

Identity and Inclusion: A Campus Climate Study

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Institutions of higher education in the United States function as engines for economic development and social change (Clark, 1983). Individuals from all backgrounds must be prepared to engage and accept responsibility for change, and higher education institutions are uniquely positioned to help students develop the capacity to do so.

National policies and socio-political movements have influenced an ideological shift from simply increasing the numbers of underrepresented racial/ethnic students to focusing on more comprehensive definitions of diversity that includes a broader conceptual and policy framework grounded in the marginalization of all people (Park, Denson, & Bowman, 2013). This shift responds to the growing complexity surrounding social identities. Students in higher education claim multiple social identities (i.e., race, gender, class, religion, ability, sexual orientation), which impact the way students engage with their peers, faculty, and the campus environment. As such, an inclusive campus climate ensures that campus environments support students by fostering their ability to contribute to the broader economic and social change needed for our nation. Previous research has considered how campus climates impact the experiences of underrepresented student populations (e.g., Park, Denson, & Bowman, 2012; Hart & Fellabaum, 2008), but a gap in knowledge exists in understanding how students with multiple salient social identities experience “inclusion” as part of their campus communities.

Identity and Inclusion: The Florida State University Charge

In 2012, the Florida State University (FSU) Center for Multicultural Affairs and the Center for Leadership & Civic Education merged to create the Center for Leadership & Social Change (“the Center”). Today, the Center’s mission “is to transform lives through identity development, leadership education, and community engagement” (CLSC website, 2014). In an effort to accomplish the department’s mission, the Center and the FSU Division of Student Affairs administered an Educational Benchmarking Incorporated (EBI) campus climate survey and concurrently conducted student focus groups to gain a better understanding of student perceptions of social identity and inclusion by their campus peers, faculty, and staff in a variety of campus settings. This report contains description of the focus group data collection and analysis process.

The Research Team

The research team was comprised of faculty and doctoral students in the Higher Education program in the College of Education Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. In Fall 2013, during the EDH6046: Diversity in Higher Education doctoral seminar, Dr. Tamara Bertrand Jones and seven students enrolled in the course developed the research design in consultation with the Center Associate Director, Miguel Hernandez. The students, referred hereafter as the Fall Research Team, were:

1. Alan Acosta
2. Danielle Acosta
3. Vivechkanand “V” Chunoo
4. Kellie Gerbers

5. Shermin Murji
6. Gilman Page
7. Sally Watkins

In Spring 2014, the Center employed a transcriptionist to create verbatim transcripts of each of the focus groups. During Summer 2014, doctoral students enrolled in the EDH 5931: Qualitative Data Analysis Practicum analyzed the data collected during the Fall term. These students, referred hereafter as the Summer Research Team, were:

1. Vivechkanand "V" Chunoo
2. Kellie Gerbers
3. Estee Hernandez
4. Miguel Hernandez
5. James Hunt
6. Dante Pelzer
7. Sally Watkins
8. Sarah Wu

Data Collection

Designing the Research

The development of the focus group protocol began with defining identity, and the implications the definition of identity development had for our work. The Fall Research Team set out to define identity and identify the appropriate language, based on students participating in the focus groups, that would help garner an understanding of students' experiences and the meaning students made of these experiences. As the definition of identity is different to different people, reducing a nuanced understanding of identity to a single focus group question was difficult for the Fall Research Team. We spent significant time and energy in discussion of an appropriate definition for identity development only to decide that it would be more effective to let the students define identity development for themselves.

The team's primary research question was: What are student perceptions of identity inclusion on campus? Additional questions included: (a) How do students define identity inclusion? (b) In what ways does identity inclusion differ in academic and non-academic settings?

The researcher team's next step was to determine how the data would be collected. In consultation with the Center staff, the researchers devised a plan for determining the number of focus groups and the needed sample. The Fall Research Team originally set out to host eight focus groups, with nested participants from the original sample size utilized in the EBI administration of the Campus Climate Survey. Initially, four focus groups were to be held with students based on their class status (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior) and four additional groups based on specific sub-populations (students registered with the Student Disability Resource Center, veteran students, international students, and graduate students) in an effort to

ensure a parity of student experience based on similar factors (year in school, or membership in a group), enabling researchers to examine trends based on population.

The Fall Research Team used a combination of convenience and snowball sampling to recruit participants. The team elected to utilize a non-random sampling technique to ensure that members of specific marginalized social identity groups (i.e., Latino students, students with disabilities) were represented in the focus group discussions. Participants of the EBI Campus Climate Survey were provided the opportunity to indicate their desire to participate in the focus groups. Focus group advertising also was sent to students involved in organizations or programs within the Center, Student Government Association, Center for Academic Retention & Enhancement (CARE), and the Center for Global Engagement. An additional focus group was purposively sampled by working with the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) consisting of only students registered with that office.

While the focus groups were being advertised, the researchers developed the necessary consent and demographic forms and anticipated logistical aspects of the process. A script was created for the moderators of the focus groups so that each focus group would have similar experiences, and the five open-ended questions centered around how students defined their identity and how they felt included on campus.

Conducting the Focus Groups

Students participating in the focus groups completed the IRB approved Informed Consent form as well as a Demographic information sheet when they arrived prior to being assigned a focus group. Students were asked to select a pseudonym for the focus group, record their contact information in case of follow-up, as well as their current class standing and number of semesters completed at the institution, age, and major. Students were randomly assigned into focus groups, where conversation and pizza served prior to the group discussion created a relaxed atmosphere prior to the focus group official start. It is worth noting that some students knew the moderators, observers, and other participants within the focus group due to the nature of how participants were recruited, and the fact that many of the doctoral students are also student affairs professional staff members.

Some focus group moderators created pseudonyms along with the students, while others used their real names. Each focus group was moderated by one higher education doctoral student and was observed by at least two other higher education doctoral students. Moderators were tasked with facilitating the focus group discussion, while observers noted body language, student participation, and initial interpretations of students' behaviors during the focus group. Each focus group was digitally recorded and the device was placed toward the moderator in the middle of the table. The observers generally did not speak unless they had a follow-up question to ask based on the direction of the conversation.

At the end of the session, participants completed an additional Demographic Information form that requested information about GPA, race/ethnicity, religion/spirituality, sexual orientation,

military service, financial resources for college attendance, and documented disabilities. This form was completed at the conclusion of the focus group so not as to influence participants' ideas about the focus group, or their responses related to identity and inclusion. The moderators and observers for each focus group compiled their notes to create top line summaries, initial interpretations of the focus group discussion, in the days following the focus groups.

Data Analysis

Verbatim transcripts were produced by a professional transcriptionist using the digital recordings of each focus group. The research team used pattern coding of the focus group transcripts to identify central themes in the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Yin, 2009). The team employed a systematic, iterative coding approach to analyze the focus group data, beginning with categorical analysis, then identifying response patterns across and between individuals and focus groups while also paying attention to unique cases that did not map onto the established codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Lastly, researchers attempted to articulate connections between coded data to develop overall themes (Miles et al., 2014).

The Summer Research Team was divided into group of two-three researchers and assigned to lead data analysis for one focus group. The group assigned to focus group #1, along with Dr. Bertrand Jones, developed the initial coding scheme after reviewing the transcript for focus group #1. The coding scheme included primary codes representative of broad constructs, such as identity and inclusion, and secondary codes within each primary code that further explicated the sub-themes identified in the data, such as identity-assigned and identity-social identity.

Each subsequent group was tasked with revising the initial coding scheme, if necessary, to add additional codes not addressed by prior versions of the coding scheme. To address inter-rater reliability, every member of the research team coded each of the 6 focus group transcripts. After coding each transcript, all researchers met to discuss overlapping and distinct text and resolve any discrepancies in coding. This process was completed for each focus group transcript. When additional codes were created in subsequent reviews of the focus groups, all of the previous transcripts were reviewed and coded with the new codes.

Once discrepancies were resolved, the agreed-upon codes were entered into a qualitative data analysis software program (NVivo 10). After all of the data was entered into NVivo 10, each member of the data analysis team was assigned a specific set of codes to review in order to identify overall themes from the focus group discussions. The Summer Research Team reviewed all of these themes prior to drafting the final report. The next section details the findings from the data analysis process.

Findings

Twenty-eight students participated in six focus groups, each lasting approximately one hour in duration. In total, 11 first-year, 2 second-year, 3 third-year, 8 fourth-year (or above), and 3 graduate students participated in the focus groups. The majority of the focus group participants were traditional college age students (18-24), while five of the students were 30 years of age or older. The students represented a wide range of academic majors, including psychology, education, sports management, political science and engineering.

Based on the findings from the focus groups, the campus climate at FSU contributes to the on-going development of our students. While some degree of students' perceptions of campus climate and diversity may be linked to external influences such as family and prior schooling, their perceptions additionally were conditioned by the interactions they have with other students, faculty, and staff at FSU.

The data analysis process resulted in the following broad themes that captured students' perspectives on identity development and campus climate: 1) transitioning to FSU, 2) identity development as a continuous process, 3) experiences of identity inclusion and exclusion on campus, and 4) experiences with social justice. Within each broad theme are sub-themes that further describe how students perceived their identity development and how they experience campus. The final section of this report outlines ways that students experience social justice on campus. We operationalize social justice as a process that calls individuals to action, advocating for policy changes that create inclusion for all persons.

Transitioning to FSU

Students' socialization prior to college influenced how they engaged with the university. Socialization includes mechanisms through which parents, family, and community members transmit information, values, and perspectives about ethnicity, race, and culture to their children. Through socialization, students develop learned behaviors, thoughts, and philosophies that formed the foundation for many of their future interactions (Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006). The following section describes how perceptions of the differences between life at home and FSU has impacted students' transition to FSU, their experiences on-campus, and their views on campus climate.

Perceptions of difference between life at home and FSU. Throughout each focus group, researchers continually encountered participants' stories of their lives prior to attending the university. Some individuals offered their personal background as part of their focus group introductions. Others used elements of their backgrounds as a means of comparison to their current lifestyle or perspectives. Many respondents commented on the process of transitioning between pre-college life and being a student at FSU as "culture shock" or experiencing initial discomfort. For some students, their lives before attending FSU served as the starting point from which they developed perceptions of the institution, their peers, and their place at FSU.

Students identified specific aspects of their backgrounds that informed their views of the FSU community, generally in contrast to characteristics of their hometown, family, and friends. Several students commented on the differences between their hometowns and Tallahassee in terms of racial and ethnic diversity. One student, in describing the culture of Miami relative to FSU and Tallahassee, shared that “when it comes to culture clashing, that’s something I faced once I got here and not down in Miami... and when I got up here it was a really big culture shock...”

Conversely, another student shared that the FSU community exposed him to greater diversity of sexual orientations than what he had experienced at home:

One of the things that happened to me when I came up here is I actually found myself becoming more tolerant of people, and like what they do, and stuff like that. My hometown, I graduated in a class of like 400 people and like there is no gay people. There are some lesbians, but no gay guys, not openly, and you come up here and you see the PRIDE stuff, and the house and everything. It's an eye opener, I guess. There is more people out there. This stuff isn't just on the news. It's right here. Culture shock, I guess, the way people dress up here, and stuff like that, was completely different than where I come from.

Another student articulated this experience more generally, saying,

We live in our own little world at Florida State. When I go back home and talk about different cultures, people I know, my parents, they are like, oh no or this or that. Florida State students are here for a common cause, and Florida State really does a good job in bringing these cultures together.

Students’ prior schooling experiences influenced their views of campus climate. A few participants recounted the ways that the White majority on campus contrasted with their high school experiences. One student explained that she, “...went to a predominantly black middle school and high school, so having multiple cultural...[people]...was the norm to me....When I came here...it was a big culture shock ... I had never seen so many white people.” Another student confirmed this same sentiment, but added that “[the contrast] does make me proud of where I came from, knowing that I came from a more diverse background.”

Some students expressed that the FSU campus seemed more inviting and intellectually stimulating than what they had previously experienced in high school. The contrast between the two environments was regarded as welcoming, rather than shocking. Comparing the availability of Jewish associations on campus with that of his hometown, one participant described the difference noting,

...[Something] that encourages you to think more about it and you can meet like-minded people, because where I went to school there weren't a lot of people who were Jewish simply because it wasn't a very big school, and that sort of diversity just by the nature of the school itself I think helps encourage [the inclusion of identity on campus].

Feeling overwhelmed by the college experience. The transition experience of students to FSU also affected students' perceptions of campus climate. One first year student explained that having a family member at FSU helped her transition, but despite this, college life was still daunting:

... I find it's just-- it's been really hard to be up here. I am seven hours away from home and I haven't been home yet. I wouldn't call it homesickness, but adjusting to living in a dorm and having a meal plan, and I guess it's part of my personality, like not having control over certain things. It's really stressful, and it's hard to like deal with. Like, I have a good time, and I like to keep occupied, but I find myself like having to go to a counselor to have someone to talk to. It's just like-- to keep adjusting.

First-generation college students frequently commended the Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement (CARE) Summer Bridge Program for its support while transitioning from high school to college. One participant noted,

CARE was a good experience, and I am so grateful for CARE. You get an understanding that you are not the only one that's struggling. I think that's like a big problem, most people don't think about—not everyone is struggling, but if you are, you just feel like, oh my God, this is so overwhelming. Then the fact that you know there is other people that's going through what you are going through, and there is other people that are making it just like you, and there are people who have struggled and made it to be successful, so it's like just that understanding has helped my transition so much...

For this particular student, the Summer Bridge Program helped create connections between students who identified as economically disadvantaged.

First-year students were not the only students to experience difficulty while transitioning to FSU. One readmitted student described the difficulty he encountered when re-enrolling at the institution:

I first started coming here, I came to get everything in place, even though I had been a Florida State student before, I was a readmit, and I was also transient at FSU-BC, and trying to get everything in place, that I needed in place, before August was so hard. I really felt disconnected from the school because they just give you a map and it says, go here. It's like, you have to go to five different departments or places to get one thing accomplished. And, then on top of it, you know, as you are walking around you see these students and it's like you are the old person on campus asking for directions. It's like, you know, old person with Alzheimer has lost their way, kind of feeling. Taking it to the extreme, but it's scary at times when you are trying to-- especially when you have a teacher's assistant who is younger than you, and they talk to you in a manner that is extremely unprofessional.

This student's experience upon returning to FSU fell short of his expectations, which affected how this student saw his place on campus, and subsequently affected his perceptions of campus climate.

Experiencing college through a financial lens. For some participants, employment and socioeconomic status (SES) informed their view of campus climate. Many students identified having various forms of employment. Resident Assistants and Campus Recreation fitness instructors were specifically mentioned, while other students referred to jobs and work obligations more generally. Multiple students (particularly non-first year students) expressed how employment presented an additional challenge to balancing school and life, particularly for those working full-time or multiple jobs. One student described the stresses associated with managing employment, school, and life in general saying, "...[W]hile I was going to school I was also teaching full-time, and then I had a traumatic life event and then I just stopped and I had to start over." While this student did not directly tie employment to having to start over, the challenges associated with managing work, school, and life coalesced to affect the student's educational experience.

Some participants described transitional challenges resulting from the change from full-time employment to full-time student status. One participant described his experience as:

I earned my bachelor's degree about 10 years ago, and then I actually got a job for a number of years, and so I was an older returning student. And I had been used to getting a paycheck for six or seven years. I'm like, can I really do school again, and I'm not going to lie, it's tough...

Another participant described the transition from work to college in terms of "...going from making money, having a lot of money, and then now, I got to study a lot. I can't work as much. I ain't making as much money." Unlike first time in college (FTIC) students, who generally experience opportunities and challenges with new-found freedoms in college, the returning students expressed feelings of having less flexibility in terms of no longer having a steady paycheck or as much time to work.

Students expressed some degree of difficulty in relating to others from higher SES. One student, in describing aspects of her identity, shared that her economic background created a barrier between herself and other students, saying "It's hard for me to identify with people that are well off. I am from humble means." For this student, coming from an economically disadvantaged background created a sense of isolation with certain populations on campus.

Social Identity Development

Focus group participants were most engaged during questions that specifically addressed their social identities. According to social identity development theory, people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories, such as organizational membership, religious affiliation, gender, and age cohort (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Assignment to a social identity group provides more than a systematic method for characterizes people. Social identities are associated with ascribed traits and assigned behaviors. These similar characteristics can unite members of a social identity group or unwantedly put them into

stereotypical boxes (Tajfel, 2010). Of the salient social identities included in this report, some were discussed more than others; the differing depth in which each identity was deliberated is described below. Race, gender, age, and ability were salient identity categories for focus group discussants. Overall, most participants explored their social identity development using their FSU experience as a filter. For these students, social identity development contributed to the way they perceived campus climate.

Race

Throughout the focus group experience, students were forthcoming with their feelings about race as a social construct. Three major themes emerged from the student focus group data: 1) race has varying levels of saliency among students; 2) race conditions perceptions of the campus climate; and 3) race can be a tenuous construct for students and instructors in the classroom.

Race Saliency. For some students, their race identity was an omnipresent identity that must be negotiated on a daily basis. When one student asked the group how they felt about race, another student responded, "Race is also what is constructed, like you are not born saying, oh, I am white. That's something that you learn from society." An interesting exchange between participants in one focus group illustrated the saliency and complexity of race:

Student 1: I mean, do you guys ever think that we could somehow end race and achieve world peace?

Student 2: I don't think so. As long as it is still in the world, it's still going to be there unless someone just takes it out of all of our minds, some type of way, it's not going to go away. Race is still going to be there. That sounds pessimistic.

Student 3: It's kind of a way that people try to make themselves feel inclusive is by race. They say, I am white, and you are white, that's a good common thing, so I think it's kind of like, it's the way people try and relate but it's--

Student 1: It still divides.

Student 2: Sometimes it just divides the wrong way.

Student 3: I agree.

One student, an African American, explained how his pre-FSU background conditioned his views on race:

People who come through the CARE program are African American or Hispanic, and very few are White. So coming in the program, for me, I am from Miami, I live in a predominantly Black community. Like I draw well to the Black community. And coming to Florida State it was like, oh, because I have never been around white people, and in my mind I am like, it was this thing, this separation, that barrier that I was building up.

For another student, attending a predominantly White high school made him feel comfortable at FSU: “For me it was kind of an opposite because I went to high school I was surrounded by-- it was predominantly Caucasian so I felt comfortable coming to Florida State.”

Multiple students expressed awareness of having to live in dual realities, balancing their worldview through both a racial/ethnic lens and the lens of the White majority:

I have always enjoyed kind of this concept of exploring the in between-ness, being part of two cultures, so I came from Cuba when I was eight years old, so obviously I am heavily influenced by American culture. But, I also have tried deliberately to hold on to my Hispanic culture, and that's something that I really am proud.

Another student supported this concept by stating, “My parents are immigrants from Brazil, and I am a first generation American, so I have always considered myself to be from two different worlds, and had to make the two reconcile [sic].”

Race was not the most conscious or salient identity for all focus group participants. One White student offered the following testimony: “I never really had anything to like show off, or anything. The only identity I really stick with is being male, being masculine, being an athlete.”

Another White male student shifted attention from his Whiteness to another salient identity, “... I'm a white male first and foremost, but that's not the most important thing. I am also disabled, which is obvious. And, I don't know if this is going to make any sense, but sometimes my disability plays into my identity more intricately than other times.” Other White participants more strongly identified with other social identities beside race – namely religion, political or gender ideology.

On the other hand, a White female student expressed disassociation with her race when she stated, “I mean, I do blend in well with younger people, but the people that I blend in well with are not my race at all, or not my culture, because honestly personally inside I don't think of myself as white.”

Race and Campus Climate. Of the students of color that primarily identified with their race, some of them experienced hyper-visibility due to the lack of structural diversity on campus when they arrived. Participants were jolted when they recognized the “Whiteness” of student population. One student provided a specific example of feeling hyper-visible as the result of the homogenous campus demographics: “There are still times of the day where I am-- I am like-- I feel like I am one like black sheep out of a whole bunch, and mostly because like there is a lot of whites here.”

Similarly, another participant stated,

I am from Miami, Florida, so we have a very, very diverse population, so that way it's like you don't have to really identify with who you are, because everybody is different. We have Spanish people. We have Haitian. We have American, and we have white

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people. So, it's not like a big thing in race. But, when I am up here, well at Florida State, it's mostly just white Americans, so that's why I identify more with my race when I am here.

Students in the focus groups also mentioned that the Whiteness of the student population made students from underrepresented populations more aware and appreciative of their own culture, as seen in this student response:

...[C]oming here, being part of a predominantly white American, the university, and everything that culture entails, if anything made me appreciate my own Hispanic culture a lot more, um, because, like I said, it's that whole idea of other-ness, and the mirror action in between those two things, between my identity and the other-ness. So when I came here, if anything, I totally appreciated my own culture a lot more, something I didn't appreciate down in south Florida because that was the common thing down there.

One student expressed how a campus program helped minimize the effect of coming to school where her race was not the majority:

I was an only child, and I grew up in an almost all white community, and I would say that half of the girls [that live with her in Southern Scholarship Foundation housing] are of color...and I have learned so much from these girls about their personal experiences...and just being aware that these could be the people sitting beside me in my classes, that have dealt with being homeless and have lost parents...but now they are here at FSU.

This individual provided some insight regarding the differences between her life prior to FSU, and how the opportunities to interact with others in the Southern Scholarship Foundation house affected her perceptions of the institution overall.

Consistent with the narrative surrounding the high concentration of White students was the idea that FSU was “the White school” in Tallahassee. In contrast, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) was perceived as “the Black school.” As one student stated, “I am from Tallahassee, and they just label FSU as the white school, and FAMU as the black school, and TCC as Tallahassee High.” In this particular focus group, students thought both schools could do a better job of promoting their distinct academic program in response to the perceptions of informal school segregation.

One student commented,

I think if—I am not smart enough to know what the answer to this is, but I think if we did something to change the image of FSU being the white school, and FAMU being the black school, I think that would really go a long way. Like, I don't think there is enough emphasis on the program differences, which is why those two schools exist in the first place, because you can major in things at FAMU that you can't find at FSU.

Race and the Classroom. Several students in the focus groups gave examples of instances when they felt their race/ethnicity was hyper-visible in a classroom setting. This hyper-visibility led to an isolated and exposed feeling.

One student shared a time when he experienced a microaggression in a history class:

I was in a Latin American history course. They were going over the situation on the border, like drug cartels, and I felt like, when they said something, like someone participate with a question, I felt like the whole class looked at me. There was like an introduction thing, like introduce yourself, and I was like, I am Mexican, or whatever, and I was the only one, besides some girl who said she dated a Mexican. I was the only one who said, I am Mexican. So, I felt like when the question was thrown out there everyone kind of looked at me like, it's your time to share."

A Black student offered another example of a microaggression, "In my science class, I take (Inaudible) bio, so they were talking about AIDS, and he said that it came from Africa, and I just like slouched down in my chair, like--because for the longest-- nobody has really said it, but people blame black people for AIDS, I guess."

Another student felt targeted by a professor through the professor's intentional use of a racial identifier, "I am usually the only black guy, especially in class, and my diversity class they were talking about black guys and the teacher was going out of the way to say African American. And, I'm like, don't say that; that feels kind of racist. I'd rather be black. I am a black guy."

Another Black male student also felt singled out by his instructor:

We do a lot of critical discourse analysis, like either on movies, or books, and all this other stuff, and they always be critical about culture, and like. I feel like they are always trying to be nice to me, or get my opinion on how disadvantaged black people are, or how things are set-up. It's like they go out of their way to make me feel included. I don't know if they are trying to take advantage, because they can, or being genuine with it. It's kind of hard to tell.

Gender

Gender identity was extremely salient for some students, and less so for others. One student equated his gender identity with anatomical characteristics ("I was born a man, you know. I got a penis, you know. And, yeah. That's--I couldn't imagine being a girl."). Another female student explained that while she identifies as a woman, she felt that it was important to acknowledge that she enjoys "computers" and "[does] a lot more guy things than female things."

One student described being female in the context of social justice—specifically in a conversation of majority and marginalized identities ("female identity is suppressed by the dominant male group, and the way they socialize"). Athleticism/strength seemed to be an area where gender stereotypes were prevalent for students. The masculinity-femininity binary was

also a point of discussion for some students. One male student connected being male with “being masculine, being an athlete.”

A female student noted,

I don't like being stereotyped that just because I am a girl, I don't have strengths. I don't like being placed into that stereotype, so often times I will go out of my way to go against that stereotype. People ask me what I do for exercise, and they assume I go on a treadmill, and I say, no, I do weight lifting with all of the other big boys, and I do that because I don't like being stereotyped because of my gender, because of my sexual identity.

The male student in this example ascribes to traditional characteristics associated with the male gender (i.e., sports, competition, etc.), but his peer, a female student, also identified with stereotypical male behaviors (Steinberg, 1993). These reflections provide evidence that some students on campus are comfortable being situated within traditional gender roles, while other students prefer to express their gender identities in non-normative ways.

Ability

Some able-bodied students described interpersonal experiences with students with visible disabilities that affected their perceptions of campus climate. One participant remarked, “people with physical disabilities I have found are not really friendly...at Florida State I run across a lot of people with physical disabilities...and they really won't talk to me, and I am like, Dude, why so serious about that?”

Other students in the same focus group offered their agreement of this sentiment. However, a participant, who was in a wheelchair, challenged this assumption, stating, “...when they [other FSU students] meet me, they seem surprised at how nice I am because their only perception of somebody else in a wheelchair was either feeble minded or being a jerk.” As with race, students may adjust their interpersonal interactions with peers on campus based on physical appearance, which can impact their perceptions of campus as either being inclusive or unwelcoming.

The participants were also able to provide a level of detail regarding the lived experience of being an FSU student with visible disabilities. One student with a mobility impairment described his experiences with a group of peers: “...when I am with a group of friends who are not disabled, unless there is a physical barrier that I can't get over... then I would say my disability really doesn't play a part in that social interaction.”

When interacting with the university's structures, one participant regarded his disability status as advantageous over those with invisible disabilities, stating,

In a way I think that my disability almost makes it easier because my disability is obvious, so when I ask for accommodations, I meet with much less resistance than you guys would, because if I was looking at anybody else in this room, you are right your disabilities aren't obvious.

Although these aspects of campus life for students with visible disabilities seemed generally positive, the climate experienced by these students still presented significant challenges. Focus group participants explained that their perceptions of campus were influenced by interpersonal dynamics with other students, institutional responsiveness to requests for accommodations, and the perceived lack of University attention to physical barriers on campus.

One student expressed frustration over campus construction, in particular:

I think FSU is a pretty inclusive campus ... but we go on these across campus walks about two or three times a year, pointing out places that are still inaccessible for people with disabilities... and I would say a good 20 percent of that list gets changed when they have ubiquitous construction everywhere else, so we know you have the money to fix this...

Students with invisible disabilities described an equally challenging campus climate when interacting with the University. One respondent indicated, "My disability, you know, it's not physical, so I think it's really an advantage in most areas of my life. Only thing I feel like it's a disability is in like school settings ..."

Another student described her difficulty regarding accommodations for her invisible disabilities. She explained,

I am registered with SDRC obviously, and my disabilities entail a lot of mental and emotional issues, and FSU's ... disability policies...[require]...you [to] get a letter for certain things that accommodate in class. Okay, well, when you have mental breakdowns you can't go to the doctor every single time and get a note. This has been my biggest problem because I have four different diagnoses, and you can't predict mental breakdowns or emotional issues, and when you have a deadline to meet that you have known about all semester.

Multiple students expressed difficulty navigating the university's support system to obtain necessary accommodations. Speaking to student/faculty interactions, another participant commented, "... I have had teachers flat out say they are not giving me accommodations." For this student, one of the most prominent figures in her college experience did not seem willing or able to provide the support she needed to be successful. Challenges for students with invisible disabilities were not limited to administrative or instructional structures.

One participant was also a service-provider through his academic program and described the situation of working with students with disabilities from a practitioner's point of view:

They [other students in treatment] are people like you, they have legitimate mental issues that are very real, and they [clinical supervisors] say, no, you have to do it in 10 sessions. And, not only 10 sessions a semester, but 10 sessions a school year. We go to our authorities and say, this is not working for us. And they go, well, they can go to as many group sessions as they want to. But, obviously those people making those policies

have no clue what actually dealing with this on a day-to-day basis is like. I don't know what it's like dealing with it personally, but I know what it's like dealing with it as a practitioner, and if it makes you feel any better, it frustrates us as much as it frustrates you.

The campus experience of students with invisible disabilities was characterized by challenging administrative structures, unresponsive faculty, and limited treatment options.

Focus group participants also described the intersection of salient identities and disability statuses. One student shared the following example of how another student's disability had been filtered by others through various lenses:

I had a gentleman in one of my classes that was-- he was a really nice guy, and one day after class-- he was confined to a wheelchair-- and one day after class we were talking and the conversation rolled around to perceptions of his disability, and he told me, he goes, someone actually asked me if I was in a wheelchair because I was shot. He was a young black male. The assumption was he had to be in a wheelchair because he got shot. He was in a car accident.

Thus, the intersectionality of identity for the student described above yielded differential perceptions at best, and may have resulted in differential treatment at worst, subsequently influencing his experience of campus climate.

One participant commented on the interaction between students with disabilities and those without, describing the value of her student group as a source of support. She noted, "those students with disabilities realize that not every person who doesn't have a disability is thinking less of you...a lot of our members automatically assume that our non-disabled counterparts ... look down upon us when that's not necessarily true."

One student encapsulated the experience of students with disabilities at FSU by explaining that, "It's been extremely hard to learn how to advocate for myself, and that's what you need to succeed at FSU. Before you learn to advocate for yourself, you flail if you are a person with a different kind of ...anything." Given the agreement of other focus group participants, this sentiment seemed to reflect a key component of campus climate perceptions among those students with visible and invisible disabilities.

Age

Non-traditional students expressed frustration that the university did not provide substantial assistance in helping them succeed academically and reported giving up advocating for themselves after hitting multiple roadblocks. Three unique themes materialized related to age including, 1) relationships with faculty and staff, 2) experiences of isolation, and 3) programming opportunities and support services for non-traditional aged students.

Faculty/Staff Relationships. The percentage of focus group participants that acknowledged age as a component of their experience at FSU was small, but they made several relevant points to consider when discussing campus climate and inclusion. One participant contemplated their connection to the faculty and staff and offered,

...{L}ike the teachers, department heads, and stuff, I don't know if it's because I am older and that's the people that I bond with. But, yeah, that's where I really feel included because they basically tell me, hey, students are the only reason we have a job, so we need to-- yeah. They make me feel included because it ain't [sic] the students at all, but it's more of the teachers and staff. And, like coming here, all of the staff is real nice. Like my department head, before I started school I met with him and told him why I wanted to come to school and if he could help me out, or should I come to school or not. He has been very helpful.

In this statement, the student acknowledged several types and levels of faculty and staff as resources. Also, the members of this group related the significance of these relationships to their feelings of inclusion while reinforcing that students are not the only contributors to students' sense of belonging. A graduate student echoed this sentiment:

So, I kind of agree with what he was saying, because I earned my bachelor's degree, about 10 years ago now, and then I actually got a job for a number of years, and so I was an older returning student. And I had been used to getting a paycheck for six or seven years. I'm like, can I really do school again, and I'm not going to lie, it's tough, but I wouldn't have taken that plunge had I not felt that I would have the support of the Disability Center, and the person who now is my major professor.

These instances were a result of casual exchanges and not specific programming initiatives targeting adult students.

Isolation. Several older students mentioned feelings of isolation and being unable to find persons who were having the same or similar experiences as they were. The following segment is an example of one student's assertion:

When I started over, at Florida State, I had to finish at TCC and then I started over here, and it was awful. There was-- nobody was my-- I am 35. Nobody was my age. I didn't have anybody to talk to. I had one adviser. And, I failed. I got kicked out three or four times. Literally kicked out. I had to fight myself back in.

This student, in particular, experienced a lack of having an advocate. Another participant felt disconnected from an academic cohort because of age, as well as the assumed level of work completed outside of schooling. These students' experiences offer valuable insight that is drastically different than the anecdotes offered by the more traditionally-aged focus group participants. As a result, FSU might want to explore further how non-traditional students' presences and experiences contribute to perceptions of campus climate.

Programming. The availability (or lack) of programming efforts and services provided by the University was another recurring theme in the discussions concerned with age. One participant noted she participated in Pride and worked with Disability Services. She acknowledged that other students in Pride were developmentally different from her and that no groups were present that afforded her the opportunity to interact with others more similar:

I'm part of like the feminist, like the F-word, and I volunteer in Pride, and then the disability services. But the thing because of my age, like I can't really-- there is nothing really for bachelors, or people in my situation, or my age. There is no groups like that. So I am in Pride, and I-- you know, it's a whole different-- like they are in a different place than I am. They have different stories. They are not out, and I'm way out, and things like that.

Another participant expressed frustration with the transition to the main campus from a branch campus and how information was provided to them in the on-boarding process:

I first started coming here, I came to get everything in place, even though I had been a Florida State student before, I was a readmit, and I was also transient at FSU-PC, and trying to get everything in place, that I needed in place, before August was so hard. I really felt disconnected from the school because they just give you a map and it says, go here. It's like, you have to go to five different departments or places to get one thing accomplished. And, then on top of it, you know, as you are walking around you see these students and it's like you are the old person on campus asking for directions. It's like, you know, old person with Alzheimer has lost their way, kind of feeling. Taking it to the extreme, but it's scary at times when you are trying to-- especially when you have a teacher's assistant who is younger than you, and they talk to you in a manner that is extremely unprofessional.

Additionally, this student struggled with personal impressions of how others perceived his age difference on campus, noting, "it's like you are the old person on campus asking for directions. It's like, you know, old person with Alzheimer has lost their way, kind of feeling."

Most of the references to age were related to negative exchanges or feelings of being isolated. One student offered constructive suggestions for actions that might enhance the campus climate and feelings of inclusion for older, as well as traditional aged students:

...I would promote equality and I would really increase the non-traditional learning styles, and I would also like, as a campus, to promote self-knowledge and self-learning, and learning about yourself, and just like really check in to like who we are, because most students are in their 20's, and as a female, and I don't know how this is with other people, I know some transitioning people are going through this also, but I change constantly, and it's really difficult to have-- to be self-aware. I think some self-awareness, and just, you are okay wherever you are, and just some general structure like promoting strengths and interests of all aspects of learning and individual behavior.

Changing Perceptions of Self

The research team established a code to denote specific mentions of past experiences that shaped students' current identity development. By usage, it also highlighted ways that participants described the fluid nature of their current identities. Student discussions of this presented three themes, including: 1) malleable aspects of identity, and 2) comparisons to previous identity contexts.

Malleable Identity. Individuals across focus groups described their identities along static and dynamic dimensions. The idea that student identities are in active flux was supported by accounts of constant change for some participants. One student expressed difficulty in remaining self-aware when one's identity is constantly changing. Providing more detail about this process in relationship to her religious identity, one student reflected, "I like...church, but there is a line with self-discovery and like checking in right now where I am at, where I'm like right between like a mix of atheism, paganism and Christian, so I am a little melting pot of religion, or non-religion, right now."

In this account, the participant's use of the phrase "right now" implied that she was not always in a state of religious identity development, nor did she anticipate having the described orientation in the longer-term future, adding evidence that her religious identity was malleable.

The changing nature of certain identities was salient to one as [she?] defined "identity" as "something that I think about a lot and keep in mind, because I see the way in which the different social constructs play a role into how my life develops as a result."

Previous Identity Contexts. By comparing their current identifications to the self-concepts established in previous contexts, participants highlighted how contextual factors changed their perceptions of identity. One participant remarked, "I struggle a lot with identifying and recognizing my learning process...I noticed that later in my life, because I am in my mid 30's, I challenge myself, but before I would just stay away from it [challenge] completely." In this example, age has clearly influenced this individual's relationship to life's challenges, with particular emphasis on learning processes. By reflecting on his earlier identity as someone who was challenge-averse, he uncovered a clearer understanding of his current self-perception.

Inclusion and Exclusion on Campus

During the focus groups, students were asked to provide specific examples of times they felt included in academic and non-academic settings. For the purposes of this study, feelings of inclusion were viewed as one representative aspect of the campus climate. The nature of inclusivity on campus was portrayed through students' descriptions of relationships with peers, faculty/staff, and family members while on campus, as well as their on-campus involvement in specific programming or student organizations. The next section of this report addresses

experiences of inclusion (and exclusion) on campus through the lenses of campus involvement and relationships.

Inclusion- Sense of Belonging

Students described a link between campus involvement and feeling a sense of belonging. Students in the focus groups were involved in a myriad of campus programs and organizations and used a variety of campus services. According to participants, these campus engagement opportunities aided in their identity development, helped them find their niche on campus, or simply appealed to a personal interest or hobby. One student found his niche through the Resident Assistant program sponsored in University Housing. He stated, "I was a resident assistant, and becoming a resident assistant, it was really my first like, I feel like, bonding experience with a genuine group of people that really want to-- they love what they are doing, and they have fun with what they are doing."

The student also explained how University programs assisted students in finding their niche on campus: "Finding my own niche here at Florida State took me a little-- took me quite a bit, but I am really proud that Florida State does offer that, and it's really, um, they encourage you to do it, find your own niche instead of having stigmas against." Students highlighted the SDRC, CARE, and International Programs as University departments where they felt connected to the campus and to their peers. In relation to campus climate, student reiterated that campus involvement mattered.

Other examples of involvement emphasized engagement in Recognized Student Organizations (RSOs) and academic programs. Participants reported that RSOs provided students a sense of acclimation, especially when students did come to FSU with a previously established peer group (i.e., friends from high school).

One student stated,

I think for me, like I am a junior, ever since my freshman year I felt really like I guess acclimated to the campus because of the various student organizations on campus, and I just have been able to meet so many awesome people that have been involved with the organizations that make me feel at home. At first I was really-- I am the only person from my school that came like a semester ahead, so I didn't know anybody. I just immersed myself on campus and met a lot of people.

According to focus group participants, joining a campus organization was particularly important for first-year students as they searched for a sense of belonging within the campus community. Students found their place at the University within academic settings as well. Beta Beta Beta (Tri Beta) and the Minority Association of Pre-Med Students (MAPS) were directly mentioned as programs that helped students find their place on campus.

A Tri Beta member offered the following commentary on his experience:

IDENTITY AND INCLUSION

Tri Beta is another unique way to make friends because it's people who share common interests with you. They all want to get to the same place in the end, so that's nice. And, they definitely make you feel inclusive, because like you are just like them. You are a biology major. You either want to do medical field research, or another track, but you are on the same path, so it's kind of cool to meet up with everybody in that organization.

In addition to viewing student organizations as entry points into the greater campus community, focus group participants equated the concept of inclusion with the myriad of student groups on campus. The different student organizations on campus allowed students to explore their identity racially, ethnically, or culturally. One participant said, "...there are a lot of student organizations on campus to help reflect that [identity], and to allow students to be able to have a little piece of familiarity or something they are comfortable with, and they feel strongly about."

Another student provided an example of how involvement in campus organizations allowed him to explore multiple aspects of his identity, "Right now, I am in the Marching Chiefs, and music is a big part of my background, too. I am in either in the spring or fall of next year, I plan on joining Progressive Black Men, because I think they are a good community service organization that I could be a part of and we share a similar culture heritage." Similarly, another student described how the availability of so many organizations gave him the freedom to explore the aspects of his identity based on his choice:

...[I] think Florida State itself is a pretty inclusive campus with all of the different groups that it has. Like I said, I identify primarily as a Christian, but I don't really identify with the Christian groups, so I appreciate all of the different types of clubs and multicultural groups that they have here that allows me to explore whatever I want to.

Not only did students express the ability to connect with their salient social identities through involvement in organizations, they also noted that student organizations were a place where members could be introduced to other cultures and ideas. One student stated,

...[B]eing involved with the Hispanic Student Union, it's not only focused on Hispanics. It is—we bring together the Hispanic culture, but there is a lot of people that aren't Hispanic that are interested in the culture, and its programs like that that you get to bring together different cultures and get to know more about each other.

Participants reported that student organizations made the campus seem smaller for those who identified with an underrepresented cultural or ethnic identity. Students that identified as Black or Latino/a were especially appreciative of having identity-based student organizations on campus. One student stated,

...[M]y freshman year I actually got to serve in a leadership position with the Hispanic Student Union, and from there I was just able to network with all of the other agencies on campus. Got the opportunity to be under my own organization and even branch out to other cultural organizations and opened their arms and accepted me.

A female student offered a similar sentiment, stating, “Well, for me, it’s the BSU, the Black Student Union, and the Divine Nine, which are the black sororities and fraternities. I haven’t pledged or joined the BSU, but I’m going to [join] next Thursday.” Another student commented on the benefit getting involved with cultural based student organizations:

FSU has a lot of student organizations on campus, and they have a lot of-- that they have helped foster, and helped grow and establish, that kind of represent a variety of identities, such as the Latin Hispanic Student Union, Black Student Union, Asian American Student Union-- student unions represent different kinds of races and ethnicities that sometimes some people may over look, just because it’s not part of the majority, they are taken into consideration.

Some students of color found a campus home within multicultural or National Pan-Hellenic Greek Council (NPHC) organizations, as this student indicated: “[I] joined a fraternity also, multicultural fraternity, where I feel like I was able to fit in most with the members in it because as I was seeing different groups, and stuff, they are more-- Florida State is a big campus.” Another student expressed a similar experience of how they felt connect to their identity through a MGC fraternity, “Like me joining the frat, frat [sic] belongs to the multicultural Greek council, so you meet people there. You meet the other frat and sororities. Like my friend is involved with HLSU, and you get involved with them and the mix of—you get like in a mix with like the MASA, CASA, groups like that. It allows you to branch out and you meet other people.” One student, though not directly involved in the Hispanic-Latino Student Union, expressed appreciation that such an organization existed. He said, “The Hispanic Latino Student Union, I wouldn’t say I am involved in it but I’d like to. That’s somewhere I find like FSU could make me feel involved. That’s like a good support group. I feel like if I ever go to them, like, as being Hispanic, that would be cool.”

Inclusion- Relationships with Peers, Faculty, and Staff

With regard to the overall focus of the study, many students seemed to equate “inclusion” with “sameness.” Students from multiple focus groups addressed the notion that FSU is a campus with a large student population, and forming meaningful relationships is a way to “shrink” the size of the campus into a more manageable atmosphere.

One student noted,

...[O]nce you get to the college world there is 35,000 people here, so there is a breadth of groups that you can be exposed to, and interest groups, and you can go there and get involved from day one. I think that encourages you to think more about it and you can meet like-minded people... and that sort of diversity just by the nature of the school itself I think helps encourage it because you can meet people who are like-minded, or similar to you.

This quote juxtaposes the concepts of “diversity” and “similarity,” suggesting that the benefit of the diversity of FSU is that students can find other students *that are like them* within the large population.

Multiple students cited the importance of finding “like-minded” people, or finding people that “think like them.” One student explained that he joined a multicultural fraternity specifically because the members of the organization “looked and acted like [him].” Some students even suggested that although the University makes efforts to host programs that celebrate and discuss multiculturalism, many students default back to their own social groups (“...because if you go to an event that’s hosted to bring different cultures together, and you bump into the people that are in the same group as you, you are going to stick with them”).

Just as students presented divergent opinions on peer relationships, commentary from students regarding faculty/staff relationships presented conflicting views. These relationships play a significant role in whether students felt included on campus based on their personal identities. One pervasive view from marginalized students was that academic faculty who taught specifically on topics of social justice or social identities were “out of touch” with the realities faced by members of these groups.

For example, one student expressed her frustration in a social work course:

I know in my example, like I am in all these social work classes, and we talk about diversity all of the time, but then when we talk about like lesbians, or (Inaudible), most of the time the teacher has no clue. They are straight and they have no idea, or they try to go from the book, and the book doesn't know anything...

Some students felt as though faculty members tip-toed around sensitive issues pertaining to their social identities, while other faculty members went out of their way to be inclusive to the point where students questioned the genuineness of their actions.

On the other hand, some students expressed appreciation of faculty and staff who created opportunities for dialogue and discussion in their classes that allowed sharing from multiple perspectives. One student noted that although he did not consider his conservative values to be a strong part of his identity, he appreciated that his professor facilitated a discussion that gave equal attention to both political parties. Students described professors advocating for both individual students and for the sharing of multiple perspectives in class as “encouraging” and “supportive.” One student also expressed appreciation that “professors make a deliberate effort to bring to the foreground our identities as a means to negotiate, or our culture as a means to negotiate our identity, and language learning, and all of these things.”

In terms of individual advocacy, several students attributed their ability to persist in college to a faculty member that advocated for that student specifically. For example, one student acknowledged, “I am in graduate school simply because my major professor truly advocated for me to be in the program. And, without her support, I don't know if I would be in graduate school at the moment.” This next student offered an experience they had in a course that defined inclusion for them: “Um, because that class specifically was about finding employment for people with disabilities, I did feel included...she had worked with the disabled population for like 20, 30

years, and she was really-- I won't say the first faculty member, but one of the first faculty members that made my disability no big deal."

Multiple focus groups included discussions of the programmatic efforts and initiatives provided by the University (and specifically the Division of Student Affairs), citing these efforts as examples of inclusion. CARE, for example, made one student feel included and encouraged her to persist in college:

For me, I am a CARE student and I work in the CARE office. I have also worked in the CARE lab, so I have a really close relationship with people on staff, and they make me feel inclusive and they make me feel included. They are my motivation here. If I didn't have that motivation, I probably wouldn't be at Florida State still. But, they definitely make it feel like home. They care about you. That's when I feel inclusive.

Overall, students made note of an overarching expectation that the campus community members should be respectful, as exemplified in the following quote: "They try to promote a certain kind of honor and value system, by which we have to live by, and uphold, and I think respect comes along with that. There are even places here if you don't feel like you are being treated well, there are some organizations that help you feel more included, and more accepted. It's not that I have encountered a need for that, but, you know." Students believe that faculty and staff have the power to create inclusive environments and experiences for the students and other campus community members.

Inclusion- Campus Events and Locations

Another defining aspect of campus climate that emerged during these conversations was the significance of campus events and locations as places of inclusion. Market Wednesday, Homecoming, and FSU football games were specifically mentioned as places and events that united students. While generally, students shared the same sentiments toward these spaces, one student offered a different opinion of Market Wednesday, "[At] Union Wednesday there are only black people there. Rarely whites or Hispanics are there. And, the numbers who are, they have relationships with the black people. So I mean, that's there." Multiple students cited football games as a key campus tradition.

The following statement translates how participants saw these activities as inclusive:

I would definitely say the sporting nature of the school has definitely brought together a lot of people, different diversity...so when you are out at Doak, and you are watching the football game, and we score a touchdown, everyone is giving high five's. No matter where you are from or what gender you are, everyone is all on the same page, everyone has the same spirit. So, I definitely think that's something I identify with as a Seminole, and it's definitely a great culture here at the school.

Another student offered a similar experience that spoke to the uniting atmosphere of football games, "At one of the football games, we scored a touchdown, and someone who I had never met

before gave me a hug.” This student continued, “I don't know why. It was a little jarring at first, but it expresses that there is no boundary. It's just that we are all Seminoles, we are all FSU.”

Students also gave Homecoming festivities high marks for inclusion. One stated, “At the Homecoming Pow-Wow, you know, when they were giving out-- I don't know what this is, but they were giving out these awards, and it was like every club was included, which I think that was cool, because they all have a chance to win. “ Another student commented how Homecoming contributes to a unifying Garnet and Gold “spirit” which symbolizes the essence of inclusion.

According to these students, feeling included on campus extended beyond the classroom or being involved in students organizations. Events sponsored the university can be positive catalysts for student engagement.

Exclusion- Experiences that Exclude Identity

Although students cited several positive University experiences, instances also occurred where students reported that they felt aspects of their identity were excluded or not represented on campus. As mentioned previously, students felt excluded in class when they experienced tokenism or microaggressions. One participant did not feel welcomed by the Hispanic Latino Student Union due to his Mexican heritage and roots. This student gathered the support of peers and formed a new registered student organization that better reflected his roots.

He explained the situation in the following quote:

They were like, “Why are you getting involved with us,” and I kind of don't embody the Mexican American aspect, but at the same time I do, so, at the same time they were like, “Oh, you are so White-washed, why do you want to join us, just go back to main campus.” And, I kind of took offense for a little bit, but then I realized we are all different. You can't judge somebody by the cover of its [sic] book.

Like this student, other focus group participants were also aware of the potential for student organizations to further separate students based on identity.

For example, one student remarked,

Because there is inclusivity, but [sic] what it ends up leading to is that you have these specific identities who just hang out with each other, and they don't hang out with anybody else. Then it can get very exclusive, even within those groups that are trying to be inclusive, and it doesn't really-- like, yeah, there are great groups here on campus, but sometimes there isn't the meshing of it. There isn't the melting pot of it where all of them come together and you get to understand each other better.

For students with mobility issues, the physical aspects of campus created feelings of exclusion. The following student explained this perspective:

I think FSU is a pretty inclusive campus from what I have seen...The only other thing I would say really has nothing to do with diversity, um, but we go on these across campus walks about two or three times a year, pointing out places that are still inaccessible for people with disabilities...I would say a good 20 percent of that list gets changed when they have ubiquitous construction everywhere else, so we know you have the money to fix this.

Student Recommendations for Inclusion

Two additional themes that emerged during the coding process included references to recommendations for cultivating inclusivity on campus, as well as assigning responsibility for feeling included to the students who attend FSU. One of the strongest threads in this theme was the aforementioned emphasis on student organizations as the nucleus of the student experience. In several instances, students in the focus groups thought there was nothing more FSU could do to be a more inclusive campus. One student stated, "I don't think FSU can do more to create an inclusion environment – clubs solve that issue."

Not only did some students in the focus groups believe student clubs and organizations were the answer to creating an inclusive environment, they also put the responsibility on students to seek out opportunities to get involved and "belong" to the institution, asserting that they "[didn't] think they [FSU] should try to make any inclusive...they [FSU] should let the person find his own." Other students thought the university could do more to create an inclusive campus environment.

Some students advocated for more opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue, the creation of more organizations or programs that bring together diverse groups of students, and more events that showcased student organizations. One student, in particular, recommended that incoming freshmen be advised in campus involvement similarly to how they are advised academically. For most students, campus involvement was the strongest entity connecting students to campus and each other. One participant suggested, "maybe educating people of everything that's available to them, so that they know. There are a lot of things that are available to the students. And everybody ought to find something that they relate with. I think educating will be a big part of it."

Additional recommendations for being an inclusive campus included encouraging more purposeful communications between the institution and the student body and better utilization of social media. One student pointed out the irony of when university-wide emails are distributed: "...[T]hey can send out emails about the football games, but [don't] send out emails for more diverse things, like be on Instagram, Facebook. That's what we are attached to, to try to get our attention, and they don't do that." Several group members call for the creation of campus events that, "include all organizations, like bring organizations together."

The same student added the following:

[O]ften you have those informational [sessions], and it's for the organization for people to

find their niche, to find what they are attached to, but if we are trying to like be diversified, maybe have something or make it mandatory-- not-- yeah. This is just a suggestion, you know, organization. Like work together. Maybe throw this massive party, or something. It's a college. That's what people like to do, college students like to do, so why not put them in a space where they are going to be comfortable with wanting to branch out, and, you know, make friendships with someone that they didn't think they would before.

Many of these recommendations were couched in assertions that the students themselves need to be more responsible for finding connections; participants valued the efforts made by the institution but encouraged others not rely on the University to create the opportunities for inclusion, as exemplified in the following statement by a participant:

...[Y]ou cannot really force anyone to do anything, but definitely providing more opportunities where if you say that today is FSU Unity Day, one day out of the entire semester, not everyone is going to be able to make it. So, maybe if there is no opportunity for people to be able to kind of step out of their comfort zone, and just to find out about different organizations-- I know here, or at the Globe, they have coffee hour. First of all, I love coffee. And, second of all, it's just an open environment to meet people you have never met. You may have nothing in common with them, but you get to sit down share a cup of coffee. I think more type of, I guess, networking opportunities give that idea of diversity that there is other people on campus that you have never met just because you have never stepped out of your office.

Focus group exchanges consistently reinforced the importance of personal responsibility. One participant summarized this feeling effectively, noting,

I don't think it's a point of Florida State being more inclusive. It's really you finding yourself, and you finding your group, and your network, so it's really you have to get involved. There is people who are interested in the same things you are interested in, who like the same things that you like, you just have to find them really.

Although mentioned earlier as an example of a unifying influence, dissent occurred among students about the influence of athletics in general, and football specifically. One participant challenged the notion that football was inclusive: "I like football as much as the next guy, but, um, that necessarily doesn't have anything to do directly with diversity and student relations."

Multiple reviews of transcript data revealed that students acknowledged that the FSU logo, a significant representation of the University was neither inclusive nor a true representation of a Seminole. One student remarked, "I would say, um, change the race on the logo. Like, why you got a white Seminole? Seminoles weren't white."

In contrast to the positive statements about staff and faculty noted earlier, a student with a disability offered the following suggestions for the University administration:

...[H]onestly, if I had two minutes to talk to Dr. Barron it would probably be, you know, more towards encouraging staff, faculty, especially TAs that aren't even professors, that are paying their way through school by teaching and such, to be more understanding, more accommodating to students that they know obviously have a disability, especially if they have a letter for Student Disability Resources, and you see it's not an obvious thing, then more than likely it's something behavioral or mental.

Another student in the same group offered a follow-up suggestion:

If I were to contact President Barron, I would acknowledge that I know they are trying, but I would also ask for increased staff awareness about disability services, and that not everyone learns the same way. You cannot just teach from Power Points; you need to have interactive class learning, you need to have auditory and visual learning activities.

Numerous other recommendations emerged through conversations, including creating opportunities for students to become more -self-aware and personally accountable, and creating an advisory board to the President made up of students from different cultures to inform the leadership on how to cultivate a more inclusive campus:

If there were more thought provoking activities, and things to encourage people to self-identify, or to make it okay that people have different thoughts and different experiences, or if you have great-- if you have the same thoughts and experiences, that's great, too, but just to make people okay, and feel like it's all right to check in with themselves, and that their awareness is okay whether it's different or the same as other people. It's more empowering than anything else. It's okay to learn that you are different, or to learn that you are the same, that you are fine. Just figure out yourself and take that space, and how to take that space, and when to take that space, because it's so healing. It's self-processing.

The Social Justice Living Learning Community (SJLLC) was cited as an example of a University initiative that was currently fulfilling students' expectations of inclusive education and programming. One student described her experience in the SJLLC:

We had to do an assignment in our social justice class where you had to pick some different identity, or culture, that we ourselves did not identify with, but maybe you could be familiar, you knew a little bit about it, but you weren't a part of it. Could be, you know, religion that's different from yours. It could be a social group that's different from yours.

Other students suggested increasing inclusion by developing more experiences that could bring students from different cultures together and encouraging random assignments to intramural sports teams to encourage the fostering of new friendships.

Advocating for Social Change

The social change primary code was created to denote both instances and/or mentions of student activism, as well as to mark conditions oppose social change. Through this conceptualization of activism, several participants in the focus groups were engaged in such

acts. In the first focus group, a student introduced herself as someone who aspired to be an activist for world peace.

Later in the group, she talked about her involvement in Dream Defenders:

I found people who were doing something that was related to something that I wanted to get into, which was activism, and they started doing real work. They had been sitting at the Capitol for 31 days, and I was like, “This is amazing.” I met so many amazing people there, and I got to talk, and it was like, “These are people who have similar thoughts that I do.” It was really hard for me to find that, because coming from the environment that I come from, Miami, it was—there were rarely any progressives there. So it was nice to finally meet people who are on the same track that I am, like mind-wise.

Other students spoke of campus-centered activism. While this report already referenced the student who created his own student organization after feeling excluded by an existing organization, another student spoke about her involvement in Students United for Justice in Palestine and the Muslim Student Association, despite not identifying as Middle Eastern or Muslim:

When the university bombing started in Syria, they invited me out to hand out fliers, and to do basically like a little memorial service where we actually—each one of us had one of the people that died, one of the victims' names, and a short little bio of that person to read out loud. And we did a prayer service, and it didn't matter whether you were Muslim or not, you could participate.

This student explained that her involvement in these organizations was motivated by her identity as a feminist, and “part of being a feminist, in my opinion, is being an activist because we are still working towards that ultimate equality.” Thus, she was invited to participate in social justice-oriented organizations, because other students who knew her knew of her commitment to equality, regardless of the identity involved.

Focus group comments indicated that that not all student activism focused on student organizations. One student, who identified as undocumented, spoke about the challenges of college affordability for other undocumented students living in Florida:

[Y]ou know what it's like to have guidance counselors talk to you about FSU, and UCF, and all of these schools, but then, of course, they are not going to tell you to walk out when they are talking about college, but you know that that doesn't include you. You don't have that option.

She indicated that she was very involved with immigrant rights at FSU and in Florida—particularly regarding in-state tuition for undocumented students, which has since passed at the state level.

A student living in the Social Justice Living-Learning Community (SJLLC) spoke about the dialogue that took place in the SJLLC class:

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I feel like the LLC that I am in is very helpful incorporating identities, because a lot of what we talk about in social justice has to do with the differences of oppression and the... socialization that [is] just resulting from the way the majority believes that things should be functioning because of what is the dominant group—the specific context, and the differences in oppression. So we are able to tackle numerous different identities, and discuss how each identity is affected in society.

This student felt these conversations were constructive, and he shared that his instructors encouraged members of the class to speak about and tackle these issues on a day-to-day interpersonal level. Another participant spoke about a social justice event he was encouraged to attend in one of his multiculturalism classes. In doing so, he was afforded the opportunity to interact with members of different cultures: “[B]y being forced to collaborate like that, we were forced to learn about each others' cultural experiences, because we had to come up with a cohesive image, or a group of images, that somehow related to each other.” This student, who was in a wheelchair, felt he had something to contribute in this activity when he spoke about his physical disability.

Activism, for some students, meant speaking up against unjust acts. One student conveyed her commitment to holding people accountable for their words:

[P]eople say something and I am like, “That's not an okay thing to say.” Like something that's racially motivated, or especially stuff that's anti gay... I speak up. I go to professors after class and I will say, “Hey, you said this, you may not have realized it, and I don't think you are coming from the wrong place, but when you say things like this, can you think about it?”

This student had spoken with professors on four or five occasions that semester and brought up insensitive comments made in the classroom. Others in the same focus group talked about holding their friends accountable via statements like, “Dude, it's not okay,” and “I can't let that one slide.” As reflected by this experience, acts as simple as challenging insensitive or careless comments can create awareness around a social issue and make a difference—even if on a small scale.

Conversely, a condition against activism was to silently or passively consent to injustice by not intervening. In a particular focus group, the facilitator prompted the students to share how they react if and when they hear or see something that may bother them, in terms of their identity.

One student confessed that she would rather walk away from these situations, rather than bring discomfort up:

For me personally, I kind of shy away from it, because like you get into an argument, or you just walk away. That's really my main thing, especially because me being African American, most people expect African Americans to be ignorant, loud, and yelling and cursing. So, it's like if I get into an argument about my race, then I am going to be

ignorant, loud, yelling and cursing, so that's why I try to shy away from it because I don't want to stoop down to the—to what people think about me, because I know I am better than that, and I know that I am better than what you are saying, so I am not going to even give you the time of day.

In this testimony, this student illustrated stereotype threat: if she chose to stand up for herself, she may unintentionally fulfill a negative stereotype (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Conversely, by walking away from a situation where her race is spotlighted, she tacitly consents to the behavior. Another student in the same focus group shared a similar reaction where she too withdrew when her identity was tested: “I don't like people knowing when I am unhappy, or something bothers me, because I tend to think that people will take joy in that, or they will be like, okay, that bothers her, good, there is something wrong.”

A different student subsequently responded with the following idea: “It's not that you want to go out and try to fight everyone that calls you, like, ‘Hey, Mexican.’ It's one of those things. It's part of growing up honestly. You have to be more mature.” These students suggested that part of being mature is to ignore negative comments and to keep feelings and emotions under control, so as not to draw unfavorable attention. However, in not responding, these students unintentionally allow for these negative comments and behaviors to continue.

Generally, students recognize that diversity and inclusion issues exist, as made evident by their statements above. One student, in particular, used the word “privilege” to describe race and gender relations: “I do not like the way that our government, and in general our society, is ruled by race and gender... it's a privilege to be White still in the U. S. I [am] privileged to be White, but at the same time, I'm disadvantaged to be White and a woman.”

As mentioned earlier in the report, students reflected a level of fatalism when asked if issues surrounding racism could be mitigated. Furthering this idea, a student offered the following testimony: “I could hang out with whoever [*sic*], any kind of friends, but at the end of the day I know some people don't understand where I come from, the food I eat, the music I listen to, the way I dance, you know.” Regardless of what some of these students might want to achieve in terms of inclusivity, they can only do so much. It is up to others to want to learn and understand. Much like what has been said before, the burden of responsibility for creating change is placed on individuals—perhaps to those who do not understand or have a cognizance of diversity.

Mentions of social change included instances of activism, as well as barriers to such activism and subsequent social change. Several students in the focus groups had engaged in such activism on a person-to-person level (e.g., holding others accountable for their language), or even in a local or state level (e.g., advocacy for undocumented students). Other students, on the other hand, did not stand up to localized injustices—in the form of negative comments, generally—because they felt restricted by perceived stereotype threat or a desire to be the “bigger person.” However, these injustices were not attributed to campus climate; they were

relegated to individual acts perpetuated by those who do not fully understand diversity. These testimonies imply that the campus climate is positive overall, save for a few individual negative acts.

Discussion

Main Influencers of Campus Climate

Based on student responses, the research team had difficulty determining if the transition to college had an impact on the overall campus climate, or whether the existing campus climate had an effect on these transition experiences. The students who described their experiences transitioning to FSU did so in response to questions regarding times when they felt their salient identities had been included on campus. However, these students did not describe how, or even if, these early experiences shaped their views on campus climate. Although these instances seemed to be important in an episodic way, the connections between these events and the rest of their college experiences were not clearly articulated. However, in this discussions, several themes emerged that require further explication with additional groups of students. Despite the need for further unpacking, students' backgrounds, as well as the salient social identities discussed influence students' perceptions of campus climate.

Even though the personal histories of the participants were not elements specifically sought, the emergence of such stories in response to questions about the FSU experience indicated that these facets are vitally important to students' perception of the institution. Hometown demographics, the experiences of prior schooling, employment and socioeconomic status or stress, and the transition to college all emerged as subthemes related salient elements of the participants' backgrounds when trying to make sense of the information offered. Undoubtedly, these factors played a role in the way student perceptions about campus climate take shape, although the influence of some experiences was clearer than the effect of others.

In multiple focus groups, race was understood as a socially constructed concept, acknowledging that socialization is a process by which people are racialized. However, "unpacking" race as a construct can prove challenging for many college students, especially when trying to understand how awareness of race can impact their relationship with peers inside and outside of the classroom. Some students view race as a uniting identity, while others recognize that race can be used to divide groups of people.

Whether students view race as a uniting or divisive construct, the way students interact with race can be tied to their upbringing and cultural background. As noted earlier, family environments and other background circumstances can condition the way students perceive society, thus race saliency can be a product of the socialization process that starts before students enroll at FSU. For some students of color, their race was only one part of an identity dichotomy that they were constantly reconciling. Double consciousness, first proposed by W.E.B. DuBois in his seminal work *Souls of Black Folks*, described this "two-ness" of being American and a Negro. Students in the focus groups presented a similar dichotomy when

describing their lived reality. These students consistently see the world from two lenses – a racial or ethnic lens and the majoritarian, American lens.

Some students acknowledged their race but specifically acknowledged that race was secondary to other identities. Students that identified as White were the only participants to explicitly downplay the salience of their race. Moreover, because Whiteness is of the majority and is thus considered normal (McIntosh, 1990)—these students did not know what to respond when prompted to talk about their own identities.

The heightened self-awareness experienced by participants of color was grounded in the fact that their home life and previous schooling experiences (schooling prior to FSU) was more diverse than what they experienced at FSU. For these students, FSU presented a stark contrast to racial/ethnic demographics of their hometowns, which made them hypersensitive of their race. When students experience the culture shock of attending a majority White school, they tended to cleave to their salient racial/ethnic identities.

Having visibility in one's identity confers significance for students. For students of color, visibility of identity means presence—or absence of, among students from hometowns more ethnically diverse than FSU. Conversely, visible racial/ethnic difference also invites ambiguity or assumptions in the absence of full information. For example, students who are mistaken for different ethnicities, students whose identities are invisible and thus not recognized, and students whose identities are taken for granted on account of their normalcy all experience having an identity “assigned” to them when their assigned identity may not necessarily match how they personally identify.

While much of the discussions focused on extracurricular experiences, participants (particularly students of color) also alluded to the racial tension that existed within the classroom—often in the form of microaggressions. Due to the lack of structural diversity at FSU for some racial minorities, students can feel isolated in the classroom, especially if they came from elementary and secondary school systems where they were of the majority race or ethnicity. The term “racial microaggression” was coined and studied by Harvard Psychiatry professor, Chester M. Pierce (DeAngelis, 2009). Pierce described racial microaggressions in the following paradox: “African Americans live in a mundane extreme environment where racism and oppression is ubiquitous, constant, continuing, and mundane” (Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002, p. 16).

Furthermore, microaggressions are described as subtle, stunning, often automatic, verbal or non-verbal 'put downs' (Sue & Constantine, 2007). In the examples of microaggressions mentioned in this report, the instructors and classmates may not have deliberately targeted their comments toward the focus group participants, but nonetheless, at times these participants felt ashamed and uncomfortable because of their race, gender, ability status, or age. Focus group participants who identified as undocumented, non-traditional aged, LGBT, and transient or returning introduced experiences that reflected how students that identified with these social identities could feel excluded.

Several students also experienced what could be labeled as “tokenism,” a perfunctory gesture toward the inclusion of members of minority groups. The ‘token’ effort is usually intended to create an appearance of inclusiveness and deflect accusations of discrimination (Hogue & Vaughn, 2008).

The examples of microaggression and tokenism addressed in this report do not describe the experience of all marginalized students. Individual students acknowledge and respond to the presence of microaggressions and tokenism based on their past experiences. The goal of presenting this data is not to try to uncover instances of closeted discrimination, but to illuminate some of the lived experiences of FSU students and learn what can be done to make the campus experience – inside and outside the classroom – more inclusive.

Student Involvement Fosters Inclusion

Students who are not involved in campus organizations can still feel “included” on campus by simply knowing student groups that represent their identities exist. As the higher education research supports, student involvement and engagement is a key predictor of academic and personal success. The data presented illuminates how involvement on campus, whether through student organizations, department-sponsored programs, or in academic settings, can be positive for identity development and fostering a sense of belonging for FSU students. Though these data cannot be generalized, it can be suggested that students at Florida feel connected to the campus community.

The key appears to be getting students connected with resources, programs, and organizations during their first year. Involvement during the first year was cited by several of the students above and was helpful to their transition to FSU. Whether its joining an organization that already exist or creating a new one that is more aligned with one’s identity, values, or interest, involvement can be a tool to inspire individual growth and unite the campus.

Within the student involvement framework, inner-group differences and biases led to organization members being a part of out-groups. Feeling excluded while participating in a student organization can result in a student not having a sense of belonging on campus, but can also inspire a student to find other avenues to feel validated. One way that students can respond to feeling like an outsider in a peer group is to create an organization that better mirrors their identity.

For some students, a cultural home on campus is needed and can often be found through National Pan-Hellenic Association (historically Black fraternities and sororities – “Divine Nine”) and Multicultural Greek Council organizations. These organizations typically have missions and historical charters that support the collegiate experience of students of color. Ethnic, racial, culturally missioned student organizations can help students connect with peers of similar background and heritage. Despite the unifying effect of social identity-based student organizations, these places of belonging can also be entities that separate students. The danger

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is that students may stay in their social identity peer groups and not explore relationships across identities and cultures.

In trying to detect the aspects of identity that affect campus climate, students clearly experienced changes in their identity and self-awareness while in college. The identity changes students reported facing included the identifications of identity elements in flux, identity changes recognized by comparisons to previous contexts, and the experience of differentiating identity from familial influences. If campus climate experiences are tied to identity perceptions, student's perceptions of campus climate should be interpreted carefully taking these forms of development into consideration.

If students have changing views on the world and their place in it as a result of identity structures continually adjusting, these shifting identities would reasonably affect students' perceptions of campus climate. As such, campus decision-makers must remember that students' perceptions of campus climate are linked to their perceptions of themselves and their place in that climate.

By acknowledging the composition of campus, understanding the student experience regarding social identity, and taking a pulse check of how social identity is currently being situated on campus, administrators and faculty can have fruitful discussions on how the institution can best support students on their personal and academic journeys.

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Appendix A

Fostering Identity and Inclusion Focus Group Guide

1. Thinking back to the social identities mentioned earlier, what part(s) of your identity is most important to you?
2. In what ways does Florida State make you feel included on campus?
3. Tell us about a time when you felt your identity(ies) were included in an academic situation – this could be in a classroom, with a faculty member, or during a group project
4. Share with us an example of a time when you felt your identity(ies) were included in a non-academic setting on campus – this could be at an event on campus, at a football game, in the cafeteria, etc
5. How could Florida State be more inclusive?

Appendix B

Fostering Identity and Inclusion: A Campus Climate Study
Demographic Information

Name: _____
(your name will not be used in the research reporting)

FSU Email: _____

Phone Number: _____

Pseudonym: _____

Current Class Standing (Circle One):

Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate Student Non Degree Seeking

Number of semesters including summers have you completed at FSU? (Circle one):

Have not completed a semester

1 or 2

3 to 4

5 to 6

7 to 8

9 to 10

More than 10

Age: _____ Major(s): _____

Additional Information Sheet

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Appendix C Additional Information

For each question below, please circle all that apply.

Cumulative GPA at the end of last semester:

Below 2.25	2.75-2.99	2.50-2.74	I do not have an
2.25-2.49	3.0-3.24	3.75-4.0	FSU GPA
2.5-2.74	3.25-2.49	Other than 4.0	

Race/Ethnicity:

Black/African American	Spanish/Hispanic/Latino/Latina
White/Caucasian	Multi-racial
Native American/Alaska Native/Inuit	Other: _____
Asian/Middle Eastern/Pacific Islander	

Which best describes the importance of religion/spirituality in your life:

Not important Slightly important Very important

Please specify your religion/faith: _____

Sexual Orientation:

Heterosexual	Bisexual	Other: _____
Gay/lesbian	Unsure or questioning	Prefer not to answer

Military Service:

No previous or current military service
Previous military service but no current military service
Current military service (also includes reserves at ROTC)

Which of the following do you use to pay to attend Florida State:

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Student loans
Scholarships
A paying job
Family financial support
Other _____

If you have a current, documented disability or disabilities, please circle from the list below:

Mobility impairment
Visual impairment/blindness
Hearing impairment
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD)
Psychological disability
Chronic illness/medical disability
Head injury
Learning disability
Other
I do not have a documented/diagnosed disability