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Exploring the multicultural competence, will, and multicultural work of student affairs educators in higher education

Jennifer Lynn Plagman-Galvin

Iowa State University

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Exploring the multicultural competence, will, and multicultural work of student affairs educators in higher education

by

Jennifer L. Plagman-Galvin

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Higher Education)

Program of Study Committee:
Ann M. Gansemer-Topf, Major Professor
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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2018

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ABSTRACT

Student affairs educators are integral to meet the needs of today’s increasingly diverse student population, especially supporting the student success of underrepresented students and developing the multicultural competence of all students. A significant component of meeting these needs is engaging in multicultural work, which specifically addresses racism and systemic oppression in the higher education environment. Presented in a three-article format, this case study examined the multicultural competence development, will, and multicultural work of student affairs educators engaged in these endeavors.

The goal of multicultural work is to address racism and systems of oppression, and to do so requires multicultural competence (Watt 2013). Multiculturally competent student affairs educators engage in multicultural work with students, colleagues, and supervisors in a multilevel higher education environment. Findings from this study suggest that multicultural competency development of awareness, knowledge, and skills occurs along a continuum. At some point along the continuum student affairs educators develop the multicultural competence and will to engage in multicultural work. The will to do multicultural work comprises the belief that racism and systems of oppression exist, a passion for serving students, and relevance to the purpose of student affairs educators’ work. Furthermore, will includes the capacity to do multicultural work and the willingness to assume the risk associated with doing the work.

Results of this study have implications for student affairs educators, graduate preparation programs in student affairs, and research in higher education administration. Results are also applicable to both practice and research, as well as non-academic organizations and communities.
CHAPTER 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Society is experiencing a growth in racial and ethnic diversity – in schools, communities, and industry. According to the Pew Research Center, by 2055 no single racial or ethnic minority will represent more than 50% of the population in the U.S. (Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/). The increasingly diverse racial and ethnic U.S. population requires multicultural competence of its citizenry to navigate schools, communities, and industry.

Higher education enrollment data are clear that racial diversity on college campuses is increasing, just as the racial diversity of the U.S. population is increasing. White undergraduate enrollment percentages decreased from 81% in 1980 to 55% in 2014. Hispanic student enrollment contributed to the greatest U.S. ethnic minority percentage increase, up 13% from 1980 to 2014. Black student enrollment increased by 4% in the same time-period (Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education, 2016).

Because higher education institutions are becoming more diverse, higher education stakeholders need to address current structures, practices, and perspectives related to race and ethnicity within the campus environment. Furthermore, institutions of higher education are uniquely positioned to address diversity issues related to race and ethnicity from educational, social, and political perspectives. As institutions increase their racial and ethnic structural diversity, they have the opportunity to facilitate opportunities for students to engage socially with peers that have different racial and ethnic backgrounds from themselves (Hurtado & Gullermo-Wann, 2013; Kuh et al., 2010). This multicultural work requires students, faculty, staff, and administrators to engage with one another (Hurtado & Gullermo-Wann, 2013;
Pope, Reynolds & Mueller, 2014); and for policies, practices, and programs to be examined through a lens of multicultural work (Watt & Linley, 2013). The results of multicultural work include the support of underrepresented students, and the exposure to multicultural competence development for all students (Hurtado & Gullermo-Wann, 2013). Literature calls for faculty to incorporate diverse perspectives into the curriculum (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2006). Student affairs educators must have the multicultural competence and will to act on this important multicultural work agenda (Pope et al., 2014).

Higher education has the ability to lead, research, teach, and cultivate the learning of diversity topics and perspectives. From the early 1900s, higher education has emphasized the important role of student affairs educators as stakeholders who provide leadership and oversight for the co-curricular student environment, and cultivating the learning of diversity issues outside of the classroom (American Council on Education, 1937; Kuh et al., 2010). Student affairs divisions on campuses oversee residence life, dining halls, health services, enrollment and orientation, student activities, programming, and student conduct. Student affairs educators create policy, implement programs, and engage with students in every aspect of their co-curricular experience (ACPA and NASPA, 2010). Therefore, it is important that student affairs educators are multiculturally competent themselves, in order to challenge and support students in their own multicultural competency development through the co-curricular experience.

Research suggests that the older adolescent to young adult age range of undergraduate students is prime for exploring, developing, and affirming their values and worldviews, including the development of cultural competencies (Erikson, 1946; Gurin et al., 2002). The
2013 Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) from the Higher Education Research Institute (Hurtado & Gullermo-Wann, 2013) supports the theory that when diversity is incorporated into curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities for students, higher education goals related to diversity are achieved. Those goals include enrolling and graduating more underrepresented students, and creating an environment where structural diversity of the student populations aids in a richer learning experience for all students. However, increasing structural diversity on college campuses does not mean that underrepresented students will persist, that students will take advantage of engaging with peers that are culturally different from themselves, or that student affairs educators will engage differently with the diverse students they serve (Quaye & Harper, 2015).

The DLE report also suggests multicultural professional development opportunities for faculty and student affairs educators support a diverse campus climate where all students succeed. Student affairs educators influence the college experience of every student that enrolls at an institution as they establish and implement campus policies, develop and facilitate programming, and engage with students through co-curricular experiences. Co-curricular experiences are far reaching and include enrollment services, financial aid, residence life, fraternity and sorority life, multicultural student affairs, student health, academic advising, among other areas.

Student affairs educators must have the multicultural competencies and the will to take action to engage in multicultural work. This topic is relevant as multicultural work is integral in supporting the racial and ethnically diverse study body that is enrolling on college campuses. Multicultural work includes strategies and initiatives to support the persistence and graduation of underrepresented students. It also includes facilitating cross-cultural
engagement of all students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds offering diverse perspectives through dialogue, team-based learning in the classroom, living-learning communities, and student organization engagement leading to a richer educational experience (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Thus, researching multicultural competence development and multicultural work in higher education is relevant.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

Given the importance of this topic, I chose to explore how student affairs educators develop and apply multicultural competence to their work in higher education, and why they choose to invest in multicultural work. Three research questions guided each of these topics of inquiry:

1. What multicultural knowledge, awareness, and skills do student affairs educators develop by participating in NCORE, an experiential conference exploring race and ethnicity?
2. Why do student affairs educators invest in multicultural work in higher education?
3. How do student affairs educators engage in multicultural work?

**Context**

In 2015, I facilitated an evaluative research study for a capstone project focused on the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE) as a strategy for student affairs educators to development multicultural competence; the results of which are presented in Chapter 2. The purpose of NCORE is to improve racial and ethnic relations in higher education by expanding educational access and success of traditionally underrepresented populations (Retrieved from https://www.ncore.ou.edu/en/about/). For the studies informing Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, I utilized NCORE attendance to recruit research participants to look
more broadly at why student affairs educators invest in multicultural work and how student affairs educators engage in multicultural work.

To provide further context for the three research areas, I offer a description of the setting and my positionality as a researcher.

**Setting**

The location for this case study was a large, predominately White institution (PWI), with a land-grant mission located in the Midwest. The institution was structurally decentralized, with curricular education facilitated at the college or department level and organized primarily by academic majors. Co-curricular programming was facilitated broadly for the greater university community by student affairs educators, as well as at the college or department level. Faculty were largely responsible for the curriculum, whereas student affairs educators were primarily responsible for co-curricular opportunities.

The division of student affairs provided oversight for a myriad of student infrastructure and resources that support the co-curricular experience including enrollment, financial aid, health and counseling services, recreation services, student activities, residence life, dining services, fraternity and sorority life, student conduct, legal services, and student activities. Several units provided specific support for underrepresented student populations including multicultural student affairs, LGBTQA services, a women’s center, scholarship programs and student support programs. The university’s strategic plan articulated a number of goals and sub-goals related to diversity including recruiting and retaining diverse staff, and recruiting and graduating a diverse student body. A diversity and inclusion committee is one of four committees within the student affairs division that structurally supports diversity initiatives within the division. The committee was charged with focusing on campus climate...
issues and enhancing the university’s diversity and inclusion initiatives. The division of student affairs worked closely with the university’s division of diversity and inclusion.

The setting is relevant for this study as PWIs strive for structural diversity as a strategy to increase access to education for underrepresented populations. In 2016 the total U.S. Minority enrollment at the institution was 12.7%, and the international student enrollment was 11.4%. While international enrollment at the institution stayed consistent for the previous five years, U.S. Minority enrollment was up from 10.6% in 2012.

Further supporting the need to address campus diversity beyond structural diversity, were several race-related incidents on campus. In 2015 students, faculty, and student affairs educators were peacefully advocating against racially sensitive comments made by then presidential candidate Donald Trump when a bystander confronted the protestors. The incident, along with racially insensitive dialogue of several other bystanders, was captured on video and went viral through social media. Events that ensued included open forums and letters to the editor where students and community members voiced their desires for increased support and sensitivity for underrepresented populations on campus.

Additional conflicts related to racial diversity have occurred on campus. Flyers promoting White supremacy were distributed throughout campus a number of times. During the spring 2016 semester, dozens of students walked out on the university president making remarks at a diversity program. In August 2016, a student posted a racial slur online, with many calling for his dismissal from the university. These incidents further emphasize the need for multiculturally competent student affairs educators to understand the lived experiences of their students, help students navigate racially motivated incidents on campus,
to work with their student affairs colleagues and campus administrators to address these
issues through communication, programming, and policy.

**Frameworks Guiding the Study**

In this section, I provide an overview of the frameworks and definitions that guided
this dissertation including the Multidimensional Model of Cultural Competence (MDCC) and
the advocacy strategy framework.

**Multidimensional Model of Cultural Competency**

Chapter 2 was informed by Sue’s (2001) MDCC (see Figure 1), Pope and Reynolds
definition of multicultural competence (1997), and King and Howard-Hamilton’s (2003)
definitions of multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills, as well as definitions for race,
ethnicity, and racism. The MDCC outlines three dimensions important in addressing cultural
competency in the counseling field: (a) the diversity of human differences—including but not
limited to race, gender, disability, age, and sexual orientation, (b) components of cultural
competence including awareness of attitudes, knowledge and skills, and (c) the foci of
cultural competence at the individual, professional, organizational, and societal levels. The
student affairs educators chosen to participate in NCORE had demonstrated competencies at
the first dimension as they had an awareness of student differences. For this study, I was
interested in how NCORE influenced awareness, knowledge, and skills; and how these were
manifested in the individual, professional, organizational, and society levels. This study
focused specifically on the second dimension of the MDCC including awareness of attitudes,
knowledge, and skills.

**Figure 1. Multidimensional model of cultural competence**

The Pope and Reynolds (1997) definition of multicultural competence is “the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary to work effectively and ethically across cultural differences” (1997, p. 270). King and Howard-Hamilton (2003) further refined Pope and Reynolds’ definition of multicultural competence to include definitions for multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge, and multicultural skills. These definitions were used in this study to investigate how NCORE influenced the multicultural competence of student affairs professionals.
**Multicultural Awareness.** “Awareness of how people’s attitudes, beliefs, values, assumptions, and self-awareness affect the ways they interact with those who are culturally different from themselves.” (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 124)

**Multicultural Knowledge.** “Having an informed understanding of cultures that are different from one’s own culture, including knowledge of their histories, traditions, values, practices, and so forth.” (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 123)

**Multicultural Skills.** “Skills that individuals use to engage in effective and meaningful interactions with those who are from different cultural backgrounds than their own.” (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 123)

This framework and the definitions for multicultural competence, multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge, and multicultural skills were appropriate for this study to understand how student affairs educators develop multicultural competence.

**Race, Ethnicity and Racism**

This study focused on multicultural competency development, within the context of exploring race and ethnicity through NCORE. The terms race, ethnicity, and racism are used throughout the five chapters. As such, it is important to define these terms.

**Race.** Race includes socially constructed categories of people based on physical, not biological, differences (Bell et al, 2016).

**Ethnicity.** Ethnicity includes shared values of group affiliation and relates to nationality, region, ancestry, shared culture, and language (Bell et al, 2016).

**Racism.** Drawing upon race as a socially constructed category, Bell et al, (2016) suggest racism is pervasive throughout institutional, cultural, interpersonal, and individual
levels of society; and that racism is enacted through individual actions and participation in a multilevel society.

**Advocacy Strategy Framework**

The advocacy strategy framework (see Figure 2) informs Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 regarding why student affairs educators invest in multicultural work and how they engage in multicultural work (Retrieved from http://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publications/advocacy-strategy-framework). Coffman and Beer (2015) suggest that the advocacy strategy framework offers a place to begin an advocacy initiative, considers intended stakeholders, considers other advocacy initiatives that may, or may not, be aligned with the topic, and prompts meaningful tactics or outcomes, and that change takes time.

![Figure 2. The advocacy strategy framework: A tool for articulating an advocacy theory of change (Coffman & Beer, 2015)](image-url)
The framework’s concept that change takes time correlates with scholars suggesting multicultural competence, and thus investing in multicultural work, occurs over time (Deardorff 2015; Iverson, 2012). Similar to multicultural work in higher education, there are a variety of stakeholders to be considered including students, staff, faculty, student affairs educators, and administrators (Hurtado & Gullermo-Wann, 2013). Another characteristic of the framework includes other advocacy initiatives. Multicultural work, as defined in this study, included work related to racial and ethnic diversity (Watt 2013). Advocacy work on college campuses comprises many underrepresented populations and topics that intersect with racial/ethnic diversity including sexism, ableism, and ageism – to name just a few. Finally, meaningful tactics or outcomes are associated with the framework, which also align with the intended outcomes of multicultural work to disrupt the structural inequities that limit marginalized groups while privileging others (Watt 2013).

The framework includes two dimensions: (a) audience – along the x-axis, and (b) change – along the y-axis. The audience dimension includes the public, influencers, and decision makers. The audience dimension correlates with multicultural work in higher education as students are the public, faculty and student affairs educators are the influencers, and administrators are the decision makers.

The change dimension along the y-axis comprises awareness, will, and action. Awareness includes outreach, education and programs, and research similar to multicultural competencies, which includes programming, implementing policy change, and education (Watt & Linley, 2013). Will within the framework aligns with the second research question for this study, to understand why student affairs educators invest in multicultural work. Lastly, action aligns with the act of doing multicultural work.
Coffman and Beer (2015) emphasize “will” as an integral part of the framework; and is relevant to this study as it connects multicultural competence with action. They suggest stakeholders engaged in advocacy need to have the will to do the work. Will includes an (a) opinion or belief about the topic, (b) intensity or passion about the topic, (c) salience or relevancy of the topic, (d) capacity, or the confidence and skills to take action, and (e) willingness to assume the risk associated with action.

This framework is appropriate for Chapter 3 as it provides the framework for understanding why student affairs educators invest in multicultural work. It is also appropriate for Chapter 4 as it provides the framework for action, or the act of doing multicultural work.

**Methods**

In order to explore multicultural competencies and multicultural work of student affairs educators, I conducted a qualitative case study at a large, predominately-White research-intensive public institution located in the Midwest. The case study design investigated multicultural competence development of student affairs educators, the will to do multicultural work, and engagement in multicultural work. A case study design involves the collection of detailed information within time and activity parameters (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). This case study was bound by parameters of both location and activity – the location at one university and the activity of engaging in multicultural competence development and multicultural work.

Yin (2009) outlines three conditions for a case study: a) research questions are in the form of how or why, b) the phenomena is independent of the researcher’s control, and c) the phenomena is current rather than historical in nature. This case study met all three conditions.
The research questions that informed this study were in the form of how. The phenomena of multicultural competency development, will, and multicultural work, were independent of the researcher’s control and a separate process from this study. The topics of multicultural competency development, will, and multicultural work were relevant for institutions of higher education, as well as greater society.

Qualitative case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic in nature (Merriam, 1997). The particularistic elements of a case studies focus on a situation, event, program, or phenomenon (Merriam, 1997); and in this case the phenomena were the development of multicultural competence, the will to do multicultural work, and engagement in multicultural work. Case studies are descriptive as rich, thick description of the phenomenon is collected. This study collected rich, thick description about the phenomena of multicultural competency development, the will to do multicultural work, and how student affairs educators engage in multicultural work. Finally, case studies are heuristic, or bring meaning to the phenomena; wherein this case study investigated the meaning of multicultural competency development, will, and engagement in multicultural work as interpreted by the student affairs educators participating in this study (Merriam, 1997).

Participants

Potential participants for this study were student affairs educators from the institution where this study was conducted, who had attended NCORE at least one time. Data were collected at two points and there were 27 total participants; 10 participated in 2015 data collection, 10 participated in 2017 data collection, and seven participated in both 2015 and 2017 data collection. Participants were diverse in their racial, ethnic and gender identities, professional roles in student affairs, years at the institution, and number of years as a
practitioner. The diversity in backgrounds, experiences, and job responsibilities allowed for trustworthiness of the findings (see Table 1).

**Data Collection**

Data for Chapter 2 were collected in 2015 through semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014; Maxwell, 2013), field notes (Rossman & Rallis, 2012) and interpretive memos (Seidman, 2013). Participants were recruited through a meeting and follow-up e-mail. I conducted and audio-recorded all interviews and focus groups in person. Interviews were between 45-90 minutes, and focus groups were between 60-120 minutes. I transcribed the recordings verbatim and member checked the transcripts

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<tr>
<td>Pseudonyms(^1)</td>
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<td>Heather</td>
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<td>LaYin</td>
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<td>Maggie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\)Pseudonyms are not connected with participant characteristics to maintain the anonymity of participants.
with participants. Data for Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 were collected in 2017, and followed the same procedures, with the exception that participants were recruited by e-mail only and focus groups were not part of the 2017 methods. Each method, used in combination with one another, provided a rich understanding of the larger phenomena of multicultural competency development (Creswell, 2014).

**Data Analysis**

Following the data collocation, I analyzed the data following Saldana’s (2015) methods for coding qualitative research including collecting data, coding data, identifying patterns, and categorizing the patterns. Analysis was conducted on the 2015 data for Chapter 2. Analysis was conducted on the 2015 and 2017 data for Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

I began data analysis by writing analytic memos to capture my insights and reflection immediately following each interview, including emerging themes, methodological questions, and connections between themes, literature, and theory (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Simultaneous to completing interpretive memos, I transcribed audio-recordings after each interview. I personally completed all transcription. I stored two copies of the originally transcribed data. One copy was stored on a password-protected online file storage site and another on a password-protected external hard drive. After securing electronic copies of the original transcripts, the original audio files were deleted and the data from the original transcripts was cleaned and de-identified. Once again, I stored two copies of the cleaned and de-identified transcripts. One copy on a password-protected online file storage site and another on a password-protected external hard drive. The cleaned and de-identified transcripts were sent to each research participant providing opportunity for their validation of the data.
After respondent validation was completed, I analyzed the cleaned and de-identified transcripts and analytic memos utilizing a three-phase approach (Saldana, 2015). In the first phase, I looked for broad themes supporting the research questions. In the second phase, I looked at the data for categories within the broader themes. In the third phase, I looked at emerging themes that supported patterns within the categories and broader themes that supported the research questions.

**Trustworthiness**

In addition to the collection of thick, rich data and utilizing respondent validation to ensure accuracy of the thick, rich data, I engaged four higher education peers in the review of the data and my interpretation of the data. One of the colleagues was a student affairs educator who works at the location for this case study. The other three colleagues were employed at three separate institutions of higher education, two were faculty members and one was a senior student affairs administrator. The reviewers represented diversity in gender, race and ethnicity, and geographical regions in which they grew up and lived. Their common characteristics included work in higher education and student affairs as practitioners and scholars. My colleagues looked for validation of the themes, bias, discrepant evidence, and any other ethical issues. Following peer review of the themes and findings, I incorporated their feedback into the final analysis. They also had the opportunity to review the final findings and offer feedback yet again.

**Ethical Considerations**

I implemented several strategies to ensure ethical research standards were maintained throughout this study. Participants for this study were not contacted until approval was received by both my Program of Study Committee and the Institutional Review Board. I
followed the semi-structured interview and focus group guides and informed consent form. The informed consent form included a description of the procedures, potential risks and benefits to participants, participant rights, measures of confidentiality, and contact information should participants want to report any ethical concerns throughout any portion of the study. I recognized that issues of race, ethnicity, equity, diversity, and inclusion might be sensitive for participants to discuss. A statement was included in the informed consent document that read, “You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. In the event you choose to withdraw from this study, all information you provide (including audio recordings) will be destroyed and omitted from the study.”

**Researcher Positionality**

It is important to recognize my own biases, as a researcher of multicultural competencies and multicultural work. I must be mindful of how my biases influence the framework, methodology, and analysis of the study. I identify as a White, cisgender female with more than 20 years of experience in higher education and the nonprofit sector; serving as a student affairs educator and an academic affairs administrator. Two of my most salient identities are being a woman and being White. As a woman, I have experienced, and can relate to gender inequities. Being White, I have reflected on the power and privilege Whiteness carries with it. Applying these identities to my personal and professional experiences – I can empathize and connect with underrepresented identities, and I can challenge and support majority identities.

I recognize that my own life history informed this study. When I first began researching the topics of multicultural competency development and multicultural work, I
asked myself, “Who am I to explore the scholarly topic of multicultural competence? I hold nearly all of the privileged identities in our society; therefore, how might I do justice to these topics?” Until I was dialoguing with a wise colleague who noted, “If you don’t, who will?” The conversation set me on my own journey of multicultural competence as I began reflecting on my own White identity development. Drawing upon Helm’s (1990) White Racial Identity Development Model (contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence, immersion-emersion, autonomy), I have reflected on the life-moments of discovery along my personal identity development journey as a student affairs educator and administrator.

My personal and professional experiences have brought me to the important topic of exploring multicultural competencies and understanding multicultural work, specifically related to issues of race and ethnicity. Early in my career as a student affairs educator, I recognized that I was not fully equipped with the multicultural competence to support the underrepresented undergraduate and graduate students who were part of the programs in which I was responsible. I was not fully engaged with my colleagues who were doing multicultural work. While I philosophically believed multicultural work was important, I was not aware, knowledgeable, or skilled myself to engage in the agenda. I now recognize as a White woman, growing up in the Midwest with few opportunities to engage with others culturally different from myself during my adolescent years, that I had not had the opportunity in my early years of life to engage with others culturally different from myself. Therefore, I was not fully prepared as a professional to support the learning and development of the students and staff in which I served.
As a scholarly practitioner, I have developed the will to engage in multicultural work. I believe racism is real, and that we all have biases and racist tendencies that we must interrogate within ourselves. Although I identify as White and have not experienced racism myself, I can empathize with experiences of oppression as a woman. As such, I have developed a passion for this work. Through my relationships with students, colleagues, friends, and the participants from this study – I know that this work is relevant to advancing not only the goals of higher education, but society as well. I have developed the capacity to engage in multicultural work as a practitioner, and multicultural research as a scholar. Furthermore, I am provided time and financial resources to do so. Finally, I have demonstrated the willingness to take the risk to engage in multicultural work. I chose this topic as a research area not only because I knew it was relevant, but also because it was a topic in which I did not feel extremely competent. In doing so, my world has become much richer. Because of my research, I have been challenged daily to be a better parent, partner, colleague, and higher education administrator.

When I served as a student affairs educator, issues of race and ethnicity were front and center as I advised and supported undergraduate students and supervised graduate students. Issues of race and ethnicity were also present in my interaction with colleagues, and as a professional navigating campus culture, policy, programs, practices, and incidents of racism and bias. These experiences provided me insight to the experiences of many of the participants from this study.

Recognizing that my own multicultural competency development is a lifelong journey, I consistently seek opportunities for my own professional develop in this area. I have attended NCORE, presented a manuscript developed from my capstone at the
American Educational Research Association (AERA), and served as a group leader for high school teachers exploring issues of race and ethnicity in the classroom. I have also engaged in reading literature, campus lectures, dialoging formally and informally with professional colleagues and friends, and engaging in professional associations and conferences where issues of race and ethnicity are addressed. Furthermore, I have chosen this topic for my doctoral research and scholarly work.

I firmly believe White people need to educate themselves and engage in multicultural work for change to happen on college campuses, in communities, and society. In my experience, life is simply richer when one engages with others culturally different from themselves. Problems are better resolved when people with different skill-sets and life experiences approach a problem in pursuit of a shared solution. Programs, policies, and practices are developed and executed more fully through collaborations with multiple vantage points.

For these reasons, I am doing this work—to be a better parent, partner, colleague, professional, community member, and friend. I am doing this work because I have both the responsibility and opportunity to influence the multicultural competency of others, as well as multiculturalism in my family, community, and in higher education.

**Positionality of Research Participants**

I have reflected significantly on my own identity as a White woman, and I realize that the participants for this study also brought their own identities to the research. Identity development is an important component of multicultural competence. As student affairs educators develop their own multicultural competencies of awareness, knowledge, and skills; they do so within the context of their own lived experiences. Their own lived experiences
influence how they come to know others’ lived experiences. As student affairs educators apply multicultural competence to their work in higher education, they must do so within the context of their own identities and lived experiences.

**Dissertation Format**

I chose to engage in a case study that explored the multicultural competence of student affairs educators and presented my finding in a three-article dissertation format. Each article addresses one of three research questions. In Chapter 2, I utilized the Multidimensional Model of Cultural Competence (Sue, 2001) as a framework, along with definitions for multicultural competence (Pope & Reynolds, 1997) and multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge, and multicultural skills (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003) to explore the multicultural competence development of student affairs educators. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 expand the research presented in Chapter 2, and were guided by the advocacy strategy framework for change (Coffman & Beer, 2015) and literature on multicultural work (Watt & Linley, 2013). In Chapter 3, I explored the will of student affairs educators to engage in multicultural work; and, in Chapter 4, I examined how student affairs educators apply their multicultural competencies to multicultural work in higher education. In Chapter 5, I provided a summary of the articles and offered considerations for how the articles collectively inform future practice and research. Given that the three articles address each of the characteristics along the change dimension of the advocacy strategy framework, I concluded Chapter 5 with a reflection of articulating progress through multicultural work.
CHAPTER 2. ON A CONTINUUM: EXAMINING NCORE’S INFLUENCE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE IN STUDENT-AFFAIRS EDUCATORS

A paper submitted to the Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity
Jennifer L. Plagman-Galvin & Ann M. Gansemer-Topf

Abstract

Multiculturally competent student affairs educators are required to effectively meet the needs of today’s diverse student population. However, little is known about how educators acquire these skills. This study examined the multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills gained by student affairs educators through their participation in NCORE, an experiential conference exploring race and ethnicity. Results of the study have implications for graduate preparation programs and professional development opportunities for student affairs educators.

Introduction

As the racial diversity of college students increases, student affairs educators need to be multiculturally competent (Harper, 2008; Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013). Racial tensions, debates, and controversies on college campuses have been heightened as a result of college administrations’ lack of awareness, knowledge, and skills; reiterating the need for multiculturally competent student affairs educators (Pope, Reynolds & Mueller, 2014).

Multicultural competency is a stated value of the student affairs profession and aligns with higher education goals (Bresciani, 2008). Student affairs educators must acquire the necessary awareness, knowledge, and skills to best serve their students (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013; Pope & Reynolds, 1997); and they benefit from competency development regardless of serving in entry-level, mid-level, or senior-level positions.
Because achieving and sustaining multicultural competence requires ongoing professional development, institutions and professional organizations provide opportunities for student affairs educators to develop their competence. The National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE) is one of these opportunities.

NCORE is “…a forum for building skills, alliances, and knowledge about issues of race and ethnicity in higher education,” by offering approximately 350 sessions on race and ethnicity in higher education. Conference participants comprise senior-level administrators, student affairs educators, faculty, and students from more than 1,000 institutions and organizations (Retrieved from https://www.ncore.ou.edu/media/filer_public/3d/a4/3da4f276-0403-4b94-93d3-bd62b7c9e37e/justification_letter_2018.pdf). The weeklong conference includes keynote speakers, workshops, and special sessions related to issues of race and ethnicity. Student affairs educators from this study who participated in NCORE met several times prior to attending the conference, engaged in intergroup dialogue with a cohort of their peers during the conference, and continued to meet once they returned to campus. As part of the cohort experience, they were exposed to readings and discussion, supported undergraduate students attending the conference, and engaged with other experts, educators, and students from across the country.

Attending the conference required a significant investment of individuals’ and institutional time and resources, but little empirical research had been done to investigate the influence of this conference on student affairs’ multicultural competence. One research question that guided our study: What multicultural knowledge, awareness, and skills do student affairs educators develop by participating in NCORE, an experiential conference
exploring race and ethnicity? Information gained through this study can document the influence of NCORE on multicultural competence specifically, but also provide broader insights into the development of multicultural competencies for student affairs educators.

**Conceptual Framework**

Sue’s (2001) Multidimensional Model of Cultural Competence (MDCC) was used as the framework for this study. We used the definition of multicultural competence introduced by Reynolds and Pope (1997) and further definitions of multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge and multicultural skills introduced by King and Howard-Hamilton (2003). Additionally, NCORE is a conference focused on race and ethnicity; therefore, we found it important to define race, ethnicity, and racism.

The MDCC outlines three dimensions important when addressing cultural competency in the counseling field: (a) the diversity of human differences including but not limited to race, gender, disability, age, and sexual orientation, (b) components of cultural competence including awareness of attitudes, knowledge, and skills, and (c) foci of cultural competence at the individual, professional, organizational, and societal levels. The student-affairs educators who were chosen to participate in NCORE had demonstrated competencies at the first dimension as they had an awareness of student differences. Therefore, we were interested in how NCORE influenced awareness, knowledge, and skills; and how these were manifested in the individual, professional, organizational, and society levels. This study focused specifically on the second dimension including awareness of attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

For the purpose of this study, the definition of multicultural competence for student affairs educators introduced by Pope and Reynolds was used, defined as “…the awareness,
knowledge, and skills necessary to work effectively and ethically across cultural differences” (1997, p. 270). We used definitions for multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge, and multicultural skills further refined by King and Howard-Hamilton (2003) to investigate how NCORE influenced the multicultural competence of student affairs professionals.

**Multicultural Awareness.** “Awareness of how people’s attitudes, beliefs, values, assumptions, and self-awareness affect the ways they interact with those who are culturally different from themselves.” (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 124)

**Multicultural Knowledge.** “Having an informed understanding of cultures that are different from one’s own culture, including knowledge of their histories, traditions, values, practices, and so forth.” (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 123)

**Multicultural Skills.** “Skills that individuals use to engage in effective and meaningful interactions with those who are from different cultural backgrounds than their own.” (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 123)

**Awareness**

Culturally competent student affairs professionals must be cognizant that students represent diverse worldviews, lived experiences, and identity groups; and in many cases, these views will be different from the student affairs professional’s worldview, lived experience, or own identity groups (Harper, 2008; Pope & Reynolds, 1997). Student affairs professionals must be aware of their own attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and prejudices and how these factors influence their work with a diverse student body. Multiculturally aware student affairs professionals are needed to contribute to the overarching goals of higher education, which include inclusive campus environments where students persist and are prepared to navigate a global society.
Knowledge

The student affairs professional must understand societal structures and policies that are rooted in Colonial-America history, culture and values; and have an understanding of how these structures and policies might work in conflict with the students they serve (Davis & Harris, 2013). Knowledge of the history of higher education, and federal, state, and institutional policies and programs, and the influence of these for diverse student populations is critical to meet the needs of a diverse student body (Harper 2008; Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013).

Skills

Student affairs educators must also have multicultural skills to develop and manage differences at varied levels including individuals, institutions, communities, and society (Watt & Linley, 2013). Watt (2013) defined multicultural initiatives as taking actions that disrupt structural inequities limiting the experiences of marginalized groups, while privileging others. Watt (2013) approached multicultural initiatives and the needed multicultural skills of student-affairs educators from a framework in which diversity is a social value, and outlined three principles that should guide multicultural work, including: (a) a multilevel transformational approach, (b) engaging the head, heart and hands, and (c) alignment with stated goals and outcomes.

Race, Ethnicity, and Racism

This study examined multicultural competence within the context of exploring race and ethnicity. Terminology including race, ethnicity, and racism, were used by the participants and throughout this article. I drew upon Bell et al. (2016) to define these terms. Race is socially constructed based on physical features such as skin and eye color, hair and
bone structure (Bell et al., 2016). Ethnicity, also socially constructed, is associated with one’s region or nationality, ancestry, or a shared culture (Bell et al., 2016). Finally, racism is a socially constructed system of advantage and disadvantage operating within multiple levels of society including the individual, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional (Bell et al.).

**Methods**

In order to explore multicultural competencies of student affairs educators, we conducted a qualitative case study at a large, Predominately White research-intensive public institution located in the Midwest. The case study design investigated multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge, and multicultural skills of student affairs educators attending NCORE, an experiential conference exploring race and ethnicity. A case study design involved the collection of detailed information within time and activity parameters (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). This case study was bound by parameters of both time and activity. The time parameter included the beginning and conclusion of the conference experience of the student affairs educators as they prepared for, attended, and reflected on their NCORE experience. The activity was the NCORE conference and the immersion experiences leading up to, during, and following the conference.

Yin (2009) outlined three conditions for a case study: (a) research questions are in the form of how or why, (b) the phenomena is independent of the researcher’s control, and (c) the phenomena is current rather than historical in nature. This case study met all three conditions outlined by Yin. The research questions that informed this study were presented in the form of how. The phenomenon – multicultural competency development – was independent of the researcher’s control and a separate process from this study. The
phenomenon of multicultural competency development is relevant for institutions of higher education as well as greater society.

Qualitative case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic in nature (Merriam, 1997). The particularistic elements of a case studies focus on a situation, event, program, or phenomenon (Merriam); and, in this case, the phenomenon was the development of multicultural competence. Case studies are descriptive as rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon are collected. This study collected rich, thick descriptions about the phenomenon of multicultural competency development. Finally, case studies are heuristic, or bring meaning to the phenomena, wherein this case study investigated the meaning of multicultural competency development as interpreted by the student affairs educators who participated in this study.

Participants

Student affairs professionals participating in NCORE received an invitation to participate in the study. Of the 23 possible participants, 17 chose to participate. Participants were grouped by the number of years they had attended NCORE: seven individuals were attending their first NCORE (novice), six were attending for the second or third time (returners), and four had attended four or more times (experts). Eight identified as ALANA (African, Latinx, Asian, Native American) and nine identified as White; 13 identified as female and four identified as male. Participants represented a range of tenure in student affairs from new professionals (five), mid-level professionals (six), to seasoned professionals (six). Participants represented 12 distinct units across both academic and student affairs. The variety in backgrounds, experiences, and job responsibilities allowed for identification of
commonalities and differences in the influences of the NCORE experience on multicultural competence development (see Table 1).

**Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2014; Maxwell, 2013), field notes (Rossman & Rallis, 2012) and interpretive memos (Seidman, 2013). Participants were invited to a set of pre- and post-interviews or focus groups relative to their assigned category for years participating in NCORE.

As this study suggests, multicultural competence development occurs along a continuum. Focus groups with the novice and expert groups were appropriate in that first-time attendees were able to discuss their personal and professional goals for attending.

Table 1. Participants’ characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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<th>Frequency</th>
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<tr>
<td>Years attending NCORE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>One year</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-three years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Four or more years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 NCORE role</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team leader</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>64.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years as a student-affairs professional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Five or fewer</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Six-ten</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than ten</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>76.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
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<td>U.S. Minority</td>
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<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=17; Pseudonyms: Anna, Claire, Danielle, Elena, Heather, Joe, Kim, LaYin, Maggie, Nou, Olivia, Phyrne, Renee, Sarah, Thomas, Ben, and Xavier.
apprehensions about exploring issues of race and ethnicity, and they were able to reflect together on their first NCORE experience. Expert participants, those attending NCORE four or more years, were able to reflect on their own multicultural competency development over several years, building from one another’s diverse vantage points (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2014; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The semi-structured one-on-one interviews with the returners, provided opportunity for deeper exploration into their multicultural competency development and flexibility for clarification and follow-up questions. The returners were not new to the experience, but were also not seasoned NCORE participants either, as they were processing and making sense of the meaning of their own development.

**Data Analysis**

After data collocation, we analyzed the data following Saldana’s (2015) methods for coding qualitative research including collecting data, coding data, identifying patterns, and categorizing the patterns. We began data analysis by writing analytic memos to capture insights and reflection immediately following each interview, including emerging themes, methodological questions, and connections between themes, literature, and theory (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Simultaneous to completing interpretive memos, we transcribed audio-recordings verbatim after each interview. The cleaned and de-identified transcripts were sent to each research participant for validation.

We analyzed the cleaned and de-identified transcripts and analytic memos utilizing a three-phase approach (Saldana, 2015). In the first phase, we looked for themes around multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge, and multicultural skills. In the second phase, we looked at the data within each of the three competency areas for themes within the overarching themes of multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge, and multicultural
skills. Finally, in the third phase, we looked at emerging themes that supported how student affairs educators develop multicultural competencies.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was received prior to conducting this study (see Appendix). Four higher education peers were engaged in the review of the data for validation of the themes, bias, discrepant evidence, and any other ethical issues. Peer feedback was incorporated into the final analysis.

**Researcher Positionality**

Creswell (2014) encouraged qualitative researchers to clarify their own biases, and how those biases might influence the methodology of the study. We acknowledged our positionality as researchers. The investigator for this study identified as a White female with more than 20 years of experience in higher education and the nonprofit sector as a student affairs educator and academic administrator. The co-author identified as a White, first generation female, with 20 years of experience working in higher education and student transitions prior to becoming a faculty member. As a student-affairs administrator and faculty member, we work to acknowledge our privilege as White women, believe in the importance of developing our multicultural competence, and seek opportunities to develop in these areas, but had not participated in NCORE prior to this study. We were mindful of potential bias and practiced reflexivity to ensure previous experiences did not impede the research process (Creswell).

**Limitations**

This study was not without limitations. It was conducted at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) located in the Midwest. Participants contextualized their multicultural competency development as a professional within the environment of a PWI. Participation in
the study was limited to one cohort at one institution. Additionally, not all student affairs professional invited to the study chose to participate; the experiences of cohort members that did not participate may have yielded different findings. We focused only on those attending NCORE and did not examine experiences of other student affairs educators who had participated in other programs with similar goals. We limited the scope of the study to the second dimension of the MDCC framework; choosing to focus on cultural competencies without the intersection of multiple worldviews (first dimension) or areas of foci (third dimension).

Findings

Our study sought to understand the multicultural knowledge, awareness, and skills student affairs educators develop by participating in an experiential program focused on race and ethnicity. Findings indicated that through participation in NCORE, student affairs educators do develop multicultural competencies in the form of awareness, knowledge, and skills. They suggested their multicultural competencies developed along a continuum beginning with multicultural awareness, followed by knowledge, and eventually skills. Participants suggested that multicultural competency development is a lifelong journey that includes self-development, professional development, and the ability to influence others’ multicultural competencies.

Multicultural Awareness

All of the participants from this study suggested that the NCORE experience influenced their multicultural awareness including their attitudes, beliefs/assumptions, and self-awareness, and awareness of one’s own privilege.
**Attitudes.** NCORE broadened Elena, Thomas, and Anna’s attitude toward race and ethnicity. Anna, an ALANA veteran participant, shared that NCORE expanded her worldview about issues of race and ethnicity: “I feel like [NCORE] has really broadened me in a lot of ways, I think even how I see the world.” For Thomas, a second-year ALANA participant, NCORE developed his awareness through reflection and making meaning of his experiences: “NCORE causes me to pause more, reflect more, to be much more reflective about things that I see; that I hear.” Elena, a first-year White participant, shared her attitude toward learning about race and ethnicity: “The minute you think you are aware or know all of these things . . . is when you should retire and go home. … I can’t imagine knowing anybody’s lived experience other than my own.”

**Beliefs and assumptions.** Participants shared that NCORE influenced their beliefs and assumptions in ways that affected their interaction with others culturally different from themselves, in particular, beliefs and assumptions about students they serve and their campus environment. Joe, a White participant, shared that NCORE influenced his awareness and understanding of underrepresented students: “I’m more in tune with our student struggles.” Sarah, also White, corroborated Joe’s perspective: “In terms of awareness, [I experienced] a lot of ah-ha moments that really made sense with what I was learning about the issues that African American students probably feel on this campus.” Nou, an ALANA participant, shared her belief about the political nature of working through issues of race and ethnicity in higher education:

I am an unafraid educator for our undocumented students, but forgetting it is also a political statement you are making. It’s not just I’m going to support these students. You are politically saying I support these issues that are unconstitutional.
Nau became aware of her beliefs and assumptions about the political nature of advocating for undocumented students through their journey in higher education.

**Self-awareness.** Participants shared that once they attended NCORE their self-awareness was permanently influenced; especially as they engaged in self-reflection and interacted with others different from themselves, as shared by Kim, an ALANA participant:

Paying attention to how I am received. The skin that I’m in. My tone. My communication style. Making sure I’m being accommodating to the person I’m interacting with, because this may be the first time that they’ve interacted with someone like me.

Participants, when asked how NCORE influenced their awareness of others culturally different from themselves unilaterally identified privilege. Participants shared they became more self-aware of their own privileges through the NCORE experience. Joe shared how NCORE influenced self-awareness of his privilege:

I probably [have more privileges than the majority of NCORE participants]. ... The reality for me to be able to say I didn’t earn any of it is what NCORE, and this process, and this awareness has let me do.

Participants recognized their own privileges, regardless of identifying as White or underrepresented. For example, Nou attended a session about undocumented immigrants at her first NCORE, she reflected on her understanding of the privileges she has despite not being a member of many historically privileged groups:

[NCORE] really struck a chord with me. It made me think about my own privileges, my own privilege as a Woman of Color. Being born in this country. Having U.S. citizenship. My parents going through and getting their citizenships and just thinking wow - this is such a privilege to sit here and say that I’m an American citizen, when someone who maybe has grown up in this country doesn’t have that privilege.
Ben was also reflective of his privilege, “As a White person, my whole life has been built around me in America. Everything was made for me – the education system, healthcare, college, scholarships.”

The NCORE experience provided for Joe, Nou, and Ben an awareness of their own privileges, regardless of if they identified with multiple privilege groups, or only a few. NCORE provided them the opportunity to explore their own racial and ethnic identities.

**Multicultural Knowledge**

Participants suggested that they began to learn about the history, traditions, values, and practices of cultures other than their own within the context of higher education through their NCORE experience.

**History.** Participants emphasized their expanded knowledge about U.S. history for people of traditionally underrepresented races and ethnicities. Phryne, a White participant, shared an example of learning history written from the lens of a White historian, shared by White educators, for White audiences:

In graduate school I was taught about how amazing the G.I. Bill was for providing access to higher education. But, over a million Black soldiers that served in WWII were not given the opportunity of receiving the GI Bill. So how is that access?

Phryne’s example of learning about history was similar to other participants who shared examples of how their previous history was disseminated through a lens of privilege. NCORE provided alternative perspectives on historical events and their impact on underrepresented groups in America.

**Traditions and Values.** Participants affirmed they gained knowledge about cultural identities including African American, Asian American, Latinx, Indigenous, and White. Olivia, Sarah, and Thomas each shared examples of attending sessions
where they learned more about specific racial and ethnic identities. Olivia, an ALANA participant, attended an African American session on post-traumatic slave syndrome that inspired her to buy a book and have further dialogue: “Let’s talk about the historical implications of what this means.” Sarah provided an example of learning about the Asian American culture: “I didn’t know a lot of the terms they were talking about. Even Asian American identity models were brand new to me.” Thomas gained knowledge about Indigenous cultures and realized he had much more to learn: “I have a much better understanding of the term, Native American [Indigenous] is not reflective of that group. I mean that group is tribes, and they are all different.” For some of the participants, NCORE confirmed what they thought they knew about race and ethnicity, for others NCORE expanded the foundation of knowledge that they already possessed, and yet for others NCORE contradicted assumptions that they previously held about race and ethnicity.

**Practices.** The topic of undocumented students in higher education was a salient focal point for participants, in particular higher education practices related to undocumented students. Nou shared that her knowledge about undocumented students was clarified and expanded: “People would ask me before NCORE about undocumented students. I had an idea, but I didn’t really know. I know so much more than I did before I went to NCORE.” Elena supported Nou’s example: “I had no idea. [Before NCORE] I would have talked about Dreamers.” Olivia shared that her perspective prior to NCORE was about Latinx undocumented students, but through NCORE became knowledgeable about immigration stories from cultures other than Latinx:

A lot of time when we talk about undocumented people [in America], we think of those coming from South America. ... There are all of these different
stories that are happening. When we talk about “the border”, what about the rest of the borders?

Thomas, along with other participants acknowledged limited institutional infrastructure to support undocumented students:

I went to a couple of sessions that dealt with undocumented students, because I know that we have a significant population of undocumented students. I’m not thoroughly convinced that we have the support structures in place and that we know how to work with those students.

For Nou, Elena, Olivia, and Thomas their knowledge about undocumented students was broadened; and some participants such as Thomas had begun to consider implications for higher education practices.

**Developing multicultural knowledge.** Participant shared the conference influenced their multicultural knowledge, but the knowledge they gained was only a foundation for areas of further exploration as shared by Heather, who identified as White: “I have so many notes on things that I need to research.” Olivia, who identified as ALANA, described a similar perspective:

[NCORE] is still only five days. It increases your knowledge. It opens the door, but you have to be willing to step in. It is going to start exposing you to things, but you really have to still delve deeper.

As participants attended sessions at NCORE, they became cognizant there was likely much more multicultural knowledge they had yet to acquire. They suggested the NCORE experience was a source of multicultural knowledge that opened doors for further exploration of issues of race and ethnicity, and they were responsible for continuing to develop their multicultural knowledge post NCORE.

**Multicultural Skills**

Participants who shared skill development were primarily returners and veterans to the NCORE conference. They identified recognizing diverse perspectives, communicating,
and influencing others as three skills they developed by participating in NCORE and engaged in multicultural work over time.

**Recognizing diverse perspectives.** Understanding multiple perspectives from diverse life experiences, was a theme carried through from areas of multicultural awareness and knowledge development, to skill development. As Joe described: “This program has afforded me the opportunity to see the issue through so many different lenses.” Sarah shared, “Every year it has an impact on you. You come back with a little bit of a different lens. ... You’re seeing things differently.” Participants provided examples of using awareness and knowledge gained about different racial and ethnic identities in their skill-set to engage with others, as shared by Anna:

> All of the stereotypes [theories or ethnic characteristics] you would assume about people. You have to pull that back, and just wait for the story to unfold. Because, yes, they may have these things in common, but this is where it is different.

Anna, and others, recognized students have unique lived experiences and student affairs educators need to understand multiple lenses when working with students rather than making assumptions about student’s experiences and backgrounds.

**Communication.** Participants suggested their multicultural communications skills were influenced through NCORE as they developed the competencies to listen, dialogue with others, facilitate dialogue, and use relevant language.

**Listen.** Kim shared she learned the importance of listening through her NCORE experience: “I do listen. I picked that skill up very intently … You’re in the zone, you’re already charged. But the best thing you can do is listen.” Kim had developed the skills to identify when to listen to others’ experiences and perspectives, and when to engage in the dialogue about race and racism.
Danielle, a White participant, described how she began to listen to the life experiences of others through her NCORE experience: “I went to the [NCORE] sessions with the lens of storytelling and listening for people’s stories.” Thomas suggested he better listens to students because of his NCORE experience:

I can listen with a more informed ear. … I understand what they are saying, because this sounds like some of the information that I learned at the session I went to on Asian Americans. … I can help students by saying, “You know, I’m not living your experience, but I understand it.”

Kim, Danielle, and Thomas not only learned to listen to the stories of others, but also to understand and comprehend the meaning of those experiences.

**Dialogue.** Claire, a White participant who had attended several NCOREs, shared how these experiences helped to develop her skill-set when dialoguing with students and their families in her job:

I’ve had a lot of those conversations with families over time [regarding issues of race and ethnicity]. I think my exposure, and self-knowledge, and teaching, and learning. … the whole NCORE process has made me much more open and willing to have those conversations.

Participants emphasized their willingness to have meaningful conversations about race and ethnicity with others because of their NCORE experience.

**Facilitate.** Participants also reported the ability to provide leadership in the form of facilitating dialogue related to issues of race and ethnicity. Sarah shared that by modeling colleagues she viewed as expert facilitators, she developed skills to facilitate difficult dialogue: “Every year, because of practice, [my facilitation] gets a little bit better.” Olivia shared examples of facilitating dialogue about race and ethnicity in her department: “Because of NCORE I’m trying to facilitate more conversations around issues of race and ethnicity [with colleagues], and a lot of other issues of inclusion.” Joe shared an example of
facilitating dialogue as a supervisor with his staff team: “I’ve made the decision to introduce and require my staff to read [a book about race and ethnicity]. It’s a professional development exercise that I’m going to continue the dialogue.” Sarah, Olivia, and Joe developed the skills to influence the multicultural competence of others as a result of attending multiple NCOREs.

**Language.** NCORE provided participants with the most current language used within the discipline of race and ethnicity. Renee, an ALANA participant, shared she expanded her vocabulary: “[I learned] a lot of new terms and a lot of old terms that are used differently.” LaYin, an ALANA participant, noted the importance of correct language when working with students about race and ethnicity: “When we’re working with a network of students, what language do we bring?” Olivia illustrated the importance of having the correct language when making observations about issues related to race and ethnicity in her work environment: “To have the language ... and be able to put your finger on it.” NCORE provided for Olivia the language, terminology, and definitions to describe observations of racism and cultural conflict within her professional setting.

**Influencing others.** The multicultural skills of veteran participants included developing their own multicultural competencies, as well as the skills to influence multicultural competencies of students and colleagues. Kim shared an example of developing multicultural competencies with her staff: “A great part of attending the conference was being able to bring back an instrument ... to do some personal reflection [with staff] about [communication styles and conflict].” Claire shared an example of being aware of policy changes and influencing others within her sphere of colleagues regarding the potential impact of policy changes for underrepresented populations at her institution:
Is anybody [in administration] considering how [a new policy] is going to impact Students of Color? How this is going to impact low-income students? How is it going to impact women? ... I have the ability to raise the questions and at least make somebody hear.

LaYin provided an example of her work with a student organization that is an awareness coalition: “Learning about history of activists and groups from different races and ethnicities, understanding that all oppression is connected, finding articles to share with them, and having discussions to help them reflect and think.” Sarah provided an example of influencing students she teaches by integrating influences of race and ethnicity into curriculum: “How I teach students or interact with them. I think for me [NCORE] opens doors for resources for teaching them.”

**Continuum of Multicultural Competency Development**

We began this study focusing on awareness, knowledge, and skills of multicultural competence. Although we were interested in examining each as distinct aspects of competence, participants frequently discussed this development along a continuum. They first developed multicultural awareness, followed by multicultural knowledge. Multicultural awareness and knowledge evolved into multicultural skills. Thomas provided his perspective of having first gained awareness:

I look at awareness as almost a first step to knowledge. I’m more aware of the issues of [Indigenous People] and their culture, but I don’t consider myself knowledgeable because I haven’t taken that next step of deeper exploration.

As Thomas described, he became aware of the Indigenous culture and his awareness developed into knowledge; yet he did not consider himself knowledgeable by solely participating in the NCORE experience. He suggested he needed to seek additional information and engage with Indigenous people before he felt truly knowledgeable about the culture.
First time participants questioned their multicultural knowledge prior to NCORE but, following NCORE could more clearly articulate examples of knowledge gained, and how the additional knowledge might transition to deeper understanding and skill development around issues of race and ethnicity. Prior to the conference, Danielle illustrated her lack of confidence in her own multicultural competencies: “If I hear my peers talking about different theories ... I feel almost intimidated. I don’t know all these theories.” Following the conference, Danielle shared, “I learned more about some theories. I’m sure some of those theories could change how I work with students.” Following NCORE Danielle reflected on knowledge gained from the experience and suggested what she learned would influence her work with students.

Student affairs educators who had attended more than one NCORE suggested their multicultural knowledge expanded and became deeper each year they participated, as shared by LaYin:

I think after attending [multiple] NCOREs and the sessions, I now have different perspectives in my memory bank. I’m able to utilize what I’ve learned from different theorists, and different presenters, and different literature. It is not just ‘what I know’, but here is what I know based on multiple things.

LaYin began to transition from having basic knowledge, to understanding the premise and supporting data for the knowledge she had acquired.

Sarah shared in graduate school she developed multicultural awareness but did not yet have the knowledge to support her awareness: “I remember in grad school learning all of these things but being really frustrated because I could never get my point across. I think in terms of knowledge it gives me the meat to back-up the claims.” Sarah suggested she
developed multicultural awareness in graduate school, but several years after graduate school it was her participation in several NCOREs that influenced her multicultural knowledge.

Much like knowledge, the data indicated skill development followed a continuum of increased cultural competence associated with more time involved with NCORE. First-year NCORE participants were less likely to identify or articulate skill development as a multicultural competency influenced by NCORE as described by Ben, a first-time conference participant:

Skills is hard to say. Maybe at some point I’ll kind of tease out some skills. ... I definitely got some information on how do you talk about whiteness with White people. I wouldn’t say that’s a skill, because that’s not a skill I have at this point, but I have the information.

Ben’s description of how NCORE influenced his multicultural skills was comparable to other first-time NCORE participants.

Even though there were sessions specifically addressing multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills; when asked about the influence of NCORE on their multicultural competencies, first-time participants were more likely to provide examples of increased multicultural awareness. They expressed their multicultural knowledge was influenced but needed to be further expanded before they would describe themselves and knowledgeable. They were least likely to identify, or clearly articulate, examples of how NCORE influenced their skills. Elena’s perspective supported Ben’s observation: “Skills, I don’t have any answers. I think that’s what the continual process is supposed to be as we come back and we continue to meet.” Elena indicated her first NCORE experience did not necessarily equip her with multicultural skills; rather she indicated returning to campus, continuing to meet with her colleagues, and applying her acquired awareness and knowledge to her work, might evolve into multicultural skills.
Veteran participants shared that multicultural competency is a lifelong journey. Joe, although he has been involved in NCORE for several years, still acknowledged his own opportunity for multicultural competency development:

I’ve literally had to almost flip the script. … I still have racist tendencies. I still have prejudice tendencies. … I don’t take that away from my history, and I don’t apologize for it; but I recognize it.

Like Joe, other veteran participants discussed their journey in developing multicultural competencies. Anna related her journey to work with students, “Where are we at in our own walk or journey? And how does that affect how we work with students?” Anna recognized that she was continuously developing as a person and a professional, and recognized her own development influenced her work with students. Olivia also discussed her journey as it related to students and their development, “Working with [underrepresented] students ... through this journey and finding their place. Feeling like they have a sense of belonging.”

Claire, another veteran participant, recognized that as her multicultural competencies evolved after several years participating in NCORE. She became the colleague counted on to work with underrepresented populations:

Along the way, I have become the person who is open to working with Students of Color, and working with first-generation students, or working with families dealing with DACA or immigration issues. It’s just been wonderful personally and fulfilling professionally.

Claire and several other veteran participants had not only developed multicultural skills, but had also become resources for matters related to race and ethnicity among their peers.

Participants demonstrated the multicultural competency development journey that evolves along a continuum of awareness, followed by knowledge, and then skills. Those
student affairs educators that had been part of NCORE for several years reflected on their journey, where they had been, and how they had developed. They recognized that even though they were veteran participants perceived as culturally competency campus role models, their multicultural competency journey was continuing.

**Discussion and Implications for Practice**

The research question for this study specifically addressed the second dimension of the MDCC that included multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills. Findings indicated that the student affairs educators that participated in the NCORE experience developed multicultural competencies parallel to the second dimension of the MDCC including multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills. Participants developed awareness from the conference, and knowledge to an extent. Participants gained some knowledge by attending NCORE, but as they reflected on their experience became aware they had more knowledge to gain. One weeklong conference did not provide the depth or breadth of information required for student affairs educators to consider themselves truly knowledgeable on issues related to race and ethnicity. Multicultural skills were not acquired until student affairs educators attended NCORE more than once, and then had the opportunity to apply the awareness and knowledge gained from the NCORE experience to their professional responsibilities.

Findings also indicated that multicultural competency development occurs along a continuum. Participants suggested that they first developed multicultural awareness, followed by knowledge, and finally skills; simultaneously they focused on their personal development before their professional development. For example, only those participants that had attended more than one NCORE, returned to their professional positions, and applied the multicultural awareness and knowledge that they had developed as part of
NCORE to their work, were able to articulate multicultural skill development as part of their multicultural competencies related to the NCORE experience. Elena, who was attending her first NCORE suggested, “Skills, I don’t have any answers. I think that’s what the continual process is supposed to be.”

**Implications for Practice**

If student affairs educators are to influence the campus environment and students in which they engage, they must have the multicultural competencies to do so. Participating in NCORE requires a significant investment in time and money, but findings from this study suggest that this investment is worthwhile. All participants from this study increased their multicultural competency because of attending NCORE.

Each year, NCORE participants include both first time participants and those who have participated for several years. First time attendees gained a significant amount of awareness and skills; multicultural competency continued to develop in participants who attended multiple times. This study reaffirms the value of NCORE for both types of participants. For institutions interested in developing the multicultural competency of their student affairs professionals, these findings support a strategy where institutions invite professionals who have not previously attended, and also encourage professionals to attend multiple times. This approach helps institutions provide at least foundational awareness and knowledge to a larger percentage of their staff.

Participants who attended multiple years noted that it took several years engaging in the NCORE experience before they felt they had the competencies to influence others, suggesting the importance of encouraging at least a core group of staff member to attend NCORE multiple times. Therefore, those with a developed expertise can then serve as
multicultural competence educators for other staff members. Additionally, because institutional change is more likely to occur when student affairs educators develop and apply their skills in their work, these staff may also take on more responsibility for creating socially just and inclusive environments.

We recognize that the multicultural competence of student affairs educators cannot be achieved solely through participation in one conference. However, NCORE, because of its focus, goals, and conference structure, does provide a valuable vehicle by which multicultural competence can be developed. Many student affairs professionals may have had graduate coursework or have participated in other professional development sessions. Despite these prior experiences, all participants found NCORE to be a powerful and useful conference that enhanced their multicultural development.

**Future Research**

Multicultural competency development and the role of NCORE in this development, is rich with opportunity for future research. First, a quantitative design might include more research participants from varied institutional types and geographical regions. Longitudinal studies investigating changes in multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills of student affairs educators attending NCORE over time would further inform the continuum of multicultural competency development. Beyond student affairs educators, replicating this study for faculty or administrators might provide valuable findings regarding advancing institutional goals related to social justice, equity, diversity and inclusion.

This study addressed the influence NCORE had on the second dimension of the MDCC related to awareness, knowledge, and skills. Exploring the first and third dimensions of the MDCC such as varying identities and levels of development including personal,
professional, organizational, and societal would provide a deeper understanding of the multidimensional elements of multicultural competency in higher education. For example, this study did not investigate the differences and similarities by race and ethnicity. However, the lived experiences and understanding worldviews of others were salient elements of the NCORE experience and would be a valuable focus for future studies.

**Conclusion**

Institutions of higher education espouse goals of diversity, social inclusion, and graduating students with the ability to navigate a global society (Bresciani, 2008). Student affairs educators play a significant role in meeting these institutional goals, but to be effective requires multicultural competence. Although student affairs educators may be exposed to these topics in graduate school (Cuyjet, Longell-Grice, & Molina, 2009; Dickerson et al, 2011; Lovell & Kosten, 2009), acquiring multicultural competence is a developmental process. This study explored the experiences of student affairs educators developing multicultural competencies within the context of NCORE. Findings demonstrate that NCORE is a powerful experience that aids in the multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills of student affairs professionals.

**References**


CHAPTER 3. EXPLORING THE WILL OF STUDENT-AFFAIRS EDUCATORS TO INFLUENCE CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A paper to be submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal
Jennifer L. Plagman-Galvin

Abstract

Student affairs educators engage in multicultural competency development opportunities. However, having these skills does not guarantee investment in multicultural work. Guided by the change dimension of the advocacy strategy framework, this case study explored the ‘will’ of student affairs educators to engage in multicultural work. Findings suggest that student affairs educator must have belief, passion, and relevance in multicultural issues; and the capacity and willingness to do the work. Results of this study have implications for practice, student affairs preparation programs, and research related to change in the higher education environment.

Introduction

Racism and oppression are real. They have a long and storied history in our country and are present in every corner of society, and college campuses are no exception (Davis & Harris, 2013). At the forefront of addressing these campus realities are student affairs educators (Pope, Reynolds & Mueller, 2014; Watt & Linley, 2013). For these key influencers in higher education, multicultural work can be challenging, lonely, and risky (Watt 2013). Furthermore, the end goal for engaging in multicultural work is elusive, void of a roadmap to meet institutional aspirations around inclusivity and welcomeness, with little indication that change is occurring (Harper 2008; Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013; Pope, et al., 2014). Yet, those engaged in multicultural work on college campuses call for needed
institutional change to address racism and oppression, and disrupt structures that reward privileged populations and limit underrepresented populations (Quaye & Harper, 2015).

In addition to addressing racism, oppression, and the complexities associated with multicultural work, student affairs educators have the access and responsibility to foster interaction and learning among students from their first campus visit through graduation (Barr, McLellan, & Sandeen, 2014). Bookended by admissions when students first engage with their institution to career services when they are about to graduate, student affairs educators facilitate programs and services such as academic advising, residence life, recreation, student activities, and financial aid. If they fail to approach their work through a multicultural lens, opportunities will be void for disrupting systems of oppression, addressing racialized incidents on campus, encouraging cross-cultural engagement opportunities, facilitating programming and practices that address racial and ethnic diversity, and ultimately preparing students to navigate a racially and ethnically diverse society.

Recognizing the necessity for multicultural competent student affairs educators to meet the aforementioned objectives, this study focused on why student affairs educators invest in multicultural work. Adapting the advocacy strategy framework theory for change utilized in the public policy arena to higher education, I explored why student affairs educators at a large, research-intensive, land-grant PWI in the Midwest are working toward change on their campus by disrupting structural inequities that limit the experiences of marginalized groups, while privileging others (Watt 2013). In order to identify participants engaged in multicultural work, I invited student affairs educators from the selected institution who had attended the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE) to participate in the study. I made the assumption for this study that those student affairs educators who had
attended NCORE had the multicultural competences and will to engage in multicultural work. Within the change dimension of the advocacy strategy framework, I specifically addressed the will, or investment, of these student affairs educators to engage in multicultural work. This case study was guided by one research question, “Why do student affairs educators invest in multicultural work in higher education?”

**Literature Review and Framework**

Institutions espouse the need for change through aspirations of a welcoming and inclusive campus community (Bresciani, 2008; Quaye & Harper, 2015). For institutional change to be realized, change needs to occur at various strata within the environment including individual, group, and administrative levels (Pope, et al., 2014; Watt & Linley, 2013). Scholars call on higher education stakeholders – students, faculty, staff, and administrators -- at each of these levels to be multiculturally competent and engage in multicultural work for aspirations of welcomeness and inclusivity to be achieved (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013; Pope & Reynolds, 1997; Watt & Linley, 2013). This study focused on student affairs educators, a key stakeholder and campus influencer in multicultural work.

The multicultural competence development of student affairs educators is well documented, and the work of several higher education scholars has assessed the multicultural competence of student affairs educators (Castellanos et al., 2008; King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Mueller & Pope, 2001; Pope & Mueller, 2000; Sriasiam, 2014). Literature has indicated that student affairs preparation programs include equity, diversity, and inclusion either in specific courses, or as a program competency (Burkhard et al., 2005; Cuyet et al., 2009; Flowers, 2003; Gaston Gayles & Kelly, 2007; Pope & Mueller, 2005). Some student affairs educators will enter into student affairs positions specifically working with multicultural
students and programming. Yet, for change to occur regarding a campus climate of racism and oppression, student affairs educators beyond those with specific job responsibilities to work with underrepresented populations are needed to engage in multicultural work.

Lacking from the literature are studies examining why student affairs educators invest in multicultural work.

To inform this study, the review of literature further explored the definitions of multicultural work, race, ethnicity, and racism; as well as the advocacy strategy framework, and the ‘will’ component within the change dimension of the advocacy strategy framework.

**Multicultural Work in Higher Education**

Multicultural initiatives are programs and strategies that “take action to disrupt the structural inequities that historically have limited the experiences of marginalized groups while privileging the experiences of others” (Watt, 2013, p. 11). These actions are aligned with stated goals of higher education and are transformative in nature at varying levels including individual, institutional, community, and societal (Watt).

Multicultural initiatives include personal and professional development on topics of diversity. Integral to multicultural work in higher education is student affairs educators engaging directly with students, colleagues, and campus administrators, and understanding their lived experiences may be different from their own lived experience. It includes policy change, programming, and practices related to serving underrepresented students or engaging students in cross-cultural co-curricular educational opportunities (Watt 2013).

While Watt and Linley (2013) utilized the term multicultural initiatives, for this study I used the term multicultural work. I approached this study from a perspective that multicultural work encompasses a spectrum of initiatives, strategies, and approaches that
include personal and professional development—with the end goal to address racism and oppression on campus.

**Race, Ethnicity, and Racism**

It is important to address terminology utilized throughout this article including race, ethnicity, and racism. This study sought to understand the will of student affairs educators to engage in multicultural work. Participants in this study were identified through their participation in a conference exploring race and ethnicity. Thus, terminology including race, ethnicity, and racism were used throughout this article. Race is socially constructed based on physical features such as skin and eye color, hair and bone structure (Bell et al., 2016). Ethnicity, also socially constructed, is associated with one’s region or nationality, ancestry, or a shared culture (Bell et al.). Racism is a socially constructed multi-level system of advantage and disadvantage including individual, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional (Bell et al.).

**Advocacy Strategy Framework**

My initial interest in this topic was on how multiculturally competent student affairs educators create change in higher education. The advocacy strategy framework introduced by Coffman and Beer (2015) is used to articulate change theory (Retrieved from http://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publications/advocacy-strategy-framework), and is applied in public policy and communication. The advocacy strategy framework provides the context by which to examine this interest. The two-dimensional model is comprised of various audiences along the x-axis and a continuum of change along the y-axis. The audiences in the first dimension include the public, influencers and decision-makers. The
continuum of change associated with the second dimension consists of awareness, will, and action.

The framework is applicable to multicultural work in higher education where higher education stakeholders (audience dimension) engage in actions that disrupt racism and systems of oppression (change dimension). Figure 1 correlates the advocacy strategy framework to a framework for change in higher education (Coffman & Beer, 2015). In higher education, the various audiences include students (public), student affairs educators and faculty (influencers) and administrators (decision makers). The change dimension adopted to change in higher education includes multicultural competence (awareness), will, and multicultural work (action). Within the framework “will” aligns with the purpose of this study to understand why student affairs educators invest in multicultural work.


Figure 1. The advocacy strategy framework for change in higher education
Coffman and Beer (2015), proposed that the framework offers a place to begin an advocacy initiative such as multicultural work; and it takes into consideration intended stakeholders, other advocacy initiatives, and meaningful outcomes. The fluid nature of the framework makes space for multicultural work and advocacy to occur over time (Deardorff 2015; Iverson, 2012). Other advocacy work on college campuses that may be working either parallel or in tandem with multicultural work might include sexism, ableism, and ageism. The end goal of the advocacy strategy framework includes meaningful objectives or tactics, aligning with the end goal of multicultural work to disrupt systems of racism and oppression (Watt 2013).

**Will**

Coffman and Beer (2015) emphasized “will” as an integral part of the framework, as will connects awareness with action. They suggested that stakeholders engaged in advocacy need to have the will to do the work. “Will” includes: (a) opinion or belief about the topic, (b) intensity or passion about the topic, (c) salience or relevancy of the topic, (d) capacity, or the confidence and skills to take action, and (e) willingness to take action, realizing risks and/or benefits of doing so (Coffman & Beer).

This framework is appropriate for understanding why student affairs educators invest in multicultural work in several ways. In order for student affairs educators to invest, they must have an opinion or belief in the importance of multicultural work (Coffman & Beer, 2015). For example, they may have awareness and knowledge on topics of race and ethnicity; however, if student affairs educators lack an opinion about the importance of multicultural work in their job, they will likely not have the will to engage. Having an opinion or belief about race and ethnicity may not be sufficient for student affairs educators
to act; they must also have a passion or desire to engage with audiences in their professional realm such as students or colleagues, to address topics of race and ethnicity. Furthermore, there must be relevancy to applying multicultural work to their professional responsibilities. Once a student affairs educator has formed an opinion with intensity driving the opinion and has made connections regarding relevance to their professional responsibilities, the student affairs educator must have the competencies, or skills and confidence to engage in the work. Last, they must have the willingness to exert time, energy and effort toward to topic.

In this study, I posited that student affairs educators who have the will to do multicultural work are investing in themselves, their students, their colleagues, initiatives within their unit and within the institution. This aligns with the principles outlined by Watt (2013) that include a multilevel transformational approach, engaging the head, heart and hands, and aligning with intended goals and outcomes.

**Method**

Guided by one research question, “Why do student affairs educators invest in multicultural work?”, I utilized a transformative approach to inform this qualitative case study. Qualitative research focuses on meaning within a context (Janesick, 2011; Merriam, 1997) with a goal to better understand the social world (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). A case study design involves the collection of detailed information bound by parameters (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). This case study was bound by parameters of location and activity. The location was a large, predominately White institution in the Midwest, and the activity centered on student affairs educators engaging in multicultural work and the meaning they make of this work within the context of higher education.
Mertens (2013) suggested that approaching research with a transformative lens “prioritizes issues of social justice and human rights as overarching ethical principles that need to permeate all aspects of an evaluation study” (p. 27). Mertens outlined a transformative paradigm that includes axiological, ontological, and epistemological assumptions. The axiological assumption addresses the nature of ethics, and holds that human rights and social justice are at the heart of a transformative axiological approach, which aligns with the core of multicultural work. The ontological assumption claims “people with different experiences have different perceptions of what is real” (p. 29). This assumption aligns with the definition of multicultural competence and the necessary awareness, knowledge, and skills to work with others that are different from oneself. This approach has been used by similar studies that have examined topics in education, including marginalized communities (Jackson et al., 2018), special education (Trainor, 2011), and campus climate and racially diverse women in STEM (Johnson, 2012).

My study also sought to understand the will of student affairs educators within the context of higher education, as they worked toward an intended goal of change. The framework that guided this study was the advocacy strategy framework, which is a model for change theory. I approached this study with a perspective that by developing, or changing the multicultural competence of student affairs educators, they might in turn change or transform other stakeholders in higher education.

**Site and Participant Selection**

This study was conducted at a large, predominately White (PWI), research-intensive university located in the Midwest. I selected the site because of a long history of student affairs educators attending NCORE annually. Participants were comprised of a purposeful
sample of higher education professionals recruited through e-mail (Maxwell, 2013). Participant criteria included: (a) employment at the institution where this study was conducted, (b) primary professional responsibilities working in a student affairs role, and (c) attending NCORE one or more times. For the purposes of this study, I assumed that student affairs educators who had chosen to participate in NCORE had some level of multicultural competence in which they applied to their work in higher education. Participants who attended NCORE seemed to suggest a will to do multicultural work; therefore, this was an appropriate sample of participants to interview.

A total of 27 student affairs educators participated. Participants self-identified or presented as White (17), Black (6), Asian (2), Biracial (1), and Latina (1). There were 21 females and six males, representing 18 distinct units across both academic affairs and students affairs. Although there more individuals who identified as women, and there were a greater proportion of White participants than ALANA (African, Latinx, Asian, Native American) participants, the sample was representative of the larger pool of potential participants, which also included more women and those identifying with the White racial/ethnic identity (see Table 1).

These diverse characteristics provided multiple vantage points from varied lived experiences and a range of years in higher education; contributing to rich, thick, data for this study. Participants had the opportunity to choose a pseudonym. I assigned a pseudonym for those participants who did not choose their own pseudonym. Identifiable information self-reported through the interviews, including position within student affairs and years at Midwest University were generalized to maintain anonymity.
Table 1. Characteristics of student-affairs educators who participated in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years as a student-affairs professional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five or fewer</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six-ten</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than ten</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALANA</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonyms(^1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaYin</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lillian</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nou</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phryne</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\)Pseudonyms are not connected with participant characteristics to maintain the anonymity of participants. N/A indicates that participants did not meet participation criteria during the year the study was conducted. NO designates 2015 participants who were eligible in 2017 but did not participate.
Data Collection

I utilized data collected through interviews and focus groups in 2015, and interview data collected in 2017. A consistent semi-structured outline, utilized for both the interviews and focus groups conducted in 2015, was informed by Pope and Reynolds’s (1997) definition of multicultural competence; and King and Howard-Hamilton’s (2003) further definitions of multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge, and multicultural skills. Seidman’s (2013) three-step interview process served as a model for the semi-structured interview guide for collecting 2017 data and encompassed: (a) past life experiences informing the multicultural work of student affairs educators in higher education; (b) details about the participant’s multicultural work in higher education; and (c) meaning-making of their multicultural work. All interviews and focus groups were conducted in person. Data were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim by the researcher, and verified by participants.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data following Saldana’s (2015) methods for coding qualitative research including collecting data, coding data, identifying patterns, and categorizing the patterns. I personally conducted all interviews and focus groups; utilizing audio recording and personal notes to capture the data. I transcribed all audio recordings verbatim and verified the transcripts with each participant. In my first analysis of the transcripts, I utilized the advocacy strategy framework to identify data that supported the will to engage in multicultural work. I pulled all data supporting will from the transcripts and looked for patterns, and then coded the patterns into categories. Once I identified the categories, I further analyzed data into subcategories. After categories and subcategories were identified, I once again read the transcripts to identify any additional data that supported the patterns. I
organized all additional data into the new categories and subcategories. To report the findings, I aligned the data with the five characteristics of will outlined in the advocacy strategy framework, including: (a) belief, (b) passion, (c) relevance, (d) capacity, and (e) willingness.

**Ethical Standards**

Institutional Review Board approval was granted before participants were contacted, and all protocol outlined was followed. I also implemented several strategies to ensure ethical research standards were maintained throughout this study. All participants reviewed and signed the informed consent form for the study, which included a description of the procedures, potential risks and benefits, participant rights, measures of confidentiality, and contact information for report ethical concerns. I recognized that dialogue on race, ethnicity, equity, diversity, and inclusion may have been sensitive for participants and included the following statement as part of the informed consent form: “You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. In the event you choose to withdraw from this study, all information you provide (including audio recordings) will be destroyed and omitted from the study.”

**Trustworthiness**

Several strategies were employed to ensure trustworthiness of the findings from this study (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2013). Triangulation was ensured through the collection of thick rich, data from 27 participants who were diverse in their lived experiences and identities, job responsibilities in student affairs, departments in which they worked, and number of years as a student affairs educator (Maxwell, 2013). Member validation ensured
accuracy of the findings. To alleviate discrepant findings and bias, and validate themes (Jones et al., 2013), I engaged three peers in higher education in the review of findings.

**Positionality**

As a scholarly practitioner engaged in qualitative research, recognizing my positionality and approach to multicultural competence is salient to the findings of this study related to race and ethnicity. I submit that I am continuing to develop my own multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge and multicultural skills, just as my research related to multicultural competence has suggested that nobody will fully understand the complex nature of race and ethnicity, and other socialized identities, as they only truly know their own lived experience. I recognize my privilege and lived experiences as a White, cisgender female raised in the rural Midwest, have not fully enabled me to understand the lived experiences of underrepresented populations. However, my professional relationships with students, colleagues and administrators throughout 20 years in the nonprofit sector and higher education, and our collaborative multicultural work have provided me with exposure to lived experiences other than my own. I believe deeply in the civic principles of education—to advance change in individuals, communities and society, particularly related to topics on race, ethnicity and racism. Change begins with people who are aware, knowledgeable, and skilled to engage with others different from themselves; and that higher education has both the responsibility and capability to spark change.

**Limitations**

As with any research, this study was not without limitations. This study was conducted at a PWI in the Midwest. Participant experiences may be unique to the institution and, therefore, not generalizable to other settings. Participants were identified because of
their attendance at NCORE. I assumed that if participants attended NCORE, they were invested in multicultural work, which may not have been the case. Results were also reliant upon the participant’s self-assessment of their competencies to engage in multicultural work and their will to do so.

**Findings**

The purpose of this study was to understand the will of student affairs educators to engage in multicultural work. Utilizing the advocacy strategy framework to structure this study, I organized findings according to the ‘will’ component of the framework’s change domain. The will component is comprised of five characteristics: (a) belief, (b) passion, (c) relevance, (d) capacity, and (e) willingness. More specifically, will is based on the participants’ belief, passion and relevance for multicultural work, as well as the capacity and willingness to do multicultural work with a goal to create change in the campus environment.

The first characteristic of will is belief. Belief is taking a position on one’s knowledge. For example, a person can have knowledge about racism, but to believe racism is real, and that it needs addressed, takes will. Passion, the second characteristic of will, takes belief to a new level of emotion. For participants of this study, passion for serving students drove their will to engage in multicultural work. Relevance is the third characteristic of will and refers to the importance of multicultural work for participants, or the outcome they anticipate to be achieved through their work. The capacity characteristic of will includes the skills, confidence, time, and financial resources to do multicultural work. Finally, willingness is an extension of will, and specifically addresses the risks associated with engaging in multicultural work. Table 2 provides a summary of the findings from this study related to each of the characteristics of will.
Table 2. Characteristics and findings associated with the “will” to do multicultural work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Will” characteristic</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>Racism and systems of oppression are real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alignment with personal belief system and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job responsibility of student affairs educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need for change at individual and systemic levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>For serving students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fueled by underrepresented lived experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Addresses access and achievement gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Better serving underrepresented students serves majority students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enriches the educational experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advances society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Multicultural competencies of awareness, knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness</td>
<td>Risk of personal vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Risk of angering others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engage amongst uninterested colleagues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Belief in Racism and Oppression, Personal Values, Job Responsibilities, and Change

Belief in racism and systems of oppression. Many of the participants had a shared belief that racism and systems of oppression are foundational to their multicultural work in higher education. Nou, an ALANA participant, experienced racism and systems of oppression in her youth that informed her belief in racism: “Racism is the core of what we face. That is the root of it all. Racism is real. I experienced it growing up.” Privileged participants such as Ben held similar perspective: “Our undergraduate students, in particular, White, straight men aren’t even learning about identities. They assume we’re in a post-racial society, and racism is something that doesn’t exist. ... I am a firm believer that is completely false.”

Participants articulated their belief that racism thrives in systems of oppression, and to engage in multicultural work is “to challenge those systems” as suggested by Sydney, an
ALANA participant. Ellie, a White participant, shared that part of her work is educating students as to how they are part of the systems of oppression “I’ve got to get students to be aware of these systems - how [they] are perpetuating these systems. Recognizing [their] experiences, [their] value system, all of these other things are impacted by the larger system.”

**Multicultural work aligns with personal belief systems and values.** Engaging in multicultural work was a personal value of the student affairs educators in this study. Eva, a White participant, shared: “[Multicultural work has] just become a personal value of mine. When you put those lenses on and you believe them, you can’t stop seeing it.” Lillian, also a White participant, shared that her belief in multicultural work was rooted in her faith: “A big part of it for me is my faith. I just really, really believe in this—the whole aspect of do unto others as you would have them do unto you—the Golden Rule kind of thing.” Many of the participants shared various ways in which multicultural work aligned with their personal values, but the conviction in their belief of the importance of multicultural work was common amongst them.

**Belief that multicultural work is part of job responsibilities.** For those student affairs educators working specifically with ALANA students, multicultural work was directly related to their job responsibilities. Olivia, an ALANA participant, shared the relevance of providing a sense of belonging for underrepresented students: “Working with US ethnic minority students and helping students work through this journey, finding their place, feeling like they have a sense of belonging here in the college. For me it is very relevant to my job.” Rose, an ALANA participant, viewed her role as a student affairs educator relevant to ensure ALANA students persist and engage in the workforce in society: “We totally need People of
Color, and people of different marginalities to be everywhere else. We need Doctors of Color, we need women in leadership, and we need people to be disseminated.”

Participants in this study held the belief that their role as educators was much more than supporting students’ college experience external of the structured classroom. They were of the opinion that their responsibility as student affairs educators included developing students as future professionals with the multicultural competencies to navigate a global world. For example, Rose shared her belief that a student’s education included more than the traditional lecture: “We all have different definitions of what education is. Mine isn’t just tied to lecture. Obviously, there are so many other ways to learn.” Ashley, who supervised several student staff members, shared her belief in educating students through employment:

It’s a great time to help them understand [multiculturalism], whether it applies 100% to their job or it just better prepares them for what’s to come. ... What can we give you that you are really going to use later on? The transferrable skills.

Joe, a White program director, shared a similar opinion: “To prepare them to work and live in the society outside of college. That’s my job.” Thomas, an ALANA participant, shared an example of preparing students to engage in a job that may take them abroad: “They may end up in a job that takes them to India. ... If they have been in this all-White world and everything is the way that want it—then all of a sudden, BAM.”

Belief that change is necessary. Participants discussed change as part of multicultural work. They talked about change at both individual and systems levels.

Individual change. Participants suggested that system change begins with small change, as shared by Sophia, a White participant: “If we engage in [multicultural] work, it feels small. But when we look at impact five years later, what did it have?” Anna, an ALANA participant, suggested that change starts with the individual, but as more people
engage in multicultural work, change becomes easier: “The more people you can get comfortable together, talking about uncomfortable things, the easier it is to create change.”

**Systemic change.** Heather, a White participant, addressed the changing racial and ethnic demographics and her belief in the need for multicultural work: “We will be in a serious problem in the United States if we continue to ignore the fact that the groups that traditionally have been in the minority are going to be the majority.” Renee, an ALANA participant, shared that multiculturalism is part of the future:

The globe is shrinking. You don’t have to put diversity in a statement, you can look around and see. I’m not alone. There’s not only me. There’s not only you. We all look different. We all feel different. We’ve all had different individual experiences.

**Summary of belief.** Belief in racism and oppression provided the foundation for participants’ will to engage in multicultural work. Many of the participants suggested that their personal values, or beliefs, provided them the will to engage in multicultural work. Finally, belief that change was necessary at both the individual and systemic levels fueled their will to do multicultural work.

**Passion Driven by Serving Students and Their Own Underrepresented Lived Experiences**

**Serving students.** Participants’ belief in the existence of racism and systems of oppression, their personal values, and their recognition of change was fueled by their passion for serving students. Without exception, all of the participants had a passion for multicultural work that was driven by their innate desire to serve students, as noted by Lillian, a White participant: “It has always been about the students for me, helping them realize their goals and aspirations.” Sydney described her passion to empower students within the context of challenging systems: “To challenge those systems. Because we have students for such a little
amount of time. Empowering them with as many skills as we can, before they move onto the next thing. They can then go on and have their own networks of influence.”

**Underrepresented lived experiences.** For many of the participants, their own lived experiences fueled their will to do multicultural work beyond the belief in racism and systems of oppression, their personal values, and their belief in the need for individual and systemic change. For some of the ALANA participants, they shared underrepresented lived experiences related to their race or ethnicity. Nou, an ALANA participant, for example shared that her undergraduate experience as a Student of Color drove her passion for multicultural work:

> I was a Student of Color. First generation. All of those different identities. Having that very personal connection, and to know what it feels like to be supported and validated in higher ed. I know that feeling.

LaYin, who also identified as ALANA, reflected on her experience with her academic advisor that did not understand her lived experience, and it wasn’t until she engaged with one of her advisors from a student organization, who also identified as ALANA, that she felt someone from the institution understood her challenges and needs:

> There were times when I didn’t feel people were invested in my development or multiculturalism. That effects a sense of belonging. I actually did want to leave my university as an undergrad. ... It wasn’t until a student affairs advisor had applied her multicultural competency and understanding. What is the problem? Is it your interest? Something at home?

Thomas shared that when he engaged with underrepresented students, he empathized with their experiences because they were similar to his: “You hear [students] speak, and you hear what they’ve had to overcome. ... This was me and I didn’t know if I could make it through.”

Kate, who identified as White, grew up living in a variety of international locations, which informed her passion for creating inclusive environments for students, “I always
wanted to create inclusive environments where people felt welcome. ... Some places [where I grew up] it was amazing, but some places I very much felt like the other.” Ellie also identified as White, but grew up with a disability. She, too, considered leaving her undergraduate institution as a student: “When I was in undergrad, I almost left too. ... I thought it was all on me. The feelings of being an outcast or being bullied.” Rose also shared a moment when a senior administrator who identified as White understood the experiences of underrepresented students through her experience as a female in STEM: “She saw [underrepresented experiences] through the lens of being a female. That light bulb came on when she realized I’m a woman in STEM, I’ve been spoken over, and I’ve been told my ideas don’t matter.”

**Summary of passion.** For participants of this study, they chose a career in student affairs to serve students. Unsurprising, they articulated their passion for serving students as a component of their will to do multicultural work, and several discussed specifically engaging in multicultural work with their students as a passion.

This study also revealed that the lived experiences of student affairs educators were important contributors to the passion for their will to do multicultural work. For ALANA student affairs educators, they saw themselves and their own experiences in the racist and oppressed experiences of the Students of Color on their campus. White participants, while they could not fully understand the lived experiences of their ALANA colleagues and students, many of them had underrepresented experiences through their own marginalized identities that allowed them to appreciate the experiences of oppression and racism.
Relevance Found in the Outcomes Associated with Multicultural Work

Multicultural work is relevant as it addresses access to education and attempts to close the achievement gap. Participants found multicultural work relevant to address access and the achievement gap for underrepresented students, and stated by Eva, a White participant: “Access, one of the most important things we can do for our students.” Rose, who was ALANA, outlined the relevance of addressing access in her job:

Higher education is getting so much harder for marginalized students – economically, principally ... from family deaths to deportations, to students being the only provider in their house, students getting fake IDs not to go to the club, but so they can work early in life.

For Sydney, an ALANA participant, the relevance of addressing access and the achievement gap was data driven: “When we look at numbers, certain groups are not achieving at the same level as other groups. Some groups are not even existing in this space.” Phryne, a White participant, addressed both access and achievement of underrepresented as relevant to her work:

I want to change this space to be more accessible, responsive, and proactive for the students it was actually meant for. Back then when the Morrill act was passed, it probably wasn’t meant for multiracial students. It wasn’t meant for domestic Students of Color, or international students. But, land-grant has changed. This is a place of access; we need to start viewing it as more than just for White people.

Even more so, participants were driven to create conditions for student success, as Henry noted, “The motivation side of it is really in terms of seeing students succeed.

Students who didn’t have a chance 10-15 years ago.” Carlos, a White participant who was told in high school by an advisor that higher education was not in his future, also had a strong passion for supporting students: “What motivates me is I graduated with a 3.989 [GPA] from college, after someone told me that I couldn’t do it.” Carlos’s experience motivated him to
engage in multicultural work so other students with similar experiences could also achieve their academic pursuits.

**Multicultural work is relevant because it supports underrepresented students, and by doing so supports majority students.** Henry, a White participant, shared that the approach at the institution by many of his colleagues traditionally focused on programming that was beneficial for most students, would in essence be beneficial for smaller groups of students. However, an increasingly important perspective was to target programs for underrepresented groups, and by doing so the larger student population would benefit. Joe, who also identified as White, suggested a similar approach: “If I don’t intentionally provide access or resources for the marginalized groups, then I’m failing the majority groups. I’m not giving any of them the access to interact.” Kate, a White participant who worked with programs serving underrepresented students, suggested her staff has realized their approach can benefit a larger population of students: “We [can] serve more students, not just the 400 within our learning communities.”

**Multicultural work is relevant because it enriches the educational experience.** Participants in this study felt strongly that engaging in multicultural work was relevant to the experience of students, that the educational experience is richer for students when multiculturalism is incorporated into the learning environment. Kate shared: “When we have these different voices I think our programs are richer. When you have that diversity of thought and people with different experiences, you just approach problems in a different way.” Henry shared that failing to embrace the diversity of the student body would be a disservice to higher education:

> We are never going to be one type of student. We’re not going to be one sex. We’re never going to be one sexual orientation. We’re never going to be one
gender. We are never going to be one race, ethnicity, or international population. … If we don’t pay attention to the multiculturalism in higher education, we’re doing us all a disservice.

**Multicultural work is relevant because it advances society.** Participants shared that the relevance of richer educational experiences was to advance society as noted by Joe, “It’s important for us to be able to do [this work] to live in a globalized society. … It’s basic human dignity that we treat each other with respect.” Olivia shared a similar sentiment about the relevance of multicultural work: “It helps us to be better people. In our work spaces, in our homes, and in the community. … We could be such a stronger, better community, society, all together.”

**Summary of relevance.** For participants in this study, the relevance of multicultural work was articulated in the aspirations, or outcomes, they held for change. They viewed their work as relevant to access and achievement for students in higher education, but especially racial and ethnic underrepresented students. Some of the participants had begun to realize that majority students have the characteristics to succeed in higher education, but by focusing enhancement of underrepresented students, they will not only have an increased chance of access and persistence, but the educational experience of the majority students will also be enhanced. Participants felt that exposure to racial and ethnic diversity enriched the educational experience and contributed to advancements in society.

**Capacity, including Multicultural Competences, Financial Resources and Time**

Participants in this study demonstrated the need for multicultural competence to do multicultural work. Phryne, a White participant, shared an example of the diverse students she engages with and why competence is critical to her will to support them:

My current job definitely requires multicultural competence. I’m working with students from urban areas, from very rural areas, from all across the
spectrum of income, and all across the spectrum of race and ethnicity. I’m trying to help all of these students be successful. Every one of them is a case that I see that requires different competencies from me as a professional.

Phryne viewed each of her students as a unique individual, and she applied her multicultural competencies through her work to effectively engage with each student. Participants suggested that multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge and multicultural skills were a critical component of the will to do multicultural work. Ashley shared that once her staff started to engage in training, they understood the need to engage in multicultural work:

“Most people on our staff, once they’ve gone through the training they are like oh, I see where you are coming from. Or, I see how this is helpful.”

Having the multicultural competencies to engage in multicultural work provided the confidence in student affairs educators to do the work. Nou, an ALANA participant whose job required engaging with Students of Color, emphasized: “My job deals with race every day. It’s an area that I’m very super comfortable. Specifically, as I think about my own racial identity. It’s something that I feel that I’m very competent.” Although multicultural competencies were most salient in the will to do multicultural work, participants alluded to the need for resources—both allocated funding and time—to support their capacity to engage in the work as noted by Ashley, an ALANA participant: “I have the resources to help. I have the ability to try to make things better.”

Summary of Capacity. Participants in this study desired to do their job well; as such, they realized the need for their own multicultural competency development in the form of multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge and multicultural skills. These competencies provided them the confidence to engage in multicultural work. However, also
important to the capacity and confidence to engage in multicultural work are allocated time and financial resources.

**Willingness to Take Risk and Engage in Multicultural Work**

**Willingness to take risk.** Participants acknowledged the risk of feeling vulnerable when engaging in the self-work associated multicultural work. Xavier, an ALANA participant, shared that self-work can expose oneself to colleagues and supervisors in ways that are uncomfortable: “If I go too deep and layout too many expectations, not only is it something as a manager that I have to manage, but my own stuff might be exposed.” Furthermore, participants acknowledged risks associated with multicultural work including offending students, colleagues, and even supervisors. As noted by Ellie, a White participant: “I was successful because I caused you to get emotional about something. I caused you to wake up and feel something. ... I ruffled feathers because you have privileged identities that you haven’t thought about yet.”

**Willingness to engage when colleagues are uninterested.** In addition to the risks associated with multicultural work, participants shared their willingness to engage in multicultural work because it is the responsibility of everyone. They recognized that for change to occur on their campus, stakeholders from all areas of the institution need to be engaged, not only those student affairs educators with specific responsibilities to work in multicultural programming as suggested by Heather, a White participant: “It was clear to me that the same small group of people shouldn’t be carrying the load of the whole university. We need more people.” Eva, a White participant, shared a similar sentiment: “My team has started to hear me over and over again that it isn’t just the staff that works in multicultural programs that should be doing this. It isn’t just the People of Color. It’s everybody’s work.”
Just as Eva provided insight into expectations of her staff to engage in multicultural work, several student affairs educators articulated expectations that their colleagues join them in their pursuit of multicultural work. Henry, a White participant, shared: “I as an administrator at the institution. . . . There are things I can do, and I can bring peers along with me.”

A frustration that many of the participants articulated was their frustration with colleagues disinterested in multicultural work. Ashley, an ALANA participant, shared: “I still feel like there is a group that you have to – I don’t want to say have to write off, but you are probably not going to change.” Lillian, a White administrator providing oversight to a large unit expressed her frustration:

People dig their heels in. They would tell you to your face that they are not prejudiced and that they are very open minded. Yet, they will never participate in any opportunity unless you make it a whole staff thing.

Thomas, ALANA, offered his perspective that those engaged in the work need to be bringing their colleagues along: “The only way for all of us to move forward is for all of us to have those conversations with the person who – ‘I don’t want to hear about diversity. I’m sick of hearing about it.’ ”

**Summary of willingness.** Participants from this study had the willingness to take the risks associated with multicultural work, including the vulnerability required of self-work and confronting the privileges of colleagues, students or even supervisors. Furthermore, they articulated their willingness to engage in multicultural work, when at times it felt like there was limited interested from colleagues.

**Discussion**

Higher education espouses aspirations for embracing multiculturalism (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013). Groundwork can be laid to create multicultural awareness,
multicultural knowledge and multicultural skills among student affairs educators, faculty and administrators (Pope et al., 2014); however, integral to propelling change on college campuses is the ‘will’ to move higher education audiences from multicultural competence to action through multicultural work. Student affairs educators have the opportunity to be important influencers of multiculturalism on college campuses, and are critical players in addressing the structures that uphold racism and oppression (Watt 2013). Yet, participants felt that not all of their colleagues were invested in multicultural work. Those who student affairs educators who participated in this study indicated they have the will to engage in multicultural work; and they are fueled by belief, passion, relevance, capacity and ultimately willingness. Findings from this study correlate with the advocacy strategy framework and suggest if will is void from the multicultural work of student-affairs educators, in particular, then action and therefore change will not occur (Coffman & Beer, 2015).

Student affairs educators in this study believed that racism and oppression are real and present on their campus, that multicultural work aligns with their personal values and beliefs, and that there is a need for change, which aligns with the heart component of doing multicultural work (Watt 2013). Not surprising, the participants in this study had a strong passion for serving students. Their passion for students and the aforementioned beliefs they held fueled their will to do multicultural work. The lived experiences of the participants of this study contributed to their passion for multicultural work.

An interesting finding was the difference among the lived experiences of ALANA participants and those identifying as White. For ALANA participants, their lived experiences with underrepresented racial/ethnic identities contributed to their passion for multicultural work. They reflected on the familiarity of growing up and attending college as ALANA
students, and heard their own marginalized experiences in the racism and oppression their students were experiencing. Several White participants had marginalized lived experiences related to underrepresented identities they held other than their own race and ethnicity—including identities such as gender, ability, socio-economic standing or first being a first-generation student. White participants did not attempt to compare their experiences to the lived experiences of their colleagues and students identifying as ALANA; rather, they empathized with their lived experiences and understood the feelings of oppression when one is in an environment that you are the only one.

Relevance was another important characteristic of will. In this case study, student affairs educators found relevance in changing the philosophy at a predominately White institution from an emphasis on strategies that serve the greatest number of students for the greatest amount of good, to emphasizing strategies that best serve the underrepresented students. In the spirit of time and resource efficiency on their predominately-White campus, participants described effort toward policies, programs and practices that served the greatest number of students. They submitted that, in actuality, the majority student already possesses the characteristics to persist at the institution. Contrary to the historical approach in which they and their colleagues engaged in multicultural work, they proposed that exerting their will to do multicultural work for underrepresented populations actually benefited not only the underrepresented populations on campus, but also enriched the learning of the majority population of students which aligns with the literature (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013).

At predominately-White institutions where the majority of the students, faculty and staff are privileged to not think about, or experience racism in their everyday lives; these findings related to will are especially important (Gusa, 2010). Instilling a belief that racism
is real, and that racism is a problem, is the first challenge on a predominately-White campus. Without this foundational belief, then passion and relevance are likely void. The willingness to take risk and engage in multicultural work at a PWI is also a greater challenge, as this type of work is not part of the culture or operating principles. Rather, those student affairs educators engaged in multicultural work may find few collaborators, and many of their peers may be resisters. Without belief, passion, relevance, and willingness – the capacity, or infrastructure to do multicultural work may be more challenging to be allocated and justified.

Colleges and universities are large, complex and sophisticated institutions that require a strategy for culture change, particularly for addressing change in a complex topic such as racism and oppression. This research looked at the will to do multicultural work at the individual level, yet there is a need to consider will at the organizational level, as well. Individuals may have the will to engage in multicultural work, but if the environment in which they are situated is ill-positioned to support their work, the efforts of individuals will likely be road blocked. For example, just as individuals have a belief and passion to engage in multicultural work, so too can organizations have a mission to engage in multicultural work. Multicultural work might be relevant to achieving organizational goals. Furthermore, organizations can develop the capacity to engage in multicultural work through multicultural competence development of their staff, establishing financial resources to support multicultural work, and allocating time to engage in multicultural initiatives.

Oppression may also influence an individual’s will to engage in multicultural work. The system in which student affairs educators are engaged in multicultural work has the potential to be supportive, neutral, or oppressive. A supportive structure has the cultural components of will. A neutral structure is neither supportive, nor oppressive. However,
individuals may be working to combat systems of oppression for underrepresented populations, while at the same time experience an oppressive structure when engaging in multicultural work.

Finally, I used a transformative paradigm to approach this study. The transformation in this study was change within an individual. The intended goal of multicultural work was systemic change; however, systemic change begins with change at the individual level. Once individuals change they have the opportunity to influence change at the unit or departmental level, followed by the organization, and eventually greater society.

**Implications**

This study has important implications for practice and research. It identified key stakeholders in higher education and the role they play in creating change in their environment including students (public), student affairs educators and faculty (influencers), and administrators (decision-makers).

**Implications for Research**

The advocacy strategy framework supported findings from this study in that change occurs along a two-dimensional model that requires engagement among all higher education stakeholders with change occurring along the change dimension comprised of multicultural competence, will, and multicultural work.

Change on campus cannot be the responsibility of student affairs educators alone. If change is to occur on college campuses, all higher education stakeholders—students, faculty, student affairs educators and administration—will need to be engaged in multicultural work. Further research is needed to understand the role of students, faculty and administrators in creating change. Faculty hold the responsibility for curriculum and have opportunity to
integrate race, ethnicity, racism, oppression and other forms of diversity not only into the content of the curriculum but also in the delivery of the curriculum. As decision-makers, administrators have the responsibility to prioritize the multicultural work agenda, support policy that aligns with multicultural work, and establish the tone for what is tolerated and accepted on campus. Students, as the public, can be a powerful force by voicing experiences of racism and oppression and advocating for change. If students, faculty and administrators are void of “will”, they will not take action to give voice to experiences of racism, enhance curriculum, or change policy.

Salient to the multicultural work of student affairs educators was their lived experiences. A limitation of the advocacy strategy framework is that when applied to multicultural work it does not account for the lived experiences of the stakeholders engaged in the work. The passion for multicultural work of ALANA student affairs educators was driven by their own lived experiences of racism and oppression. For many of the White student affairs educators, they had lived experiences through underrepresented identities other than racism that had provided them exposure to oppression. These findings suggest that additional research related to identity development, power and privilege, and their influence on the will to invest in multicultural work could be relevant in addressing racism and oppression in higher education. Furthermore, this finding may present challenges in engaging student affairs educators that have not had, or have not reflected on, underrepresented experiences of their own.

The case study design of this study included one institution – a large, predominately White research-intensive institution in the Midwest. Additional studies exploring the advocacy strategy framework at diverse types of institutions are important to understand
change theory in a broader context of the higher education environment. There may be regional influences, institutional type or size implications associated with the advocacy strategy framework across different types of academic institutions. For example, institutions with social justice as a core value may be more explicit in their multicultural work agenda, priorities established by senior administrators may have a clearer focus on diversity and inclusion efforts, and supervisors may not hesitate to establish expectations for their staff to engage in multicultural work.

**Implications for Practice**

Multicultural work is needed on campus and this study shows that student affairs educators are not only embracing this need, but they also have the will to engage in the work. The findings from this study demonstrate the important characteristics that comprise the will to take action toward campus climate change related to racism and oppression. Whereas institutions aspire to be welcoming and inclusive through strategies of diversity, social justice and equity – ultimately preparing their graduates to navigate a global society, it is important to understand the framework by which this change takes place. How do institutions instill a sense of will within the influencers and decision-makers to take action towards change? This section offers implications for practice related to each of the characteristics of will as well as overall suggestions for practice and student affairs preparation programs.

**Belief and passion.** From this study, we can understand that the student affairs educators engaged in multicultural work must believe that racism and systems of oppression are real, as those engaged in this work consider racism and oppression as foundational to their belief in the will to do the work. Examining systems of power and privilege and exploring identity development within the context of serving as a student affairs educator are
important components of multicultural work; as such, they must be incorporated into the personal and professional development of student affairs educators through job responsibilities, annual goal setting and performance reviews. Furthermore, identifying ways to share the experiences of ALANA students, faculty, staff, and administrators with the greater higher education community is important to engaging others in multicultural work; for example listening sessions, student and faculty/staff meals, or communication strategies.

**Relevance.** Student affairs educators find relevance in their work by addressing access, closing the higher education achievement gap, and enriching the educational experiences for students with the ultimate goal to advance society. Given these findings, routinely assessing student programs that support underrepresented students and/or engaging students in multicultural competence development within the context of these student outcomes will provide relevance for engaging student affairs educators in this work. Furthermore, clearly communicating the philosophy that focusing efforts to support underrepresented students will enrich the educational experience of both underrepresented and majority students. Providing success measures to support this philosophy and integrating it into policy, practice and programs is needed at all levels of higher education from administration and faculty, to staff delivering programs. They include retention initiatives, student organizations, scholarships, learning communities, designated spaces on campus, and inclusive communication.

**Capacity.** Building capacity within student affairs educators includes opportunities for personal and professional development of multicultural competence. Engaging student affairs educators in intimate colleague networks such as book groups, intergroup dialogue, strategic work groups around multicultural initiatives to explore topics of power and
privilege, race and ethnicity, and systems of oppression are a component of building
confidence to do multicultural work. Institutions must allow for time as part of job
responsibilities and the work week, and financial resources in the form of professional
development funds and programming budgets to do multicultural work, as they are critical
for strategy implementation.

**Willingness.** An important finding in this study is that participants understood the
institution’s overarching goal of diversity and inclusion, but few felt there was an expectation
to do multicultural work at the departmental level. This finding suggests administrators at all
levels of the institution must embrace multicultural work, establish expectations to do
multicultural work through strategic planning and goal setting, and clearly communicate
eamples of multicultural work in action through assessment and reporting. Student affairs
educators must be supported by their supervisors and administrative leaders through
allocation of work time for both personal and professional development of multicultural
competence; and acknowledgement that multicultural work in as part of their job
responsibilities rather than an added service or benefit to the institution. Multicultural
competence must be part of the human resources process including hiring staff with
multicultural competence, providing multicultural competence professional development
opportunities, incorporating multicultural work in annual goals and evaluations, supporting
multicultural work at the individual and group levels, and rewarding multicultural work.

These findings also have several implications for student affairs graduate preparation
programs. This information can be used by faculty to educate graduate students about the
need to engage in multicultural work. The characteristics of will provide a framework for
personal assessment of one’s investment in multicultural work. As future practitioners, these results inform graduate students of a ways to create change in higher education.

Furthermore, findings from this study suggest student affairs educators with underrepresented lived experiences have greater willingness compared with their peers to engage in multicultural work; indicating that those with power and privilege that have not experienced underrepresented experiences may choose not to engage in multicultural work. A challenge for higher education is engaging those these audiences – if expectations are established by decision-makers and supervisors, and peers are engaging in the work, participation from those unengaged may increase. Strategies to engage student affairs educators refraining from multicultural work comprise capturing and sharing testimonials of those who are engaged – including the belief, passion and relevance for doing the work. For change to occur, there must be a willingness from administrators to establish expectations for multicultural work, and there must be a willingness of student affairs educators, and other audiences in the institution, to do the work.

Conclusion

For institutions to foster an inclusive and welcoming environment that addresses racism and oppression, audiences at all levels of the institutions – students, faculty, staff and administrators – must engage in multicultural work. This study examined the concept of will as an integral component of student affairs educators who have multicultural competence to do multicultural work. Findings illuminate the components of will -- belief, passion, relevance, capacity, and willingness.
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CHAPTER 4. ACTION IN PRACTICE: UNDERSTANDING HOW STUDENT-AFFAIRS EDUCATORS ENGAGE IN MULTICULTURAL WORK

A paper to be submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal
Jennifer L. Plagman-Galvin

Abstract
Student affairs educators are integral to student success, especially supporting underrepresented students and developing the multicultural competence of all students. To meet these aspirations, multiculturally competent student affairs educators must engage in multicultural work. This case study illustrates how student affairs educators at one predominately-White institution engaged in multicultural work. Results suggest that student affairs educators engage in multicultural work with students, colleagues and supervisors in a multilevel environment. Findings from this study have implications for practitioners, supervisors and administrators in higher education, as well as research related to campus climate change.

Introduction
Multiculturally competent student affairs educators are integral to the important multicultural work that addresses racism and oppression in higher education; work which is needed to serve an increasingly diverse student body and foster a more inclusive and welcoming campus (Quaye & Harper, 2015). A number of scholars have contributed to the literature related to multicultural competency development of student affairs educators (Castellanos et al., 2008; King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2014). Although several studies have demonstrated the multicultural competence of student affairs educators, the literature is limited as to how multicultural competencies are employed (Pope et al., 2014). Engaging in multicultural work is more than having the competencies
and will to do the work; rather, it is the action of engaging with others, both culturally different and similar, with the aspiration of change for social good. This study looks specifically at how student affairs educators engage in multicultural work.

I approached this study from a perspective that multicultural work encompasses a spectrum of initiatives and strategies, with the end goal to address racism and oppression on campus. To better understand how student-affairs educators engage in multicultural work, I facilitated a case study at a large, predominately White research-intensive university in the Midwest. I canvassed 27 student affairs educators who had attended the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE) to explore how they engage in multicultural work. I made the assumption for this study that student affairs educators who had attended NCORE had the multicultural competences and will to engage in multicultural work.

**Literature Review**

For this study, I was interested in how student affairs educators engage in multicultural work. Informed by the definitions of multicultural work and multicultural competence within the context of higher education, I used the advocacy strategy framework to guide this study. This review of literature further describes multicultural work, multicultural competence, race, ethnicity, and racism, and the advocacy strategy framework.

**Multicultural Work in Higher Education**

Watt (2013) approached multicultural work from a framework that diversity is a social value, and suggested that multicultural initiatives in higher education include programs or strategies that “promote skill development to better manage difference on a personal, institutional, community, or societal level” (p. 7). Watt (2013) further posited that the end
goal of multicultural initiatives for higher education stakeholders is to disrupt structural inequities that limit experiences of underrepresented groups and privilege others.

For the purpose of this study, I broadened their concept of multicultural initiatives and used the term multicultural work to more accurately represent the actions of student affairs professionals. Multicultural work may include personal and professional development around issues of diversity (Watt 2013); policy, programming and practices related to serving underrepresented populations (Watt & Linley, 2013); multiculturally-oriented supervision (Mueller & Pope, 2001; Pope & Reynolds, 1997); classroom curriculum (Castellanos et al., 2007); and experiencing multicultural interaction with students, faculty and staff (Castellanos et al., 2007; Watt & Linley). At the very foundation, multicultural work for student affairs educators involves engaging directly with students and having an understanding that their students’ lived experiences may be different from their own lived experience (Watt & Linley).

**Multicultural Competence in Higher Education**

To effectively engage in multicultural work, student affairs educators must have the multicultural competencies to do so (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013; Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2014; Quaye & Harper, 2015). Pope and Reynolds (1997) first introduced the concept of multicultural competence to higher education and defined it as “the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary to work effectively and ethically across cultural differences” (p. 270). I used further refined definitions of multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge, and multicultural skills provided by King and Howard-Hamilton (2003):
**Multicultural Awareness:** “Awareness of how people’s attitudes, beliefs, values, assumptions, and self-awareness affect the ways they interact with those who are culturally different from themselves” (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 124).

**Multicultural Knowledge:** “Having an informed understanding of cultures that are different from one’s own culture, including knowledge of their histories, traditions, values, practices, and so forth” (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 123).

**Multicultural Skills:** “Skills that individuals use to engage in effective and meaningful interactions with those who are from different cultural backgrounds than their own” (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 123)

Student affairs preparation programs have learning outcomes including multicultural competence that prepares new professionals for multicultural work in higher education (Burkhard et al., 2005; Cuyet et al., 2009; Flowers, 2003; Gaston Gayles & Kelly, 2007; Pope & Mueller, 2005). Student affairs educators already in their career may develop multicultural competencies through programming such as workshops, seminars, and staff retreats (Cuyet et al., 2011; Pope & Reynolds, 1997); and scholarly activities such as literature review and common book reads (Cuyet et al., 2011; Pope & Reynolds, 1997).

**Race, Ethnicity, and Racism**

This study explored the multicultural work of student affairs educators within the context of addressing racism and oppression. It is important to clarify terminology utilized throughout this article including race, ethnicity, and racism. Race is socially constructed based on physical features such as skin and eye color, hair and bone structure (Bell et al., 2016). Ethnicity, also socially constructed, is associated with one’s region or nationality, ancestry, or a shared culture (Bell et al.). Racism is a socially constructed system of
advantage and disadvantage operating multi-level including individual, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional (Bell et al.).

**The Advocacy Strategy Framework**

I used the advocacy strategy framework to understand the multicultural work of student affairs educators (Retrieved from http://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publications/advocacy-strategy-framework). Although the advocacy strategy framework is most commonly applied to public policy or communications initiatives (Coffman & Beer, 2015), it can also be applied to multicultural work related to racial and ethnic diversity (Griffith et al., 2007; Klugman, 2011).

Coffman and Beer (2015) suggested that the advocacy strategy framework offers a place to begin an advocacy initiative, identifies intended stakeholders, considers other advocacy initiatives that may or may not be aligned with the topic, and prompts meaningful tactics or outcomes. Advocacy work on college campuses comprises many underrepresented populations and topics that intersect with racial/ethnic diversity including sexism, ableism, and ageism—to name just a few. Meaningful tactics or outcomes are associated with the advocacy strategy framework, which also aligns with the intended outcomes of multicultural work to disrupt the structural inequities that limit marginalized groups while privileging others (Watt, 2013). The advocacy strategy framework, similar to other models, suggests change in individuals, institutions and society occurs over time and may not be linear (Deardorff 2015; Iverson, 2012).

The advocacy strategy framework audience dimension along the x-axis includes the public, influencers and decision-makers (see Figure 1). Parallel stakeholders in higher education are students (public), faculty and student affairs educators (influencers), and
administrators (decision-makers). The change dimension along the y-axis comprises awareness, will, and action. Awareness translates to higher education in the form of multicultural competency development including the development of the multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge and multicultural skills to engage in others different from ones’ self (Pope & Reynolds, 1997). Will consists of understanding why student affairs educators invest in multicultural work; more specifically, the belief, passion, relevance, capacity and willedness to engage in the work. Last, action aligns with the multicultural work necessary to create change. For the purpose of this case study, action is the application of
multicultural skills to do multicultural work. Audiences in higher education apply multicultural competence in a number of ways including research, practice, and outreach efforts. For the purpose of this study, I looked specifically at how student affairs educators apply their multicultural competence through their various roles as practitioners in higher education to engage in multicultural work.

Drawing upon the definitions of multicultural competence and multicultural work, and the advocacy strategy framework, I made the assumption those student affairs educators who have attended NCORE have developed the multicultural competence and the will to engage in multicultural work. The foundation of multicultural competence is the awareness, knowledge and skills to engage with others culturally different. Will is having the belief, passion, relevance, competence and willingness to do multicultural work. Engaging in multicultural work is more than having the competencies and will to do the work; rather, it is the action of engaging with others, both culturally different and similar, with the aspiration of change for social good. Multicultural work does not occur in isolation, rather is happens through engaging with others. For this study, I used the premise that to do multicultural work, student affairs educators take action by engaging in relationships with others including students, colleagues, and administrators. To explore multicultural work of student affairs educators, I focused on the action component of the change dimension of the advocacy strategy framework; specifically, how student affairs educators take action to engage in multicultural work (see Figure 2).
Method

This qualitative case study sought to answer one research question, “How do student affairs educators engage in multicultural work?” A qualitative research study focuses on understanding meaning within social context (Janesick, 2011; Merriam, 1997; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Case studies are bound by parameters, in this case location and activity, and include comprehensive information about the case within the parameters (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). This case study took place at a large, predominately White institution in the Midwest. The study focused on the activity of doing multicultural work; more specifically, how student affairs educators engage in multicultural work.
I approached this study from a transformative frame. Transformative approaches align with critical theory, action research, underrepresented populations, and issues of social justice and inclusion when making meaning of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). A transformative approach is appropriate for this study as it included race, racism, oppression, diversity, and inclusion; with the purpose of taking action for change. The transformative approach guided my choice of case study design as I could further understand how engaging in multicultural work at a predominately White institution has the capacity to create change, or transformation at various levels of higher education institutions.

**Participants and Site Selection**

To answer this question, data were collected through interviews and focus groups of 27 student affairs educators who had attended NCORE from a large, predominately White, research-intensive university located in the Midwest. Participants were comprised of a purposeful sample of student affairs educators recruited through e-mail and in-person meeting announcements (Maxwell, 2013). Participant criteria included: (a) employment at the institution where this study was conducted, (b) primary professional responsibilities working in a student affairs role, and (c) attendance at NCORE one or more times. For the purposes of this study, I assumed that student affairs educators who had chosen to participate in NCORE had some level of multicultural competence in which they applied to their work in higher education. This assumption is important, as for student affairs educators to effectively engage in multicultural work, they must have the multicultural competence to do so. For this study, to understand how student affairs educators engage in multicultural work, it was important to identify participants with the multicultural competencies to do the work.
Participants self-identified or presented as: White (17), Black (6), Asian (2), Biracial (1), and Latina (1) (see Table 1). There were 21 females and six males, representing 19 distinct units across both academic affairs and student affairs. Although gender favored women and there were a greater proportion of White participants than ALANA (African, Latinx, Asian, Native American) participants, participants were representative of the larger pool of potential participants, which also favored women and ALANA student affairs educators.

These diverse characteristics provided multiple vantage points from varied experiences and a range of years in higher education; contributing to rich, thick, data for this study. Participants had the opportunity to choose a pseudonym. I assigned a pseudonym for those participants who did not choose their own pseudonym. Identifiable information self-reported through the interviews, including position within student affairs and years at the institution, were generalized to maintain anonymity.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

I utilized interview and focus groups data collected in 2015, and interview data collected in 2017. The 2015 semi-structured interview and focus group outline was informed by Pope and Reynolds definition of multicultural competence; and King & Howard-Hamilton’s further definitions of multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge, and multicultural skills. Seidman’s (2013) three-step interview process served as a model for the semi-structured interview guide for collecting 2017 data and encompassed (a) past life experiences informing the multicultural work of student affairs educators in higher education; (b) details about their multicultural work in higher education; and (c) meaning-
Table 1. Characteristics of the participants

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<th>2015</th>
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¹Pseudonyms are not connected with participant characteristics to maintain the anonymity of participants. N/A indicates that participants did not meet participation criteria during the year the study was conducted. NO designates 2015 participants who were eligible in 2017 but did not participate.
making of their multicultural work. I conducted all interviews and focus groups in person. Data were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and verified by participants.

Following data collection, I conducted data analysis by coding the data, identifying patterns, and categorizing the patterns (Saldana, 2015). In my initial analysis, I used the advocacy strategy framework change dimension as a guide to inform my choice of coding data related to action or doing multicultural work. Once I coded the data for multicultural work, I looked for patterns within the data. The patterns that emerged were congruent with the stakeholder dimension of the advocacy strategy framework; that student affairs educators were engaging in multicultural work through their relationships with students, colleagues, and administrators. I conducted a third level of analysis by identified patterns within the categories of students, colleagues and administrators. For example, conduct was a pattern that emerged from within the overarching student category. Data were organized by the three categories of students, colleagues and administrators to report the findings from this study.

Statement of Positionality

Recognizing my positionality as a scholarly practitioner and qualitative researcher is important as I approach multicultural work and interpret findings from this study. My research and work in higher education have been influenced by my own identities and lived experiences. As a White, cisgender female raised in the Midwest, I understand that my lived experiences are different from those that I engage with personally and professionally. I have been fortunate in 20 years as a nonprofit and higher education professional engaged with students, colleagues and administrators, to be privy to lived experiences other than my own. Exposure to lived experiences other than my own have greatly influenced my work as a
scholarly practitioner. I believe strongly in the civic principles of education and lifelong learning; and submit that I am continuing to develop my own multicultural competencies, particularly related to topics of race and ethnicity, racism, and many other identities. I engage in this work, as I strongly believe that access to education advances change in individuals, communities and society.

**Ethical Considerations**

The Institutional Review Board approved this study. Several ethical considerations and measures of trustworthiness were implemented to validate the findings. Participants reviewed and signed the informed consent form for this study, which outlined procedures, potential risks and benefits, participant rights, measures of confidentiality, and protocol for reporting ethical concerns. The informed consent form also addressed topics of race, ethnicity, equity, diversity and inclusion through the following statement, “You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. In the event you choose to withdraw from this study, all information you provide (including audio recordings) will be destroyed and omitted from the study.”

**Trustworthiness**

I employed a number measures to ensure the trustworthiness, or validity of the findings from this study (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2013). To ensure the reliability, or consistency of the findings I collected thick, rich data from 27 participants in total. Triangulation was ensured through a diverse group of research participants, multiple sources (focus groups and interviews) of data collection, and collection of data at several points of time (Maxwell, 2013). The diverse characteristics of the participants included their job responsibilities, representation from 19 distinct units across campus, years in student affairs
ranged from two to more than 20. All transcripts were member checked to further strengthen the accuracy of the findings. To alleviate discrepant findings and bias, and validate themes (Jones, et al, 2006), I engaged three higher education peers representing both administration and faculty in the review and interpretation of the data (Maxwell, 2013).

**Limitations**

This study was not without limitations. The case study design was bound by location and activity. The site for this study was a large, predominately White institution in the Midwest, and the activity was the multicultural work of student affairs educators within this setting. The participant experience may be unique to this setting, and not generalizable to other institutions of higher education. I also made the assumption that student affairs educators attending NCORE were multiculturally competent and were engaged in multicultural work; attending one conference on race and ethnicity may not yield multiculturally competence student affairs educators engaged in multicultural work. Furthermore, the results of this study were dependent upon participants’ self-assessment of the action they were taking to engage in multicultural work.

**Findings**

In this case study, I sought to understand how student affairs educators engage in multicultural work. Assuming that participants had some level of multicultural competence from their involvement with NCORE, I was interested in what action they took to engage in multicultural work as a practitioner in higher education.

Findings suggest that student affairs educators engage in many forms of multicultural work in their jobs and throughout campus. An important finding that guides the organization of this article is that multicultural work is not conducted in isolation. The participants from
this study engaged in multicultural work through interactions with students and colleagues, through supervisor and supervisee relationships, and they recognized the multi-level environment by which they engaged in multicultural work. These findings correlate with the advocacy strategy framework and other scholars (Pope et al., 2014; Watt & Linley, 2013) that suggest campus-wide engagement in multicultural work is necessary for change to occur in the campus environment as noted by Sophia: “Students, faculty, staff of different levels. You think about the director level, that mid-level, the new professional. All have something to contribute to the work.”

Participants suggested that multicultural work is not only engaging with students as one of their core responsibilities as a student affairs educator, but multicultural work also includes employing strategies and initiatives such as co-curricular programs, classroom teaching, and engaging with key stakeholders across the institution. Sophia, White, further shared:

It’s not just a conversation with a student. It’s not just the program that we are having. It’s where we are engaging with the faculty in the classroom. We need our president involved in these conversations. We need higher administration involved.

The ultimate goal of multicultural work is to address racism and oppression on campus, such that the environment is welcoming and inclusive for all university stakeholders to be successful (Quaye & Harper, 2015; Watt 2013). For environmental change to occur the advocacy strategy framework outlines strategies to engage the public, influencers and decision-makers along a change dimension comprised of awareness, will and action (Coffman & Beer, 2015). As such, I framed findings from this study according to the student affairs educator as the influencer engaged in multicultural work. Specifically, I describe how student affairs educators engage in multicultural work with the various stakeholders in higher
education (i.e., students, colleagues, and administrators). Faculty are also a campus stakeholder group, but participants identified very few examples of engaging with faculty through their own multicultural work. Therefore, the faculty were not addressed in these findings.

Engaging Students through Multicultural Work

Aligning with higher education literature, student affairs educators shared countless examples of engaging with students through multicultural work including advocacy, conduct cases, enhancing curriculum, assessing and implementing policies, programming, creating space, advising student organizations, and engaging one-on-one with students (Barr, McLellan, & Sandeen, 2014; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2006).

Advocacy. Student advocacy was an important part of multicultural work of student affairs educators. They served as advocates for underrepresented students, and worked to support students to advocate for themselves regarding issues of race and ethnicity. Anna, an ALANA participant, shared an example of collaborating with colleagues in the dining center to advocate on behalf of Muslim students: “It’s Ramadan, and I can’t eat in the dining center because they close before the sun goes down. That somebody else can be that voice for them.” Anna was suggesting that if she understood a policy, program or practice on campus to be culturally insensitive, she had the responsibility through her multicultural work to address the situation and advocate for the underrepresented populations of students impacted by the situation.

Conduct. Student conduct was another area where issues of race and ethnicity were present in the work of student affairs educators. Sophia, a White participant, suggested that
her department had begun engaging students in “conversations of impact and intent” as part of conduct cases, and used an example of a student using a racial slur. She suggested the student “…may not have known the intent, but now knows that it was hurtful” because staff facilitating the student conduct case took the time to educate them about their language. Elena, also White, described a complex conduct case involving racial profiling and utilized it as an educational opportunity for a student who racially profiled a peer, and an opportunity to support the student who was racially profiled: “I open that conversation, not only with the student that may have been racially profiled, but also with the student that may have racially profiled their peer.” Elena shared an important finding that student affairs educators need to engage in multicultural work that not only supports underrepresented students directly, but also challenges and supports the students, faculty, staff or administrators that are creating the incidents of racism or oppression on campus.

**Curriculum.** Student affairs educators have responsibility for specific academic courses; and participants shared several examples of influencing the curricular learning of students by integrating multicultural topics into the classroom either through courses specifically designed to develop the multicultural competence of students, or through integration of multiculturally rich content into the classroom learning environment. Anna, LaYin, Renee, Sarah, Sydney, and Ben each outlined the courses they taught where the curricular focus was on race and ethnicity; in essence, they served as multicultural educators. Rose, an ALANA participant, described speaking to several classes of students and her practice of learning about the curriculum and making relevant multicultural connections to the curriculum before speaking to the class: “What can I say that will help me gain some credibility? Some street cred?” She shared an example of educating a Food Science class
about Jewish meat processing, and described how a local business changed their product from pork to goat meat to adjust to a niche market; ultimately saving their family-owned business because they understood the food and nutrition culture of a growing population in their community. Rose could have simply gone to the class and delivered basic information to students about services her area provided, but she engaged in multicultural work by researching ways to integrate culturally appropriate content into the curriculum.

**Navigating Systems of Oppression.** A compelling finding was the countless stories of student affairs educators working one-on-one with students to navigate systems of oppression that they were experiencing in their academic journey. Oftentimes the navigation included components of their personal lives outside of the academic institution, that were influencing their student experience. Rose highlighted several challenges for ALANA students she worked with as they navigated higher education:

Economically, principally – I think it’s just become so expensive to be a college student. I’ve seen how much that is just one domino piece to student issues. I’ve heard it all in this room – from family deaths to deportations, to students being the only provider in their house, students getting fake IDs not to go to the club, but so they can work early in life.

Rose, like many of the participants, described how her role as a student affairs educator engaged in multicultural work supporting ALANA students. She suggested student success included partnerships with students and colleagues across campus to navigate the system: “Building another mountain or bridge. It’s never just linear for me.” Rose identified partnerships for problem solving with student affairs colleagues including one with financial aid to create an emergency fund to support students with extenuating circumstances beyond their control, and helping DACA students navigate their status with enrollment services.
Space. Several participants suggested they engaged in multicultural work by simply providing a space for underrepresented students. Sydney, an ALANA participant, shared: “Because they are underrepresented, they often don’t have a lot of different spaces to go to and just be. I try to be that for my students. They can come in, stop by, and talk about whatever.” Xavier’s office created a conversation space for students, staff and faculty to engage in dialogue around current events “…where race or ethnicity have a significant impact on what’s happening.”

Student Organizations. ALANA student affairs educators highlighted various forms of engagement with ALANA based student organizations. Anna, an ALANA participant, described a multi-year collaboration with a Latino fraternity on an outreach project. LaYin, also identifying as ALANA, advised more than a handful of student groups with ALANA membership:

Making sure student organizations with racial identity membership are aware of their racial identity, to be activists in different areas. Working with another student on bringing more awareness to the Asian American studies program. Working with another group of students … to connect them with Latino/Latina faculty and staff.

Thomas, ALANA, shared that he makes sure to attend a variety of meetings each semester including the Black Student Alliance, Latinx programs. As an ALANA leader on campus he shared, “I need to be there for all students, but those students with multicultural backgrounds. … I have to let them know that I care.”

Very few White participants shared examples of supporting ALANA membership-based student organizations. Phryne, a White participant, shared an example of supporting the formation of a student organization for ALANA women in technology fields, but commented that she may not be the best advisor for the student organization long-term: “I’ll
be your advisor until you get the organization, and then I know I’m probably not the best person to continue to do that. But I can help you jump through all of these institutional hoops to get you where you need.”

**Summary.** Participants in this study shared examples of supporting students through multicultural work in nearly every aspect of their experience at the university, from student conduct to dining services, advising individual students and student groups. With few exceptions, the majority of examples that student affairs educators shared were co-curricular and supported ALANA students.

**Engaging Colleagues through Multicultural Work**

Engaging with colleagues was a salient component of the multicultural work of student affairs educators. Sarah, a White participant, expressed: “One of the biggest things is that [multicultural work] creates a community of people who are all passionate about [multicultural work], who will hopefully be much more successful as a group than as individuals trying to do different things.” Joe, also identifying as White, shared the influence his colleagues had on him as he developed personally, professionally, and developed his staff team: “I’m not on this journey alone. I’ve got friends. I’ve got colleagues who are supporting me through this. Who are educating me.” Colleagues shared examples of being the influencer, and being influenced, by their colleagues. Rose, ALANA, shared how she utilizes her network of ALANA colleagues:

> I’ve never been in such an amazing, supportive, like bad-ass sisterhood as this is. Having women across campus that understand the work that I do. Who are also giving and taking just as much in the group, collective together. ... We could completely function without ever having to meet. But, that fact that we’ve decided to pull in our collective efforts to support the work that we do has been really empowering.
Lillian, identifying as White, shared how she frequently engaged with an ALANA colleague who had primary responsibilities to serve ALANA students: “She and I work through issues with students. She knows that, to the extent that I can do something, I’m going to.”

Participants provided examples of influencing their colleagues in both formal structure and informal conversation. Many of the participants indicated that colleagues across campus asked them to facilitate programming for their units on issues of diversity and inclusion. Ashley, with expertise in communications and multicultural work, shared: “I try to do as much as I can to influence other communicators on campus.” Several of the participants shared they provided leadership for common reads and intergroup dialogue groups as part of their staff professional development.

Nou, identifying as ALANA, shared a situation where she held her colleagues accountable to address a racist incident through dialogue in a meeting:

It’s not just about Students of Color, right? When I bring a racist incident up [with colleagues], it’s also about what students are experiencing. It’s also about how White students are experiencing it, too. Are we ok with this being ok? If we’re not, how can we move this forward for the greater good of all students on campus?

Similar to Nou, Kate, a White participant, shared an example of exercising accountability among peers: “Talking to faculty, getting them to appreciate our [multicultural staff] is not needing to be educating them on diversity and inclusion. If you are going to sign up for a committee, you need to do some of the work.” Olivia, an ALANA participant, shared an example of proactively engaging her colleagues in intergroup dialogue: “Trying to host more dialogues within the college. And facilitate more conversations around issues of race and ethnicity, and a lot of other issues of inclusion.”
Summary. Engagement among a community of colleagues to facilitate multicultural work was an important component of the strategy for change among participants in this study. Participants shared examples of motivating colleagues, collaborating with colleagues, and holding one another accountable when facilitating multicultural work. Engagement among colleagues was reciprocal -- participants shared situations when colleagues challenged and supported them in their own multicultural competence and multicultural work; they also shared situations when they were the challenger and supporter for their colleagues.

Staff Development through Multicultural Work

There was a salient human resource component to the multicultural work of participants in this study. Specifically, participants shared the important nature of the relationships they had with their supervisors as well as the professional staff, graduate assistants and student employees they supervised.

Supervision of professional staff. Student affairs educators expressed a desire to be challenged by their supervisors with expectations to engage in multicultural work, as noted by Ben, a White participant: “When I met my supervisor at my campus interview, I was like this is going to be someone that is going to support me, challenge me. That’s what I want.” LaYin, who identified as ALANA and advised several ALANA student organizations, shared that her supervisor allowed her to incorporate these added campus service responsibilities into her work: “Administrators have really given the flexibility, the time . . . it could be very easy for my director to say ‘it’s not your 8-5 [job]’, you need to make up the hours you spent advising students.”

Whereas Ben and LaYin shared examples of being challenged and supported by their supervisors to engage in multicultural work, other participants suggested there were limited
expectations from their supervisor to engage in multicultural work as shared by Joe, a White participant: “It’s not an expectation. It’s not an expectation within our jobs. It’s not an expectation within our evaluations. It’s not an expectation within our hiring processes.” Supervisors did not necessarily discourage engagement in multicultural work, but they were neutral to their staff members’ willingness to engage. Kate, a White participant, shared: “I have never felt supported . . . I mean, nobody has ever told me not to pursue [multicultural work].” Some participants felt they received mixed messages from their supervisors when engaging in multicultural work. Heather, for example, shared that her department philosophically supported multicultural work but, when she proposed incorporating multicultural competency development into the annual review process, it was met with resistance: “I [proposed this] with the management team and they’re like oh, well, we would need to make sure HR approves this . . . it’s interesting when the feet hit the pavement.”

For several of the student affairs educators, the supervisor and supervisee relationships were a source of competency development as they engaged in multicultural work. Nou, for example, who identified as ALANA, was sought out as a resource: “Whether that’s as a supervisor, whether that’s the associate dean, or it is the Dean. ... What do you know about DACA? What are your thoughts?” But, she also found herself learning from graduate staff she supervised: “I feel like this work is so ongoing and it gets harder the further you are removed from a specific graduate program,” She suggested that graduate students, or recent graduates in student affairs preparation programs, may have a greater knowledge of current issues in multicultural work.

Finally, supervisors engaged in multicultural work had the opportunity to influence the multicultural competency of staff in their unit through hiring and professional
development. Kate, a White participant, reiterated the importance of hiring diverse staff: “I have a staff that comes from different backgrounds that feel comfortable enough to say, ‘Have we thought about it this way?’” Participants in supervisory roles also discussed their investment in the multicultural competence development of their staff. Eva, who also identified as White, shared that her team started a diversity discussion group for her staff which included graduate students, merit staff, new and experienced professionals: “We are going to start once-a-month readings, activities, discussion groups for an hour and fifteen minutes. I’ve told my staff that they don’t have to take vacation to come, and we are not meeting over the lunch hour.” Joe, also a White participant, shared the importance of challenging and supporting staff in an effort to better serve underrepresented students: “I ask them to think about this policy that we have . . . They are so much more thoughtful. They are so much more broad, about how this policy could be impacting one person.”

**Supervision of student employees.** Participants that supervised student staff suggested they incorporated multicultural work into their supervision efforts in two ways. First, they meaningfully developed the multicultural competencies of student employees; and second, they supported underrepresented student employees as they navigated the institution. Ashley, who identified as White, shared her philosophy of developing the multicultural competency of her student staff: “We’re teaching ... training them, trying to infuse some culture of what we feel our culture is here in our department.” She described working with her student staff to understand effectively communicating with diverse campus populations, “Whether it is accessibility ... body issue awareness, race and ethnicity—making sure people are receiving our messages, kind of putting yourself in their shoes.”
Ashley also demonstrated how through multicultural work she supported an ALANA student staff member who was a leader of an ALANA student group when a racist incident occurred on campus. Ashley described how the student was calling in sick to work, because as an ALANA student leader the student was tapped to respond to the fallout from the racist incident. Ashley shared a conversation she had with the student:

I know what you are going through and why you are needing to be in all of these meetings. You don’t have to call in sick. You can be up front with me. I’m going to support you in this, at the very least be understanding of it.

Ashley further shared that not only was the student emotionally impacted by the incidents on campus, but the student was also expected to attend administrative meetings to educate campus staff and administrators regarding her perspective of the situation, lead her student organization and support her peers, and respond to media requests. Ashley understood the complex nature of the situation, realized the student needed support to maintain her grades and attend work to pay her rent, and supported the student as she navigated the situation as an individual and student leader.

**Summary.** These findings suggest that engagement through supervision can be a powerful component of multicultural work at all levels of the institution. Although this study was not specifically about multicultural competency development, it does indicate that an important component of multicultural work is the development of others’ multicultural competence. Student affairs educators incorporating multicultural work into their supervision strategies felt that by developing their staff, they in turn were better serving students. These findings also suggest that part of the multicultural work of student affairs educators is for supervisors to establish and supporting expectations for multicultural work.
Multilevel Approach to Multicultural Work

Findings from this study illustrate the multilevel approach needed for student affairs educators to effectively engage in multicultural work. This section addresses the dual role of student affairs educators as influencer and decision-maker, the role of senior administration in the multicultural work of student-affairs educators, and identifies audiences that were absent from the results of this study.

Dual roles of student affairs educators. Findings from this study suggest that student affairs educators have dual responsibilities in student affairs—as influencer and decision-maker. They engage at the micro-level supporting students in one-on-one relationships and direct oversight of student affairs programming. As student affairs educators transition from program delivery responsibilities to program administration and supervisory responsibilities, they evolve into administrative decision-makers.

Participants in this study identified as administrators through their multicultural work with policies, programs and practices. Sophia, a White participant, shared that through her responsibilities to directly interact with students through one-on-one relationships, she evolved as an administrator responsible for policies, programs and practices that impacted students, even if she was not the staff member responsible for direct student contact. An example she shared was in review of policy: “Looking at our policy handbook. Where are we not being inclusive?” Claire, who also identified as White, provided an example of enhancing communications practices: “I can be a voice for those students in our brochures and in our pictures. What we represent and what we don’t represent; and be authentic in who we are, in our advertising.” Several student affairs educators from academic advising, recruitment, retention programs, and financial aid suggested changes to scholarship policies
and practices can have positive or negative impacts on underrepresented students. Eva, also White, shared: “Our scholarship structure ... how it negatively impacts certain populations when you change small things ... at the end of the day it is just a business practice that is the most efficient administrative function.” Eva suggested that because of her multicultural competencies, she could identify the challenges in the scholarship program as a practitioner, and she could challenge administrators of scholarship programs to consider how changes impact students.

When student affairs educators view themselves as program coordinators, they see themselves as impacting students directly, and may not realize the power they have to create change in their administrative roles. Thomas, who identified as ALANA, shared that part of multicultural work is empowering all student affairs educators to realize that they are part of the solution; that they are part of the administration too:

Staff that are struggling with things happening [on campus], to realize that they are part of the solution. We need them to feel like they are part of the solution and not like, well the administration “needs to do.” Well, you are the administration too.

Thomas’ perspective was similar to what some of the participants alluded to a campus culture for community members to ask: “What is ‘administration’ doing about this problem?” Henry, a White participant, stated: “You can have your upper-level leadership, your exec, your senior leadership, the folks that report directly to the vice president, who are saying this is a goal. I’ll be on board, but that’s ten people.” Henry was suggesting that for change to occur, stakeholders beyond administrators need to be part of the solution.

The role of senior administrators in multicultural work. Participants shared limited examples of how they engaged directly with senior administrators (i.e., university president, vice president and their respective cabinet leadership) through their multicultural
work; rather, they shared their observations of senior leadership engaging in multicultural work. Ellie, a White participant, shared an example of a senior leader addressing the division-wide staff at the beginning of the academic year, “Our director shows commitment. . . . We have a get together of everyone in the department including merit staff. He addressed what happened in Charlottesville.” Carlos, who identified as White, also referenced the university president’s campus-wide e-mail addressing Charlottesville, “He just sent a single e-mail and said you know what, Charlottesville was not for us. Students of Color, you do matter.” Being present at meetings and events was another way the participants articulated senior administration’s support of multicultural work. Ellie described a senior administrator’s presence: “I’m not in many spaces with [our vice president], but I think he shows a lot of concern for what students are facing . . . he has been open and transparent about his own experience, too.”

Although student affairs educators observed signs of senior administration’s outward support for multicultural work, some experiences Rose, an ALANA participant, had indicated that student affairs educators are possibly viewed as the experts when doing multicultural work is necessary. Rose shared an example of senior leaders in her college engaging in listening sessions with ALANA students, to hear their lived experiences as underrepresented community members at the university. Rose shared: “We (student affairs educators) need to give them some expectations, and like prep them for what may happen, because students may feel comfortable tearing them to shreds.” Rose described ways in which her team prepared senior leaders for the listening sessions: “We told [the senior administrator] it’s important to listen. Sometimes you don’t have to give an answer right away, just listen. The students want to be heard . . . listen to their story.”
Opportunities to broaden multilevel engagement in multicultural work. An important component of research is to recognize data that are not present in the findings (Maxwell, 2013). In this case study, faculty were largely void from the data. Participants sparingly mentioned engagement with faculty in their pursuit of multicultural work. This finding does not mean that faculty are not engaging in multicultural work; rather, student affairs educators from this study were not engaged in collaborative multicultural work with faculty.

Another stakeholder group largely void from the data were White students. In this case study, there were limited examples of participants directly influencing White students through their multicultural work. The participants from this study shared salient examples of supporting racially and ethnically underrepresented students in their role as a student affairs educator; but relatively few examples were shared in regards to influencing the learning of White students through multicultural competence development opportunities outside of facilitating conduct cases, teaching classes, and broadly delivering programs and services.

Summary. These findings suggest that student affairs educators play a dual role as both influencer in their practitioner role and decision-maker in their role as administrator; and must be empowered to embrace both of these roles through their multicultural work. Student affairs educators demonstrated that through their multicultural work they were decision-makers responsible for departments, hiring and staff development, evaluating and implementing policies, programs and practices.

Discussion

Through this case study, I sought to understand how student affairs educators engage in multicultural work in higher education. The very premise of multicultural competence is
working with people—having the awareness, knowledge, and skills to engage with people who have lived experiences, both similar and different, from one’s own lived experiences (Pope & Reynolds, 1997). In higher education, these relationships for student affairs educators unfold through multicultural work with students, colleagues and activities related to supervision. The findings also illuminated the importance of a multilevel approach to multicultural work (Watt & Linley, 2013).

Congruent with student affairs literature, student affairs educators participating in this case study demonstrated their engagement with students in nearly every aspect of the co-curricular college experience (Barr, McLellan & Sandeen, 2014; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2006), and in this study participants engaged with students through a diversity of multicultural strategies, initiatives and tactics. Findings from this study also align with literature suggesting that multicultural work does not occur independently; but through a network of colleagues (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013; Plagman-Galvin & Gansemer-Topf, 2018; Pope, Reynolds & Mueller, 2014; Quaye & Harper, 2015). The collaborative relationships of colleagues were an integral component of the multicultural work of participants in this study.

This study supports the work of Watt and Linley (2013), suggesting a multilevel approach is needed to engage in multicultural work. The multilevel approach to multicultural work may begin with the relationship of the supervisor and supervisee; as the supervisor has the opportunity to prioritize the multicultural work agenda and develop the multicultural competence of their staff, who in turn have the multicultural competences to influence the student experience. The dual roles of influencer and decision-maker that participants from this study demonstrated suggest that student affairs educators play an important role in
connecting upper administration decision-making authority with the experiences of students. Important audiences that were not salient in the results of this case study were faculty, White students and senior administrators. The infrequency in which these audiences were mentioned may suggest that either student affairs educators are not engaged in multicultural work with these audiences, or these audiences may have limited engagement in doing multicultural work.

**Implications for Research**

I used the advocacy strategy framework as a model to guide the methods and interpret the findings for this case study. It was an appropriate framework to articulate how multiculturally competent student affairs educators do multicultural work as they engage in a multilevel environment. However, a limitation of the advocacy strategy framework was that it stops short of actually measuring change. Future research should explore change outcomes associated with multicultural work, in order for those engaged in multicultural work to realize progress and continue to be motivated to do the work.

I approached this study from a transformative paradigm, believing that change in student affairs educators through multicultural work has the potential to produce system-wide change. At the individual level, engaging in multicultural work demonstrates or transforms change within individual people. However, change occurring at the unit or departmental level has the capacity to create change within the organization.

The results of this case study were reliant on the self-reflective perspective of how student-affairs educators perceived their influence on others through multicultural work. Without engaging students, collaborating colleagues, and supervisors in the study, we are not
fully confident that the multicultural work of student affairs educators is contributing to impact on others, or change in the campus culture and environment.

This case study looked specifically at student affairs educators. In order to comprehensively understand change through a multilevel context, similar studies exploring the role of faculty, upper level administration and students are necessary. The advocacy strategy framework and this case study design can easily be applied to these higher education stakeholder groups.

**Implications for Practice**

The results of this study inform a number of important implications for practice. This study demonstrates how student affairs educators can engage in multicultural work. To engage in multicultural work with students, student affairs educators may not need to create new policies, programs, or practices; but approach activities in which they are already engaged including student conduct, advocacy, curricular learning, and advising from a multicultural work lens.

Findings from this study suggested that supporting diverse work groups and networks of colleagues around opportunities for multicultural competence development and multicultural work have the potential for change at the individual, group and institutional levels (Plagman-Galvin & Gansemer-Topf, 2018). Multicultural work groups around strategies, initiatives and tactics to support the multicultural work agenda have the potential for influencing change at the group and institutional level. Networks of colleagues engaged for the purpose of multicultural competency development have the potential for influencing change at the individual and group levels.
Findings from this study related to the relationship of the supervisor and supervisee suggest integrating multicultural initiatives into the human resource processes of the institution benefit the personal and professional development of student affairs educators and advance the multicultural work agenda. Supervisors may not be multiculturally competent themselves; but regardless of their competency levels, they need to support a multicultural work agenda and establish expectations for multicultural competency development of their staff. Furthermore, findings suggest the benefits of incorporating multicultural strategies into all aspects of the human resources process including hiring, training, personal and professional development, individual and team goals, and annual action plans.

Engagement can take the form of different people—students, colleagues, supervisors and supervisees—at different levels of the institution, both micro and macro. Findings from this study suggest that on this campus, there is opportunity to reframe the role of student affairs educators as having responsibilities of both influencer (in the role of practitioner) and decision-maker (in the role of administrator). Student affairs educators do multicultural work that engages students. However, they are also viewed as decision-makers and must be empowered to own their decision-making privileges and leadership responsibilities to be part of the solution toward change.

It is important to consider these findings within the context of a predominately-White institution. Incorporating multicultural work into policies, programs, and practices is challenging when student affairs educators lack the ability to naturally approach their work through a lens of multicultural competence (Gusa, 2010). At a predominately-White institution, strategic efforts to engage White allies to engage in multicultural work is critical to change. Advocates, ALANA and White, of multicultural work must be identified,
supported, and encouraged in their endeavors. White student affairs educators not engaged in multicultural must be invited by those already engaged in order to grow the momentum for change.

**Conclusion**

This case study sought to understand how student affairs educators engage in multicultural work. Multicultural work occurs in a multilevel environment where student affairs educators engage with students and colleagues, supervisors and supervisees. This study found that multicultural work includes engaging with these stakeholders to implement strategies, initiatives and tasks important to multicultural work. Integral to the multilevel approach to multicultural work is understanding the influence of engagement on change. Future research should address change as the result of multicultural work.

**References**


CHAPTER 5. GENERAL CONCLUSION

“Unless you plan to work in your basement for the rest of your life, and not interact with anyone, then everyone needs to be exploring these conversations.” Olivia

Engaging in multiculturalism is a necessity in our world. No person has the same lived experience as another. To engage with others requires multicultural competencies in the form of multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge, and multicultural skills (Pope & Reynolds, 1997). Multicultural competence is the foundation for multicultural work. An integral component connecting multicultural competencies to multicultural work is will. Will is required to connect multicultural competencies to action in the form of multicultural work. Change is the aspirational outcome for multicultural work, with the intended outcome for change to occur within individuals, groups, institutions, and society.

The three-articles in this dissertation explored multicultural competence, will, and multicultural work of student-affairs educators. The foundation for change in the higher education campus climate is multicultural competence, as explored among student affairs educators in Chapter 2. The focus of Chapter 3 was to explore the will of student affairs educators to do multicultural work. The article in Chapter 4 ascertained how student affairs educators engage in multicultural work. In this chapter, I provide reflections on multicultural competence, will, and multicultural work. At the conclusion of this chapter, I offer broad suggestions for research, practice, and articulating progress.

**Multicultural Competence**

For student affairs educators to effectively engage in multicultural work they must have multicultural competencies which include multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge, and multicultural skills (Pope & Reynolds, 1997). In Chapter 2, I explored how student affairs educators develop multicultural competence. Findings suggested that student
affairs educators develop multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge, and multicultural skills along a continuum. Multicultural competence development includes both personal and professional development, and it may take time for student-affairs educators to feel confident in their competence to engage in multicultural work.

**Will**

In Chapter 3, I explored the will of student-affairs educators to engage in multicultural work. Student-affairs educators develop multicultural competencies through a variety of strategies and tactics; however, for action to occur, they must have the will to apply the competencies in their work in higher education. Participants demonstrated will to engage in multicultural work when they perceived many of their student affairs colleagues unwilling to do so. For the participants in this study, will was comprised of the belief, passion, and relevance in multicultural work as well as the capacity and willingness to do the work (Coffman & Beer, 2015). An interesting finding in the study was the difference between ALANA (African, Latinx, Asian, Native American) participants and White participants. On one hand, ALANA participants had lived experiences that included racism which instilled in them the will to engage in multicultural work. On the other hand, White participants in this study shared examples of underrepresented lived experiences other than racism which enabled them to empathize with ALANA students and colleagues which, ultimately, provided them with the will to engage in multicultural work.

**Multicultural Work**

Student-affairs educators were engaged in multicultural work that permeated every area of the institution. Chapter 4 provided insight in regards to how student affairs educators engage in multicultural work. The definition of developing multicultural competence is to
engage with others through differing lived experiences (Pope & Reynolds, 1997); therefore, engaging with others was a salient component of the multicultural work of student-affairs educators as they illustrated countless examples of engaging with students and colleagues in the pursuit of campus culture change. The multicultural work of student-affairs educators occurs in a multilevel environment where they engage with students, colleagues, and supervisors. Findings also suggested that the supervisor-supervisee relationship has the capability to be a powerful component of multicultural work.

**Future Practice**

Guided by the advocacy strategy framework, this study provided a comprehensive perspective for higher education stakeholders to understand the change process within university communities. Higher education stakeholders must identify strategies to engage all audiences in their college community in a multicultural work agenda for change to occur.

Change starts with multicultural competence development of individuals. Time needs to be allocated for personal and professional multicultural competence development, and resources need to be allocated to support community members in their multicultural competency endeavors. Unengaged stakeholders need to be strategically invited into the fold of multicultural work agenda. Change occurs slowly, and patience is required as individuals develop their multicultural competence and as the multicultural work agenda unfolds at the institution.

Developing the multicultural competence of student-affairs educators is not sufficient for action in the form of multicultural work to occur. For student affairs educators to invest in multicultural work there must be will. Engaging uninterested stakeholders in higher education will address a roadblock to campus climate change. Strategies must be considered
to engage not only student affairs educators who are uninterested in multicultural work; but, administrators, faculty, and students too.

For change to occur through multicultural work, the institution needs all audiences engaged—students, faculty, staff, and administrators (Watt & Linley, 2013). Student-affairs educators desire administrators to establish multicultural work as an institutional priority, and for supervisors to provide both the expectations to engage in multicultural work and the capacity in which to do so. Multicultural work agendas, enacted through the various higher education audiences, have the capacity to bring together higher education stakeholders at multiple levels of the institution in meaningful collaborations for change. These collaborations should be encouraged and supported. Student-affairs educators engaging one-on-one with students should consider carrying out their work with a multicultural lens. Collaborative work groups of colleagues supporting multicultural competence development and the multicultural work agenda must be encouraged and nurtured for change to occur at individual, group, and institutional levels. Integrating multicultural initiatives as part of the human resources process will yield multicultural hiring, training, supervision, and ultimately the will of staff to engage in multicultural work (Kayes, 2006).

**Future Research**

This research introduced the advocacy strategy framework to higher education. The bi-dimensional model was appropriate to explore how change occurs from both a change dimension and stakeholder dimension. The study focused on student-affairs educators as influencers of change. Further research focusing on administrators as decision-makers of multicultural work, faculty as influencers of multicultural work, and students as the public
affected by multicultural work is integral to fully understand the advocacy strategy for change in higher education.

Because student affairs educators were the primary focus of this study, findings illuminated how multicultural work is integrated in the co-curricular environment of an institution; however, further research to understand multicultural work in the curriculum is necessary to fully understand the framework for change in an institution. This case study was conducted at a large, predominately White research institution in the Midwest. Although findings might be generalizable to other institutions, similar research at colleges and universities with different characteristics would inform the research more broadly. Finally, there are opportunities to enhance the advocacy strategy framework in the application to higher education. Although the framework is a model for change, change was not assessed in this study. Furthermore, the framework does not account for race and ethnicity or other stakeholder identities. The findings of this study revealed identity to be a salient component of engaging in multicultural work which should be considered in future studies.

**Articulating Progress**

The advocacy strategy framework establishes a model for change in higher education. However, participants articulated that measuring change as the result of multicultural work is difficult. Participants suggested that developing multicultural competence is a personal and professional journey that one may never fully realize. Similarly, at a systemic level, eliminating racism and systems of oppression may not be fully achievable. Participants suggested that, rather than measuring success, evaluating progress is better suited when assessing multicultural work.
Participants such as Lillian suggested change begins with influencing one person at a time:

Like a stone thrown into a pond, you get a ripple effect. I would love for it to be the whole pond. I think it is going to take a lot of people throwing a lot of stones into the pond, and hopefully all of the circles that are rippling are all going to become concentric.

Although participants could not see significant signs of change through their individual viewpoints, the examples they shared collectively in this study populated each section of the advocacy strategy framework as illustrated in Figure 1. This figure highlights the action occurring at the various levels of the institution as a result of the multicultural work of the 27 student-affairs educators who participated in this study.

**Conclusion**

The focus of this study was on the multicultural competency development and multicultural work of student affairs educators. Student-affairs educators engaged in multicultural work have the multicultural competence and multicultural will to do so. They engage in multicultural work, aspiring for change in higher education. Student-affairs educators are seeking change in the systems that uphold oppression and racism which advantage the privileged and disadvantage underrepresented populations (Watt, 2013).

Change starts with people. Social change in a multicultural environment requires people to engage with others culturally different from each other in appropriate and meaningful ways. Once individuals develop multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills to engage in multicultural work, it will become part of their DNA. These factors instill in them the will to do something. They enhance the decisions they make, programs they
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Students (Public)</th>
<th>Staff &amp; Faculty (Influencers)</th>
<th>Administrators (Decision-Makers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural Work</td>
<td>Rallies &amp; Marches for Social Change</td>
<td>Engage w/ Students Utilizing Asset-Based Approach</td>
<td>Revise Mission/Vision Statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitate Student Conduct through a Multicultural Work Lens</td>
<td>Policy Review/Updates Through SJ Lens</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>Engage Peers in SJI Discussion</td>
<td>Lead SJI Learning Opportunities for Colleagues &amp; Students</td>
<td>Colleague Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Address DACA</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural Competence</td>
<td>Student Staff Multicultural Competency Development</td>
<td>Attend NCORE/Professional Development</td>
<td>Attend Racial/Ethnic Membership Based Student Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teach Diversity Courses</td>
<td></td>
<td>SJLI Listening Sessions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


Figure 1. The advocacy strategy framework for change in higher education, populated by the multicultural work of student-affairs educators facilitate, their support for students, and their relationships with colleagues. Student-affairs educators acquire a broader lens through which they can view their personal and professional networks, and engage with others in their communities and society. Through their engagement, change is inevitable.
REFERENCES


Iverson, S.V. (2012). Multicultural competence for doing social justice: expanding our awareness, knowledge, and skills. *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis*, 1(1). doi: 2012-10-01T07:00:00Z


APPENDIX. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Date: 11/14/2017
To: Jenn Plagman-Galvin
0355 Memorial Union
From: Office for Responsible Research
Title: Exploring the Multicultural Work of Student Affairs Educators in Higher Education
IRB ID: 15-190
Approval Date: 11/14/2017
Submission Type: Modification
Date for Continuing Review: 3/23/2019
Review Type: Expedited
CC: Dr. Ann Gansemer-Topf
2621 Lagomarcino

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.
- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. Approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g., student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 202 Kingland, to officially close the project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.