Title of Project:

Experiences of Students of Color in Student Affairs and Higher Education Graduate Preparation Programs

Amount Requested:

$1600

Experiences of Students of Color in Student Affairs and Higher Education Graduate Preparation Programs

Project Narrative

Faculty in student affairs preparation programs strive to develop and support socially conscious, competent, and ethical professionals (American College Personnel Association and National Association for Student Personnel Administrators [ACPA/NASPA], 2010). More specifically, missions of student affairs graduate preparation programs often include a commitment to social justice, equity, inclusion, and diversity (ACPA/NASPA, 2010). However, anecdotal evidence indicates Students of Color experience microaggressions in student affairs graduate preparation programs. While many studies broadly document the experiences of graduate students with racial microaggressions (Gomez, Khurshid, Freitag, & Lachuk, 2011; Guzman, Trevino, Lubugin, & Aryan, 2010; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009), little research explores the experiences of Students of Color specifically in student affairs and higher education (SA/HE) graduate programs (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002). Because SA/HE programs often include a focus on social justice and equity, understanding and documenting the racial climate in these programs is particularly important. Additionally, the theory to practice model employed in many SA/HE programs begs faculty to model effective inclusive practices in classrooms that can be transferred outside the classroom in student affairs professionals' work. Understanding the racial climate in SA/HE programs provides insight for faculty and other mentors to support Students of Color managing daily microaggressions as well as to challenge well-intended students who perpetuate these slights.

Microaggressions include the "everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages" (Sue, 2010, p. 3). Microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations represent three kinds of microaggressions most commonly committed. Microinsults include subconscious behavior and comments that communicate insensitivity toward a person's identity. Conscious behaviors including name-calling and discriminatory behavior make up the category of microassaults. Finally, microinvalidations, often subconscious, minimize and exclude people and their experiences (Sue, 2010). Microaggressions are often committed by well-intentioned peers, faculty, and other support people, resulting in the targeted person minimizing the experience. Some compare microaggressions to a "million little paper cuts." In isolation, most do not amount to a significant negative experience; however, when they happen over and over again, the cumulative effect results in "racial battle fatigue" (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011, p. 63).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of students seeking master's degrees in SA/HE programs related to racial microaggressions. By understanding the manner in which students experience racial microaggressions in preparation programs, faculty will be better prepared to build and manage safe classroom climates, develop awareness around their own areas for growth and self-awareness, and address microaggressions committed by other students in the classroom. Further, as a result of the transformative framework employed in this study (Mertens, 2010), participants in the study may develop new coping mechanisms for managing racial microaggressions and a larger community of support, important in managing negative racial climates (AUTHOR, under review).

Relevance of the Study to the Goals of the Commission

This study supports two goals of the Commission on Professional Preparation. First, one of the stated goals of the commission reads: "promote advanced learning opportunities that embrace critical values of the profession such as the development of the whole student, diversity, and ethics" (Commission for Professional Preparation, n.d., para. 2). The results of this study will assist faculty as they work to provide opportunities for student growth and development. More specifically, the results of this study will allow faculty to challenge students committing racial microaggressions and assist students experiencing microaggressions effectively address negative racial climates. Another goal of the Commission includes providing professional development for faculty in preparation programs. This study will contribute to improved pedagogical practices for faculty in preparation programs. We anticipate disseminating the findings through presentations at national conferences and through journal article submissions.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study include:
- What are the experiences of Students of Color in student affairs and higher education programs?
- What are "best practices" Students of Color recognize in their graduate preparation programs related to inclusivity and equity?
- What strategies do Students of Color employ to manage and address experiences with microaggressions?
- What recommendations do Students of Color have for faculty and other students in graduate preparation programs related to building and managing inclusive environments?

Methodology

Through a transformative paradigm supported by critical race and intersectionality theory, we will employ narrative inquiry in this study. Researchers using a transformative paradigm use research to deconstruct systems of oppression and work with participants to construct new knowledge, highlighting the voices of participants wherever possible. Additionally, transformative research often results in study participants gaining new insight and knowledge related to their experiences, contributing to personal growth and development (Mertens, 2010). In this study, we seek to address systems of oppression by uncovering the insidious nature of racial microaggressions in classrooms and related training locations, providing opportunity for faculty to challenge notions of White privilege and racism. Further, by involving participants in a focus group to create a collective meaning from their individual experiences, we will engage in co-creation of knowledge with the participants of the study.

Narrative inquiry formalizes the process of story-telling for purposes of research (Chase, 2005). Scholars advocate the use of stories to address systems of oppression, noting the importance of story-telling in the histories of many marginalized populations (Delgado, 1989). Further, exploring stories allows researchers, participants, and consumers of research to understand a phenomenon in greater depth, resulting in a deeper understanding of a problem. Sharing stories provides healing opportunities for members of subordinated groups and learning opportunities for members of dominant groups (Delgado, 1989).

Critical Race Theory (CRT), originating in Critical Legal Studies, highlights the importance of centering the experiences of People of Color in research and praxis (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Further, researchers engaging with

CRT explore the dynamics of power and privilege in their research, deconstructing the ways in which power structures have historically centered the experiences of White people, excluding People of Color. Using story-telling as a method, critical race theorists recognize experiential knowledge of People of Color as central to dismantling systems of oppression (Yosso et al., 2009). Finally, critical race theorists advocate praxis through research – reflecting and acting based on findings in studies (Wing, 1999). Through this study, we will center the experiences of Students of Color by exploring the dynamics of power and privilege in SA/HE graduate preparation programs. Further, the information gleaned through this study will be disseminated through conference presentations and journal publications to provide opportunity for praxis – improving graduate preparation programs through intentional reflection and action.

With roots in critical race theory and critical race feminism, researchers employing intersectionality theory explore multiple identities at once (Bowleg, 2008). Students of Color may experience racial microaggressions at the same time they experience microaggressions based on other social identities or at the same time they experience privilege based on another social identity. Taking this into account throughout the research process allows us as the researchers to explore larger issues of power and privilege, resulting in a complex understanding of people's experiences with microaggressions.

Participants. We will recruit at least 15 Students of Color in SA/HE graduate preparation programs to participate in this study. Participants will be selected for maximum variation in social identities (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), region of the country, and type of institution (public, private, small colleges) (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, we will select participants planning to attend either the national ACPA or NASPA conference so they can participate in the focus group for the study. We will recruit participants through list-servs for ACPA's Standing Committee for Graduate Students and New Professionals and NASPA's Graduate Students and New Professionals Knowledge Community. If we do not receive enough response from these two list-servs, we will send an email to the CSP-Talk list-serv asking faculty in graduate preparation programs to assist in identifying students who may be interested in participating in the study.

Data Collection. After participants have been identified and selected, we will conduct individual interviews with each participant, exploring their experiences as a graduate student in SA/HE. We will also ask participants to complete at least two guided reflections throughout the research process by sending them prompt questions via email. Finally, we will conduct focus groups at both ACPA and NASPA's national conferences with all of the participants in the study, exploring the initial themes from the individual interviews and further exploring their experiences in their graduate preparation programs. Interview protocols, journal prompts, and focus group questions are included in the appendix.

Project Budget

Budget Item	Amount Requested
Dinner for 20 participants at NASPA and ACPA	$600
Rationale As both an incentive and token of appreciation for participating in the study, we will provide dinner for each participant at the focus group during the NASPA/ACPA meetings. The amount is based on an estimated $30/person for dinner catered by one of the hotels/caterers for the conferences.	
Support for graduate student researchers (2) to attend conferences and assist in data collection and analysis process	$1000
Rationale To provide an opportunity for a graduate student to gain experience in conducting research and to attend and participate in the national NASPA and ACPA conferences, we will support each of two graduate students with $500 in funding to attend the conferences. One graduate student will attend ACPA and one graduate student will attend NASPA to assist in the data collection process. These students will also be involved throughout the research process, providing them an opportunity to learn to conduct qualitative research.	
Additional costs for data collection, analysis, and dissemination (i.e. researcher time) will be supported through the principal investigator's institution.	
TOTAL BUDGET REQUESTED	**$1600**

Proposed Timeline for the Study

Research Activity	Completion Date
IRB Proposal Submitted	Dec 16, 2011
Research Team (including at least two graduate students) identified and organized	Jan 15, 2011
Participant recruitment emails sent to list-servs	Jan 31, 2011
Participants identified and selected	Feb 15, 2011
Initial Interviews with Participants Completed	March 5, 2011
Focus Group protocol (based on initial themes) developed	March 9, 2011
Focus Groups completed	April 1, 2011
Data Analysis completed	June 1, 2011
ACPA and NASPA conference proposals submitted	Sept 1, 2011
First manuscript for publication submitted to JCSD	Nov 1, 2011

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Appendix A: Interview, Focus Group, and Journaling Protocols

Interview Protocol Questions
1. Tell me about yourself. Where do you go to school? Where are you from? Where did you do your undergraduate degree?
2. Why did you choose to pursue a master's degree in Student Affairs? What things influenced your decision to go into this field?
3. Talk about your graduate program. Why did you choose it?
   a. How has your experience matched your expectations for the program?
4. Tell me about your experience in your graduate program.
   a. What have you really appreciated about the program?
   b. What do you think could improve your experience in the program?
5. How has the program influenced your personal growth and development?
6. Tell me about your experiences in the classroom. How have your faculty influenced your experience in the classroom? What about your peers?
7. How do you experience your racial identity in your graduate program? What kinds of things do you notice related to your race?
8. How does this intersect with some of your other social identities?
9. What about the larger campus climate? How do you experience your race on the campus as a whole?
10. What about the larger field of student affairs? How do you experience your race in the field of student affairs?
11. How do you manage negative experiences with racial microaggressions (assuming students share some negative experiences)? In what ways do you navigate negative racial climates?
12. What strategies have you observed your faculty use to create and maintain a safe learning environment for you?
13. Anything else you have to add about your experiences in student affairs or your graduate program?
14. Demographic questions:
    a. How would you identify your race?
    b. Gender?
    c. Sexual Orientation?
    d. Ability status?
    e. Nationality?
    f. Other salient identities?

Journal Prompts
1. As you reflect on the interview you did last week, what other things come to mind? Pay attention in class for the next week. What interactions do you notice that you may not have noticed before? In what ways does race (your own or others') show up in your classroom experiences?
2. Design your ideal safe learning environment. You can draw a picture, write words, draw a classroom layout, or create a collage of various pictures representing a safe (or inclusive) learning environment. Who are the key players? What are the essential

components of a safe learning environment? What does it look like? Feel like? Sound like?

Focus Group Questions
- To be determined based on initial themes from individual interviews and journal prompts.