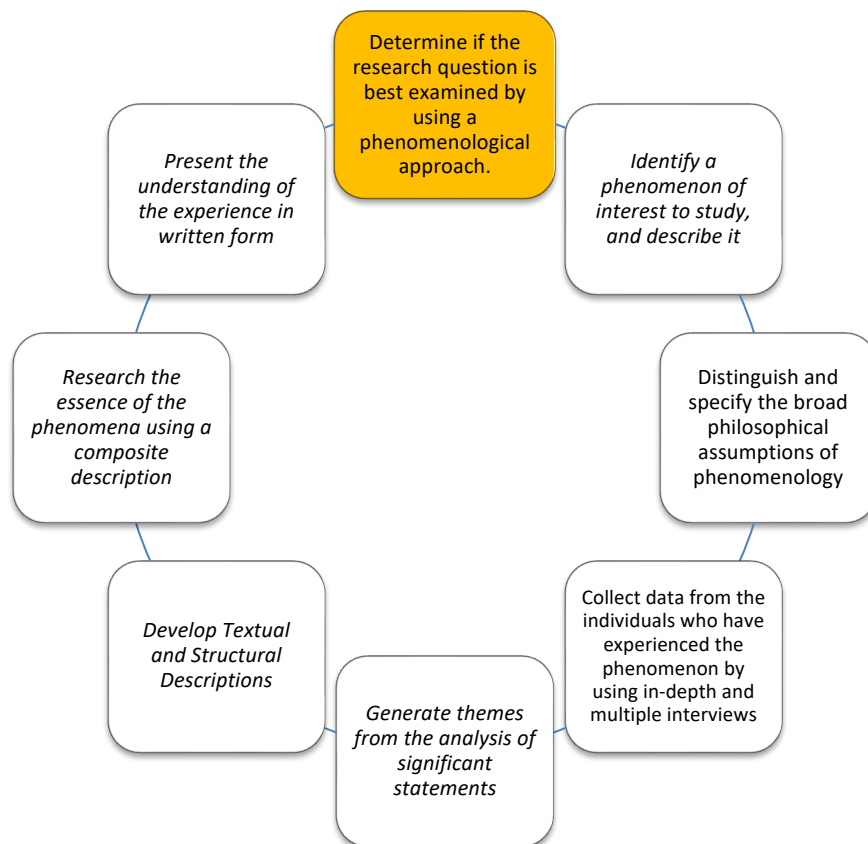
this chapter and the step-by-step processes of data analysis and data collection used in this research study.

Figure 3.1 Procedures for Conducting Phenomenological Research



Adapted from Creswell and Poth, 2018

Figure 3.2 Procedures for Conducting Phenomenological Research- Step 1



Adapted from Creswell and Poth (2018)

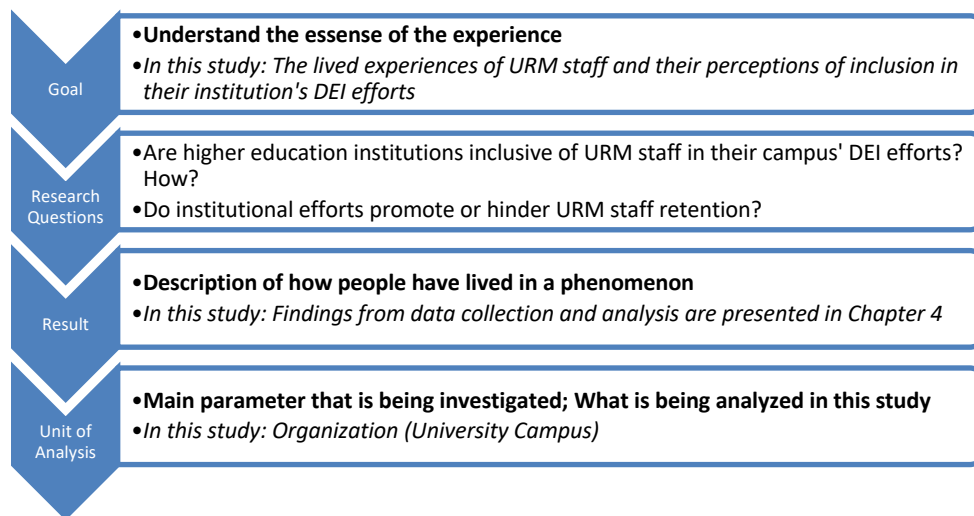
The first step in conducting phenomenological research is determining if it is the appropriate approach for addressing the research questions. Creswell and Poth (2018) provide that:

The type of problem is best suited for this form of research is one in which it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon. It would be important to understand these common experiences in order to develop practices or policies or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon (p. 79).

The case study method was an appropriate research approach to examine the “how” and “why” aspects of a phenomenon (Yin, 2013). Most of the information available on URM professional staff is quantitative. Therefore, it was important to consider the “how” and “why” questions to gain deeper understanding and to learn more about the personal experiences of URM staff, how they perceived being included or excluded in their institution, and why some DEI initiatives may contribute or deter URM staff retention.

Figure 3.3 depicts the steps conducted for assessing the fit of this study for the phenomenological research approach. To do so, the researcher must first consider if the overall goal of the research is to “understand the essence of the experience” (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

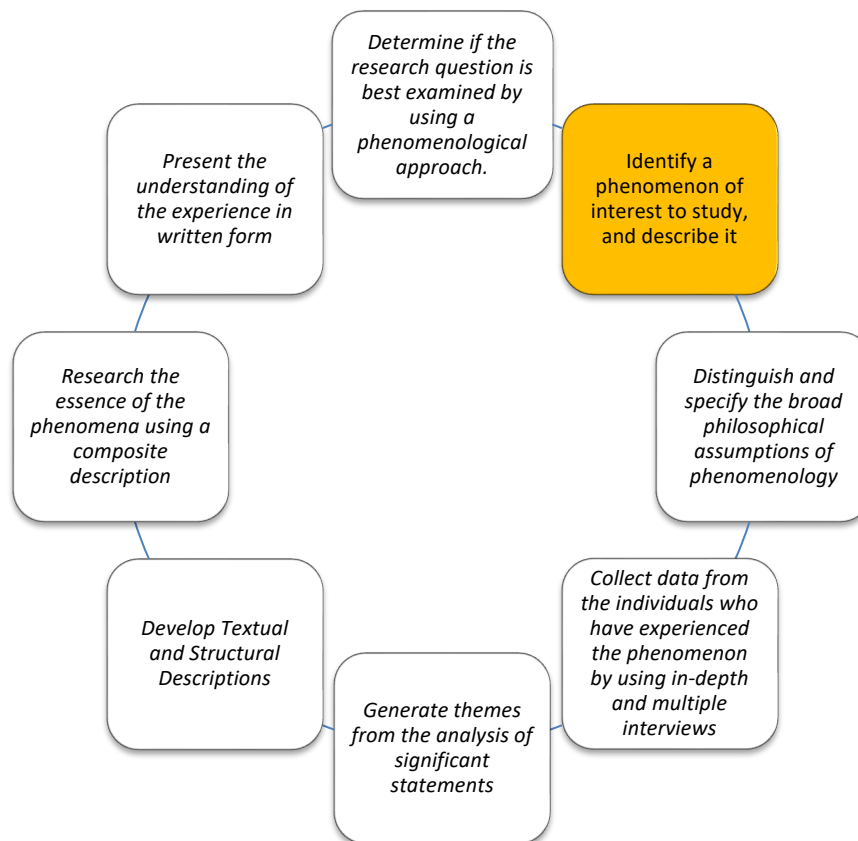
Figure 3.3 Assessing Fit for Phenomenological Research Choice



In this study, the lived experiences of URM staff and their perceptions of inclusion in their institution’s DEI efforts aligned with the goal of understanding the essence of the experience. Next steps were to consider the research questions, identify whether the desired result of the study involved a description of how people lived in the phenomenon, and whether the unit of

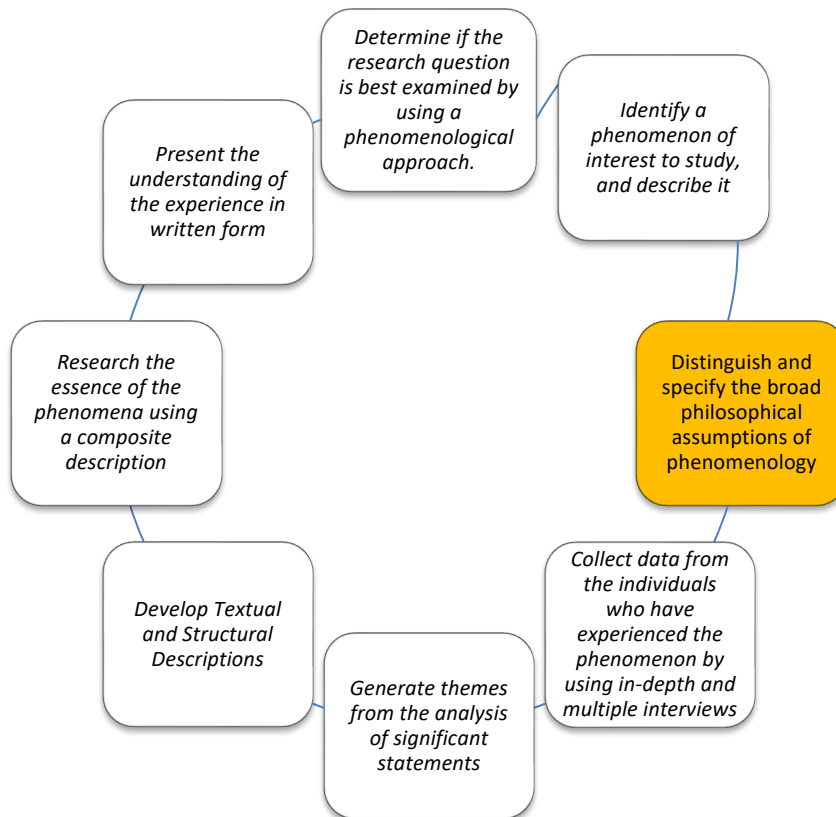
analysis of this study aligned with the phenomenological approach. Upon reviewing each step to assess whether this research approach was the best choice to obtaining the goals and results in answering the research questions, the phenomenological case study was determined as an appropriate fit.

Figure 3.4 Procedures for Conducting Phenomenological Research- Step 2



The second step in conducting phenomenological research is to distinguish the phenomenon, defined by Oxford “as a fact or situation that is observed to exist to happen, especially one whose cause or explanation is in question,” of interest to study and describe it (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The phenomena of this study is defined as the experiences of institutional DEI efforts’ influence on staff retention.

Figure 3.5 Procedures for Conducting Phenomenological Research- Step 3



Phenomenological Assumptions and Positionality Statement

The third step, as illustrated in Figure 3.5, in conducting phenomenological research is distinguishing and specifying the broad philosophical assumptions. Creswell and Poth (2018) provide that “to fully describe how participants view the phenomenon, researchers must bracket out, as much as possible, their own experiences” (p. 79). Moustaka’s (1994) book, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, states that the focus of phenomenological research is more on the experiences of the participants and their descriptions as opposed to the interpretations of the interviewer. To do this effectively, researchers must set aside their own experiences by detailing their own experience with the phenomenon in order to bracket out their own views (Moustakas, 1994). Reflexivity is considered a necessary process in qualitative research. It requires self-examination by the researcher which includes consideration of the

research relationship by assessing their assumptions and preconceptions and how these affect research decisions (Hsiung, 2008).

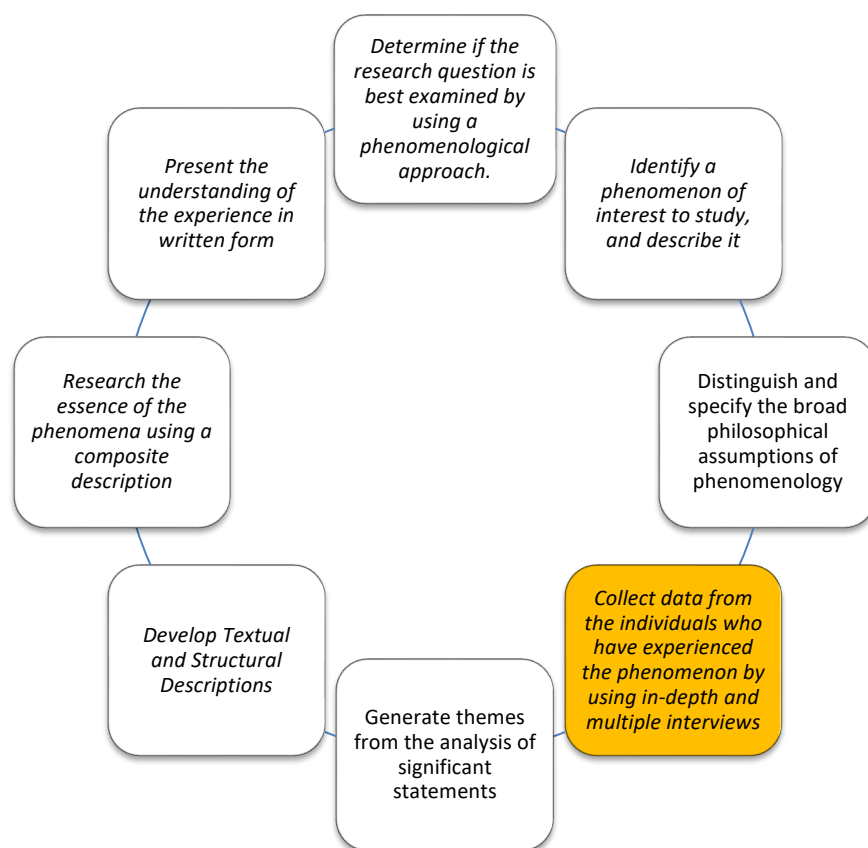
To this note, I provide the following positionality statement to reflect on my relationship to this research and serve as a reminder to continuously examine my assumptions and preconceptions throughout the process of this study:

I am a Southeast Asian, more specifically, Filipino-American, upper-middle class, cisgender straight, non-disabled female. I am a first-generation college graduate in my immediate family as well as among the first generation in my extended family to attend college in the United States. I attended predominantly white higher education institutions throughout my entire undergraduate and graduate years. My educational background and professional experiences of over 16 years as a URM professional staff member, eight of those at the research site selected (please note that I have transitioned out of the university in 2019), has a significant influence on my choice of this research topic as well as my chosen approach to data collection and analysis. I acknowledge that I approach this research study with experiences and meanings attached to my identity and personally lived experiences. Therefore, my role as the researcher requires continuous awareness of my interactions with the participants of this study to minimize any distortion of the meanings made in interviews (Seidman, 2019).

My study included interviews of URM professional staff and former colleagues, many of whom may share similar categories of identities with me, as noted in my positionality statement, in a multitude of ways. Conversely, the participants in this project are recognized as having similar, intersecting identities with each other that impact their lived experiences and meaning-making. It is important to establish trust between the study participants and the researcher, as

well as the research itself. Quinney et al. (2016) stated that “trust can emerge quickly when the participant and researcher have a level of common understanding from being members of a group with similar but different life experiences” (p. 8). Consequently, it was also imperative to reduce any researcher bias that may occur. To do so, I ensured limiting any assumptions I may have had of the participant or their experiences and recognize, that although there may be some similarities, my role as a researcher was to also discover differences that contributed to true meaning-making of the phenomena being researched.

Figure 3.6 Procedures for Conducting Phenomenological Research- Step 4



Adapted from Creswell and Poth (2018).

Figure 3.6 illustrates the next step in phenomenological research, which is data collection. In his book, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods*

Approaches (5th edition), Creswell (2018) explains that a case study involves the process of collecting data from multiple sources within a bounded system to provide a specific illustration of a larger problem or phenomenon and aims to broaden understanding of a wider issue (p. 97). The bounded system in this study is one university campus that has been selected as the research site. The focused problem this study is the lack of research on URM professional staff, which includes research on their retention. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that “qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents, rather than rely on a single data source. They then review all the data to make sense of it, organizing it into categories or themes that cut across all of the data sources” (p. 43). The data collection for this study included a two-part process that involved analysis of institutional documents outlining DEI efforts and semi-structured interviews of URM professional staff. Data collected through semi-structured interviews, in conjunction with the data collected from the document analysis, offered broader insights of URM staff through their perspectives of inclusion in institutional DEI efforts as university employees.

Document Analysis

In his article, *Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research*, Bowen (2009) defines document analysis as “a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents” in order to “elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” (p. 27). For the purpose of this study, document analysis was used to answer the first research question, *Are higher education institutions inclusive of URM staff in their campus’ DEI efforts? How?* Before this research could address whether DEI efforts increased or hindered URM professional staff employee retention, I had to first explore if the higher education institution chosen as the research site named URM staff in their published documents that outline their institutional DEI

efforts and, if so, how were they mentioned? The goal was to explore whether URM staff were integrated into written institutional DEI action plans and, if so, was there emphasis placed on retaining diverse staff members.

Bowen (2009) asserts that “documents can provide data on the context within which research participants operate” (p. 29). Because this study focused on perceptions and lived experiences of URM professional staff on being included in institutional DEI efforts, a review of university documents that formally discuss DEI actions provided foundational information on the institution’s DEI efforts. Atkinson and Coffey (1997, p. 47) identify “social facts” as articles such as university-wide diversity strategic plans that outline institutional plans and annual reports. The articles analyzed in this study were provided by DEI offices, which were produced, shared, and used in socially organized ways. A review of how these social facts include or acknowledge URM staff provided understanding of the institution’s considerations of URM staff retention. The content analysis study conducted by Wilson, Meyer and McNeal (2011), previously mentioned in an earlier chapter, provides a great example of this. The research examined mission statements of 80 higher education institutions and found that 59 (74%) of the institutions mentioned the term diversity as part of their mission statement but only 10 institutions had detailed an actual diversity plan. My study aimed to further Wilson, Meyer, and McNeal’s (2010) research by reviewing an institution that has employed a diversity plan. This study also reviewed the progress on the institution’s diversity plan based on social facts from annual reports and campus climate surveys and insight from the semi-structured interviews that discussed their successes and areas of needs.

In this study, document analysis provided a review of whether university employees were mentioned in stated goals for diversity and inclusion and how they were mentioned. Documents

that communicated the institutional DEI strategies and goals were included in the review. In addition, documents that provided follow-up reports on these goals, which included information that highlights where the institution felt they succeeded and areas where the institution addressed a need for further action were included in the analysis. Communications and announcements that were provided by administrators or documents that only discussed DEI efforts but did not provide in-depth explanation of action steps to desired outcomes were not reviewed as these statements may only suggest the importance of DEI but did not provide a vision for moving forward. Additionally, since this study's aim was to gain understanding of organization-wide DEI efforts, I limited the review to university and campus-wide documents that were communicated or directed from upper administration offices such as the Office of the President, the Offices of the Provost, the Office of the Chancellor, university DEI offices, Human Resources Offices, and Institutional Research Office. Departmental and individual program DEI documents stating only department goals, and not campus-wide goals, were not reviewed.

In this case, the university chosen as the research site had developed institutional diversity strategic plans each spanning over four academic years with the first one beginning in 2010. In addition, annual reports provided by the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion offices along with campus climate surveys provided extended context and follow-up responses from the campus community in relation to the university's strategic plans. These reports detailed potential impacts, trends, and issues at the conclusion of each action plan. Table 3.1 is a list of documents selected for the analysis.

Table 3.1 Examples of Documents for Analysis

Document Title	Synopsis	Source/Author
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2021 Current Action Plan	Living document of Race & Equity Initiative Committee Action Plan that is intended to be continually updated that outlines current objectives and action steps to address institutional racism; provide opportunities for faculty, staff and students to acquire shared language and practices of race and equity; and assessment of campus climate and ongoing initiatives	Campus Office of Equity & Inclusion
2017-2021 University Diversity Action Plan	Outlines university's updated six goals that encompass diversity goals, recommended priorities, and suggested action steps for 2017-2021	Office of the President; Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
2010-2014 University Diversity Action Plan	Outlines university's six goals that encompass major areas of emphasis for diversity, strategic priorities and recommended action steps for both administrative and academic units for 2010-2014	Office of the President; University Diversity Council
2020 Campus Climate Survey	Executive summary and full report of survey results examining the full range of student, faculty and staff experiences related to learning, working, and living on their respective campus. Survey was conducted from Oct.-Nov. 2019 with feedback from over 18,000 respondents total.	Institutional Research
2019-2020 Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Annual Report	Outlines 2019-2020 year in review including accomplishments in Equity &	Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

	Inclusion focus areas of: building a diverse campus community and accomplishments of campus community change makers and advocates, and Office of Equity & Inclusion goals for 2020-2021	
2018-2019 Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Annual Report	Outlines 2018-2019 year in review including accomplishments in Equity & Inclusion focus areas of: enhancing campus education, developing community partnerships, building a diverse campus community, and Office of Equity & Inclusion goals for 2019-2020	Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
2010-2014 Goal Attainment/2013 Report	Data analysis report of measures for each of the six goals areas pertaining to the 2010-2014 Diversity Strategic Plan	Institutional Research
20 Year Diversity Focus Groups: Summary and Recommendations	Vision and diversity recommendations prior to 2010-2014 Diversity Strategic Plan implementation; Includes themes gathered from focus groups throughout university system	Office of the President; Vice President for DEI Affairs; Vice Provost for Diversity

Note. Titles of documents and official offices may have been changed to provide anonymity of the research site.

Artifacts that provided institutional background information of historical DEI were also revealed for the purpose of explored in relation to tracking changes and developments made by the institution on said efforts. Bowen (2009) states that “such information and insight can help

researchers understand the historical roots of specific issues and can indicate conditions that impinge upon the phenomena under investigation,” (p. 29), such as the impact of institutional DEI efforts on professional staff experiences.

The document analysis provided research data that lead to the formulization of interview questions. In addition, it further contextualized data to be collected during the interview process (Bowen, 2009). In a study conducted by Goldstein and Reiboldt (2004), for example, document analysis was used to create new interview questions used in a longitudinal study of service among families living in poor urban communities. The researchers found that information and insights obtained from available documents were beneficial additions to their knowledge base. Having a foundational background of what DEI efforts have been established at the research site provided a helpful framework and initial guide for the semi-structured interview protocols.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Additional data for this study was collected through semi-structured in-person and virtual interviews. In his book, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, Moustakas (1994) states that the phenomenological interview “involves an informative, interactive process that utilizes open-ended comments and questions” (p. 114). Semi-structured interviews allow for the researcher to develop a framework of questions in advance that aim to construct a “comprehensive account of the person’s experience of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994) with the expectation that questions could be varied, altered, or emitted depending on the direction of the interview. Variations, alterations, and emittances of interview questions were largely informed by the codes gathered from the theoretical framework, Bean’s Model of Work Turnover, as well as themes identified from the document analysis. Yin (2013) suggests semi-structured interviews in case study research should function more as “guided conversations rather than structured queries” to

allow research participants to provide the full story of their own lived experiences. This method of interviewing was the most appropriate for allowing URM professional staff to provide real-life context and to discover meaningful characteristics of their experiences with institutional DEI efforts based on their individual perceptions and understanding. Semi-structured interviewing also provided this study the opportunity to gain an understanding of multiple realities within the same phenomenon due to the individual experience.

Research Setting/Data Sample

The geographical area for this study lies within the Pacific Northwest. The specific area of the research site was the first globally connected settlement in the region and originated as the home to a very diverse group of people who came from all over the Americas, the Pacific Islands, Europe, and the Caribbean, in addition to the Native American population that were indigenous to the area (Rudrid, 2022). Founded upon a rich, diverse history, it made sense to choose an institution within this area as the research site, especially one that stated its commitment to ensuring that its presence would not “displace or destroy the past” and that the campus intends to “be respectful of [the area’s history]” (Sullivan, 1997).

The research setting for this study is an urban-serving, public university campus that is part of a multi-campus university system. The campus, more-recently founded in 1990, has a unique student population with 80 percent of its students identified as transfer students from one of the community colleges in the area or from other four-year universities. While there is a growing number of incoming freshman attending who are directly from high schools, the campus also attracts a large non-traditional student population, which includes those returning to post-secondary education, military personnel and their families, and professionals working on new career goals. Additionally, more than half of the student population is considered first-generation

meaning that they are the first in their family to attend college. The campus serves a student population that is comprised of nearly one-third underrepresented minorities- the highest percentage in comparison to the other campuses within the university system. The research site is comprised of more than a dozen departments and programs that focus their efforts on increasing student success outcomes in a variety of specialized areas that range from equity & inclusion, first-generation initiatives, student transition & success, career services, and new student and family programs. These programs were specifically developed to provide access to education and to increase successful outcomes for the diverse student population across the campus. Each of the previously-mentioned departments employ professional staff members and many, if not all of the departments, are also lead and coordinated by professional staff members.

The research site was chosen based on its multiple diversity-specific action plans and the availability of official and published documents that range within the last decade. These documents allowed for analysis of how DEI efforts have evolved in the last 10 years at this specific institution and include two separate diversity strategic plans that outline the university's goals and strategic priorities from 2010-2014 and from 2017-2021. The first of these strategic plans was developed after a university-wide diversity focus group published their summary and recommendations in May 2010. The focus group consisted of 85 individuals including faculty and staff members ranging from campus DEI offices, University Diversity Council, and student leaders from the associated study body. The intent of the focus group was to address the future of diversity at the university over the next two decades. The outcomes and recommendations provided by the focus group informed the university's first diversity strategic plan based on the following themes: retention, inclusion, accountability, collaboration, and incentives.

Participants

The goal in selecting participants for phenomenological research is to find those who “who have lived experiences based on the focus of study, who are willing to talk about their experience, and who are diverse enough from one another to enhance possibilities of rich and unique stories of the particular experience” (Lavery, 2003, p. 37). For this study, participants were initially chosen through a purposeful sampling method that identified participants based on characteristics of a population, URM professional staff, and the objective of a study (Crossman, 2009). This method allowed for identification and selection of information-rich cases that I, as the researcher, could learn a great deal from that highlight issues of central importance (Leedy & Omrod, 2010).

The sampling method entailed recruiting employees of the university who identified as a URM professional staff member with a varied range of employment years at the research site, as well as prior URM professional staff employees who have departed from the institution within the last ten years. The reasoning behind the variation of employment years and the inclusion of previously employed URM staff was due to the research inquiry of employment retention. This inquiry intended to explore differences in views and experiences that could have been affected by several factors including length or era of employment with the institution. The inclusion of previously employed URM staff who have left the institution within the last ten years was an attempt to gain perspectives of whether, and how, DEI efforts affected their decision to depart the university, which included the span of years in which the university first began its implementation of the diversity strategic plan.

To ensure a diverse population among study participants, considerations were made when selecting individuals to reflect variations in a) levels/types of professional roles, b) racial makeup, c) gender, and d) level of postsecondary education. Understanding there is a broad

population of professional staff, I narrowed the criteria of professional staff for the purpose of this study to a smaller, targeted population of student service professionals as these roles are primarily involved with upholding or initiating DEI initiatives for students based on the literature review. This was defined as professional staff who work within student affairs and student support offices and roles, which included: academic advising, admissions, enrollment services, student life, career services, and student transitions and success offices.

The criteria for selecting participants were:

- a) University employees who identified as belonging to an ethnically underrepresented minority group;
 - a. African American
 - b. Asian American
 - c. Hispanic/Latino
 - d. Native American
 - e. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
 - f. Two or More Ethnicities Indicated Above
- b) are considered professional staff by definition of “staff not considered faculty and/or not employed under academic contracts”
- c) including those in positions within student support services and academic departments and schools, which included: academic advising, admissions, enrollment services, student life, career services, and student transitions and success offices
- d) have worked within the university for
 - a. 1-2 years

- b. 3-5 years
- c. 6-10 years
- d. 11-15 years
- e. Former Employee (asked to specify range of years employed)

Initial outreach of potential study participants was conducted by emailing campus leaders of departments and programs that employed student service professionals. The email communication included information about the research study and a request to send an invitation out to their department staff or available listservs for their participation in an interview (see Appendix A). These departments and programs specifically included:

- Academic Advising,
- Academic Affairs,
- Office of Admissions,
- Career Development,
- Center for Student Involvement,
- Division of Student Affairs,
- Equity and Inclusion,
- First Generation Student Initiatives,
- New Student Programs, and
- Student Life

In addition, the university developed a Staff Implementation Team that was tasked to review the climate survey findings, gather additional data, and recommend concrete actions in response to improving campus climate through equitable and just working and learning

environments. These individuals were listed on the website and were also invited to participate in the study.

Professional staff are the least likely to have information publicly available on the institution's website that verify them as meeting this study's participant criteria (as opposed to faculty biographies and upper administrator positions, which may have posted curriculum vitae). Therefore, the snowball sampling approach was used to expand participant outreach. With the criteria for participants restricted to URM professional staff, a random sampling method would not have been useful to use in this recruitment. Initial potential study participants were emailed an invitation to participate in this study, which included a statement that encouraged them to recommend other potential participants they believe fit the criteria. This method, known as snowball sampling, allowed me as the researcher to reach further into networks that I may not have been aware of or have access to without introduction or referral from the primary study participants. In addition, at the conclusion of each interview, each participant was verbally asked if they knew of any individual that may be interested in participating in the study that they recommend I reach out to directly. The reasoning behind this step was guided by the assumption that after the participant experienced the interview process and developed a rapport with me as the researcher, they might be inclined to refer other professional staff members that would be interested in participating. Many participants provided a list of contacts they suggested for outreach. This method created a supple amount of participants for the overall study.

Target Enrollment of Participants

Multiple researchers and texts state there is not a specific target number of interviews for qualitative research studies, however, Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest the number of

participants can depend on the qualitative research approach. For phenomenological studies, the suggestion of a target number of 3-10 study participants is considered sufficient. This target enrollment allows for access and understanding of the essence of an experience (Ellis, 2016), which, in this study was that of being a URM professional staff within higher education and their perceptions of inclusion in institutional DEI efforts.

According to the most recently available report from the research site, in 2018, the campus employed a total of 85 individuals who were categorized as “Full-Time Non-Instructional Staff” and worked within “Student and Academic Affairs and Other Educational Services Occupations.” Out of those individuals, there was an estimated 36 who self-identified under one of the underrepresented minority categories defined in this study’s criteria. By setting a target recruitment of 10-15 participants for this study, this would represent about 28%-41% of the research site’s total assumed population of URM professional staff. The total number of participants interviewed for this study was 17. The following section of this chapter describes the demographics of the study participants.

Demographic Information of Study Participants

This section describes the individuals who were interviewed and provides background on the overall group makeup of those who participated in this study. Study participants were selected based on a certain set of criteria, as described earlier in this chapter. Each participant verified they met the participant-eligibility criteria through a preliminary intake form prior to the interview.

Table 3.2 provides a summary of each of the study’s participants. Pseudonyms were used in place of the participant’s name to protect their identify and for anonymity. The table is organized by the pseudonym used, self-identified ethnicity of the participant, their area or role of

employment, and the length of employment at the research site either if they are a current employee or the total length of their employment at the institution prior to their departure.

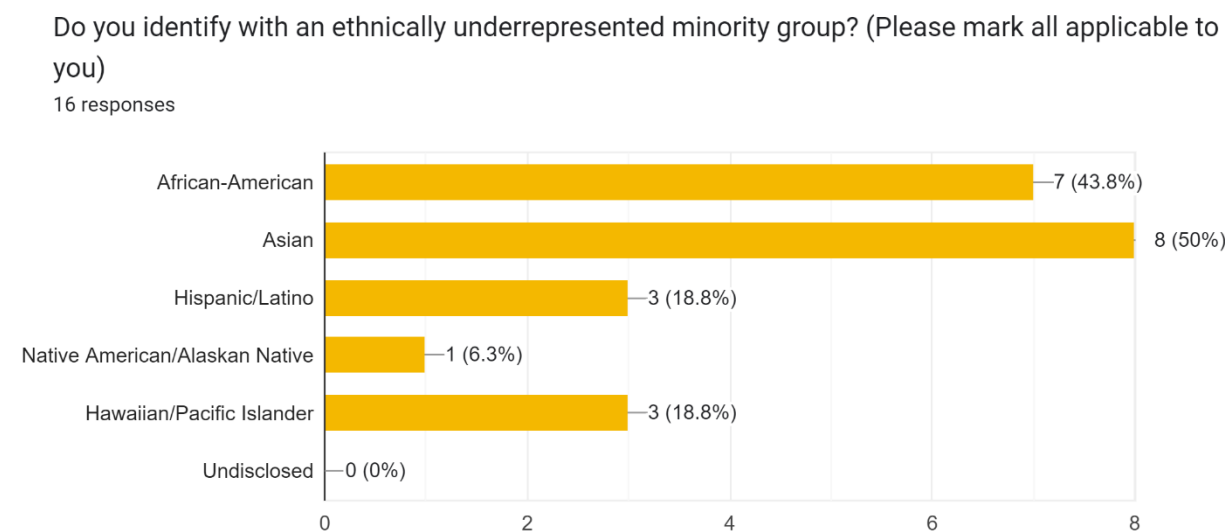
Table 3.2 Summary of Study Participants

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Area of Employment	Length of Employment at Research Site
Felix	Asian	Academic Advising	6-10 Years
Maeve	Asian	Academic Advising	1-2 Years
Luna	Hispanic/Latino, Native American/Alaskan Native	Academic Advising	11-15 Years
Ronin	African-American	Student Transitions	1-2 Years
Iris	African-American, Hispanic/Latino	Student Success	1-2 Years
Olivia	Asian	Academic Advising	3-5 Years
Hazel	African-American, Asian	Academic Advising	3-5 Years
Ivy	Asian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	Veteran and Military Services	3-5 Years
Charlotte	African-American	Student Success	3-5 Years
Amelia	Asian	Student Success	1-2 Years
Silas	African-American	Student Transitions	6-10 Years
Nora	African-American	Student Success	3-5 Years
Stella	Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	Student Life	3-5 Years
Asher	Asian	Student Life	3-5 Years
Lily	Asian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	Student Success	3-5 Years
Ruby	African-American, Hispanic/Latino	Student Transitions	1-2 Years
Quinn	African American	Financial Aid	11-15 Years

Figure 3.7 depicts the self-identified racial/ethnic makeup of the study's participants based on their survey intake form responses. Participants had the ability to choose multiple

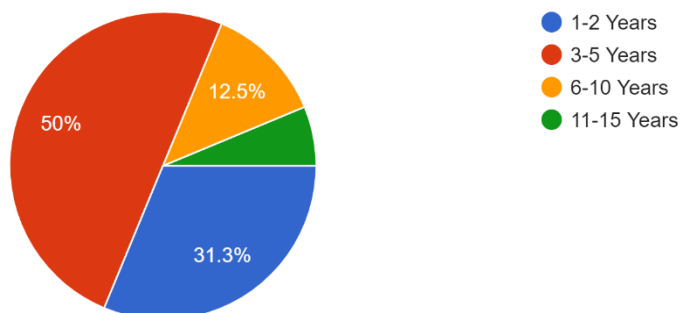
options on the intake form. Majority of the study participants identified as Asian or African American.

Figure 3.7 Racial/Ethnic Makeup of Study Participants



Out of the 17 participants, 11 were current employees at the time of their interview and 6 were former employees that had voluntarily terminated their employment with the research site. Figure 3.7 breaks down the length of employment for each of the study's participants. Half of the participants had worked at the research site from 3-5 years. Overall, more than 80% of the participants had worked at the research site less than 5 years and about 18% who have worked over 5 years.

Figure 3.8 How Long Have You Worked for this Institution?

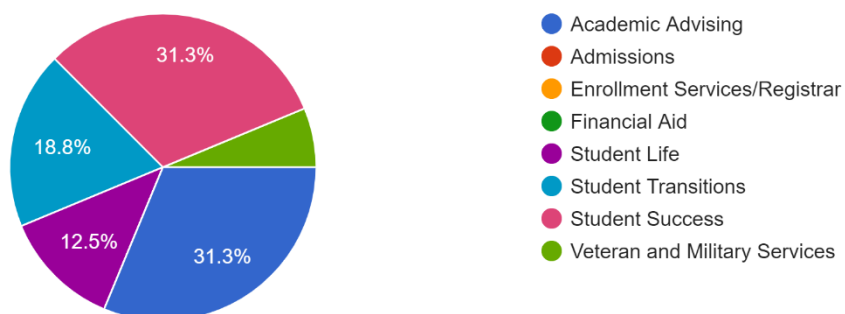


Lastly, Figure 3.8 depicts the areas of student services study participants were employed and the percentages each make up of the entire participation sample group with a majority of the respondents from Academic Advising or Student Services.

Figure 3.9 Area of Employment

Please identify which area of Student Services your job role entails (Please mark all applicable to you)

16 responses



The sample population of the participants in this research study is representative of the URM professional staff at the research site on the basis of racial/ethnic makeup who hold positions within student support services and academic departments with a diverse range of years of employment between the individuals. The next section provides details of the findings from the semi-structured interviews of the URM professional staff outlined above.

Data Collection Methods

Documents listed in Table 3.1, shared earlier in this chapter, were collected from the institution's website pages. A search throughout the campus's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion office webpage provided access to publicly available documents such as the Campus Climate Survey, Annual Reports, Response and Implementation Plans, and Reports and Implementation Plans specific to the campus. By locating the current Equity Annual Report (2019-2020), the page also included access to the prior year's Equity Annual Report (2018-2019). Additionally, under the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion webpage is the Equity Initiative Committee Action Plan that is outlined as a living document to be continually updated with additional goals and action steps. A search on the university's main campus provided university-wide documents such as the Diversity Strategic Plan for years 2010-2014 and 2017-2021 that were inclusive of all campuses within the university. Archived documents, to include prior University Provost Reports and Trends, 2010-2014 Goal Attachment Dashboard, 2013 Annual Report, and the Diversity Focus Group Summary and Recommendations, were also located under the 2010-2014 Diversity Strategic Plan page. Lastly, during the semi-structured interviews participants were also asked of any documentation that fit the criterion for analysis.

The second phase of data collection in this study was that of semi-structured interviews, which were audio recorded and transcribed. As part of the interview screening process, demographic information was asked of each individual to ensure diversity among study participants. The following questions were included in the interview intake form titled "Underrepresented Minority Professional Staff Research: Interview Participation (see Appendix B) that interested participants were requested to complete:

1. *Ethnicity*: Do you identify with an ethnically underrepresented minority group? (Please mark all applicable to you)
2. *Professional Staff Member Verification*: Are you a professional staff member by definition of "staff not considered faculty and/or not employed under academic contracts"
3. *Department/Role*: Please identify which area of Student Services your job role entails (Please mark all applicable to you)
4. *Total years of employment at research site*: How long have you worked at this campus?

The interview protocol included questions that were informed by the data obtained from the document analysis process of this study as well as the theoretical framework of Bean's (1981) Model of Work Turnover. Interviews were conducted through open-ended questions that led to follow-up questions based on participants' responses and reflections. Study participants were informed at the opening of their interview that the structure was meant to be open-ended and there was not a list of pre-determined questions in this process. As the researcher, I explained to each participant that my main objective was to hear their perspectives and experiences as a URM staff. The interview centered around what the participant believed was important to share (Appendix C). Moustakas (1994) suggested concentrating on two, broad questions: What have you experienced in terms of this phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences in this phenomenon?

The basis of each interview was guided by three main inquiries that requested further explanations detailing the experiences and perceptions of each individual who participated in the study. The first two questions originated from the study's original focus on campus DEI efforts and their inclusion of professional staff and how these efforts affect URM professional staff retention:

- Do you feel included in your campus's/institution's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts as a staff member?
 - If so, how do you feel included? If not, how do you feel excluded? Could you provide examples?
- Do you feel that your campus/institution makes a concerted effort in retaining professional staff employees?
 - If so, how? Do you have examples?

The third main inquiry emerged from the document analysis findings' focus on diverse staff hiring. Throughout the university documents, there is significant mention of hiring practices with the goal to attract diverse candidate pools for open and upcoming positions. Since this study aims to focus on the retention of URM staff, it is also important to understand the hiring processes and the university's efforts. Therefore, survey participants were also asked a form of the following question:

- How would you describe the hiring practices on your campus in relation to DEI efforts?
Are there programs/initiatives within the institution focused on diverse staff hiring?

Follow-up questions and the general direction of each interview was based on the individual's responses to the previous question asked. Based on their responses, further inquiries were directed to gain insight regarding information and themes identified from the document analysis in Research Question One. The opening questions outlined above attempted to gain insight on experiences and perceptions regarding the stated institutional goals and action steps from Research Question One. Questions were asked to elicit further context on experiences of URM staff based on the themes from the theoretical framework.

- How are URM included in DEI?

- University Services/Programs: Are there programs/initiatives within the institution focused on diverse staff hiring?
- Are there programs/initiatives within your institution that focus on retention of URM staff?
- How are policies communicated throughout your institution? (diversity blueprint, trainings, etc)
- How would you describe the peer culture towards DEI work within your campus?
- Participation in decision-making of DEI efforts

Building Trust and Participant Protection

Building trust is essential in the interview process as it allows for participants to provide candid answers throughout the interview. All study participants were notified in the initial outreach email that their contribution in this research study was voluntary and their identities would remain anonymous through the use of pseudonyms and limited correlation to job titles and department/program of employment when possible. To ensure informed consent, this study followed Oregon State University's IRB protocol of a signed consent agreement (Appendix D). This agreement providing subjects sufficient information about the study, which included: the research procedure, the purpose of the study, any risks and anticipated benefits, and a statement which offered participants the opportunity to ask any questions or withdraw at any time from the research. Participants were notified in their initial email invitation, as well as the informed consent document they were required to sign prior to their interview, of the use of pseudonyms and their anonymity to reported responses.

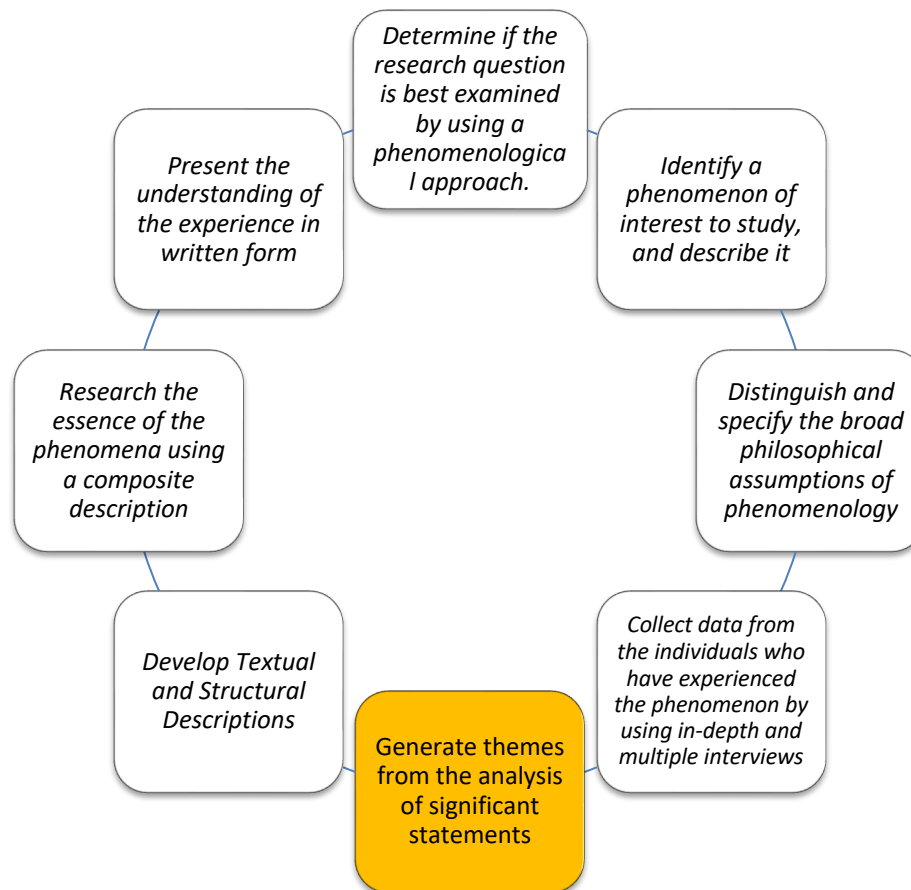
Interviews were audio- and/or video- recorded based on the format of the interview. For interviews conducted in person, the entirety of the conversation was audio-recorded using a

mobile phone application, which also transcribed the conversation with the permission of the study participant. For interviews conducted virtually over a secured videotelephony software program platform such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, audio and visual recordings were obtained with the permission of the study participant. Transcriptions of each individual interview were saved and used for the purpose of coding. Audio and visual recordings were deleted after the transcription of data. Transcripts were saved in a password-protected file and will be kept no longer than five years after the study is completed.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis has been defined as “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned” (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p. 145). This upcoming section discusses the step-by-step data analysis plan used in this research study and details how the information was organized and synthesized in order to search for patterns among the documents and interview transcripts. Figure 3.9 shows the Step 5 of the procedure for conducting phenomenological research.

Figure 3.10 Procedures for Conducting Phenomenological Research- Step 5



Document Analysis

In analyzing the raw data, the researcher must first identify themes that emerge from the data collected. This process, referred to by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as “open coding,” requires the researcher to “identify and tentatively name the conceptual categories into which the phenomena observed will be grouped” (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 55). In open coding, the goal is to create diverse categories to form a preliminary framework for analysis. Since this study used Bean’s (1981) Model of Work Turnover as a theoretical framework, I utilized some of the organizational variables identified in his theory as a basis for the conceptual categories. I altered some of the variables to shift the focus from students to university employees. Also, considerations were made of the fact the raw data provided additional variables not previously considered in the

theory. Conversely, some variables from the organizational variables from Model of Work Turnover theory may did not present. Some of the variables from the theoretical framework, as previously discussed in Chapter Two, are listed below:

- Regulation of Life/Work Duties (as an employee) at School/Employer
- Communication of Policies
- Close Friends
- Helpfulness of a Mentor
- Information Contact with Upper Administration
- Participation in Decision Making
- Memberships in Campus Organizations/Committees
- University Services/Programs (Recruitment/Retention/Professional Development)
- Peer Culture
- Leisure Activities
- Discussed Leaving with Outsiders
- Discussed Leaving with Insiders

Information collected from the documents listed in Table 3.1 were thoroughly reviewed to identify information that was meaningful and could be categorized. Bowen (2009) outlines the process of document analysis as “skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation” (p. 32) with the intention of establishing meanings within the document and its considerations to URM professional staff retention. The initial review of the documents involved coding from variables from Bean’s Model of Work Turnover. The second review of the documents identified any additional themes or patterns that were not aligned with the coding from the theoretical framework. The culmination of the codes and themes discovered

throughout the document analysis provided a framework for questions that were used in the semi-structured interviews. Table 3.3 provides examples from a prior study using Bean's organizational variables in the Model of Work Turnover that helped develop the framework for the direction of the interviews. The sample items listed below were altered to reflect the focus on employees as opposed to students.

Table 3.3 Organizational Variables, Definitions, & Samples from Bean's Model of Work Turnover

Variable	Definition	Sample Item
Intent to Leave	The estimated likelihood of discontinuing one's membership in the organization	<i>URM Staff: Do you intend to stay at the university? How long do you anticipate being employed at this campus?</i>
Satisfaction	The degree to which an employee likes being an employee?	<i>URM Staff: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about being an employee? I find enjoyment being an employee; I consider being an employee rather unpleasant; I definitely dislike being an employee; Most days I am an enthusiastic employee</i>
Instrumental Communication	The degree to which information about being an employee is transmitted by the institution to its staff	<i>How well-informed are you about university rules; social rules here?</i>
Participation	The degree of power that an individual exercises in university decisions	<i>Here is a list of some decisions which are made at most universities. Please indicate how much say you feel you actually have in making these decisions: Kinds of work assignments; Work policies and procedures</i>
Integration	The degree to which an individual has close friends among organizational members	<i>How many close friends or have support: in your department or in similar roles as you? Are you involved in extra-curricular</i>

		<i>activities or invited to attend community events?</i>
Courses	The degree to which an employee views the content of the curriculum of professional development as desired	<i>To what extent does this university offer professional development trainings/workshops/opportunities that you want or are interested in?</i>
Campus Organizations	The degree to which a employee is integrated into the co-curricular activities of the institution	<i>How many committees/campus organizations/professional organizations do you belong to?</i>

Semi-Structured Interviews

To begin analyzing the data from the interviews, the primary step was to read the interview transcripts in their entirety. The initial purpose was to gain a global sense of understanding the phenomenon as a whole (Kleiman, 2004). Creating a broader understanding of the phenomenon eased the process of breaking down the raw data into more manageable chunks. Maintaining accuracy of the data collected was the primary focus in the initial cycle. The second step required reading the transcripts a second time with the intentionality to identify meaningful data into categories by distinguishing significant phrases or sentences that pertained to the phenomenon. Lastly, final themes were established in the data collected by formulating meanings and clustering them into themes that were common throughout multiple participants' transcripts. Yin (2013) recommends beginning with themes that stem from the theoretical framework, research questions and interview protocol followed by emergent themes that are revealed in the data. These themes represented clusters of meanings were related to answering the research questions and identified any revisions of additional themes developed based on the participant contributions of the interview. The emergent themes included:

- Perceptions of inclusion as a professional staff and URM professional staff in DEI efforts
- Perceptions of efforts in professional staff retention and URM professional staff retention
- Input/Feedback provided from staff
- Institutional focus on faculty but not staff

Risks and Ethical Considerations of this Study

Conducting an ethical study involves more than seeking and obtaining permission from an Institutional Review Board (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This study made every effort to ensure ethical consideration and to minimize any foreseeable risks to the study's participants. Possible risks in the study were identified before the recruitment process of participants and emergent risks were considered throughout the entirety of the study. Identified risks primarily included emotional discomfort and breach of confidentiality that may risk anonymity. This could affect the participant's employment or reputation since this study specifically asked participant to reflect on their views and perspectives about their experiences as a URM professional staff within their institution/employer. Participants were made aware prior to the interview that aspects of this study may ask them to reflect on their views and perspectives about their institution/employer, their racial and ethnic identity, and their employment and professional experiences. There is the minor possibility that, in small communities and organizations, I, the researcher, could not guarantee that participants' peers would not find out their involvement in the study. This is especially true when using the snowball method of participants referring other individuals to take part in this study, yet much of the risk involved in this scenario was due to

participants' self-disclosure of involvement as opposed to information provided by the researcher.

As the researcher, I was intentionally mindful of the possibility that participants may be sharing experiences of trauma through their lived experiences as a URM professional staff and these may arise in the interview process. My objective in these interviews was not to uncover detailed traumatic experiences nor cause emotional discomfort or harm to the study participants. Yet, in the event that the interview lead in this direction, I was prepared to provide references to off-campus counseling services as well as known community affinity groups that individuals from this study could reach out to in an effort to ensure their mental health was not at risk by being a study participant in this research.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

External validity is determined when study results of a sample population may apply to a broader target population (Findley, Kikuta and Denly, 2021), in this case URM professional staff in other higher education institutions. While establishing external validity in a case study is often seen as an impossible feat, trustworthiness of the study is still feasible through dedicated and mindful selection of the participants and rigorous attention to the research procedures throughout the data collection and analysis phases. During the interview process, follow-up questions were routinely used to clarify an/or increase the depth of understanding of the researcher to the participants' perceptions and lived experiences. After initial review of the transcripts, follow-up interviews were also conducted if there were additional points of clarity based on participants' responses. It is important to recognize that in qualitative case studies research does not focus on creating generalizability but rather, "relatability" (Wellington, 2015). Wellington (2015) offers

that small case studies have the ability to generate findings that suggest implication that are relatable to many.

Trustworthiness of this study's findings is also established in the process of document analysis as it is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation- the combination of methodologies in a study of the same phenomenon (Denzin, 1970, p. 291). In qualitative research, the researcher is often expected to "draw upon multiple (at least two) sources of evidence; that is to seek convergence and corroboration through use of different data sources and methods (Yin, 2013). Triangulating data allows the researcher to provide a "confluence of evidence that breeds credibility" (Eisner, 1991, p. 110). Bowen (2009) states "by examining information collected through different methods, the researcher can corroborate findings across data sets and thus reduces the impact of potential bias that can exist in a single study." Triangulation helps the researcher guard against the accusation that a study's findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator's bias (Patton, 1990). In addition, the use of a theoretical framework, in this case, Bean's (1981) Model of Work Turnover, keeps the researcher from forcing preconceptions of the findings (Grant and Osanloo, 2014).

Limitations

The methodological approach of this study, as well as its design and sample group, include several limitations that should be considered when reviewing the findings. First, recruitment of URM individuals was difficult. According to the University of California, San Francisco (n. d.), researchers acknowledged the importance of diversity among study participants, however, despite national efforts, research participation has often been found to be lower for underrepresented groups, especially racial and ethnic minorities, women, and low

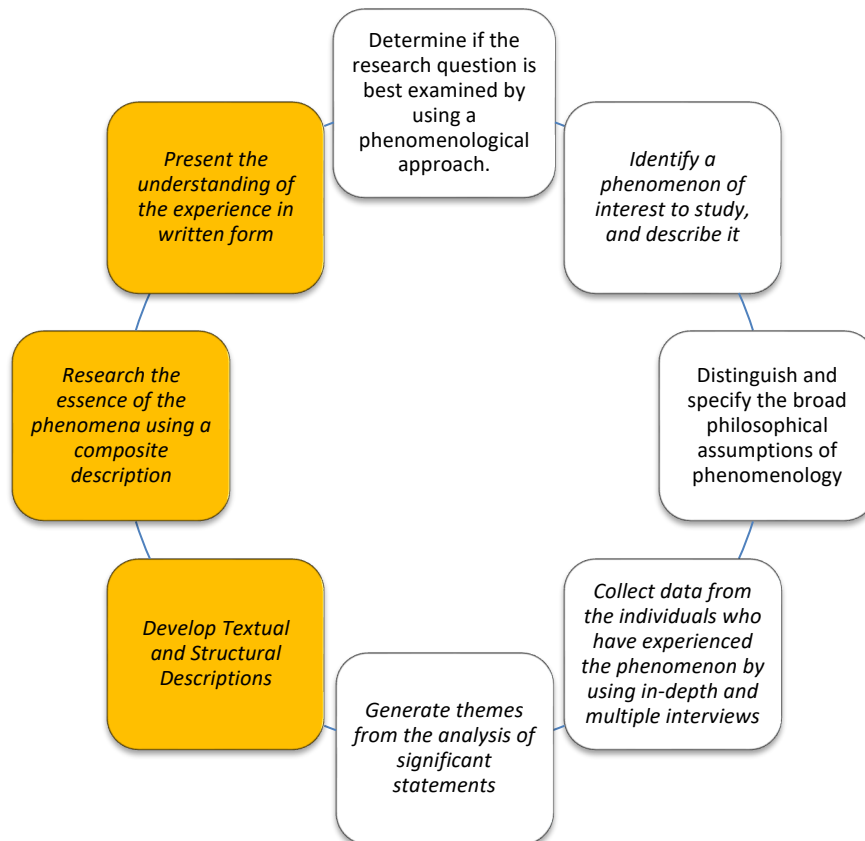
socioeconomic status populations. As such, those who have agreed to participate in this study are not meant to be a fully representative sample of the URM professional staff on their campus.

Second, restricting the scope of articles used for the document analysis to ones that are only publicly available poses another limitation. While these documents provide the outward commitments expressed by the institution and campus, there is the likelihood that information from internal documents, not publicly available, may hold greater details on the current status of institutional DEI efforts. For example, nuances of enacting DEI efforts, where those efforts may have failed, present internal and external barriers, what alternative plans have been established based on campus feedback, and other pertinent discussions may not be included in the strategic plan or yearly report if they are occurring in present times and not publicly available.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the focus on a particular population of university employees is based on the assumption that they are not only likely to have shared experiences, but also have unique ways of processing and making meaning of those experiences (Hickcox, 2002). The population and sample group in this study were limited by the specific type of experience for which participants were targeted: only URM professional staff at a specific campus of a mutli-campus public university. The single-site setting of one university campus and the small sample group may limit the data, as the experiences of URM professional staff in this setting may be unique, and their perspectives may or may not resonate with other URM professional staff at other higher education institutions or employee organizations outside of higher education.

This chapter discussed the initial steps of conducting this phenomenological study, as outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018). This included the determination of whether the research question was best examined by using a phenomenological approach, identifying and describing

the phenomenon of interest in this study, distinguishing and specifying the broad philosophical assumptions within this research, the data collection processes, and the themes generated from the analysis of significant statements. The upcoming Chapters 4 and 5 will address the remaining processes of developing textual and structural descriptions, providing a composite description, and presenting the understanding of the experience.



CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore if, and how, institutional DEI efforts impact the experiences of URM professional staff and influence their retention as employees. This case study specifically asked two research questions with the intent to address a void in current research regarding retention of URM professional staff in higher education institutions.

- 3) Are higher education institutions inclusive of URM staff in their campus' DEI efforts?
How?
- 4) Do institutional DEI efforts promote or hinder URM staff retention?

This chapter presents the findings from data collected from the document analysis of a total of eight university-published Diversity Strategic Plans, DEI Annual Reports, and campus climate surveys along with data collected from the interviews of 17 URM professional staff study participants' on their individual experiences.

Based on the review of the data from documents and interviews, four main themes were generated that will be discussed in this chapter:

Theme 1: Climate of Symbolic Inclusion

Theme 2: Seen, but not Heard (Recruitment and Retention)

Theme 3: Lack of Communication

Theme 4: Responsibility of DEI

While these present as four separate themes, there is considerable intersectionality between them, which will also be discussed.

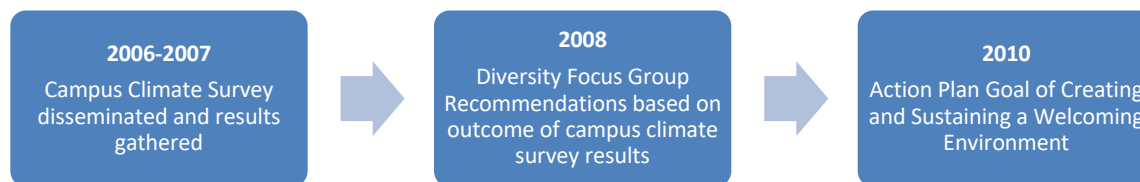
Theme 1: Climate of Symbolic Inclusion

The theme "Climate of Symbolic Inclusion" refers to the university administrators' goals of providing a welcoming environment as outlined in the document analysis. This theme also

includes how those espoused goals are perceived by URM professional staff who reported divergent experiences in their sense of belonging to the campus, citing that DEI efforts for staff are largely unsuccessful due to a number of contributing factors, which comprise of a lack of concerted efforts, a sense that most efforts are performative, and a disconnect from administration and peers. In this theme, I argue that while institutional documents emphasize the importance of creating a welcoming environment in which students, faculty, and staff feel welcome, data from the interviews conducted describe URM staff as feeling excluded from this campus goal.

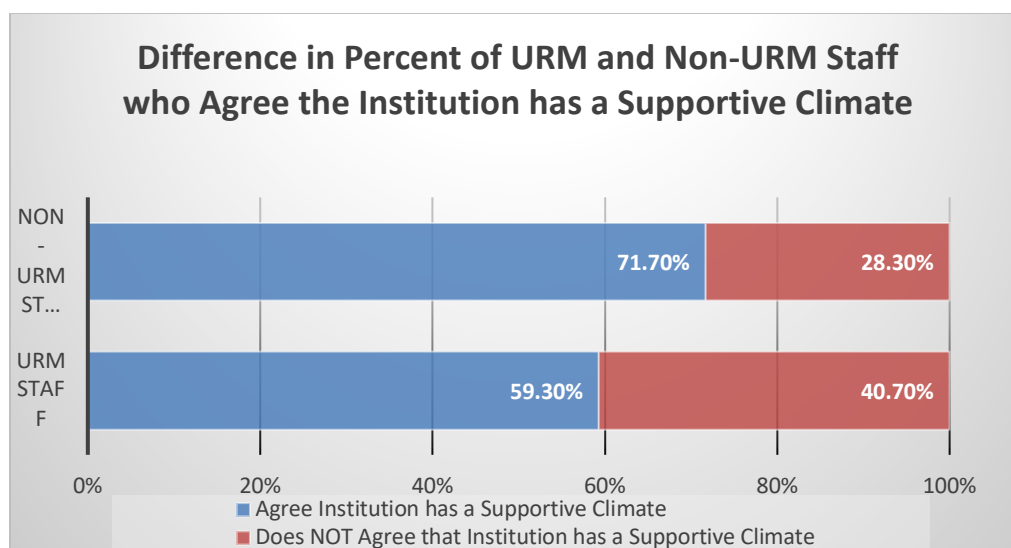
The document analysis of this study portrays professional staff as included by the administration throughout DEI written materials, which emphasized the need to create a welcoming environment. The earliest example of this was found in the 2008 “Diversity Focus Groups Summary and Recommendations” article, as a recommendation to the institution to establish ways of creating and sustaining a welcoming environment. In response to this recommendation, the institution’s first “Diversity Action Plan,” dated from 2010-2014, stated an institution-wide objective to develop and implement specific diversity goals which include creating an environment in which students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds feel welcome. Both the initial recommendation and goal were in response to results from an institution-wide campus climate survey that inquired about staff’s perceptions of the institution. Figure 4.1 depicts the progression of how the institutional goal of a welcoming environment was first formed.

Figure 4.1 Progression of Goal of Creating a Welcoming Environment



To further understand the background of this goal, it is important to discuss why it was established and recommended. As part of the process for collecting information for the survey, focus groups were held on each campus to identify survey topics. These topics entailed whether the faculty and staff agreed the institution had a supportive climate. Results from the climate survey reported quantitative data that revealed a difference in perceptions of a supportive climate between URM and non-URM staff. The percentage of URM staff who found the climate as supportive was lower than non-URM staff. Of the staff that completed the climate survey, 59.3% of URM staff agreed the institution had a supportive climate, in comparison to 71.1% non-URM staff, denoting a -11.8% difference between the two group (Figure 4.1). This statistic suggests that URM staff may experience a different environment than non-URM staff albeit a shared one.

Figure. 4.2 Perceptions on the Institution's Supportive Climate



A noted deficiency of the quantitative data is the failure to provide further insight on why there may be differences in perception among the two staff populations. The lack of qualitative data also makes it difficult to determine how to rectify this perceived difference. What factors within the environment contribute to it being a less than welcoming or supportive one for URM staff? What can the university do to determine specific goals and action steps that would achieve the campus culture for which they are striving for? Another problem with the report's findings is the lack of definition and discussion as to what a "welcoming environment" entails along with who makes the determination of this. Perhaps, the closest evidence of addressing a definition in a public document is from the "2018-2019 DEI Annual Report" released from the DEI office of the research site. In the report, the term "welcoming environment" included a discussion of the office's purpose and intent on the campus. The campus DEI office stated it's goal to remove obstacles that foster inequality with the intent to create environments empowering all students, faculty, and staff to bring their whole identities to the classroom and the workplace.

Overall, the university administration declares that a welcoming environment has been the focus of university DEI efforts with staff highlighted and included in this specific goal, as seen throughout the social artifacts for over a decade. Despite their inclusion throughout written documents, many URM staff interviewed in this study shared perceptions opposite of a welcoming environment. Data from the transcribed interviews provided first-hand experiences that counter the institution's written efforts. During the interviews, each participant was asked the question "Do you feel included in your campus or institution's DEI efforts as a staff member?" Responses were divided between a few who felt included, a majority who expressed feeling excluded, and those that could not answer with certainty. Most of the experiences that were shared provided examples of social integration factors described in Bean's Model of Work

Turnover. Of those factors of social integration, peer culture was highly present among the data transcribed from the interviews.

The few who had expressed feeling included in institutional DEI efforts shared that invitations to attend events that specifically focused on DEI across campus allowed them to feel part of the community. For example, when asked if she felt included in her campus' DEI efforts, Ivy, who has worked on the campus between 3-5 years in the Veteran and Military service center, shared "We're always invited to things and there's panels that are always going on. It feels nice to be present and be heard, or at least part of the community." Ivy's experience portrays a campus that provides a welcoming environment by offering events and opportunities that give space for a diverse staff to be involved, providing a sense of social integration throughout the campus.

Two other study participants also expressed positive experiences of social integration in relation to DEI efforts. One discussed feeling accepted in a professional role while also being able to express himself as an individual. Ronin, who recently began his employment on campus in the Student Transitions office within the past year, commented:

I personally feel like the campus is very open-minded. Understanding that everyone comes from different backgrounds means that everyone has something different to bring to the table. For me, I'm not really the dress-up in a button up every day person; I like to wear my hoodies. And this environment is very endearing of that. And although I'm a staff member who doesn't dress like everybody else, I've never felt like I wasn't part of a professional staff team or that I was looked down upon or "less than" my peers. For a Black man, especially, this is a bigger deal than it may sound.

Feeling accepted by his leadership and peers by breaking down a cultural norm, such as professional attire, is one example of how individuals may have felt supported and that the campus was welcoming. Ronin experiences an environment that looks beyond his external appearances and acknowledges that what he wears does not enhance or diminish his work or his assets to the community. Another participant, Silas, who also works in the Student Transitions office in a leadership role and has been with the campus between 6-10 years, adds to these remarks of feeling supported by leadership. He provided specific examples of how he feels his direct supervisor supports DEI work. As one of the more veteran employees on the campus, he also shares his outlook of how the focus of DEI has transitioned over the years he has been employed on the campus. Silas states:

Because of the department I work in, I feel more confident with the work that I do and how I do it because I have the backing of a supervisor who is multicultural, who also shares the same lens that this needs to be a multicultural office and we need to have various cultural backgrounds in this office in order for it to work. My supervisor is someone who advocates for all the work that we do and how we show up in our work. I can't say that that is the case for other offices. I can see that it's not that way because of the people I know who work in other offices and do not experience the same support. I will say, though, over the years I feel that there's been a shift and that it's more intentional now. It's not from a "well, we have to do this" mindset anywhere. I feel like the conversations have shifted to 'we need diversity and inclusion' versus 'we're only doing it because we're mandated to.

It should be mentioned that both Ronin and Silas are employed within the same department. Both express a strong sense of support from their department leadership when it comes to their work,

especially around DEI. From the interviews, their specific department has been reputed throughout the campus to have a more diverse staff in comparison to other departments. Both Silas and Ronin shared this was intentionally due to the commitment and understanding of their director on the importance of DEI. Markedly, Silas' comment brings to light his, and perhaps Ronin's, experiences are unique, such that if he were in a different department and had a different leader, his feelings of inclusion may differ.

Another study participant also shared an overall positive outlook regarding the campus' efforts of creating a welcoming environment. Ruby, who also worked in the Student Transitions office, shared that she felt invited, but also added that often times she didn't have the opportunity to attend many of the events due to her availability. Her statement points out that there may be layer of difficulty in participation that the campus is experiencing due to altered work schedules given the new hybrid model between remote and on-campus:

I feel like I have been invited to things. I think my lack of participation has not been because I didn't feel welcome or that I shouldn't attend. I would say my lack of participation was mostly because I'm either not available or on campus the days they hold events because now a lot of us are remote.

Ruby shared an experience that other staff alluded to in their interviews, which is an awareness of campus events that are geared toward creating a welcoming environment but some staff may not be able to participate in due to their availability. Nevertheless, for Ruby, the invitations and events themselves contributed to a feeling of being included on campus and was seen as an attempt towards social integration.

Nora, a former employee who previously worked in the Student Success office for 3-5

years, added to the perception of feeling included, but offered the caveat that her invitations had been a result of her own involvement in leading the events. Nora stated:

I did feel included because I lead a lot of them [the DEI efforts]. Which is good and bad. Good, obviously, because it means that I have some ownership and some awareness of what the direction is. Bad, because most of us are already doing a plethora of work on these efforts, yet we were already knowledgeable about the DEI concepts being shared including how to embed it into the work. All of us have either educational or professional backgrounds in DEI work.

While Nora's work increased her awareness of the effort across campus on DEI, it also alludes to the opinion that most of the staff who invest their efforts and time into DEI are the same individuals each time as opposed to an increase of engagement of other staff who have yet to engage in DEI efforts. Silas and Nora also both shared that their invitations throughout campus were dependent on their professional commitments to DEI and their relationships across the campus due to their work, adding acknowledgment that the outreach and invitation that they experienced was not reflected on everyone.

While the comments thus far highlight the random nature of staff inclusion, Iris, a former employee in the Student Success office for less than two years, noted that she felt the institution's DEI efforts were not due to genuine efforts, but more so out of performative measures. Performative, in this study, refers to the act of participating in, or stating efforts towards, a movement or belief for the purpose of gaining recognition or attention rather than out of genuine commitment. Iris stated:

It was like "we have to check this box, we have to say we're doing this" but as far as action and follow-through goes, we don't actually do it. We pick a buzzword and do all

of this for PR [public relations] and marketing. We pick buzzwords that everybody else uses to show we're doing the work, too.

URM staff showed a leeriness towards the amount of effort that campus makes to advertise DEI and the use of key phrases that indicate a commitment. This, coupled with the lack of follow-through by the administration, has left URM staff members to inquire about the institution's intentions when it comes to the work surrounding DEI. Several other study participants also expressed perceptions that DEI efforts throughout the campus and/or the university-system felt performative.

Although participants, thus far, generally felt included in their campus, they almost universally provide caveats to why their experiences may be unique relative to others. Their perceptions were likely accurate, as most of the study participants responded they did not feel included in institutional DEI efforts. Although the documents express collaboration and coordination throughout the university as a main priority, several study participants provided terms such as "lack of concerted efforts" and exposed an environment that was "not cohesive" or seen as "performative" when it comes to DEI efforts. Participants also expressed DEI attempts on campus were not impactful, "thrown together," and perceived as "last minute" attempts that did not indicate a collaborative campus-wide effort, leaving it difficult for staff members to participate due to various reasons. One named reason is that of the restricted scheduling availability, as earlier expressed by Ruby. Hazel, who has been an academic advisor of 3-5 years, also shared a similar example. However, while Ruby expressed feeling included despite her availability to attend events, Hazel shared a different perspective in that the lack of availability was a result of barriers that were created by the nature of the DEI events. These barriers account for many individual's feelings of exclusion from DEI efforts.

When events are announced on email listservs, it's done so very last minute. For example, an email might be sent out on Monday saying 'hey, there's an event that's happening today, tomorrow, or maybe Wednesday,' and you might get like 72-hours' notice at best. But as an academic advisor, my schedule is almost always packed. So, really, if there's something that I want to be involved in, I probably need to know two weeks in advance. That limited notice means that if there's something that I'm really interested in being involved in, chances are I'm already booked and can't get involved.

Hazel points out that those in student-serving positions who operate on an appointment-based calendar are often booked out several weeks in advance based on student demands for office hours. These staff often have less flexibility over the work week to adjust for short-term notices of extra-curricular events.

While Ruby and Hazel both discuss staff availability in reference to attending events, meetings, or professional growth, they provide different lenses in that Ruby attributes it to her own schedule but still feels included, yet Hazel attributes it to a lack of campus consideration for staff member schedules along with a lack of overall preparation of the event, which results in exclusion from campus efforts. Hazel shared an alternative view from that of Ruby's, which is that while the campus may make attempts toward DEI, staff remain unseen as they are not able to participate in the efforts. Another perspective Hazel shared is that these DEI efforts can be viewed as less important given the lack of notice and communication behind them. Accordingly, staff observe these as events that did not have much more thought or preparation behind them and appear "thrown together."

The content and focus on these DEI events were also a noted factor as to why staff feel excluded. One study participant stated that she didn't feel staff are included in the goal of a

welcoming environment because the diversity efforts only focus on student populations and do not reflect staff and their experiences on campus. Stella, who has worked in Student Life for nearly 4 years, stated:

My job pertains to creating programs and resources for students of color, underrepresented students, and other identities, to have a space where they can share about themselves and feel validated in their experiences. But why don't we have that space for staff? ... I feel there's a lack of that. There's not a lot of moments where staff reflect on 'how do we gather' and 'how do we, as staff, talk about our experiences that we have felt or have gone through.' The trainings that [staff] are offered are mostly on how to support students, but then there's no support system in place for us to reflect or re-energize.

Amelia, who has worked on the campus from 1-2 years in Student Success, offered a very similar statement, which also indicated most of the efforts around DEI do not focus on staff and are only geared towards the underrepresented student populations. She indicated that the campus fails to be inclusive of the staff and faculty who support and carry out this work.

I think administration has tried a lot of things around DEI, but I don't think they were really targeted toward staff. Most of the time, the DEI efforts are for students. But, for staff and faculty, we are often left out of the picture. It seems like they [administration] want you to look at the diverse groups of students we have, but it's definitely not the same for the faculty and staff.

Both Stella and Amelia highlight that a large number of staff carry out roles and responsibilities that specifically entail creating spaces for students that ensure a welcoming environment for the URM student population. However, staff themselves do not see the same efforts for URM staff.

There is no dedicated staff or employee group appointed by the administration to create this for staff members, thus leaving the feeling that URM staff would be required to create their own welcoming environment.

In relation, several statements from the interviews reflected perceptions of varying interest levels and actions within and among departments throughout campus, which overall described a disconnect between colleagues and department managers and not just with administration. Luna, who has been an academic advisor on the campus for over 15 years, expressed “DEI is approached differently between departments. So much so that there are significant variances in how much DEI is made a focus in certain areas of the campus in comparison to others.” Hazel’s statement agreed with Luna, in which she shared “DEI efforts are kind of spread out. They are either done by a small group in a department or individually lead.”

Departments should have the autonomy over how they approach DEI work rather than all abiding to a singular approach as the same may not be as effective for some departments as it is for others. However, a lack of cohesion or foundation to guide these approaches is expressed in these statements. This lack of foundation or guidance has allowed for some departments to essentially ignore the goals of DEI based on individual’s beliefs and values. Silas expressed this concern by stating:

Among staff members, there’s a disconnect. There are folks who, for whatever their background is, never had to deal with the experiences of their colleagues of color. And it feels like these issues will never matter to them, and they’ll never try to have a personal connection to this work. Regardless that it matters in the work that they do and the students they serve. It feels even more important to continue to uplift the voices of those that are underrepresented.

Silas shared that the feelings of a lack of community are not just sourced from a disconnect with administration, but that staff colleagues and peers themselves contribute to an unwelcoming environment for URM staff. While the institutional leadership encourages DEI efforts for students, there are staff who do not sense a connection among their peers on these efforts towards staff.

When asked about a supportive peer culture, Iris shared statements that agreed with the other study participants and added that the majority of her work peers were not truly invested in prioritizing DEI throughout the campus. Iris shared:

To describe the peer culture towards DEI, I would say that ‘tolerated’ would even be a stretch. As far as staff goes, there’s a handful of people who understand the value and want to do the work. But a ‘handful’ is even being generous. I think there a lot of people on this campus who think they are good white allies, they put up the Black Lives Matter signs up. But when the DEI work comes around, they don’t participate in the action. They’re supportive on the surface and it seems more like a self-serving interest. I would say these staff members who display this level of support make up a third of the staff population. Most of the rest of the staff population believe everything is fine and there are no concerns. Then there is a decent number who I know are silent but believe that this work is stupid, and the campus shouldn’t be doing this.

Based on both Iris’ and Silas’ perceptions, most of the campus staff are either performative, unaware of the issues experienced by URMs, do not recognize the needs of URMs, or are outright opposed to DEI efforts. All of which could be considered as barriers to a welcoming environment by any definition.

The comment that those opposed to the work as being the quiet ones brings another concern. As a silent population, this makes it difficult for the university on several factors. First, the university is unable to promote or create a welcoming environment if there is an unawareness of how many campus members do not agree with or oppose the work. Second, this could also result in unspoken or hidden pushback towards DEI efforts.

While the comments from Iris and Silas show that there are staff and management who contribute to the lack of DEI advancement, Lily, who has worked for the campus in student services from 3-5 years, argues that upper administration has played a role in this matter. She highlights an issue the institution has in addressing those who are opposed to DEI efforts, which is a lack of direction and structure from administration that has allowed certain departments on campus to determine their level of interest in DEI matters. Lily stated:

It seems like no one is really responsible for driving the action points that come out of initiatives. No one seems to be making sure that everything we do as a campus is towards that initiative. There was no one really there to hold us accountable to making sure we adopted these DEI initiatives. I feel like it needs to start from the top-down. There is just a lack of enforcement to drive those initiatives... I think, peer to peer, there are a lot of staff members and faculty members for that matter, who share the same opinion regarding DEI efforts in that it lacked gumption, or it was just non-existent. This was apparent throughout the various levels of staff, administrators, managers, and directors, and vice presidents... I felt like I had to force my way to the table. I, on my own, had to seek out the committees that worked on DEI rather than it being common knowledge... I think what we lacked as a university was structure in terms of everyone knowing what the plan was.

This statement exposed a peer culture where participants can choose their level of commitment as the university does not hold anyone accountable to pursue this work or create this culture. As Lily highlighted the peer culture on campus, this also addresses a separate theme that is discussed later in this chapter regarding a lack of structure around institutional DEI efforts that could be attributed to the ambiguity behind who is responsible and accountable for these efforts being implemented and successfully carried out.

In reference to the peer culture, Maeve brought up a distinction that she noticed between newer staff members and those that had been employed on the campus for a longer period of time. Maeve noticed members who had been employed at the campus longer seem to be less involved or interested in campus DEI efforts. Maeve shared:

I think the peer culture isn't very cohesive. We're not on the same page in terms of what individuals are interested in and what we should do collectively as a professional staff group. As a newer staff member, I see a lot of the professional staff in student services going to the events put on by the DEI office. But it is people who have been on the campus for a long time that I don't see attending. I know some of them are fatigued and feel like they've had to do this a million times without seeing change or there are those that were probably never interested in it. It's the newer staff, I notice, who are looking for opportunities and seeing what the university is offering us in terms of DEI development and work.

For some of the more veteran staff, their lack of involvement may not necessarily equate to a lack of interest or accountability on their part, though, this may be the case for some. However, the suggestion that was brought up that some are less invested to DEI efforts due to the fatigue of not seeing changes throughout their time on campus is supported by several study participants,

specifically those who have been employed on the campus longer. This brings forward another perception that the institution's peer culture and history of events may deter participation and interest from some URM staff who have experienced cycles of DEI efforts.

Quinn, who has been on the campus for over 10 years, shared her direct experience, which supports Maeve's observation. Quinn highlighted her perspective on why staff who have been employed on the campus longer may feel less invested in the DEI efforts, also adding an additional factor that she perceives has a stalling effect on DEI advancement, which is the pattern of interim leadership during any given time:

From a staff perspective, it seems like the peer culture is hit or miss. I personally would like to see more commitment from my colleagues, but I've watched this campus try to make changes for however many years and it seems like they just keep going back to old habits. I don't know if they've truly made any changes. I feel like we just don't have the right leadership in place and it seems like there is always interim leadership, so how do you make decisions as a campus? And how are you supposed to implement positive change if all you have in place is temporary?

Quinn's outlook shows that while the campus looks as if it is attempting to make changes to become a more inclusive peer culture, it seems that there is a lack of progression that the URM staff who have been employed on campus longer perceive. This is a prime example of a climate of symbolic inclusion in which URM staff see no change in the norms on campus that would contribute to a welcoming environment for all.

In addition to the inquiry of their feelings toward being included in campus DEI efforts, participants were specifically asked about their perceptions of the peer culture they experience. Responses described the peer culture on campus as also being performative, especially in

situations where actions that were meant to acknowledge DEI efforts did not result towards a change in the environment and were not acted out with genuine intent. For example, Nora shared the reactionary responses towards the public outrage of the George Floyd murder, where a black man was killed by a white police officer who kneeled on his neck (History.com, 2021). She expressed her frustration that the campus did not provide the same attention to the murders that had happened locally under similar conditions, suggesting that the campus did not genuinely care about its Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) populations when it ignores what is happening directly in their community:

I feel like this campus is completely performative. It's ridiculous. It's not intelligent. I'll talk about the response to George Floyd. It's unconscionable to me that it took maybe the 6th murder of a black man this year because this is not by any means the first one that happened this year alone. We have black people being killed in [university's city of residence]. So why didn't we have a town hall meeting for that? It's very performative to show that you suddenly care now that this is on national media, when your black and brown students have been dealing with the trauma of these situations the entire time, whether national news or not. So, it's really concerning to me that we're now claiming to care now.

Nora's statement highlights a mistrust in the campus on being genuine in their efforts to provide a supportive environment when there was no attention or attempts were made after similar incidents occurred locally and were essentially ignored. Nora shared another detailed example of an event that occurred on campus that indicates a lack of acknowledgement or announcement despite a concern over the safety of members of the campus.

Another example I'll bring up is the time a white supremacist group put stickers all over the campus overnight. Administrators worked hard to get the stickers removed by the morning before the campus opened. Yet, they failed to tell the community what happened the day of. When the information was finally released days later, they neglected to provide further details on the event or what was being done about it. I feel they tried to minimize it. It was like, 'hey, this kind of sticker that is associated with this hate group was placed all over' but without any additional details, it leaves you feeling vulnerable. You don't feel supported, understood, or respected as a minority. Certain people on campus are going to be fine, but a lot of folks aren't. So, withholding information like that from us is not allowing us the autonomy or agency to engage and to understand what's happening within our own community. It's frustrating.

What Nora describes as a hate crime in the form of vandalism, however, the campus tried to minimize the act by suppressing details to the community members who may consider this an attack on them. Her statement also expresses that by essentially ignoring the problem, staff members remain vulnerable at their own place of work, leaving them to feel unsafe, unheard, and unseen on their campus. Her experiences expose the harm behind not addressing current situations that create discomfort and vulnerability toward the URM population, a population that the institution makes several claims to ensure they are included in a welcoming and supportive environment.

More pointedly, many of the interview participants state there is still a lack in the change of treatment on campus for URM staff. This presents a concern that relates back to the campus climate survey from 2006, which indicated URM staff experience a different environment than non-URM staff. An organizational model that references climate of symbolic

inclusion states that in order to advance as an institution, “motivation must come from within the organization in a way consistent to its mission and support systems and must be created for diverse individuals and groups” (St. Mary’s College of California, 2009). Based on the responses from the interviews of this study, the research site has not yet reached that point.

Theme 2: Seen, But Not Heard

While this study’s initial focus was on URM retention, it is impossible to discuss retention without discussing recruitment. As stated in a previous chapter of this dissertation, recruitment does not equate to retention, however, the two concepts are extensively interwoven. Recruitment has been seen as having considerable impact on retention; therefore, this study also placed a focus on the research site’s hiring practices of URM staff. This theme, titled “Seen, But Not Heard,” represents the perceptions collected from study participants stating an overarching concern that while the staff on campus may look diverse and there are efforts seen toward hiring diverse staff, many URM professional staff collectively feel unheard as employees. This indicates a significant outlook among many URM staff that their retention is not seen as a priority on the campus.

Recruitment

As displayed throughout the university documents, recruitment and retention are each been key priorities of the institution. Yet, earlier documents primarily focused their efforts solely on faculty. While the university’s first Diversity Action Plan, which was produced in 2010, stated the goal of attracting and retaining a diverse faculty and staff, the action items and further detailed description of the goal only highlighted their attention on faculty. The action plan acknowledged the fact that there have been minimal changes among the institution’s professoriate demographics despite an increase in availability of underrepresented faculty

throughout the country. This statement excluded any acknowledgment towards changes among the staff demographics throughout the institution, nor data on their availability nationwide.

The focus on staff increased throughout the years within the subsequent university documents. For example, the “2017-2020 Diversity Action Plan” named the goal to attract and retain a diverse staff as a continuing priority from the previous Diversity Action Plan. However, in this document, the language specified staff its intent to attract and retain a diverse staff workforce as a separate goal from faculty. In this goal, the university stated the need to increase recruitment opportunities of diverse staff members. As such, the institution committed to analyzing yearly data on hiring to update its current practices, which focused on increasing diverse applicant pools. At the time this document was published in 2010, the university analyzed its recruitment targets and retention goals of URM staff, which were shared in their 2010-2014 Diversity Action Plan. Table 4.1 shows the percentages on the number of URM staff on campus. The document notated the recruitment target for 18.3% of overall URM staff fell short at only 12.4%. This showed a 6.9% shortage from their goal of actual URM staff that make up the employee population throughout the institution.

Table 4.1 URM Staff Recruitment

<i>Recruitment (Target has not been met)</i>	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Gap</i>
<i>Percent of URM staff</i>	<i>12.4%</i>	<i>18.3%</i>	<i>6.9%</i>

Despite these stated goals, the annual report following the “2010 Action Plan” acknowledged that although the institution aims to increase the diversity among faculty and staff, difficulty in accessing current demographic data on campus faculty and staff remained a barrier throughout each campus in the university system. In response to this issue, the DEI office of the

research site stated one of their goals was to create a process to collect and analyze data on the hiring and retention efforts of underrepresented staff and faculty on this campus.

Study participants were asked of their opinions regarding the campus' efforts to hire more diverse staff and whether the campus was successful in their efforts to diversify the workforce. Many interview participants provided positive responses regarding the campus' recruitment and hiring efforts, yet most were unable to comment on any official hiring policies, programs or practices. Most participants admitted that they were not aware of any. For example, Quinn, who has been with the campus over 11 years, shared that she sees the campus being more intentional about hiring, but was not able to state whether these intentions were successful or not:

I don't know if there's been an increase overall in hiring diverse staff, but I do think there is an intention from the administration to attract people of color. Whether it's working or not, I don't think they [administration] even know.

Quinn's statement demonstrates, at a minimum, there are individuals on campus who see an organizational shift or an institutional acknowledgement to incorporate diversity among the staff workforce.

Ronin, who has worked in Student Transitions for less than two years, shared his experiences that are based on his comparison to other institutions he had previously worked. He perceived the campus as successful at establishing diverse faculty and staff but, again, was not able to provide any comments on specific efforts:

I'm not aware of any programs, per se. However, I do feel like there must be some initiative that I'm just unaware of because our campus is among the most diverse set of faculty and staff I've personally ever seen. I feel there are a lot of people working on this campus who make for a widely diverse staff workforce.

Quinn and Ronin represent opposite ends of an employment spectrum. On one end, Quinn, shared her perspective as someone who has worked on the campus for over a decade and has witnessed increased intentions throughout her time employed there. Despite this increase, there is still doubt if these efforts are successful. On the other end, Ronin, shared his perspective of someone who has joined the campus in more recent years and came into a community with what he considers a highly diverse staff indicating the campus has been successful over the years in developing and hiring a diverse workforce.

Another participant, Felix, who has also been on campus for nearly a decade shared that while they were also unaware of any specific institutional efforts to hiring a diverse staff, they agreed the campus showed success toward this goal. Felix, who has worked in Academic Advising just under 10 years, attributed this success to alumni who recently graduated. When asked ‘Do you think there are programs or initiatives within the institution that focus on diverse staff hiring?’ Felix shared:

Honestly, no, I don’t. I think they just do a good job anyways, despite not having campus initiatives. They get a diverse pool of people, but it just happens organically. I think it has more to do with the number of alumni who come back that want to work in campus offices because they loved their time here as a student. And since our student population is highly diverse, it works out to reflect as a diverse recruitment of future staff.

While Felix’s statement suggests that having a diverse student population has had more to do with the campus’ success of attracting a diverse applicant pool than any actual, intentional work done by the campus itself, there is no campus demographic data collected to support this.

Luna, an academic advisor on the campus for over 15 years, added her perspectives in agreement to Quinn’s sharing that she sees the effort and stated “I do think there’s some positive

momentum in that direction of hiring. I think there is focus and some efforts behind it.” Yet, Luna’s perceptions diverge from others in terms of the actual process of hiring for a diverse staff, suggesting there is a disconnect somewhere between the application process and the hiring process:

Why the campus ultimately does not get to its goal of hiring people of color, I’m not sure.

I think there still remains a disconnect. There’s more work that needs to be done and I think they’re trying to do the right thing. But somehow, it doesn’t always work out that way. And I wonder if they have any inclination as to why. Why are we not hiring more diverse candidates?

Quinn’s statement highlights an important consideration regarding the campus’ true intentions. Her interview prompts that there is a gap between attracting a diverse applicant pool and hiring for a diverse workforce. She indicates that success in one does not equate to success in the other. Attention should be made toward the fact that attracting a diverse applicant pool requires less effort than the actual hiring for a diverse workforce. A few participants shared the opinion that the campus has a higher level of control over its decisions on hiring an individual to become part of the campus workforce than it does on the outreach and response of external applicants. Whereas outreach is more dependent on the response from an external community, hiring is an internal process that the institution has the control of the outcome. To exemplify this, one study participant, Amelia, who has worked in Student Success for under two years, shared that they were aware the campus had policies tied to the goal of attracting diverse pools of applicants. Yet, despite this awareness, they felt actions based on these policies were not truly carried out on their campus. Amelia shared:

In terms of implementation, even though there's campus-wide or university-wide policies that indicate a desire to have more underrepresented minority candidates and we all want to see them represented at the interviews, that's not actually happening. It's not being done at the university or the campus level.

Only one participant out of the study's sample group shared an awareness of institutional policies and procedures. Yet, that individual provided the perception that those policies and procedures are not actually carried out. This puts those very efforts into question. This can be interpreted as a lack of intention behind these policies and provides another example of performative behavior.

Lastly, Nora, who has worked in the Student Success office between 3-5 years, shared an important consideration that provides insight to the previous comments that allude to the gap between outreach and hiring. Nora shared the following scenario:

When we look at our hiring practices, we often have a committee in the search process and the interview process, but ultimately, the decision solely comes down to the direct supervisor.

Essentially, Nora's example displays that there can be a full committee composed of multiple individuals throughout the entirety of the screening and hiring process that may make concerted efforts to ensuring DEI is a pronounced focus, but the overall outcome may come down to a single individual whose decision could differ from the committee's based on a range of factors, including their cultural competence or their perspective on the value of DEI.

Relatedly, several participants shared corroborated perspectives of inequity within hiring practices. As noted in the theme of "Climate of Symbolic Inclusion," participants shared that the levels of commitment towards DEI varied among individuals and their personal beliefs of its importance, whether cognizant or not. Several participants stated that this also applied to the

level of importance individuals placed on expanding opportunities to recruit and hire more diverse a more diverse workforce. Olivia, who has worked as an academic advisor for 3-5 years, maintains this belief as she stated, “I think hiring practices are very much based on people’s biases.” Amelia’s interview supported this notion by also adding the her perspectives:

Hiring doesn’t look the same across campus, especially in certain schools and programs. I know this for a fact based on my own experience. I’ve seen it as a student and I’ve seen it now as a staff member. When it comes to hiring, they might have a diverse group of people who applied, but you wonder if they will actually hire certain people, which turn out to often be people of color, or if they’re going to hire the non-minority just because ‘they fit the mold better.’ It leaves it hard to have any trust in their hiring processes... Overall, in terms of staff, you can see that there’s an effort being made [in hiring diversity] in certain areas of the campus, but not all.

Amelia offered the unique perspective of a student as well as a staff employee. Not only does statement provide support to earlier comments made regarding student alumni who apply for staff positions at their alma mater as a factor for increased diversity within an applicant pool. Her statement further highlights some of the barriers seen in the actual hiring process. Another important consideration that emerged from her statement is whether the university has different “molds” when looking at student recruitment as opposed to staff recruitment. The brings forth the question of whether there are different standards for DEI efforts among individuals who meet the criteria to enter the student population and individuals who could be considered to join as staff within the institution’s work force.

Luna, who has worked for the campus for nearly 15 years, also described the phenomena among variances of DEI, adding her perception that some departments or leaders focus on diverse hiring in a performative manner:

There are significant variances in how much DEI is made a focus in certain areas of the campus in comparison to others. I've been on a few hiring committees throughout the campus and some departments have a stronger commitment to hiring diverse staff than others do. In the same tone, some of those departments who are focused on hiring a diverse staff do it in a matter of a 'checkbox' style whereas others are further along in making sure they are focusing on equity and inclusion rather than just looking diverse.

Luna's statement highlighted a narrative that practices that promote equity are not equally exercised throughout the campus. This exposes a key problem that occurs when there are no official policies, programs, or practices in existence or there is a lack of awareness towards them. This also suggests that a lack a shared belief on the importance of DEI can lead to performative actions. Additional examples that alluded to this problem were shared by Iris and Charlotte, who both work in the Student Success office and are also both alumni of the institution. Separately, they provided their direct experiences that exemplified Luna's earlier statement of a 'checkbox,' performative approach towards hiring for diversity. Unprompted, both shared nearly identical experiences as black women being hired on and their perceptions of being hired solely based on their racial/ethnic demographic as opposed to the extensive work experiences and professional assets they each provide. Iris, who has been with the campus under two years, shared:

I think this example is indicative of the racism that's not realized on this campus. After I was hired into my position, I was told by several colleagues that they specifically wanted to recruit a black woman into this position. A few years later, after I chose to move into

another position on campus, I was told by my supervisor, who is a white female, that she really wanted to hire another black woman in my place in my previous role. Not anyone specific. Just another black woman. It made me feel like I was just easily replaceable, and the only qualification needed to take on my role was to be a black woman. We are not a monolith.

Strongly echoing this sentiment, again without being prompted, Charlotte, who was employed with the campus under five years, discussed in her interview:

There's a contradiction in the fact that they [administrators] say they want to be considered an urban-serving campus, but they actually don't want to support the staff who fall under the category of the same students we serve, who are now professionals within the institution. The woman who hired me was a white woman who desperately wanted to hire a black person in this role, but couldn't articulate why. And it felt like I was bypassed from all of my qualifications because the real aim was to hire a black person. The fact that you couldn't articulate why you wanted a black person in this role is a huge problem.

The desire to hire based on a specific ethnic demographic without the ability to articulate why is highly problematic on multiple levels that perpetuate the concept of "diversity hires." These two participants shared that, aside from this action being disrespectfully performative and tokenizing of URM individuals, it also creates the risk of not being able to provide proper support. More importantly, these experiences once again highlight the institution's inability to utilize the talents many URM professional staff possess as is discussed throughout various themes in this chapter.

Charlotte brings up a critical consideration that reflects the very purpose of this study, which is, although the campus exclaims pride in being an urban-serving campus, many staff

indicated that they are often excluded as part of that same urban community the campus intends to serve. Her experience provides a distinct example of both the difference of experiences for URM students in comparison the experiences of URM staff on the same campus as well as the difference of environments perceived by between URM and non-URM staff. Both Charlotte and Iris discussed a more welcoming and supportive environment as students that was not replicated as a member of the professional staff on the same campus.

Ivy, who has worked for the Veteran and Military Services office between 3-5 years, strongly suggested that DEI trainings should also be intentional about moving beyond being performative in this specific work. Several interviewees identified the need for comprehensive trainings on hiring practices that incorporate the institution's DEI initiatives and promote a culture that advances beyond what they perceive as "just filling a quota" in hiring. Ivy suggested that the administration also look at the hiring systems that are currently being used within the institution in consideration of the following concepts:

Are we evaluating somebody based off of their name? Should we take out names so that we're all just looking at credentials? Are the resources or the systems we're using to get applicants bias in their own way, such as, are the networks we reach out to primarily accessed by predominantly only Caucasian people? What are networks that are accessed by underrepresented communities that we could be tapping into? I think, from an HR perspective, they [administration] need to review their recruiting practices by being really critical and critiquing the current systems to determine if they are efficiently engaging the campus' DEI initiatives.

Again, Ivy alluded to current practices of the institution that indicate credentials and talents of individuals, specifically URM staff, are being overlooked. More importantly, Ivy's statement

proposed another hinderance when DEI work is siloed rather than done in collaborative efforts, as discussed in the previous theme highlighting the need for campus departments to collaborate their efforts. In this case, efforts done separately by Human Resources and by DEI offices result in incohesive efforts, rather than a unified attempt towards making recruiting and retention practices more equitable throughout the campus.

In relation to the theme's title, "Seen, but not Heard," several statements gathered from the interview data supported the notion that the institution's goal of diversity among staff professionals may be successful in attracting diverse candidates, yet the success is not entirely due to the university's efforts. A majority of study participants shared a lack of awareness of any official policies practiced throughout the institution that could account for the success towards the goal of a diverse staff. This suggests that factors other than the institution's efforts are responsible for any success toward diverse applicant pools. In the hiring process, diverse applicants can be seen, but in terms of the actual hiring, the findings of this study conclude there are many barriers caused by the university's lack of programs, policies, and practices.

Retention

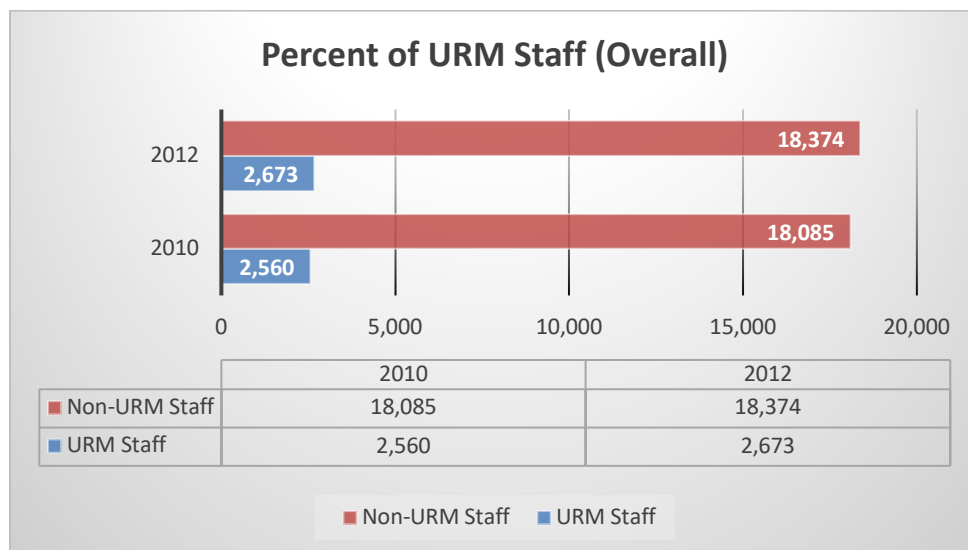
As displayed in the discussions of recruitment, URM staff provided examples of patterns indicating diversity is seen among the work force, yet beyond that, many URM professionals often felt unheard throughout various times within the campus. These same sentiments were echoed when participants were asked to discuss their experiences and perceptions of retention of URM professional staff on campus. The theme "Seen, but not Heard" pronounces the experiences of feeling unheard that strongly contribute to employee retention that are presented in this next section.

Much of the earlier mentions of URM staff in university documents focused mostly on quantitative data gathered on recruitment and retention. Acknowledgements made within the “2010-2014 Diversity Action Plan” pointedly stated that the institution’s staff retention goals were not met. Table 4.2 displays the institutional retention goal showing that there was no differentiation between URM staff and non-URM staff in the rates of employees leaving as being met. Less than a 1% difference between the two groups was reported, indicating that the rate of employees who left the institution is essentially the same for URM and non-URM staff.

Table 4.2 URM Staff Retention

<i>Retention (Target has been met)</i>	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Gap</i>
<i>Difference in rate of leaving among URM and non-URM staff</i>	<i>-.9%</i>	<i>0.0%</i>	<i>0.9%</i>

In addition to the data on retention rates, the number of URM staff employed across the entire university system in comparison to non-URM staff population were shared in the 2010-2014 Action Plan. Figure 4.2 below shows URM staff make up 12.4% of the overall university staff population in 2010 with only a minimal increase to 12.7% in 2012, despite the goal to increase the diversity among the workforce shared from 2010.

Figure 4.3 Percent of URM Staff Across the University System

Note: Data provided by Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Office. Underrepresented minority (URM) staff identified as those for whom race/ethnicity was listed as Black, American Indian, Pacific Islander, or Hispanic. All other staff identified as non-underrepresented minority (non-URM), except for those of Unknown ethnicity who were excluded from all counts.

While the information portrays numerical data and insight on staff demographics, the data on URM staff is not further discussed in the written narrative provided of the Action Plan. The detailed narrative only discussed faculty and provided in-depth details on URM and non-URM faculty rates of leaving. The university only highlighted the significance of a diverse faculty workforce who serve as role models for students who come from underrepresented backgrounds but did not mention the influence and impact staff provide for these students throughout the campus. Additionally, the priority action steps outlined in this goal only focused on the recruitment and retention of URM faculty. No further mention of staff, beyond the statistics provided in the graph on the percent of URM staff makeup, is provided or discussed, exposing that the university did not consider staff retention or the importance of staff roles throughout the institution.

I placed emphasis on these statistics to emphasize another example relevant to the theme of “Seen, but not Heard.” I argue, once again, that staff are seen in the statistics, but when presented with the detailed discussion of these numbers, they are omitted from the review. Additionally, since the initial presentation of the data for retention and recruitment was first made available, there has been no update in subsequent years that has been made available to the public on these specific statistics. It is important to mention this detail as it relates to the university’s goal of analyzing hiring and retention data that was previously mentioned as an effort to update their practices. The lack of statistics made available to the public incites questions on how the institution has made progress in these goals over the years.

In this study, participants were asked if they felt the campus made concerted efforts in retaining URM professional staff. Interviews revealed several experiences, which alluded to staff feeling unheard or invisible throughout the campus in a multitude of ways. Perceptions of a lack of recognition, the hiring of consultants, feeling undervalued by the administration, a lack of resources, and additional burdens that are placed on URM professional staff were all mentioned as contributing factors towards URM staff attrition.

Related to a lack of recognition, interview participants shared that the institution overall showed deficient in the ability to utilize the talent among staff members. For example, Olivia, in academic advising, stated:

The institution doesn’t really know how to handle the talent that it has. A lot of that talent comes from URM staff. We’ve had so many staff members who are incredible and could do amazing work for our students and for the community, but they just haven’t been given the proper support or resources. So they leave. And the students, fellow staff, and the campus community lose out when that happens.

Olivia's statement also emphasized on the deficiency in support and resources. These not only affect staff, but also have a reverberating affect across the entire campus community when the lack of recognition, support, and resources result in the departure of URM staff members.

Along the same lines of the lack of recognition, several staff perceived that the campus viewed them as replaceable in their specific job role or responsibility. Many interviewees felt this attitude came from upper administration and leaders among the campus. Quinn, who has been with the campus over 11 years and had advanced to a director position over her career, shared examples of this in her interview:

Professionally, for me, it has been really frustrating to work here these past years. While I've looked for other opportunities, and I don't think that this campus would even try to retain me, despite the number of years that I've worked here along with the skills and the knowledge that I have over someone who would be coming in externally or someone being promoted into this role. It would take years to get them up to speed for this job role and I don't think that's something this campus realizes or values any of the current employees. People leave because there is no opportunity. Administration seems to think it's just easier to hire new people to train into these roles rather than to look at providing more opportunities to current staff.

Quinn provided one example of staff who have worked on the campus for more years as feeling less valued over time, despite their growth through the skills and institutional knowledge they have acquired throughout those years. However, data from the interviews also indicate that newer staff were also in agreement with Quinn's statement related to being replaceable. Staff who have worked on the campus for less than 5 years shared that their perceptions towards being

replaceable was specifically attributed to an unawareness on administration's part regarding the work staff carry out and the roles they provide throughout the campus. Luna discusses:

I feel like students notice more when a staff member leaves than when administration does because students are more affected by staff leaving and [administration] doesn't experience the same affect because they're unaware of that person's role on the campus. Especially those in student service roles. When a staff member leaves, so does their knowledge and expertise. And [administration] act like they can just hire anyone to take that person's role. Yet, in the meantime, students are scrambling and feeling the loss of that staff member being gone.

Luna stressed that losing staff members often disrupts the student environment, yet administration seems to be oblivious to this notion. She shared this from her own personal experience as a student when her advisor left the institution for another opportunity and she was left to rely on another staff who was not trained in the same expertise and knowledge that she, as a student, needed. Her student experience, coupled with her insight as a current staff member on the campus, has culminated in feelings of being easily replaceable and attributes to the pattern seen throughout the range of newer staff and veteran employees on the campus. The common factor ascribed to a lack of relationship between staff and administration. Hazel, who has been an academic advisor on the campus between 3-5 years, highlighted this by stating:

There's a great disconnect between higher ups and the folks they are supposed to represent. The ones who they're supposed to help remove obstacles and barriers. Leadership should consider how to help staff make their jobs easier and effective. The administration is far removed from any current real consequences, and they see the

people that work below them are essentially replaceable. I think they perceive that there's a lot of people who work in the education field.

Along similar lines, Amelia, who has worked in Student Success for less than two years, added experiences of staff feeling inferior from various levels of leadership, stating:

From a staff perspective I feel like I'm being treated 'less than.' Like my work is not as important as someone else's. It's something that needs to be addressed from the top-down, but the problem is this campus has gone through a ridiculous amount of leadership change, which seems to allow certain managers and people at similar levels to get away with treating other people like shit.

Both Luna and Amelia expressed feelings of being part of an invisible population that leaders and administrators fail to acknowledge much less learn about. Participants also expressed the perception that, based on the administrators' actions, there seems to be a belief among leadership that there is an affluent pool of professionals available that can immediately be pulled in to do any number of the roles needed to be filled on campus when a staff member departs and a position becomes vacant. However, as discussed earlier, the university publicly stated it has not recently analyzed data on current climates of hiring, which could reveal an opposing scenario to this belief if that is the case, especially in the higher education professional field. For example, the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR), shares institutions "can no longer assume that the U.S. workforce considers higher education to be a great place" (Brantley and Shomaker, 2021) citing a study that there are poor perceptions of higher education culture and compensation, especially among Black Americans and LGBTQ+ Americans. This could result in a decrease of interested or qualified applicants to replace vacancies on campus. This is also be indicative of the interview findings that state administration

is out of touch with the professional staff realm. These statements corroborate an earlier argument I proposed that the lack of awareness stems from the lack of a shared belief throughout the campus culture, which will be further discussed in one of the upcoming themes.

Despite noted flaws perceived in the relationship between administration and professional staff, Nora, from student success, added that feeling unheard as a result of the lack of recognition actually goes beyond staff. She suggested that this phenomena is also experienced among upper administration as well. Nora shared in her interview:

I feel that we have a considerable amount of administrators and leaders who are people of color, but we don't have an environment that actually gives them the ability to speak to the issues or really make change. They still have to appease the masses, the white masses, so that has to be frustrating for them and disappointing for them to have to go unrecognized. But it's also disappointing for us who are looking at them to break out and just be empowered. It's like the campus hires people in leadership who are people of color but we know we're not supposed to expect anything real out of them because that would be too much. I get that its challenging for them, but that doesn't help the situation, that doesn't move the needle at all. And that is a huge issue.

To summarize, Luna posited that the environment also fails to recognize the talents that campus leaders hold just as much as it does to staff, limiting administrators of color in their professional. This not only created challenges for people of color in leadership positions but seeing their own leadership as less empowered and not recognized as leaders by their own campus has an impact on staff of color feeling a lack of progress is being made on the advancement of DEI.

Another discussion that was brought up, in relation to the campus underutilizing the talents of their current staff, was the administration's repeated pursuits of hiring external

consultants. Several participants expressed significant frustrations toward the use of external consultants to aid in campus issues, specifically DEI efforts. Many strongly felt that the institution was more invested in bringing in professionals outside of the organization rather than tapping into the expertise that was already available on campus. This was interpreted by many individuals as a failure to invest in or listen to their own staff, especially when a multitude of those staff members have current, first-hand knowledge of the issues occurring on their own campus. Olivia, an academic advisor from 3-5 years, shared her exasperation when it came to hiring consultants and connected how this procedure attributed to staff retention:

The campus has spent thousands and thousands of dollars to pay people to come in and provide consulting and suggestions of our practices, but they [administration] are not even asking their own people, their own staff, the people who are well-versed in what students and the campus are facing, or what our thoughts are towards solutions. It sends the message that we don't matter. That our work doesn't matter. That our voices don't matter. They [administration] see that so many people are resigning, but they attribute that as an occurrence being experienced across all businesses, but the reality of it, at least here, is that we're all just done putting up with their shit and feeling undervalued.

Highlighting another example of the disconnect professional staff in this study have already shared, the hiring of external consultants drives a further gap between staff and administration, adding further contributions to the argument that staff feel unheard and their talents are not recognized.

Silas also shared similar perspectives in connection to hiring consultants and stated that many of his colleagues across the campus felt it was a continuously failed routine when

administration brought on what they believed were “experts,” especially when there were no changes seen:

It’s to the point now that when they hire consultants, we all just see it as a performative way for administration to say they’re taking actions and to portray a concern that they want to know, and are invested in, what needs to change. But the reality is that those of us who have been on campus long enough share the sentiment of ‘here we go again’ because we know that consultants have come before in the past, yet the outcome has been the same in that nothing changes. It’s the same outcome. Every time.

Other participants shared similar sentiments that showed many of the staff see no purpose in the campus continuously enlisting what administration seems to think is a solution to fix problems occurring on campus, adding on further frustrations felt when there are no changes that occur after having consultants complete their contract. This also alludes to another point made in Olivia’s earlier comment and emphasized the financial support provided on a regular basis to enlist external professionals rather than investing in their own professionals.

Another goal that incorporated professional staff was provided in the “2010-2014 Diversity Action Plan,” which stated the need for university staff and faculty to have opportunities that enhanced knowledge and skills relative to diversity. The goal suggested ongoing workshops and conversations focused on DEI, ongoing trainings on discrimination and harassment prevention, expanding professional development topics around diversity, and providing incentives for faculty and staff to participate in professional development activities that were specifically centered on diversity. The university also announced their intentions to develop intellectual communities for faculty and staff members by supporting work groups that are involved in research on diversity issues, providing professional development and leadership,

and creating advancement opportunities to ensure equitable representation of underrepresented faculty and staff throughout the institution.

In the document analysis, the “2017-2021 Diversity Action Plan” reiterated these goals to expand university-wide practices that support retention and advancement of underrepresented staff. The updated plan outlined several action steps, which included:

- *Professional Development*: Create and support professional development opportunities for staff, which includes sharing resources from Human Resources to units working on developing such programs; Increase staff participation in trainings on being culturally responsive
- *Staff Advancement*: Observe advancement trends of URM staff through annual reviews of staff reclassification and promotion within the university
- *Leadership Opportunities*: Provide leadership opportunities promoting equitable presence of URM staff in university administration; provide administrative leadership information on succession planning incorporating DEI considerations.

Despite professional staff being significantly mentioned throughout the institutional documents regarding professional growth, an overwhelming majority of the study participants provided perceptions of a lack of support in professional development, advancement, and leadership chances. As pointed out earlier, to summarize up the opportunities and efforts provided by the campus as perceived by this study’s participants, trainings offered to professional staff only focused on strategies and best practices for supporting students. There was no reciprocated support in place for these same individuals who are tasked do the work and meet the same demographics as the students. Ultimately, many interviewees reported the lack of opportunities for growth was one of the top factors of deterring retention. Asher, who has

worked in the Student Life office between 3-5 years, shared his own experiences which culminated his decision to leave the institution:

There was no room for growth. They weren't investing in me as an individual or seeing me as bringing assets to the table. I left because I feel I had much more opportunities outside. I don't think they valued anything we [staff] said at all. My experience was that they only cared about students and did not necessarily care about staff. They [administrators] didn't encourage you, didn't mentor you, didn't talk to you about what struggles staff experienced. Staff often go through similar struggles as students, because we were those students who are now professionals. But who is there to support us? They [administrators] advocate for students' upward mobility in terms of pay or social scale, social class. But as a professional once you get there, there's no support once you're there.

Asher brings up an important concern in that the institution places a considerable amount of focus towards minimizing barriers and providing support for student populations, especially URM students, but does not display the same commitment towards staff. This brings forth a question asked by one of the study participants regarding "what is the institution's intentionality?" Also, how much does the institution really understand URM populations they are serving, regardless of if an individual is a student or a staff member?

Furthering the discussion of leadership opportunities, another stated goal was written in the "2018-2019 Annual Report," which was to expand professional development opportunities for faculty, staff, and administrators that specifically address equity, anti-racism and inclusion. However, a considerable number of staff described budget and funding was a repetitive problem related to professional development opportunities. Essentially, participants shared that

opportunities for advancement and professional development were not budgeted for in either financial funds or the time commitment to participate. This creates discouragement among staff to pursue professional development and, again, created an outlook that the institution was, once again, performative in their attempts. Nora shared her example in relation to this sentiment:

I felt that there were many times the institution would tell you that they really wanted to support you and tell you they want you to get the skills that you need for your goals. But when you would bring up any professional development opportunity, they were often quick to tell you that the timing of the event or training were during times that were too busy for the office to be down a staff member. This was even the case for online/virtual opportunities. Or, if a training was \$500 instead of the estimated \$400 that you previously asked for, you would hear ‘oh, we’re not actually going to be able to fit that in the budget.’ Their actions were often contradictory to what they tell you in the beginning.

Felix provided an alternative perception, which entailed discouragement and stated that he felt he didn’t want to “ask too much” from the institution to invest in him as an individual, a professional, or as member on the campus.

I don’t think there were many professional development opportunities at the time. I knew there were professional development courses, but I knew they cost money, so I didn’t ask because I feel as though I was trapped in this minority mindset that “oh, it’s too much money, don’t go ask and don’t be a burden.” In comparison, I saw my white counterparts that were comfortable in asking for those opportunities getting approval or support.

A pattern identified within the responses is that, more often than not, staff experience being turned down for professional development due to a lack of budget or support. This not only contributed to the perceptions that have been expressed of not being valued, but it also attributed

as another key reason why staff are frustrated by the cost that consultants incur from what is usually a short-term contract. When a fraction of that cost is denied for staff's request for professional development or staff don't feel valued enough to ask for such opportunities was a pointed cause for frustration among many staff interviewed.

In contrast, the few staff members who were able to find the time to participate in professional development opportunities described that there had been no benefit to doing so, especially in terms of being recognized by the institution. Quinn shared her experience as a staff member who voluntarily sought out professional development on her own time:

I'm performing better at my job, but I just get the regular, old, cost of living, pay raise that everybody gets every year. There's no real incentive for me to do any professional development. I still do it for the opportunity to learn, but there's no connection between developing myself professionally that leads to more enhanced opportunities offered for taking the initiative to do so. There's no benefit that is outlined other than I do my job better for the same amount of pay. And I often have to squeeze in my own personal time to do it outside of work hours.

For the very few who are able to push through the barriers around budget and restricted times, it is often because they are required to sacrifice their own resources to promote their own growth. Despite taking these initiatives, staff still feel unnoticed and undervalued, leaving it difficult to find motivation to professionally advance or grow at the institution.

Another considerable discussion brought up by this study's participants heavily related to budgets is the issue of compensation. A few staff members shared their views on the inequities behind a lack of budget to support staff retention, despite there being a specified budget set aside to ensure faculty retention. Amelia shared her insights on budget and retention:

There doesn't seem to be a financial pool of money available for staff retention and, if there is, it is not utilized or made aware of. We have lost an incredible number of staff in this last year alone and a lot of them specifically stated that compensation was a main factor. So why is it that we can offer faculty a compensation package for retention, but we can't do that for staff? I've seen amazing staff just walk out the door and all I can think of is how much this campus needed them. We needed them because they have wonderful ideas, they work well with students. They're an asset on campus. Why are we losing them because of compensation? A lot of those who leave are, unfortunately, women of color. So, it really makes you wonder why are we not able to retain them when our student body is so diverse, and we can't keep these staff members around?

The lack of compensation is indicative of the discussion towards being undervalued, not being recognized for talent, and a lack of support. If administration is disconnected and unaware of the assets professional staff provide throughout the campus, compensation likely reflects this in the form of salary range placements and minimal annual raises, or salary increases.

Lastly, this theme concludes with a discussion on the additional burdens placed primarily on URM professional staff that non-URM staff are often not subjected to, or affected by, in their professional roles. These burdens present in various forms. Factors such as emotional burdens, being expected to represent all URM student populations, requests to extracurricular responsibilities not directly part of their primary job role such, which include serving as staff advisors to specific minority groups, along with unresolved experiences of micro-aggressions and racism are all contributing forms of experienced extra burdens that are experienced by many URM staff. Despite this additional work and expectation of representation, many staff pointed out they were still underpaid in comparison to non-URM colleagues all while having to deal with

these hurdles within their careers. Lily explained the stress of these additional burdens in her comments, stating that “in today’s environment, work life balance is a real thing. And people will start to consider whether the stress that they’re experiencing is worth it.” Maeve provided further context on statement Luna shared:

Specifically, when it comes to the campus’ success towards DEI, it’s hard because you hear about folks who are leaving their jobs and they pointedly say it’s because micro-aggressions or experiences of bias that they deal with from a supervisor or faculty or whoever. It’s almost always people of color who are leaving. Initially, you think the campus is great, you come to see the student body is really diverse. Then, at the staff level and then the faculty level, and certainly at the leadership level, it gets a lot less diverse. A lot of folks are the only person of color in their department. I’m the only person of color in my office. There is not really a feeling of connectedness for us.

Nora added to these sentiments and provided a vivid explanation of her experiences, along with similar experiences of others that she has witnessed first-hand, of additional burdens:

The campus has actually gotten worse for URM professional staff. A lot of us have experienced blatant like racism and bigotry and like discrimination in our academic careers on this campus along. For some of us, that is why we wanted to work in academia. To break that down. But then we just continue to experience this at a professional level, which is really, really, just invalidating. You know you’re fully capable, you have the same degrees, you have a comparable background [as your non-URM] counterparts that may even be more comprehensive but you’re getting paid a little less. You’re being passed over for promotions or for new roles. But you’re saddled with all of this additional work. To top it off, you’re also the person students go to more often

because students know that you genuinely care. You're dealing with all of this additional emotional labor while trying to fight burnout. But there's no recognition of this from the university. There are no support mechanisms for you or the acknowledgement that [administrators] understand what we're dealing with.

The increased responsibilities of these additional burdens, coupled with the lack of acknowledgment or awareness that these expectations create have been identified by URM staff as the leading causes to experiencing burnout within their careers. This scenario heavily affects URM staff retention as they continue to experience a lack of support.

Luna added her own perspective that echoed her colleagues' statements of situations and examples of racism that often go unresolved or acknowledged, leaving the victims, who in these cases were staff members, the burden with finding ways to cope and deal with on their own:

Sometimes, it seems like we create this situation where 'oh, you're a black staff member, so you've got to answer to all the needs of our black students. That's not right. There's so much more than just our outward appearance. You have some leaders who are notorious for hiring on the basis of skin color in an attempt to look good and make it seem like their staff is really diverse. But then issues arise for these folks after they are hired and we don't do anything to correct it. For example, there was a situation where one of our colleagues was experiencing extreme racism after receiving communications that had racial slurs and derogatory comments directed towards them and our supervisor just poorly mishandled the whole thing by moving her into a different role rather than addressing the situation and making sure she was okay.

In relation to the discussion around the lack of training focused on staff, this also highlighted that leadership is also not prepared or equipped to respond to situations of racism experienced by

staff members. What is the outcome for situations where staff members are attacked and exposed to racist acts? By being silent or displaying a lack of action to address the situation, this hinders URM staff retention and renders an unsafe environment for URM professional staff.

Additionally, staff expressed that this non-response to experiences of racism on staff also represents leadership as contributing to the racism as well.

To conclude, this theme demonstrated how the campus, whether by their own efforts or through external factors, is seen as successful in their outreach and recruitment efforts to attract a diverse applicant pool, however, their ability to hire diverse applicants was considered less successful according to the data from participant interviews. Furthermore, the discussion with URM staff highlighted several factors that were viewed as hindering retention, which strongly included a lack of recognition, being seen as “easily replaceable,” feeling a lack of support and resources for professional growth and advancement, and additional burdens placed on URM professional staff that are not expected of non-URM professional staff. These factors and the discussion centered on retention strongly reinforces the arguments presented in the first theme, Climate of Symbolic Inclusion, and portrays additional concerns to the goal of a welcoming and supportive environment.

Theme 3: Lack of Communication

The importance of communication has been hinted throughout the previous themes, specifically regarding inclusion within the campus environment, the cohesion of campus efforts, and knowledge of institutional policies, practices, and procedures. However, its significance requires further attention. In this theme, I more explicitly argue how the significant lack of communication negatively impacted the stated goals of the university around DEI. I emphasize on the patterns found relating to one-way communication, participation in decision-making,

influence of policies from main campus, and specific discussion around the communication of the University Diversity Action Plans.

While the research site shared detailed action plans and DEI commitments, the document analysis of this study found a lack of examples for any communication plans that pertinent to successful implementation of DEI strategies. Communication was only mentioned two explicit times within the eight documents that spanned from 2008-2021. The first remark on communication was found in the “2010-2014 Diversity Action Plan,” which mentioned that communicating the institution’s commitment to diversity was a priority. In this document, the university stated that their commitment to diversity would be made evident to all current and future students, faculty, staff, and the public through its strong communication of core values and vision for diversity.

The second acknowledgement within the documents that mentioned communication was found in the 2018-2019 Equity & Inclusion Annual Report. In this document, the intent to conduct a campus-wide survey in efforts to catalogue current practices, programs, and data that centered on of diversity, equity, and inclusion was presented. The aim of this action was to determine how wide-spread the communication of these resources was throughout the campus community.

Minimal consideration is made on the communication or a communication plan for DEI was evidenced in the document analysis. As one of the most prominent, institution-wide articles, the administration created the Diversity Action Plan to serve as the primary document that outlines the university’s mission, vision, values, and goals that encompass diversity, strategic priorities, and recommended action steps. Communication of this document is assumed to be a high priority of university administration and leaders as it emphasizes the culture and

environment the university aims to establish. As such, all study participants were specifically asked about their awareness or knowledge of the university-wide Diversity Action Plans mentioned in the document analysis. Based on interview responses, very few participants were aware or knew anything of the Diversity Action Plans. The overwhelming majority of the participants responded with statements such as “not aware,” “never heard of it,” or “had no clue” that any of the present or past Diversity Action Plans had been produced or even existed.

The few participants who shared that they knew of the Diversity Action Plans shared that it was communicated to them through another individual or isolated incident and not from a campus-wide campaign. Amelia shared that she had heard it mostly because of a specific faculty member who she described as “committed to making changes on the campus.” However, aside from this individual faculty member mentioning the document, she would not have been made aware of any strategic plan around DEI. Similarly, Iris stated that she was aware of the Action Plans from her onboarding process as a copy of the document was included in her onboarding packet. However, beyond the inclusion of the document, there were no further conversations. It was never discussed or presented again after the start of her role on campus. Another participant, Felix, stated that he had heard of an action plan or that it might have “sounded familiar” but admitted that he hadn’t looked at it. He prompted that the reason behind this was due to a lack of communication or expectation to become familiar with it. He explained:

I can tell you I didn’t look at it. I guess I didn’t understand the ‘why’ while I was a program coordinator or program assistant, and maybe that’s part of why I didn’t look into it further. I didn’t know if it was expected that we [staff] were supposed to look at it based on my level of employment in the hierarch of things. For me, I need to understand

the ‘why’ because if it’s something that is just handed to you but you’re not necessarily told what to do with it, there’s no incentive to truly understand it.

Felix’s statement highlights that introducing the Action Plan without an explanation of its purpose and contents nor placing any emphasis that the document is a guideline to the university’s supposed goals allows for it to be bypassed by the few who are even aware of it.

Quinn corroborated this outcome when she shared that she happened upon the Diversity Action Plan on the website and was surprised to find it existed since there was no communication about it. She expressed:

I have a copy of it saved on my computer. I leave things on my desktop that I feel are undone or need more time and energy and attention. But that was on my own doing.

There’s been no guidance, no discussion. According to the university, this is our charge.

But there’s no steps discussed, nothing. No town hall to present the Action Plan. Not even a divisional meeting that’s dedicated to discussing it. It’s crickets.

Both Felix and Quinn provided examples of incohesive communication and the effects on how the recipients perceive the document’s level of importance. The examples, thus far, bring me to my argument on the ineffectiveness of one-way communications, how value and intent are perceived based on the communication, and why feedback and follow-up are crucial in pursuing the desired outcomes of the diversity action plan. Participants who had not heard about the Diversity Action Plan did not provide much commentary other than they found the concept of them to sound very interesting, especially when they had never heard of it. This creates another concern as interview participants, who all identify as a person of color, shared a lack of awareness and communication around a strategic plan centered on DEI, as this plan was intended

to focus on them. Olivia prompted an important opinion as someone who had never heard of the plan and stated:

It sounds like really interesting stuff when you have never heard of it before. Especially as a person of color when the institution is actively talking about wanting to retain me, but they're not even telling me that I was part of a goal. Or made me feel that I was even considered among these goals.

These action plans proved to be highly interesting to those who had never heard of it before and many of the participants determined that these plans were worth investing in. However, the lack of communication of these plans poses a severe problem without widely sharing or discussing the goals and intent within them lost and the existence of such documented plan proves to be moot.

Data gathered from the participant interviews strongly agreed that communication on the campus is problematic. As part of the interview questions, participants were asked "How are DEI policies communicated throughout your institution?" This question aimed to inquire about the perceptions and experiences of their campus' efforts in ensuring staff are well-informed about DEI efforts, especially as they relate to one's job. While one of the stated goals found in the document analysis was determining the effectiveness of the institution's communications, the over-arching feedback shared throughout the participant interviews portrayed a severe lack of communication. Many shared that any interactions concerning DEI were conducted through 'one-way communication' method that often came from the top-down. The primary methods for communication were often done through mass e-mails and campus-wide 'Town Hall' meetings in which the campus community was invited to hear report-outs from leadership and administration. Many organizations utilize meetings in a Town Hall format as an opportunity to

provide members of their community a space to ask questions and prompt discussions. However, several members of the research site noted that it had not been the culture behind most of the Town Hall meetings on their campus. Essentially, most survey respondents shared that they felt the communication surrounding DEI efforts were lacking and inconsistent in either format. Not only is the problem that these specific methods of communication utilized by the campus were seen as ineffective, but it also left the responsibility up to the audience of the message to determine its importance along with their individual willingness to participate in them as in the case of Felix's experience:

I feel like most communication about DEI policies is sent out through mass emails and its something you look into at your own leisure kind of thing. I think one of the things I wish I had a better understanding of is our campus goals or our strategic plan.

Amelia added to this opinion of a small number among the community read these emails and gave insight to some of the factors why:

If there is any communication, it's through a mass sent email that most staff, students and faculty do not read. It's generally boring and plain and clearly policy-based and the only reason why they're (administration) sending it is because they know they have to. It literally takes a chain of people who finally get to a point of "hey, did you notice that this e-mail says this?" And most respond with 'oh, I didn't. I got that email, but I didn't read it.' It just proves it's not an effective way to communicate. It's literally one-way learning. It's just receiving information like a bulletin.

Maeve added to the above sentiments stating that the manner of communication was an ineffective method to connecting DEI efforts with the campus community by providing details of these emails sent:

I think it's usually just kind of like a general email announcement. It's really easy to miss that kind of communication. If it was brought up at each faculty meeting and staff meeting, that would be more helpful. But it's usually just an email and then if I catch it, great.

These comments described a passive communication situation they see as common and does not emphasize on the importance or the relevance of its contents, nor does the situation generate an opportunity for respondents to discuss or ask clarification if they do take the time to read it. Participants also alluded that there are no repercussions for not reading these specific emails, essentially pointing out that there is also no reward or motivation to read them. In fact, many interviewees mention that they opt out of reading them due to their already heavy workloads previously discussed.

Hazel specified in her interview that emails sent through listservs, such as those that communicated DEI efforts, tend to be ignored since recipients of these emails must determine, on their own volition, how these actions relate to their specific job roles and responsibilities. Participants also shared that emails that are sent out to a large group can often allow individuals to feel that it is not directed towards them and may want to avoid adding more to their job roles without having direct communication to do so. She detailed this further in her statement:

I couldn't say that the communication is robust. Like, it could just be that there's so much on my plate and everyone else's plate that it's sometimes difficult to just read an email sent through a listserv or a mass campus-wide email, especially if the content doesn't fall under your exact job responsibility or explains how it does. So, personally, I don't always read those listserv emails in full detail. I don't think any of us do. It can be difficult to communicate messages in that format. But I will say that in terms of these displayed

actions for communicating with the campus, it doesn't seem like diversity, equity, or inclusion is valued much.

Hazel highlighted another important reminder. The lack of effective communication on any topic can be viewed as a representation of how much the campus values or emphasizes that specific concept.

Several participants stated that not only are the methods of communication severely lacking, but the absence of any action plan or next steps directly related to the communication is often found to be another factor as to why these emails are often ignored. Lily provided the following example:

Communication was inconsistent, to say the least. I think there was a lot of talk about what was ideal in terms of DEI and how we wanted to get to a culture of where we wanted to be, but there was no clear plan of how we were going to get there that we went into any deep discussions on.

Asher's statements supported Lily's and added:

The university would share all of these new DEI initiatives and tools and ways of operating. But that's it, you would hear it in a Town Hall meeting and you would see it in a link in an email that gets sent out to everybody, but there was no follow up. There was no 'here are the steps,' 'here are the measurements,' 'this is what this means for you.' And a lot of times that generate questions on 'what does this mean in terms of my work.' It wasn't ever taken to that level of discussion.

The lack of concrete steps or follow-up that Lily and Asher addressed are indicative of a lower level of importance towards these efforts. If there is no guidance on how to further the work described, individuals will easily ignore it and carry on with their job as they have been. This is

especially true when there is no accountability in implementing the concepts into their daily work or roles.

Although there is a lot of discussion concerning the negative impacts towards the communication, there was some positive feedback provided by some of the study participants. A few interviewees shared that their supervisor provided an additional layer of communication to the emails sent through direct discussions with their supervisor that included further explanation or conversation. For some staff members, this additional reinforced the communication within the email, however, this was highly dependent on the supervisor. For example, Ruby stated that although DEI efforts were primarily shared by email, she felt her “supervisor does a good job of reiterating policies or changes so that we know about them, and I know how we’re going to move forward together. I think that’s because she’s a good leader.”

In contrast to Ruby’s observation, Asher shared an example of his supervisor experience that was less than effective. When employees had questions regarding how the announcement would affect their work, the response received from upper leadership was along the lines of “your direct supervisor should know.” Yet, Asher added that there was also a disconnect in communication for their direct supervisors. In his interview, he shared “when you spoke to your direct supervisor about it, they didn’t even have any additional information. Often, this created a domino effect where that supervisor would then have to go to their direct supervisor who also didn’t have the information. It seemed like the information was just given to them and administration expected them to just execute, but many managers often didn’t have any further details either.” This directly corroborates to the discussion of disconnect felt between staff and administration and provides an example of how that disconnect also impacts communication. The lack of relationship results in a lack of communication and vice versa.

Iris provided the perspective of someone in a supervisor role, sharing in agreement that the communication throughout the campus is poor and inconsistent. Iris's statements supported Asher's that communication being trickled down through a ranking system on campus and highlighted that there was no accountability to whether communication was successful or effective. She added that this was also not a new pattern experienced only by the current administration, but that this has been a cultural problem on campus historically:

I would say under both of our most recent chancellors, policies are not really communicated across the campus. Usually, when there is a decision made, it's put out to HR or to the deans or unit leaders and they're expected to communicate it to their staff. But, in reality, sometimes it is communicated out and sometimes it is not. Most of the time, though, the campus hears of policies through the grapevine. And then everybody gets to put their own spin on it. I'm aware that for some instances, the Chancellor doesn't want to be the one to send out the message, but I feel like it is leadership's job to make sure people all have that same communication. The information coming from me, as a mid-level supervisor, doesn't do anything.

Iris brings up an important point, which is the exposure to communication of certain campus changes is differentiated based on an individual's role on the campus. This proposed another concern to the lack of a cohesive plan that everyone is ensured to receive the communication which may also influence individuals' perceptions of feeling well-informed. One participant, Ivy, for example, stated that she felt the communication on policies that came from the Chancellor's office and other areas of administration, including the Town Hall meetings, were good. However, she also included that she may have biased perceptions because she was usually aware of the policies prior to them being mass communicated out to the campus.

One-way communication in this environment proved to be largely ineffective, as shown from most of the participant interviews. It also contributed to the problems seen in previous themes, which is a of social integration along with a lack of providing feedback and feeling unheard. Communication should be a two-way effort. In conjunction to perceptions of communication as a one-way method, there was also a pattern indicated throughout the interviews that many felt excluded from the majority of decision-making processes on campus.

Many of the staff interviewed for this study shared they felt included only after a decision was made. When asked, ‘do you feel you were a part of any type of participation in the decision-making processes related to DEI efforts?’, Asher responded, “No, they never did. I felt like we [URM] were an invisible community separate from students and faculty. Those populations [students and faculty] were the only people administration considered in anything.” Other staff shared examples of the barriers they experience in voicing their opinions, which included limitations on opportunities for them to provide feedback. Amelia emphasized this in greater detail:

I feel that professional staff have to make a more concerted effort to voice their opinions and some just don’t want to jump through all of the barriers, which we feel the university creates for expressing our opinions. One simple example is when they offer opportunities to provide feedback on campus. These have historically been ‘lunchtime sessions.’ What if they also offered a morning or afternoon session for staff, faculty, and students who don’t have the time, who have calendars literally booked up? And administration does this for really big campus decisions. It feels like it’s on purpose.... The campus generally only announces opportunities for staff to voice their opinion maybe the week of the event? I don’t feel that they involve us or want to hear our opinions, particularly when it

comes to goals around staff and faculty. It definitely feels that the campus creates barriers so that your voice isn't heard.

Heavily relating to the comments shared of a welcoming environment in the theme, "Climate of Symbolic Inclusion," staff shared that the scheduling of events not only hindered staff to participate, but it also created barriers for them to contribute their perspectives. Specifically, from Amelia's comments, communications from staff are often stifled and they are given limited opportunities to offer it, which alluded to why many staff feel they are only aware after a decision is made.

Another consideration made in reference to the exclusion of their participation in decision-making is who is involved in those decisions. The discussion, thus far, has concentrated on individual participation of decision making. However, one-way communication is also seen from a departmental- and campus-level approach to decision making in this multi-campus setting. Participants shared that the main campus often controls higher level decisions that are implemented onto other campuses, however, the unique needs of students and staff among the other campuses is not often considered. For example, the main campus is not an urban-serving campus, it is not a commuter campus, nor does it recognize place as part of its mission. Without having the ability to participate in decisions made by another campus, these needs are ignored and administrators from the smaller campuses feel that their hands are tied.

With many of the DEI policies engineered out of the main campus, two problems are perceived from the interviewee responses toward this scenario. First, policies do not reflect the diverse differences among the campus communities on each site and, thus, may not be applicable to each campus population. In other words, some policies that may work for the main campus were said to contribute to barriers for another campus. This, in and of itself, is shown to be

contradictory to the purpose of DEI work. Hazel's interview provided an example of this in her statement:

So many of the policies here aren't decided by our own campus, they are decided by people in main campus and are main campus driven. Higher ups can make the decisions that they're going to make, and they know they're not going to be short on students.

Hazel indicated a lack of concern by main campus on the effects their policies may have on the students of the other campuses. However, she added that any negative consequences of their policies would not result in a deficiency of students as the institution's demand and popularity is revered as high within the state.

The second problem highlighted is that of the lack of accountability for leadership on the smaller campuses when their directions primarily come from the main campus. To further explain this, Iris shared that when staff do participate in the sparse opportunities to provide feedback, administration alluded to a lack of power in implementing any changes without the approval of main campus. Iris made the statement: "there's always the excuse given by our campus administration of "we have to ask main campus," which means that nothing will move up the chain or change.

A prominent example of this that are the university's Diversity Action Plans. While these plans were stated as a collaborative documents between all of the campuses within the university system, the perception from staff members was that 'main campus' was the ultimate driver in this force. The lack of involvement in the decision-making process by leaders outside of the main campus may be a factor for why there was no communications made regarding these plans to their respective campuses, resulting in the unawareness shared by a majority of study participants on these plans.

This theme provided a look at a severe problem regarding communication. Not only is communication on the goals of DEI seen as lacking, but this also deeply affects the campus-wide ability to succeed in these goals or ensure efforts on DEI are taken seriously. The upcoming theme considers the consequence of a lack of communication and asks the questions of who is responsible and accountable in ensuring successful DEI outcomes.

Theme 4: Responsibility of DEI

The final theme discusses the ambiguity behind who holds responsibility for DEI efforts on campus. Throughout the documents and interviews, I discovered varying beliefs on who is accountable for ensuring DEI efforts that were mentioned throughout the previous themes, which include providing a welcoming environment, recruitment and retention, and ensuring communication. The primary issue presented in this matter is a lack of clarity and understanding on who is to lead the work and who is to carry out the various roles required to make DEI efforts successful. Many study participants expressed that the individuals on campus who have a personal commitment to DEI believe the responsibility is that of every member on campus and everyone is held accountable to ensuring success throughout these efforts. However, the impression these same study participants have on their colleagues was the majority of the campus staff believed the work was the responsibility of mainly the DEI office. In this theme, I argue that the lack of clarity on who is responsible for DEI creates various barriers and gaps to advancing the success of these efforts.

Significantly related to the theme of lack of communication, the institution itself does not make the responsibilities clear in their published documents. The mention of the campus DEI offices in the document analysis was minimal. The DEI offices were only brought up in three of the university documents, two of those being articles published by the research site's own DEI

office, which indicated these were not part of system-wide university artifacts. This portrayed that the university, as a whole, did not emphasize or provide attention to the campus offices that are intended to be the hub of DEI efforts. This also indicated that the university left it up to the campus DEI offices to promote their own purpose and presence. The only mention of DEI offices within the university-wide documents was found in the “2008 Diversity Focus Groups and Summary Recommendations.” This document shared the primary recommendation to maintain a centralized diversity office that housed resources and assistance to students, staff, and faculty related to DEI.

Responses from study participants showed varied opinions on the role of the DEI office. Interview statements explained how the lack of communication from administration allowed for avoidance of accountability among both campus departments and individuals. Olivia expressed how the DEI office was “unfairly deemed as the only office that’s responsible for the work.” An excerpt from Asher’s interview supported this statement and provided a detailed description of how varying departments and individuals view the DEI office:

If I were to describe DEI at the campus, I would say that the campus expected the DEI department to solely work on it. Most of the campus community don’t see it as an initiative that the university that needed to work on. Campus and department leaders would often default to sending everything to the DEI office. But this work needs to be done by everyone. Not just a department. There were a few times I raised the suggestion that our department should be doing this [incorporating DEI work], and I’d be told, ‘oh, we don’t do that. That’s the work of the DEI office. It leaves a lot of staff wondering what the intentionality is when the campus and university creates DEI initiatives but

doesn't seem to enforce them campus-wide. It seems like a lot of administrators really don't know how to reach these goals.

Asher described an environment where there had been no directions really given on their roles and responsibilities nor any direct communications on how these specific efforts contributed to the goal of an institution-wide culture shift. This poses the question for institutions on how they communicate and develop the meaning behind any institution-wide and how one successfully establishes a culture shift on a university.

Stella's interview added points similar to Asher's and stated the need to create space for staff of color. She emphasized that this needs to happen outside of the DEI office to break out of the silos. Stella shared that by doing so, it sends the message throughout campus that this work isn't just intended for the DEI office. She added:

DEI work is the entire institution's responsibility to be doing. However, a lot of folks tend to push the responsibility to lead these trainings and workshops to have these difficult conversations around DEI especially. They tend to turn to the DEI office to do the work as they see them for their expertise in the area, but honestly, this work needs to be done by every department no matter what department you are in. We need champions across the campus who can do this work and lead these conversations rather than just giving it all to the DEI office.

Both Asher's and Stella's examples portrayed the pressures placed on the DEI office along with a campus culture that either does not want to or is uncomfortable taking on the work. Since many staff shared there are no campus expectations set, it makes it easier for units outside of the DEI office to pass off the work. Specifically, the pattern displayed by these statements is that the administration's views on the DEI office being the sole department responsible for the work,

which has created this mentality for the rest of the campus. Yet, many of the study participants strongly argue this mentality only created silos on the campus and has prevented the very goal of cohesion. This also creates frustration for staff who view DEI to be everyone's responsibility and feel they must individually promote this ideology to change a campus culture.

The DEI office of the research site took the initiative to address their mission and purpose. In the campus documents authored by the research site's DEI office, the stated purpose of the office was to engage collaborative efforts among all university units. This comes with the acknowledgement that individual experiences are just as important as the number of students, faculty and staff on campus, which reflects the importance of this very study's purpose to provide the experiences and perspectives of URM staff beyond quantitative statistics.

In that document, the DEI office recommended a networking hub or portal that allowed faculty and staff to find other colleagues involved in, or leading, diversity activities in other units across the university system. However, contrary to this suggestion of collaborating efforts among the different campus departments on DEI, the perceptions and experiences shared by study participants included the strong opinion that, once again, DEI efforts were not cohesive across campus. Several responses alluded to varied approaches towards DEI among the campus that did not align with the goal of collaborating efforts. For example, Charlotte shared:

Different departments approach DEI in different ways in comparison to other departments across campus. For example, one department will hire a consulting firm for their DEI efforts and another department will decide to hire a different consulting firm. It's really weird to me... things like that make it feel like it's not an inclusive or collaborative effort.

Charlotte makes it clear that while some departments are making efforts towards DEI, they're not communicating with each other. It is also clear from the interviews that each department employs separate approaches to addressing DEI. Participants shared a pattern that, again, pointed to this as a result of varying commitment levels among individuals towards DEI. As participants shared that DEI was mostly done by separate, small groups throughout the campus, often in silos, these statements suggested that each department's commitment was largely dependent on staff who were invested in individually leading those efforts. For example, Nora shared:

There are little pockets all over campus of folks who really get it and who are interested in really trying to work on it personally and professionally. There are definitely pockets of people who are receptive to the work and where you can really feel like you can have open conversations. You have this sort of community built around it. But the difficult part is those pockets aren't necessarily connected with each other. Often times, they're siloed.

Nora shares a sense of limited spaces where individuals can contribute to open conversations in a safe environment. Olivia provided statements strongly aligned with that of "Nora's perceptions and even used similar, unique phrases such as "pockets" to describe the small groups throughout the campus that were dedicated to DEI work. In her statement, she indicated that these people are the minority among the staff population who share a commitment to progress DEI. In Olivia's interview, she mentioned:

There are some people who are aware that DEI is everyone's job. But really, we are so far away from people understanding that DEI work really is everyone's responsibility. There's not a lot of cohesion on campus. There are pockets of people who are dedicated, but you can only do so much with what feels like a small group of those committed.

These statements exemplify the difficulty in advancing DEI work when there is minimal cohesion of efforts. Despite working in separate departments, there is a common language being shared throughout this theme of “pockets,” “silos,” and “small groups” strongly indicating the opposite of cohesive efforts. These comments also highlight the intersection of prior statements of staff feeling unheard when siloed into small groups and experiencing a lack of cohesion.

Similar to what has been expressed in previous themes from this chapter, participants reiterated their assessment of a significant absence of support on DEI efforts collectively from their peer individual colleagues and the university administration. Despite that the university provided statements towards its commitment to DEI, participants in this study shared administration’s lack of actions was evidenced further that the commitment was seen as performative. In addition, the lack of administration’s support and direction had also allowed for individuals who are uninterested or against DEI efforts to remain unresponsive. For example, Nora stated in her interview:

The administration says they’re supportive but they’re not actively supportive. It’s just lip service. For example, they send an email, they show up at one zoom but beyond that, they’re not present. And then, you have some department leaders vehemently against DEI, whether they have a genuine understanding or they’re just ignorant. This isn’t just a problem on our campus. You see how those are the individuals who are the loudest and have a lot of influence. I can name a few department and academic leads that have quite a bit of influence and decide whether their employees have time to work on DEI initiatives. Or they also decide whether DEI initiatives will be discussed as part of a department meeting. It feels like we’re trying to connect these little pockets but also trying to not be

super obvious to these administrators who seem to make it harder to do what we need to do.

Nora's recall that department leads have a large influence on their staff regarding the time they may be able to devote towards DEI can be problematic if a department leader does not view DEI as part of their staff's work. This goes back to the comments shared on additional burdens that are placed upon URM employees if they invest their time into DEI efforts in addition to their primary work responsibilities when they are not given the support to incorporate it as part of the work. Nora's statement also brings up additional concerns of staff not feeling safe, posing another example opposite of a welcoming environment. Her statement summarizes that there is a delicate balance in promoting DEI but also keeping it out of the reach of those in department leadership roles who may try to diminish or create barriers towards its work and progress. Because there is a perceived lack of clarity behind administration's support and stance on DEI work, this essentially allows those who may not agree with the importance or value of DEI to determine its existence within their own department.

Lily provided statements supporting the concept that lack of accountability creates a culture of indifference for those who do not identify with or understand the importance of DEI on the campus. When initiatives and goals are shared on the campus, but accountability and responsibility are not tied to them, these initiatives go unnoticed or lack the structure in making them successful or meaningful. Lily expressed:

I think smaller groups on campus don't really have a stake in terms of DEI initiatives. It seems like no one is really responsible for driving the actions that come out of these initiatives. No one seems to be making sure that everything we do as a campus is reflective of that initiative. There was no one really there to hold us accountable for

making sure we adopted them. I feel like it needs to start from the top-down. There is just a lack of enforcement to drive those initiatives... I think, peer to peer, there are a lot of staff members and faculty members for that matter, who shared the same opinion in regard to DEI efforts on campus: that it lacked gumption or it was just non-existent. And that was apparent throughout multiple levels of staff, administrators, managers, and directors, and vice presidents. I felt like I had to force my way to the table, I had to seek out the committees that worked on DEI instead of it being common knowledge... I think what we lacked as a campus was structure in terms of everyone knowing what the plan was.

The lack of structure Lily mentioned has resulted in a perceived deficiency of comprehension on the importance of DEI. She added that this occurred through multiple missed opportunities to train staff on DEI and the application of DEI in individual work roles on campus. Although the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 Annual Reports provided by the research site's DEI office stated that the department's goal of offering programs and training on DEI, Asher his perceptions that these were not occurring:

I know that [upper administration] created initiatives based on the campus climate feedback, but at the same time, when they have these initiatives, how well do they train the staff on them and does [administration] really understand what these initiatives mean? Does the administration have an understanding of how that applies to the work that we all do? No one's really expected to take a deep dive into these topics. Instead, its seen as 'here are some big buzzwords that we often use.' But are we actually matching or mirroring the work that we do? Where's the intentionality? I think a lot of administrators just don't know what to do and it ends up being poorly executed.

Asher pointed out the assumption that not only is the communication of DEI efforts weak, but there is also a significant lack of foundational training that could significantly enhance the endeavors throughout campus.

In closing for this theme, one consideration that needs to be made is the institution may have expressed ideas of who is responsible for DEI efforts in unpublished communications that were not made available to the public, for example, campus emails or discussions in meetings. However, as seen in the previous theme, there is considerable lack of communication throughout the campus and based on participants interviewed, they do not feel this concept has been directly communicated. Another significant point made within this theme is the notion that the DEI office is seen by administration as a resource, but the office itself is said to have no authority or responsibility to engage other offices in this work. This allows for department and programs to determine their own levels of commitment to DEI causes.

Summary of Findings

Data analyzed from the semi-structured interviews of URM professional staff members, in conjunction with the information found in the document analysis, produced the four main themes discussed above that allow me to answer the research questions of this study. The simple answer to the initial research question is yes, URM professional staff are named in written DEI goals, action plans, and campus climate surveys, including the university campus in this study. Findings of the document analysis revealed how URM professional staff are mentioned or named in the campus' DEI efforts throughout institutional action plans, campus climate surveys, stated institutional goals, and annual reports. Within these documents, staff were mentioned within the goals pertaining to creating and supporting a welcoming climate, attracting diverse staff

candidates in recruitment and hiring processes, and retention of URM staff through professional development, staff advancement, and leadership opportunities.

Study participants were asked questions based on the content of the documents, however, there were mixed responses that split between those who felt included in the institution's DEI efforts and those who do not. Additionally, there was a significant amount of study participants who do not agree that the campus made a concerted effort in retaining URM staff. Based on statements pertaining to social integration, more participants perceived experiences that felt their campus had a lack of concerted efforts when it came to DEI, as well as feelings of invalidation, being replaceable, and efforts being performative in comparison to positive experiences that were shared. Many participants also shared an absence of participation in decision-making, particularly in providing input and feedback, leaving URM professional staff feeling unheard on campus. Study participants also discussed a deficiency of communication of policies, especially regarding the university-wide Diversity Action Plan, which a majority of participants stated they were unaware of any plans over the last decade. Chapter Five provides further interpretation on the findings and how institutional DEI efforts promote or hinder URM staff retention.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

While higher education institutions pronounce their commitments to establishing DEI efforts practices among their campuses, very little research has focused on the individuals carrying out those institutional commitments, which are professional staff. For many, the lack of acknowledgement or recognition of professional staff members as contributors to the institution's mission, vision, and values leave this workforce population essentially invisible. The exclusion of professional staff in DEI efforts also merits the question of whether retention for these individuals is considered a priority for the institution. In order for a campus to truly make progress towards successful outcomes pertaining to DEI, professional staff need to be equally recognized as an important entity of the institution and included in these efforts.

This study identified two specific problems. First, a perceived lack of consideration of professional staff within DEI efforts and, second, the impact this lack of inclusion has on staff retention. The purpose of this research was to explore how institutional DEI efforts impact the professional experiences of URM staff and influences their retention by considering the following research questions:

- 1) Are higher education institutions inclusive of URM staff in their campus' DEI efforts?
How?
- 2) Do institutional DEI efforts promote or hinder URM staff retention?

Research on professional staff, especially URM professional staff, is notably absent from present understandings of higher education. As such, my research aimed to document the lived experiences of URM professional staff in higher education to better recognize, understand, and support this population of employees. The findings of my study aim to be a significant venture in promoting the importance of the professional staff role and highlighting the need for higher

education institutions to be actively inclusive of URM professional staff in their DEI vision, mission, values, and goals. This study seeks only benefit both higher education organizations, and URM individuals in the staff population. By understanding the needs of URM professional staff and what promotes or hinders their retention, higher education organizations can incorporate this study's findings to implement policies and practices that strengthen their ability to retain a diverse workforce. More importantly, this study highlights the opportunity for universities and colleges to be holistically inclusive of their entire campus community.

My study looked at URM professional staff in relation to institutional DEI efforts and staff's perceptions and experiences on being included in those efforts. To do this, I conducted a qualitative study that included document analysis and semi-structured interviews. This chapter provides a summary and discussion on how this study's findings answered the research questions above. I'll discuss the research findings, which include four key themes:

Theme 1: Climate of Symbolic Inclusion

Theme 2: Seen, But Not Heard: Retention and Recruitment

Theme 3: Lack of Communication

Theme 4: Accountability for DEI Efforts

This chapter concludes with an analysis of the implications for practice and policy in higher education and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

This section discusses how each theme contributes to prior research and theories discussed in the literature review presented in Chapter 2. The discussion of each theme provides background to the recommendations that are later presented in this chapter.

Theme 1: Climate of Symbolic Inclusion

Bean's Model of Work Turnover suggested that social integration increases an employee's commitment to their institution. Sachau's (2007) study on motivation-hygiene theory supports this concept stating that an employee's work experiences often have an influence on their willingness and desire to stay with an employer. As such, the document analysis of my study searched for key concepts related to social integration. Factors of social integration mostly appeared within the university's written goal to foster a welcoming environment for diverse communities that was heavily mentioned throughout the document analysis. Actions that were outlined to meet this goal included organizational variables from the theoretical framework such as leisure activities, peer culture, regulation of life/work duties and memberships on campus organizations and committees. As a reminder, the goal and importance of a welcoming environment was made in response to initial campus survey results, that detailed URM professional staff perceived a less supportive campus climate than their non-URM peers. Over a decade after the initial results were gathered, many participants from this most recent study expressed similar perceptions and experiences, indicating that the campus still severely struggles with their intentions of social integration and a welcoming environment.

Findings from this study support prior research on the effects of social integration on campus communities. Previous studies include, such as Thomas and Hanson's (2014), *"Developing Social Integration to Enhance Student Retention and Success in Higher Education,"* and Wilcox et al.'s 2005 study titled, *"It was Nothing to do with the university, it was Just the People: The Role of Social Support in the First-Year Experience of Higher Education.* These studies, which primarily focused on student populations, stated that having peer connections, such as friendships, on campus provided direct emotional support similar to

that provided by family relationships. Additionally, these relationships act as a buffer in stressful situations. The findings from my research expand these concepts by suggesting that this is also the case for campus staff, specifically those who identify as a URM. Study participants who provided positive experiences discussed dedicated support from their department by colleagues and leadership and stated this support created a family environment. However, to recall, the only participants who explicitly provided positive experiences about their supervisor and leadership were employed in one department, indicating these efforts were isolated to a single unit.

In comparison, those who did not experience the same supportive environment within their department provided a different perspective that shed light on the effects of a lack of social integration. These effects included feeling excluded and an unawareness throughout the campus of the policies and culture. In a 1982 study titled, *The Management of Academic Culture: Notes on the Management of Meaning and Social Integration*, Dill argues that “academic institutions possess distinctive cultures, which are developed and sustained by identifiable actions of the community members” (p 304) essentially saying that campus cultures are reflected through its community members. An example from my study shared one single department that was identified as successful in developing and sustaining a culture of social integration, which was achieved by the identifiable actions of department leadership. This, in turn, influenced staff to perform the same identifiable actions. However, Dill’s claim could also be interpreted that a lack of actions results in a lack of campus culture. My study’s findings strongly support this claim as shown through the statements of varied commitments toward DEI efforts and the lack of cohesion on campus.

Additionally relating to Dill’s claim, there is some indication, as mentioned by a few study participants that the campus culture towards DEI must first be implemented by the

leadership. The campus administration is responsible for establishing the foundation that would support institutional claims of its commitment to DEI in order to develop a campus culture where the entire community is invested. However, staff who had experiences of a lack of social integration expressed a general deficiency of identifiable actions by leadership that would lead to developing, much less, sustaining, a distinctive culture.

Dill emphasizes in his study that it is the community members of the campus who create the culture within their environment. My study suggests that community members are limited if there is no support from leadership indicating the importance towards an identified culture. The inverse to Dill's statement can also be inferred, in that if campus community members do not have the support actively create a culture of social integration, cohesive campus communities are not developed, and distinctive cultures are much less likely to occur. This study also highlights the consequences when there is a lack of a distinctive culture established. The research site's goals indicate that it has attempted to establish a welcoming environment for over a decade, however, campus climate surveys and participant statements, which collectively span over that same decade, show that a number of participants felt they were excluded from DEI efforts based on perceptions of a lack of connectedness to the campus and an environment that is "not cohesive" when it comes to genuine DEI efforts, thus exemplifying a lack of a distinctive culture. This disconnect throughout the campus created barriers to feeling supported, whether emotionally or professionally. Many participants in this study stated the disconnect often contributed to severely stressful situations.

These findings support Dill's study while incorporating this study's theoretical framework as it shows the effects of how a lack of social integration creates significant barriers to developing a distinctive culture. Findings from my study express that departmental staff are

reliant on their leaders to create and foster a DEI-friendly culture as individual staff cannot be the only ones responsible for DEI since it requires cohesive efforts. If leadership does not place emphasis or importance on DEI efforts, staff may be limited in their engagement towards it. I argue that the feelings of disconnect expressed by individuals in this study is a result of a lack of community and that lack of community provides an inability to develop and sustain identifiable actions towards DEI efforts.

More importantly, while URM professional staff are named in every goal of establishing a welcoming environment, participants described that most DEI efforts carried out were mainly 'performative.' A study conducted by Wilson, Meyer, & McNeil (2012) defined 'performative' as supporting a cosmetic desire for inclusion. Their findings indicated that performative approaches only served to make the university appear inclusive but did not illustrate a true commitment to students of color. In their research, they concluded that a large percentage of institutions in their sampling made no mention about diversity in their mission and diversity statements, which indicated that diversity was not a priority for those institutions. On the contrary, my study examined a campus that named DEI as a top priority in their mission and diversity statements. Within the documents, the university stated its commitment to create effective institutional responses to events that affect diverse communities. However, information from the interviews suggested that despite these statements, the campus still acted in a performative manner, especially in actions meant to acknowledge DEI efforts. Interviewees reported that any actions that were taken did not result in a change in the environment and were not often acted out of genuine interest. Participants who shared this perception stated the lack of actions and responses were seen as a method of ignoring these situations on campus. This ultimately resulted in staff feeling vulnerable at their own place of work and URM staff in

particular, feeling unsafe, unheard, and unseen throughout their own campus. My study shows that even if mentioned in institutional mission and diversity statements, this alone does not provide a welcoming environment.

Lastly, this study acknowledged the action steps listed under the goal of a welcoming environment included diversity programming, affinity groups, and resources that address evolving diversity trends and issues as they arise. Despite this explicit goal, many participants in my study stated no change in the culture. This supports earlier research that programming has been ineffective as many feel these efforts are performative and, thus, ineffectual towards changing the campus culture. A study conducted by Davidson and Wilson (2014) concluded that adding programs or clubs are not effective without the intention of building a culture of relationships or a campus-wide belief that DEI is a priority and is centered throughout the institutional vision, mission, values, and goals. They further this statement by adding that leaders must assess the needs of students at their institution with the goal of understanding unique needs. Only then, the authors argue, can campus leaders even begin to build relationships based on their college's unique characteristics.

My study reflected Davidson and Wilson's statements and provided examples of how a welcoming environment is pronounced in institutional publications and actions towards programming that are set in place to create such an environment. While my study's findings expose a disconnect in the relationship between staff and administration, these findings also contribute additional evidence that support Davidson and Wilson's (2014) remarks around assessing needs of the community. Based on the participant interviews, administration has attempted to assess staff needs by disseminating climate surveys, but when results were gathered there was no acknowledgement of staff's feedback or their shared needs, which was said to cause

further strain on the relationship between administration and staff. This lack of relationship created a barrier to establishing beliefs that developed the basis of a campus culture, such as the importance of DEI. This is emphasized in situations where URM members feel ignored and unheard, thus, showing a campus culture that does not prioritize DEI.

Theme 2: Seen, But Not Heard: Retention and Recruitment

Recruitment

Prior research on higher education hiring, which include Prebble et al. (2004), Smith et al. (2004), Gasman, Kim, and Nguyen (2011), only focuses on faculty. This was also reflected in my study as evidenced by the first Diversity Action Plan of 2010-2014, wherein the goal of attracting and retaining a diverse work force primarily focused their efforts and attention on faculty and excluded staff in the details despite naming them in the broader recruitment goal. Many of the prior studies named above provided suggestions that could be utilized towards staff recruitment and attracting a diverse staff applicant pool. For example, practices such as incorporating diversity descriptors and goals in job announcements (Smith et al., 2004), using strategically-placed advertising in targeted journals and list-servs (Gasman, Kim, & Nguyen, 2011), and recruitment through personalized networks (Gasman et al., 2011) could be replicated to the staff workforce.

Additionally, these practices could be implemented with minimal additional work if they were already being carried out for faculty recruitment. In my study, the document analysis provided evidence that goals to increase recruitment opportunities for a diverse staff workforce exist, however, there is nothing shared about specific practices the university planned to implement to meet these goals. The only action step discussed in the goal was to analyze yearly data on hiring to update its current hiring practices but this still does not provide specific

information on programs, policies, or goals that the university plan to instill. The university did, however, acknowledge the lack of specific action steps taken in the documents and acknowledged a difficulty in accessing current demographic data on campus faculty and staff throughout all campuses in the university system.

Study participants echoed concerns and unawareness of any specific programs, policies, or goals related to diversifying the staff applicant pool. Despite this, many interviewees noticed an increase of diverse applicants over the previous years. Some attributed this to occurring ‘naturally’ or just ‘happening,’ while some believe this is a result of diverse student populations. My interpretation of the latter possibility can be contextualized by three possible reasons. These reasons are based off a prior study by Smith and Schonfeld (2000) that discussed the benefits of diversity and argued that “sometimes, the very existence of ethnic groups on campus provides a basis for alliances across campus ethnic groups and provides people with a base of support from which to become more actively engaged on campus” (p. 19). The same argument could be made for diversity amongst the staff workforce.

The first possible reason I propose is it may be that job applicants might view an institution with a diverse student population as indicative of a welcoming environment with alliances and support already established from not only an administration who supports these students, but also possible support from the student populations as well. Second, job applicants may research the student population and feel more comfortable on a campus that has larger populations representation of their own identities. Adding to Smith and Schonfeld’s (2020) study, Hurtado et al. (2008) discussed that students who attend desegregated institutions will likely have fewer stereotypes to combat and are less fearful on an interracial campus, which would allow them to express greater satisfaction with their college settings. Again, Hurtado’s

findings could also be applicable to staff, who may find an interracial campus more appealing to work at.

Lastly, the third reason could be that students graduating from the institution often apply for positions at their campus, thus, having a highly diverse student population would result in a highly diverse applicant pool for those that attempt to pursue employment within their alma mater. While a study conducted by Sivak and Yudkevich (2009) was focused on faculty, it addresses that the pattern of hiring institutional alumni has been a practice for a substantial period of time citing that these alumni have insight on what they perceive as the cultural norms of the campus. Their experiences as a student may be part of the attraction to stay beyond their academic career (Sivak & Yudkevich, 2009). Participants in this study indicated a strong representation of alumni who contributed to the diverse applicant pool.

Beyond a diverse applicant pool, a notable concern arose. Participants shared that despite having more diversity among those applying for various positions, there were significant issues when it came to the actual hiring practices. Study participants stated the processes were a barrier to diversifying the actual workforce on campus. A previous study by Fujii (2010) stated although college search committees have the opportunity to publicly claim they value diversity, they often engage in practices that are incongruent to such claims. More importantly, Fujii's (2010) study concluded failure to address search committee members' implicit biases result in no change to the process or environment. My study provided further support in Fujii's claims that values, beliefs, and behaviors are key factors that affect hiring practices. As some interviewees stated, there are often gaps that occur between the hiring committee and the individual who makes the final decision for who is hired, making it difficult for many to have trust in the hiring process. Study participants shared inequities they believed were due to a large variance among

individuals and their personal beliefs on the importance of expanding opportunities to recruit diverse candidates.

Retention

As discovered from the literature review, prior research on the influence that institutional DEI efforts have on URM staff employment retention is very limited. My study serves as a contribution to the field of research specifically on URM professionals and their retention. Of the few studies available that discuss URM employee experiences after hiring, one key theme presented is the absence of official policies, procedures and strategies that address retention of URM staff (Webster, 2019; Liera, 2020). In Webster's (2019) research study, participants that shared that they received strong encouragement from upper administrators to emphasize on diversity, yet there was an absence of written guidelines and policies.

My study supports the findings in Webster's (2019) research on a lack of official guidelines and policies. The findings from my study showed that while university documents emphasized retention as a prioritized goal of the institution, action steps that had been mentioned specifically toward retention of staff are minimal throughout the years. In 2010, the institution acknowledged that URM retention goals had not been met. Furthermore, documents published afterwards failed to provide updates of any changes to these stated retention goals. Action steps toward the goal of retention that are provided in the documents, such as creating opportunities that support professional development for staff, providing cultural responsiveness training, and monitoring advancement of URM staff, seem to be areas URM staff perceived as ineffective. Many interview participants stated that they were not even aware these steps were part of any goals based on the data from their interviews. While these action steps may present as ways administration placed importance and support of DEI, they lacked explicit guidelines related to

how staff are meant to learn about and engage with offerings which imitates similar statements shared through Webster's (2019) study.

There is one significant contrast between my study's findings and that of Webster's (2019), which is the perception of encouragement and support from upper administration. While Webster's participants shared experiences of strong support, the majority of staff members interviewed in my study expressed the opposite, stating that upper administration made many individuals feel unvalued and unrecognized on campus. Two participants in my study would agree with Webster's research, stating that they received great encouragement and support on DEI efforts. However, they indicated that those experiences were the result of strong leaders within their specific department who take on the roles and responsibilities of ensuring DEI efforts are successful.

The majority of the other participants in my study shared feelings of a great disconnect between staff and administrators, which heavily contributed to staff's perceptions of being unvalued. Additionally, many expressed the campus did not provide proper support or resources to URM staff. This point is significant to make. Throughout this study, one underlying conclusion found is that written policies, procedures, and strategies to retain staff bear no weight if there is no active support, whether financial or programmatic, seen from administration that would indicate institutional commitment towards the written statements. This reiterates the findings from several past studies that point out leaders not only need to create diversity goals, but need to advocate for employee diversity, and train staff, faculty, and administration on the specific issues racially minoritized employees encounter in the workplace (Bensimon, 2007; Turner, Gonzalez and Wood, 2008).

Another theme exposed from earlier studies on URM employee experiences was that of additional responsibilities and pressures URM staff carry based on being underrepresented (Salesho & Naile, 2014; Webster, 2019; Liera, 2020). In these studies, URM expressed concerns of working twice as hard as their white counterparts, fatigue from carrying the responsibility of transforming organizational cultures from predominantly white cultures to being more inclusive, feeling tasked with representing all people of color at their institution and being tokenized. This theme was also presented throughout my research study, producing the exact same vocabulary as in earlier studies, such as “fatigue,” “burden,” “working twice as hard,” “increased workload,” and “tokenized representation.” Adding to prior studies, participants from my research also indicated emotional burdens, such as being expected to represent all URM student populations or serve in additional roles not directly tied to their primary job role, such as staff advisors for specific minority groups, and experiencing micro-aggressions and racism that go unresolved are all contributors to these additional burdens.

Findings from my study’s theme of ‘Seen, but not Heard,’ also support Milem’s 2001 research study, which concluded “simply admitting more minority students does not produce the substantial changes to obtain the full benefits of diversity” (p. 234). It is important to point out Milem’s study only focused on students. My research furthers this prior study’s scope beyond student diversity by expanding it to URM professional staff, indicating this statement is applicable throughout the entire campus community. It reiterates that hiring more URM employees does not just automatically benefit the campus or produce substantial changes, especially when those employees experience feeling unheard via a lack of recognition, feeling undervalued by peers and by administration, lack of resources, and other additional burdens that are

placed on URM professional staff, all of which were named as hinderances to URM staff retention.

New Considerations on Retention

Finally, in relation to this theme, my research study also discovered new factors URM professional staff retention that had not been discussed in prior studies. First is the act of hiring external consultants. Second, the detailed perceptions towards a lack of resources. These two highlights directly related to the theoretical framework of Bean's Model of Work Turnover, particularly on participation in decision-making and professional development and curriculum.

Participation in Decision-Making

Two prior studies provided insight on the importance of decision-making, Thibaut and Walker (1975) and Witt (1991). These studies identified two distinct forms of participation: a) choice, which indicates that a participant has some level of control over the outcome, and b) voice, which indicates the level a participant feels they can articulate their interest to the decision-maker and can include influence over defining the problem, collecting information bearing on the decision, and identifying alternatives. My findings reveal that the hiring of consultants heavily affected individual's participation in decision-making by taking away both a staff member's choice and voice.

Participants shared that they feel there is little control they when the institution hired consultants. Moreso, participants shared that the hiring of consultants predicted, an outcome of nothing happening or changing in regard to DEI efforts based on their history of experiences on the campus. Hiring consultants was seen as a performative act that allowed administration to check the box and say they are taking action on improving campus efforts, especially when nothing has changed within the campus culture after consultants leave.

Professional Development and Curriculum

The lack of resources strongly affected professional development and curriculum mentioned within the documents as important means to support retention and advancement. As a reminder, curriculum, in this study, referred to the availability of trainings, classes, and workshops that were considered desirable to URM professional staff. The university documents stated their desire to offer staff more opportunities of professional development and build intellectual communities that addressed and enhanced staff knowledge and skills around DEI. However, participants shared most of the trainings made available to them were focused on how to best support students and did not provide any reciprocated focus on the individuals who do the work and identify with the same demographics as these students. Similar sentiments were also shared by study participants on the lack of opportunity for professional advancement and growth, which has ultimately led to the departure of many staff members. Throughout the interviews, budgeting and unstable funding were cited as the reason behind the less than robust opportunities for professional development as well as the opportunities for professional growth. The issue of a lack of financial support was also evidenced in the 2018-2019 Annual Report in a statement regarding permanent funding for certain staff positions. Interview participants also cited financial support as a barrier to retention when staff made decisions to leave the institution based on better opportunities for compensation. These considerations highlight new information that can enhance institutional understanding on URM staff retention. Later in this chapter, I provide suggestions that incorporate these new findings.

Theme 3: Lack of Communication

An emerging theme from my study on URM staff retention was the significant lack of communication around DEI policies. Nearly all study participants indicated concerns and

frustrations toward ineffective and inconsistent communication practices throughout their campus. Collectively, experiences were shared of one-way communication coming from the top-down in the form of mass emails or campus-wide ‘Town Hall’ meetings, which were described more as report-outs from leadership to the campus community. Since this theme was not considered prior to the document analysis and semi-structured interviews portion of my research study, a supplemental literature review on organizational communication was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the prior research that has been produced. Specifically, I located studies centered on higher education communication

In agreeance with earlier discussions in my dissertation on the theoretical framework, several past studies show communication is a significant factor to staff retention and attrition. An article on enhanced organizational communication written by McConnel (2011) expressed a direct relationship between organizational communication and employees’ willingness to remain with their employer. The article suggests that “employees generally want to feel a part of the organization and be treated as though they matter within the organization’s goals- that they are partners and participants rather than servants” (p. 281).

A more recent study from 2021 focused on communication strategies specifically within higher education institutions around the COVID-19 pandemic. The study suggested that “communicating complex issues to diverse audiences is more challenging than ever before” (p.7). Along those lines, Calonge et al. (2021) directed a focus to staff and stated institutions need to ensure staff members are “regularly and accurately informed of the situation, feel engaged, and listened to” in order to avoid what another research study by Palttala & Vos (2012) termed as a “vacuum of communication,” defined as the situation when staff feel forced to identify necessary and relevant information the organization failed to provide often on their own.

Related to these past findings, another study conducted by Narayan et al. (2018), provided further explanation on the possible root of the problem around communication. Their research identified a link specifically between poor communication and job satisfaction. In their study they state, “ineffective communication channels between leadership and staff drive the knowledge and information gap” (p. 8). One example used that portrayed this was the common occurrence of poor communication on policy changes from higher levels of leadership. Participants in their study shared policy changes often seemed ad hoc as opposed to part of an organized system of communication where information was regularly conveyed. Participants from my research study expressed the exact same environment, which mirrored one defined in the “vacuum of communication” and highlighted sentiments toward a knowledge and information gap. One specification that should be made is that although it appears administration believes their methods of providing information through mass emails and campus-wide report out meetings, the “vacuum” in this situation lies more on having to identify what is “necessary” information and how is it “relevant.” Based on the interviews, what the research site in my study failed in was not emphasizing the information shared *is* necessary and *how* it is relevant to their role, them as an individual, and relevant as part of the campus community. This exemplified that the previous study’s findings on difficulties of communications sent to a diverse audience in a mass email.

Another finding from Narayan et al.’s (2018) study is the “lack of clarity of policies has led to confusion and inconsistent implementation” (p. 6). On many higher education campuses, official policies decided at higher levels had not been disseminated to the staff who would be expected to implement the policy. This was especially the case for changes to existing policies and programs, creating confusion and inconsistency. Narayan et al. (2018) proposed that policy

ambiguity leads to inconsistent, and often inequitable, implementation on the ground. Their study also points out the “absence of accurate information fuels conjecture, speculation, and disenchantment” (p. 6) explaining that when there is a lack of information, inaccurate assumptions are often made.

These same concerns were strongly presented in my research study by the majority of the interview participants. This provided further evidence toward the importance of communication as it could have detrimental consequences. For example, my study concluded that emails sent out to a large group can often allow individuals to feel that it is not directed specifically toward them specifically, creating the vacuum of communication. This, itself, had the potential for allowing many individuals to avoid any additional duties to their roles that they not find importance or with which there was no connection. Another example pulled from my study’s findings that tie to Narayan et al.’s (2018) study regarded the absence of accurate information. The absence of any action plan or following steps served as a reason to why mass communications were often ignored.

One last study I will draw attention to on the topic of communication is that of Muindi (2011) who highlighted the necessity for two-way communication channels. In their study, the absence of effective two-way communication was found to exacerbate confusion among the campus. This concern was also brought up in the interview findings in my study. Most of the problems perceived were due to participants experiencing only a one-way communication method, which left them to unheard as it created a barrier to for them to provide feedback. My research findings strongly concurred that instrumental communication needs to be viewed as a two-way communication system, otherwise, it is ineffective.

One-way communication was also seen as a detriment to one's participation in decision-making. Muindi (2011) stated in his research that one-way communication often occurred when those in authority make isolated decisions that affect an entire department or program. Findings from my study support Muindi's and provided additional examples towards the ineffectiveness of one-way communication. My study concludes that the lack of communication is viewed as a hinderance to staff retention. It has been established that when instrumental communication is missing or limited, an individual's level of job satisfaction is much lower.

Theme 4: Accountability for DEI Efforts

Changing an entire campus culture cannot be the responsibility of any singular department. Yet, this seems to be the unspoken expectation from administration through the ranks of many on the campus. In an earlier chapter of my dissertation, I asked a question of reflection, "Who does the DEI work on university and college campuses?" My aim was to describe the roles and responsibilities that many URM professional staff members take on. I referenced that DEI work was primarily focused on to establishing a welcoming environment for students. The research I conducted resulted in expanding the scope of this question. My original focus of who does DEI work shifted to include those staff responsible and accountable to not only the students, but to their fellow colleagues on campus. It is easier to identify who is responsible for ensuring a welcoming environment for students. As a higher education professional, I argue that if you were to inquire with anyone on campus, you would likely get an answer that it is everyone's role and responsibility to foster such an environment that makes students feel welcome. However, if you were to ask higher education colleagues whose responsibility it is to foster an environment for the campus staff, you would have varied answers,

as seen in the interviews that concluded varied levels of commitment and ideas of who should be doing or overseeing the work to incorporate staff in the goals of a welcoming environment.

In an article by Parker (2020), they stated that Chief Diversity Officers are often tasked with enacting and navigating institutional change through the development of diversity-centered initiatives, culturally responsive programs, and effectual relationships. My study reflected this and suggested that the majority of the campus expected the work to fall on the DEI office and didn't see it as the responsibility for the campus as a whole. Participants highlighted that placing the entire responsibility to enact an institutional shift on one department, more so one individual, remained to be an unrealistic expectation.

Several other studies stated institutions who provided events and programming that allowed underrepresented populations to engage and connect with one another provided essential institutional support to this population and showed the institution's commitment to their success (Henry, 2010; San Antonio, 2015). My study not only agrees with these prior studies, but it further expands the notion of what institutional support should mean. Support needs be shown throughout the entire institutional rather than just a representative of the institution, which is often the DEI office. This also means that the commitment needs to come from the entire institution, as opposed to one office on campus.

Most relevant to my research is a recent study by Yi et al. (2022) that specifically discusses the complication behind the idea of diversity centers as symbols of commitment from the institution. In their multi-campus study, diversity centers were found to play a central, symbolic role on each campus, which suggested a level of commitment to the institutional DEI agendas. The study mentions that while the centers symbolized institutional efforts to address racism, there was a lack of clarity on "how the diversity center and its functions fit into the

organizational structure and decision-making to constructively address racism and transform the campus toward a more inclusive and equitable culture” (p. 9). The findings from my study contribute to these exact same sentiments and support this recent research study by adding that the perceptions of DEI efforts being solely carried out by one department allowed other units and departments across the campus to be less accountable for these efforts, highlighting the ambiguity of the organizational structure and roles and responsibilities on a department level.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion of this research study, I make the following practice-based recommendations that include real-world applications and suggestions. These suggestions involve improvements, changes, and expansions to organizational practices and policies.

Implementation of a two-way communication plan. Perhaps, the most important reoccurring problem throughout this study was that the current methods of communication did not work on this research site. Therefore, a primary recommendation is to establish and implement a two-way communication plan that is specific to each campus of the institution. This communication plan should specifically aim to incorporate concerted feedback mechanisms that emphasize routine follow-up from all community members and must be developed with the intention of improving the culture on campus. Additionally, the communication plan should assess who is participating in the conversations, who is not, and determine why in order to make improvements based on audience preferences. The overall focus of the communication plan should be to ensure the campus is regularly and accurately informed and engaged with the communication.

Define what is meant by the term “welcoming environment.” Throughout the study, there was a lack of definition within the goal of a welcoming environment to help determine what was even considered to be a “welcoming environment” and, also, what deters the campus from providing a supportive climate. It is recommended that campuses assess staff needs in order to not only create a welcoming environment but define what they consider and need as a welcoming environment. I strongly suggest that administrators, departmental leadership, and staff throughout the campus must assess the current environment and identify gaps leading to their intended environmental goals. Rather than utilizing best practices or studies on what other campuses have found successful, finding out what is specific to your campus, your staff, your community, can only be determined by getting feedback from staff. Feedback could be gathered through routine campus climate surveys with the intent to provide a timeline of addressing issues identified from the responses.

Enhance efforts for social integration. Identify what current methods are being employed on the campus that encourage social integration and assess whether these methods contribute to developing the desired culture on campus. Identify approaches relevant to the culture demonstrate intentionality behind the goals of social integration in relation to creating and sustaining a welcoming environment outlined above.

Assess the needs of professional staff throughout the campus. To address the disconnect between staff and administrators, administrators and department leaders must assess the needs of staff in order to build relationships that would close the gaps in the current relationships. This also includes the recommendation to intentionally make efforts to collect demographic data of campus staff, with particular attention to URM staff, and continue updating

data to remain knowledgeable to the current environment. In addition, inquire about professional development opportunities that are indicated as a need or interest by identified by staff.

Discontinue the hiring of external consultants for DEI efforts without the engagement of staff throughout the process. As staff have mentioned in this study, the hiring of external consultants communicates a lack of administration's understanding of the talent that is present among the professional staff already employed on the campus. Specifically for DEI efforts, institutions should refrain from hiring consultants without the input and full engagement of staff, preferably before, and certainly throughout, the process of hiring consultants intentionally enable staff to be heard and contribute their insight and experiences towards the situation that needs to be addressed. Ensure staff have the opportunity to participate in decision-making often and in multiple ways.

Establish and pronounce organizational beliefs to better orient the campus. This recommendation includes a culmination of the earlier recommendations regarding a robust communication plan that engages the entire campus community as well as defining a welcoming environment. This recommendation emphasizes the consideration that towards change the culture to a more inclusive and equitable one, campuses need to provide professional development that is centered on identifying individual's beliefs and values with a focus on cultural competency with the intention to connect individual's beliefs with the institution.

Establish written policies, procedures, and programs on hiring and retention. An initial recommendation I considered before completing this study was to establish written DEI policies, procedures, and programs on recruitment and retention that specifically outline the hiring goals and practices. I emphasize that these need to move beyond the stated goals in Diversity Action Plans. While I believe this is still necessary in order to provide clarification,

definition, and pathways, it is more important that campuses commit to these goals and need to accompany the written guidelines with support and follow-up from leadership in order to have any written policies be successful and meaningful on the campus. The development of guidelines and policies needs to have its own communication plan that entails actions, follow-up, measurements, and opportunities for the campus to engage and provide feedback.

Robust training on hiring practices. As part of establishing written policies, procedures, and programs, campuses must also create common hiring practices that emphasize institution's DEI efforts and offer comprehensive training on such practices through wide-spread, intentional efforts. Strong communication and consistent messaging on the value of diversity along with the intent to disrupt the conventional hiring practices that have traditionally used on campus should be conveyed. Similar to what was stated above in the recommendation of professional development, current hiring practices should also include training on implicit bias, values, beliefs, and behaviors. These trainings, at a minimum, should focus on efforts toward making transformational change grounded in equity that are specific to the hiring process, comparing the differences between older hiring practices in comparison to the direction of the newer hiring practices also provides better understanding of the differences and methods the campus is moving away from.

Identify retention methods specific to campus. As this study's initial focus, it is important to highlight that retention needs to be considered from the initial hire of an individual. The above recommendations all contribute to the culminating recommendation towards identifying what the specific campus needs in order to show intentionality behind retention of URM professional staff.

Conclusion

This study emphasized various organizational factors that provided insight of URM professional staff perspectives. Findings from this study shared a disconnect between the institutional goals and the perceived realities as told through staff's lived experiences. The organizational factors, as offered through Bean's Model of Work Turnover, also indicate varied reasons that impact URM staff employee retention. As an under-researched population, this study contributed to the field of research by providing novel findings that not only highlighting URM professional staff and their necessary roles within higher education, but also provide a voice to their experiences of exclusion on campus. The recommendations in this chapter will hopefully guide higher education institutions towards establishing a welcoming environment inclusive of URM professional staff.

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APPENDIX A

Invitation to Participate

Good morning,

My name is Arlyn Palomo. I am a former professional staff member of UWT and a doctoral candidate in Oregon State University's Adult and Higher Education program. I am recruiting participants for interviews as part of my doctoral research on retention of underrepresented minority (URM) professional staff in higher education.

Your name was provided as someone who may be interested in participating in this study.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Participants will be ensured anonymity throughout the study and identities will be protected through the researchers' efforts to keep participation confidential. The interview is expected to be 60-90 minutes long and can take place where participants are most comfortable (in office, off-site or via an online method such as Zoom or Teams).

The questions involved will be related to their perceptions of campus Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts and individual experiences as a URM professional staff. These insights are valuable in better understanding how higher education institutions can build capacity to retain a diverse workforce and can assist in promoting the importance of the various professional staff roles throughout campuses.

For those interested in participating, please fill out this participant interest form or email me, Arlyn Palomo, directly (palomoar@oregonstate.edu). I can answer any questions and will also schedule the interviews.

Interview Participant Form: [redacted]

Please do not hesitate to give me a call if you have any clarifying questions.

Thank you in advance for your consideration,

Best,

Arlyn T. Palomo
Doctoral Candidate
Oregon State University, School of Education

APPENDIX B

Interview Intake Form

Underrepresented Minority Professional Staff Research: Interview Participation

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Participants will be ensured anonymity throughout the study and identities will be protected through the researchers' efforts to keep participation confidential. The interview is expected to be 60-90 minutes long and can take place where participants are most comfortable (in office, off-site or via an online method such as Zoom or Teams).

The questions involved will be related to their perceptions of campus Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts and individual experiences as a URM professional staff. These insights are valuable in better understanding how higher education institutions can build capacity to retain a diverse workforce and can assist in promoting the importance of the various professional staff roles throughout campuses.

Study Title: Does Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Include Everyone? A Phenomenological Case Study of Underrepresented Minority Professional Staff in Higher Education

Contact Arlyn Palomo at palomoar@oregonstate.edu if you have any questions about this research study.

- Name:* (Your identity will not be used in the research findings)
- E-Mail:*
- Alternative E-mail:
- Do you identify with an ethnically underrepresented minority group?* (Please mark all applicable to you)
 - African-American
 - Asian
 - Hispanic/Latino
 - Native American/Alaskan Native
 - Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
 - Undisclosed
- Are you a professional staff member by definition of “staff not considered faculty and/or not employed under academic contracts”?*
 - Yes
 - No

- Please identify which area of Student Services your job role entails* (Please mark all applicable to you)
 - Academic Advising
 - Admissions
 - Enrollment Services/Registrar
 - Financial Aid
 - Student Life
 - Student Transitions
 - Student Success
 - Veteran/Military Services

- How long have you worked at [the research site]*
 - 1-2 Years
 - 3-5 Years
 - 6-10 Years
 - 11-15 Years

**indicates an answer was required*

APPENDIX C

Interview Script

Thank you for meeting with me today. As per the interview consent form, this interview will be recorded for the purpose of transcribing our discussion and this recording, along with your participation in this interview will not be shared with anyone other than myself. So if it's okay with you, I'd like to begin recording?

I sincerely want to thank you for participating in this study. The research conducted on professional staff within higher education is limited and this study will add not only to the field of research, but will also hopefully provide higher education institutions insight on how to support underrepresented minority professional staff.

The structure of this interview is meant to be open-ended and there is not necessarily a list of pre-determined questions that we have to go through. My main objective is to hear your perspectives and experiences as a URM staff. This is based on what you feel is important to share.

The scope of this interview is on the institution's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusionary practices and how it considers (or does not consider) professional staff members. As a starting question:

- Do you feel included in your campus's/institution's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts as a staff member?
 - If so, how do you feel included? If not, how do you feel excluded? Could you provide examples?
- Do you feel that your campus/institution makes a concerted effort in retaining professional staff employees?
 - If so, how? Do you have examples?
- Do you feel that your campus/institution makes a concerted effort in retaining URM professional staff employees?
 - If so, how? Do you have examples?

Other possible topics/Themes from document analysis:

- DEI documents/statements mostly focus on faculty, but not staff
- How are URM included in DEI?
 - University Services/Programs: Are there programs/initiatives within the institution focused on diverse staff hiring?
 - Are there programs/initiatives within your institution that focus on retention of URM staff?
 - How are policies communicated throughout your institution? (diversity blueprint, trainings, etc)

- How would you describe the peer culture towards DEI work within your campus?
- Participation in decision-making of DEI efforts

Lastly, is there anyone else that you may know of that I should reach out to to invite them for an interview?

APPENDIX D

Interview Participant Consent Form

Does Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Include Everyone? A Phenomenological Case Study of Underrepresented Minority Professional Staff in Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Bach Mai Dolly Nguyen

Study Investigator: Arlyn T. Palomo

Study Purpose

You are consenting to participate in a research study on campus efforts of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) on underrepresented minority (URM) professional staff. The purpose of this research is to explore how institutional DEI efforts impact the professional experiences of URM staff and influences their retention.

For this part of the study, you consent to participate in one in-person interview with one researcher. This interview will take between sixty and ninety minutes at a convenient meeting location determined by you or through an online platform (i.e. Zoom or Teams), and will ask questions about your views and perspectives on inclusion in your institution's DEI efforts. Examples of the types of questions that may be asked in the interview include:

- Do you feel included in your campus's/institution's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts as a staff member?
 - If so, how do you feel included? If not, how do you feel excluded? Could you provide examples?
- Do you feel that your campus/institution makes a concerted effort in retaining professional staff employees?
 - If so, how? Do you have examples?
- Do you feel that your campus/institution makes a concerted effort in retaining URM professional staff employees?
 - If so, how? Do you have examples?

Risk

Aspects of the study may ask you to reflect on your views and perspectives about your institution/employer, your racial or ethnic identity, and your employment and professional experiences. While the researcher is committed to confidentiality and protecting your identity, there is the possibility that in small organizations or communities, the researcher cannot guarantee that your peers may find out that you are participating. No individual data, however, will be reported and the researcher will not share your individual results during or after the project to anyone. If you would like to further understand how your confidentiality will be preserved, you can contact the Study Investigator, Arlyn Palomo, at (360) 556-.0163.

Benefit

Your participation benefits the field of research on professional staff. In addition, it may benefit your employer institution as it will lend insight to how the organization can better support URM professional staff and strengthen the institution's ability to retain a diverse workforce.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is voluntary. You may terminate your involvement in the study for any reason without penalty, and your withdrawal would have no bearing on your community/professional standing as a community member/leader/institutional staff. You may also decline to answer any question asked of you, and by doing so will not be required to terminate your involvement in the study. Your decision of whether or not to participate in this research group will not affect the benefits and assistance to which you otherwise have access to in your relationship with your organization.

Questions

The researcher is willing to answer any questions you might have before or after you have participated in the study. However, the researcher may delay answering questions regarding the findings of the study until after the project has been completed.

Confidentiality

No individual data will be reported and the researcher will not share your individual participation during or after the project to anyone. Pseudonyms will be used in the place of your real name and data collected for this research study will be coded to protect your identity in this study. Audio recordings of these interviews will be deleted after the transcription of the data. You permit publication of the results of the study with the agreement that appropriate steps are taken to maintain participant confidentiality. These publications will not include any identifying information.

Data Management

Data from this study will be used to better understand if and how institutional DEI efforts impact the professional experiences of URM staff and influences employee retention. Data collected in this study belong to the researcher and will be kept no longer than five years after the study is complete. Data may be collected in written or digital form and the data will be stored under password protection.

Audio

The researcher will be utilizing a tape recorder to document the interview, unless audio recording is declined. Should recording be allowed, the recordings will only be used for the purpose of capturing aspects of the interview that cannot be retained through written notes. Only the Principal Investigator and Study Investigator will have access to the recordings. The recordings will be deleted after transcription of the audio.

Compensation

There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

Contact Information

Matters relating to this study can be directed to the Study Investigator, Arlyn Palomo, at (360) 556-0163 or palomoar@oregonstate.edu. You can also contact the Human Research Protection Program with any concerns that you have about your rights or welfare as a study participant. This office can be reached at (541) 737-8008 or by email at **IRB@oregonstate.edu**. The principle investigator (PI) can also be reached at dolly.nguyen@oregonstate.edu.

Age to Consent

You acknowledge that you are eighteen years of age or older, and that you have read the above explanations.

Again, your participation in this study is voluntary and that you have the ability to withdraw at any point without penalty.

Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

 Participant's Name (Print)

Participant's Signature

Date

I have presented this information to the participant and obtained his/her voluntary consent.

 Researcher's Signature

Date